

Alien visitors?

By Jon Van

COMMUNION. By Whitley Strieber. Borch-Trenthow, \$17.95.
INTRUDERS. By Budd Hopkins. Random House, \$17.95.

Strangers from other planets seem to be rather like annoying relatives. They drop in unannounced, without invitation and usually at inconvenient times to make themselves at home without concern for their host's peace of mind.

This impression is derived from two new books from major publishers. It is possible another bout with flying saucers reminiscent of one spaced some years ago by the film "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" is on the horizon.

The books treat their content and style similarities such as do television situation comedies that spin off one another. Budd Hopkins, author of "Intruders," is a self-proclaimed UFO investigator who was called upon by Whitley Strieber, a writer of fictional horror tales, for help with Strieber's own odd encounters, described in "Communion."

Hopkins located descriptions to hypnotize Strieber so he could retrieve encounters with other-worldly visitors. On most occasions, Hopkins participated in the questioning of Strieber while he was under hypnosis.

Strieber's book concentrates on his own personal experiences and makes passing references to similar stories from others. He spends a lot of time speculating about the meaning of these experiences. Hopkins' book focuses on the experiences of one woman, but also brings in stories from several others.

Hopkins and Strieber both criticize skeptics and both adopt a pseudo-documentary style that apparently is intended to persuade the reader that, fantastic as it may sound, Earthlings are visited repeatedly by short gray people with large, scary eyes who travel in flying saucers. Both books are filled with meaningless detail, long verbatim rambling accounts by people who are hypnotized and extensive pseudo-hypnotic narratives and analyses.

Skeptics who balk at the notion of flying saucers and little gray men are called closed-minded, while Strieber and Hopkins call themselves true skeptics who keep their minds open while seeking the real truth.

Yet even a canny reading indicates that far from being a skeptic, Hopkins is a checkered advocate of spacemen and UFOs. In Hopkins' view, alien visit humans so often that if they flew commercially instead of using flying saucers, they'd earn enough frequent flyer bonus points to go to China twice a week. Hopkins suggests to people seeking his advice that their troublesome nightmares were "real" by dreams at all, but actually are real events their minds won't accept.

Strieber is less certain than Hopkins that the visitors are aliens from other planets, but he is convinced they are real and that they select people to contact repeatedly. He ponder several alternative explanations of these beings, suggesting they may be fairies, ghosts, time travelers from the future or members of a large insect-like hive, something like tall territes, whose activities are governed by the **MEGALITHON** rather than individually.

The visitors' behavior is difficult to fathom, even for UFO investiga-

tors. Like The Shadow from the old radio serial, these aliens have "the power to cloud men's minds," making people forget most of what happens during their visits. But not all. Why people remember some things from their encounters, why they have dreams and why sometimes the aliens reject to wipe away memories is unknown. We are given a picture of creatures with vast intelligence and advanced technology who at times seem to be forgetful bunnies and at other times unfeeling fiends.

In total, these books ask the reader to accept as fact a series of assertions that are fantastic on their face. For their arguments to persuade, the reader must accept on faith that these authors are honest, objective men who passionately seek the truth.

Most of the alien behavior as described in these books seems pointless. Who they are and what they want is a mystery.

These visitors could be remnants of a dying race trying to strengthen their genetic stock, as one visited woman in the Hopkins book suggests. Or maybe they realize they look funny being so bald, and they want their kids to have hair, according to theories of a mechanic in the Hopkins book, who claims he had sex with an alien.

Whatever they are, the creatures portrayed in these two accounts and the humans they visit appear mostly as tedious orks.

Their antics may be followed with less exertion and more enjoyment by scanning tabloid headlines while waiting in supermarket checkout lines. □

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