

# Take me to your reader

Whitley Strieber has turned his close encounter with a woman from outer space into a best seller. YVONNE ROBERTS discovers what it all means

AT FIRST glance, Mr Whitley Strieber of New York looks remarkably familiar. Dressed in tweedy casuals and brogues, the slanted eyes and light lemon complexion nag at the mind. A quick look at the cover of Mr Strieber's best seller, *Communion - Encounters With The Unknown*, and you realise he looks exactly like the chief female "unknown", painted in ochre on the jacket. Is this narcissism on a scale which is literally out of this world?

Mr Strieber replies mildly that, yes, others have noticed the similarities. The "woman" he met on December 26, 1985, had no hair, leather-like skin and black holes where her pupils should have been, but there is a certain Strieberism to the cheek bones and the tilt of her eyes.

And Whitley, the original terrestrial toy-boy, admits to a certain affection for this older "woman" - even though she and a hundreds of other little creatures, kidnapped him from his bed, whisked him away to perform all manner of terrible experiments on his body and left him, in the short term, terrorised and mentally tortured. And in the long term, very, very rich.

## Sincerity is his biggest asset

*Communion* was published in the States in February. Mr Strieber had already received a million dollar advance and it is selling there by the thousands; it is published here tomorrow. Of course, others have been kidnapped by unknowns before - but Mr Strieber is the first intellectual. Or Intellectual, as he might prefer it. Had it affected his friends? Do they expect him to turn mauve at dinner parties?

"No," says Mr Strieber a touch flatly, "Lots of people have had experiences. And once you begin to talk about it, you realise how - by chance or whatever - these people tend to cluster together."

In the artificial light of a London hotel room, Mr Strieber, 41, who also looks remarkably like John Denver after a particularly tough night, is low key to the point of impassivity. If the "unknowns" have selected him to be one of the Chosen Few, then they are obviously not opting for Earthlings Who Like A Good Time.

Sincerity is Mr Strieber's best asset - that and what he terms his Credibility. Unlike the stereotype of many who have seen an Unidentified Flying Object - never mind boarded one - Mr Strieber did not need the notoriety. In the States, he says, he was Already Famous.

Two books he has co-authored, *Warday* (about world peace) and *Nature's End* (the environment), have been well received and entered the New York Times best seller list. Indeed his publisher was so concerned about Mr Strieber's reputation he refused to publish *Communion*.

"It was important for me to go ahead," Mr Strieber says. "People in the media knew me, they knew I wouldn't do anything fraudulent." Subsequently, a phalanx of doctors have judged him not to be nuts; lie detector tests have said he is speaking the truth and his saga, under hypnosis, remains consistent. The story goes, in part, like this.

On December 26, 1985, Whitley, his wife Anne and their small son were asleep in their log cabin near New York. He woke to the sound of swirling in the house, "as if a large group of people were rushing around the liv-

ing room". Two groups of "unknowns" appeared by his bed. One group were shorter and dressed in blue or grey overalls; the other were slender and taller.

They took him away to perform experiments on him, which included inserting a small thin needle into his brain (the pin prick was visible to Anne the next morning) and they placed "an enormous and extremely ugly object, grey and scaly with a sort of network of wires on the end" into his rectum.

Not unnaturally (no pun intended), Mr Strieber screamed and felt absolutely "terrorised". At this point, the unknown on the cover of the book - the older woman in Mr Strieber's life - asked "What can we do to stop you screaming?"

## A crusade for fellow abductees

"You could let me smell you," Mr Strieber reports himself as saying - and is given a whiff of something which is akin to cheese and old cardboard or cinnamon. A perfume which, he discovers later, has haunted his life.

*Communion* tells the tale of how he comes to terms with being one of the chosen few. Under hypnosis, Mr Strieber realises that it was no accident that at the age of 13 he announced "spacemen" had helped him to build an anti-gravity machine; he recalls how on a visit to London, staying in a flat in the King's Road, he "crossed the rooftops". And then there was the time in New York, in the early Seventies, when he and Anne had had a dialogue with the stereo.

Didn't Mr Strieber think all of this was odd, long before December 26? "No," he answers simply. "Perhaps, I didn't want to."



Alien fancy: Whitley Strieber has found fright turned into fascination

RON ANDERSON

Which brings us instantly back to Mr Strieber's sincerity.

Since the book's American publication, Mr Strieber says, he has had only two hostile interviews ("C'mon, Whitley, you're making a mint...") and Phil Donahue on his talk show had tried to do him down - but Mr Strieber's *Sincerity* won the day. Following his TV appearance, *Communion* moved up from Number 7 to Number 3 on the best-seller list.

As it is, Mr Strieber's present crusade is to give fellow abductees - people who have had remarkably similar

experiences but who are too frightened to speak out - a better break. "They deserve to be treated with dignity".

Therapy has taught him "to live with a high level of uncertainty" and if the visitors come back he's no longer worried. "It's gone from frightening to fascinating." Besides, they might not be visitors. *Communion* ends with musings on the wonders of synergy; the spiritual balance between us and the world. And the Eagle within Mr Strieber.

It's much easier to come to grips with his little visitors hypothesis. If he was taken by little visitors, he offers,

then they may have "doing something to me to cause an effect on our culture". This sounds more familiar. "You mean, you might be a sort of Messiah?" No, Mr Strieber is emphatic, that is not what he means. And here, suddenly, his hitherto dormant humour jumps into life - the effect is rather like hitting *Voice of Bulgaria* after hours of radio crackle. "They may have been programming me to forget something they'd done. If that's the case, they cocked up. And my wife tells me," he adds, chuckling, "I may be in bigger trouble than anybody has ever been in this world before."