

People

May 11, 1987



Making Communion With Another World

America's fascination with UFOs booms again as three new books suggest that humanoids are here

Whitely Strieber's is a story that not every man would be bold enough to tell: On the evening of Dec. 26, 1985, says the novelist, he awakened in his Upstate New York cabin to find a strange being standing in the bedroom doorway. Sometime after blacking out, he found himself in a small, gray room full of quick little humanoids. When one of them brandished a hair-thin needle and informed him that it would be inserted into his brain, "I became quite simply crazed with terror," he reports.

With a "bang and a flash," the

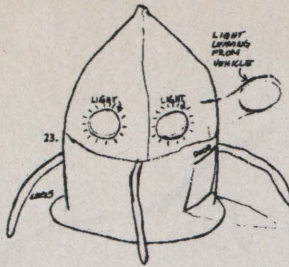
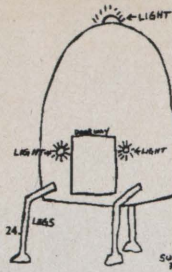
Coming to terms with the "visitor experience," says Strieber, has given him a heightened sense of his own spirituality.



instrument was then fired into his brain. "I felt like weeping," Whitley remembers. "I recall sinking down into a cradle of tiny arms..." Taken into an operating theater of sorts, the distraught subject was probed and poked, and—finally—transported back into his bedroom where his wife, Anne, was sleeping peacefully. Paralyzed with horror, he buried the memory, which he later reconstructed under hypnosis. When "the confused swirl resolved into a specific series of recollections, I just about exploded with terror and utter disbelief," he says.

The introspective author of pop-
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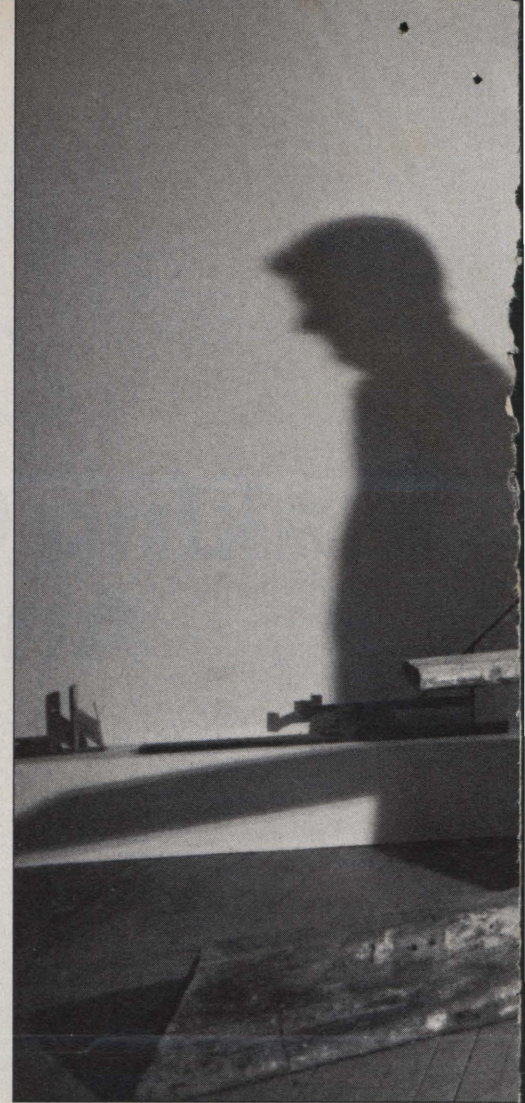
Sketches of humanoids (left) and alien craft (top) were collected by UFO investigator Budd Hopkins from alleged victims of the aliens.



An Indiana woman who drew her captors and their craft for Hopkins is still tormented by "visitors." "I feel like a freak," she says.



Author Gary Kinder (near his home in Sun Valley, Idaho) says he saw a spectacular UFO in 1972.



ular horror novels like *The Wolfen* and *The Hunger*, Strieber is hardly the sort to risk his reputation in the service of mere sensationalism; there are easier ways for him to make money than chronicling his bizarre encounters with what he suggests are intelligent non-human beings. But *Communion* (Beech Tree Books/Morrow, \$17.95) is a book that he says he had to write. "I want to dispel the stigma and the fear," he says. "I thought I was going crazy in an extremely embarrassing way. I became rather suicidal. I suffered with this, and it was a great relief to find that others had had the same experience. It's a very scary thing, but I want to let people know that they can cope if it happens."

DALE WITNER

Published early in February and currently second on the *New York Times* best-seller list, *Communion* seems to signal a dramatic new era in UFOlogy. This time around an increasing number of everyday folk are claiming not merely to have spotted saucer-shaped spacecraft, but to have had disagreeable encounters with creepy travelers



Hopkins' subjects typically depict their humanoid kidnapers as bald creatures with domed heads and insect-like eyes. These sketches are based on "encounters" in New Jersey (left) and Kentucky.





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from another Time, Space, or Universe. Often signalled by the appearance of a dazzling white light, these so-called “alien abductions” allegedly leave the victims with periods of lost time for which they cannot account and hazy memories of frightening medical procedures at the hands of their captors. Descriptions of the offending aliens are fairly standard: The childlike figures are said to have grayish-white skin and round, black eyes set in grotesquely oversized, bulbous skulls.

Aside from *Communion*, two other nonfiction books recently issued by major publishing firms claim to chronicle meetings with extraterrestrials. The more plausible, *Intruders: The Incredible Visitations at Copley Woods*, (Random House, \$17.95) written by UFO investigator Budd Hopkins, offers up accounts of intimate, disturbing experiences that begin in childhood and engender psychic disturbances like the ones that Strieber suffered.

Strieber’s account of “kidnappings” which may have begun when he was 12

An artist whose work has appeared in the Guggenheim Museum, Hopkins has had little time for painting or sculpture since writing *Intruders*.

has drawn serious reviews. And Middle America has risen up to declare that it, too, has witnessed weird things. On talk shows, callers check in not to poke fun, Strieber says, but to report their own close encounters. By this month readers had sent him more than 1,000 letters detailing everything from sightings of alien craft to crossbreeding experiments conducted by humanoids.

The Illinois-based Center for UFO Studies reports that requests for information have “increased greatly” in the last few months; membership in the 1,500-strong Mutual UFO Network, a Texas-based investigatory group, has increased by roughly 10 percent in the same period. And the public response to the November UFO sighting by a Japan Air Lines pilot has been such that the federal government now offers information kits on the incident; for \$194.30, one receives a packet that includes Kenju Terauchi’s drawings of the craft that he encountered.

On the pop-culture front, the theme has emerged in one noteworthy context of late: The cliffhanger episode of *The Colbys* saw Fallon (portrayed by Emma Samms) disappearing into the sunset—not in a regulation plane crash, but in the bowels of a spacecraft that ambushes her car on a lonely desert road. “Richard Shapiro [the show’s co-creator] has been aware of the recent interest in UFOs, and it was an effort to end the season on as provocative a note as possible,” says supervising producer Bob Pollock.

There is no more controversial UFO tale than the one Gary Kinder, a 40-year-old writer based in Idaho, spent three years investigating. In the 1970s Eduard Meier—a Swiss caretaker offered films, tape recordings and shards of metal to support his claims of contact with emissaries from a distant star. Within the UFO community Meier is rejected as a fraud. Kinder still counts himself among the skeptics: In *Light Years* (Atlantic Monthly Press, \$18.95) he presents Meier’s story without making hard-and-fast conclusions about the evidence. “There were times when I’d be sitting there watching Meier, and I’d think, ‘This guy is just a very clever con man,’ ” says Kinder. “. . . If the contacts are true, of course it’s the biggest story ever. If [not], it’s a fascinating story about how this one-armed, sixth-grade-educated caretaker in Switzerland has been able to fabricate highly sophisticated evidence.”

The scientific establishment has yet to embrace the notion that aliens are walking among us. “I think those books reach the height of malarkey,” says Paul Kurtz, chairman and founder of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. “It’s possible there is life in outer space, but I know of no really hard evidence that we have been visited by extraterrestrial beings.” Still a growing number of reputable scientists are refusing to dismiss people like Strieber. Research psychologist Dr. John Gliedman is a “sympathetic skeptic” and a friend who witnessed Whitley’s struggle: “We should keep an open mind about what’s happening to him and to others,” Gliedman says. “I see no evidence that you’re dealing with mental illness here. But it’s not a pleasant experience; people who believe they’ve been abducted talk about it the way others might talk about a rape. They need to be given help.”

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Orson Welles's *The War of the Worlds* sparked an alien scare in 1938.

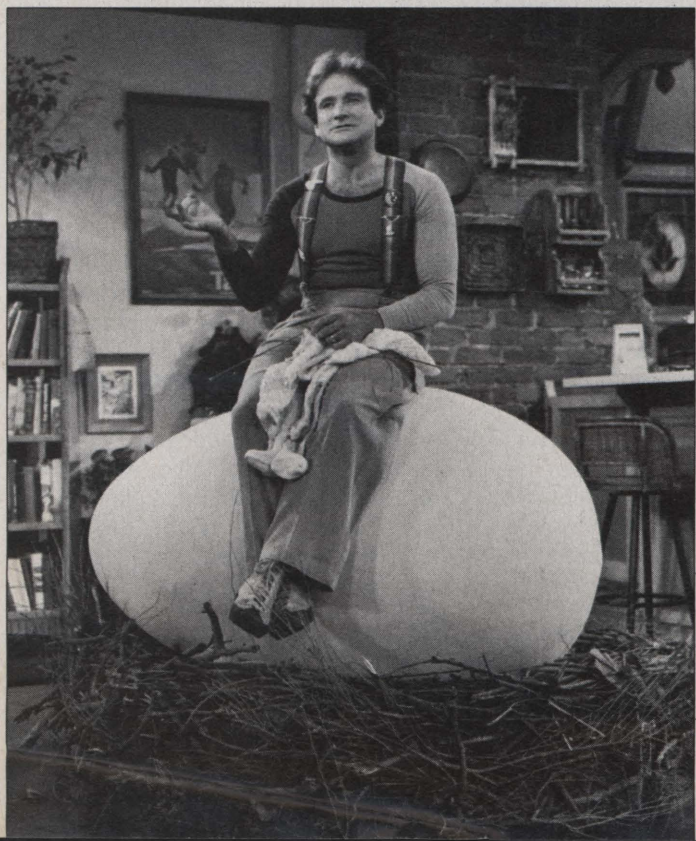


In Steven Spielberg's 1977 *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, abducted

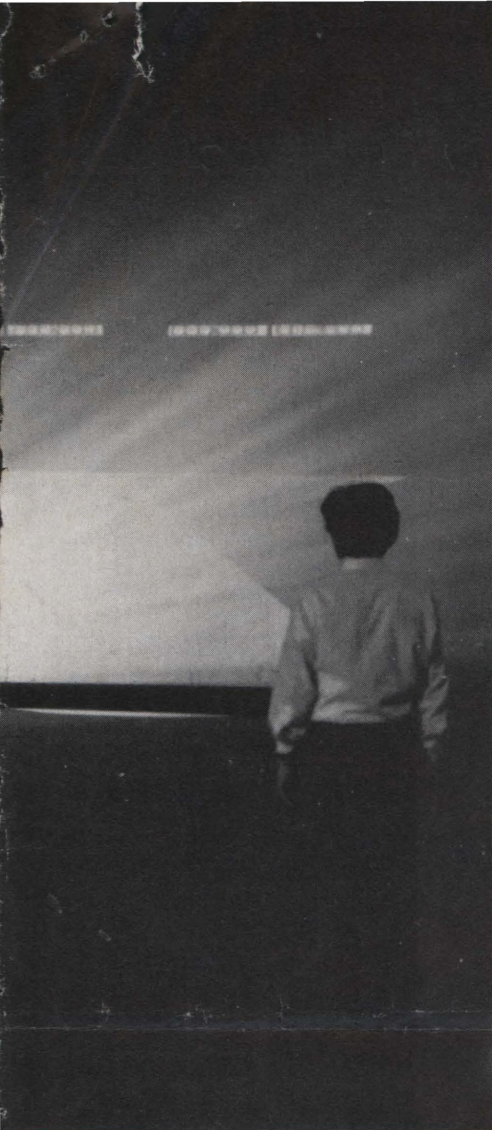


MOVIE STAR NEWS

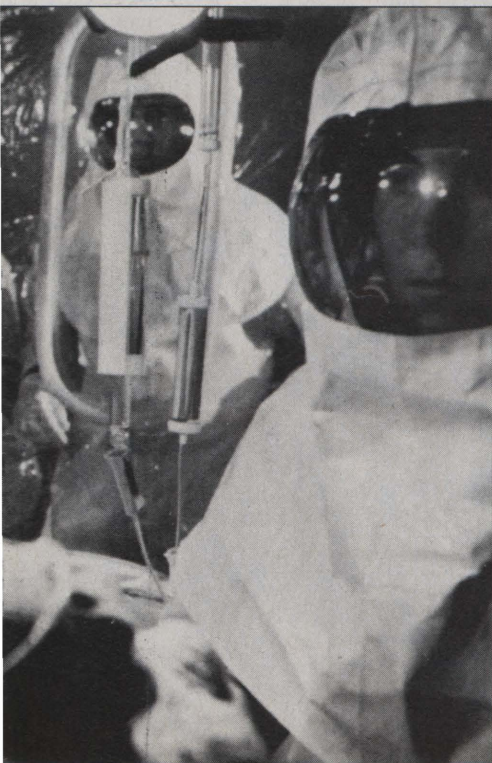
In *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (above) aliens arrived via pod. Robin (Mork) Williams (below) was egged on by Mindy to have a child.



Elliot (Henry Thomas) formed a warm bond with his visitor—here, in the



humans landed in a luminous craft.



BRUCE MCBROOM

clutches of dastardly adults—in 1982's *E. T.*

Budd Hopkins was the man whom Whitley consulted when the memories of his abduction began to haunt him. A successful painter and sculptor, Hopkins began to examine the UFO phenomenon after spotting an elliptical-shaped object hovering over Cape Cod in 1964. In 12 years he has recorded thousands of hours of interviews with more than 135 subjects. In *Intruders*, more than a dozen subjects describe kidnappings in which aliens perform skin grafts, probe orifices with needlelike instruments, appropriate sperm and ova and even present small hybrid beings that female abductees somehow know to be their own.

An abductee support group meets occasionally in the Manhattan townhouse Hopkins shares with wife April Kingsley, an art critic, and their daughter Grace, 13. When he saw Whitley last February, Hopkins says, "He was one distraught and disoriented man." Indeed—Strieber was undergoing a personality change so pronounced that his 17-year marriage was showing the strain. Hypersensitive, snappish, easily confused, he slept fitfully and felt as though he were being watched. Working was impossible—unable to concentrate for more than 10 minutes, he was wracked with chills and bouts of fatigue.

Whitley wanted to ignore the disjointed bits of evidence—his odd pains and inexplicable scabs, the UFO sightings near his country house, the confounding visions of "visitors"—but he presented them to Hopkins, instead. "As I sat there in that man's living room, listening to him tell me I wasn't alone, tears rolled down my cheeks," he wrote later, "and I went from wanting to hide it all to wanting to understand. . . ."

Toward that end, Strieber subjected himself to a battery of physical and psychological tests. A neurologist found no evidence of organic abnormalities, and a polygraph operator found that Strieber fully believed his own stories. Dr. Donald F. Klein, Director of Research for the New York State Psychiatric Institute, took Whitley through a series of shattering hypnotic sessions in which he recalled his "abductions" in lavish detail. In an appendix to *Communion*, Dr. Klein pronounces the patient of sane mind, saying, "He appears . . . to have adapted very well to life at a high level of uncertainty." Whitley, his wife Anne, 40 (who is also a writer) and

their son Andrew, 8, have come to terms with the fact that something surpassingly strange has touched their lives. (Andrew, he says, had dreams about being kidnapped by "little doctors" before he heard his father's story; Anne has witnessed unearthly lights and the like, but has no clear memories of being abducted.) Whitley continues to receive the occasional "visit" from the now-familiar humanoids, but the fear has abated: "I am beginning to have an awful lot of fun with this from an intellectual standpoint," he says. He is not at all sure that his captors are corporeal, or that they come from other corners of this universe: "I'm 80 percent sure that it is visitors, not necessarily from another planet, but from another aspect of reality, whatever that may mean," he says.

Even those in the business, as it were, occasionally find the quest overwhelming. Hopkins is unnerved by his discoveries: "These are not welcome inroads," he says. "The one thing I share with the people that this has happened to and with the skeptics is that none of us like this material, none of us want it, and all of us find it almost impossible to believe." Hopkins is resolute in defending the credibility of his witnesses: "They're not people who have regular psychotic episodes," he says. "In court, testimony from any one of these people might put somebody in an electric chair."

Strieber is determined to go boldly where no man has gone before. A *Communion* sequel is in the works, and he plans to publish many of the letters sent to him by fellow travelers who are willing to go public. He knows that there are those who cannot accept his story, but he stands by it. "Behind these perceptions," he says, "is some kind of great wonder. Anything that prevents us from having the joyous experience of discovering what that is is simply a waste of time."

—Written by Michelle Green, reported by Meg Grant and Kristina Johnson

After a Mexican abduction case, the "victim" drew this sketch of a hooded humanoid.

