

The World of Books

Close Encounters of a lucrative kind

TWO years ago novelist Whitley Strieber woke to find himself being scrutinised by a grey-faced, lipless, bald-headed alien with massive, impenetrable eyes and limbs like a grasshopper's.

He was transported to a spacecraft, had probes inserted into various orifices by bug-like beings smelling of burnt cardboard, and was subsequently returned to his bed, traumatised, sore-nosed and filled with 'an insane desire to come out with this in public.'

This desire was not as insane as you might suppose. The resulting book, *Communion - A True Story* currently tops the U.S. non-fiction bestsellers having sold over three million copies, has earned its author a million dollars, and attracts 50 letters daily from hitherto closet alien-spotters.

'I get chilled at the thought of being called Mr UFO,' protests Strieber, who is busily writing the screenplay, 'but for whatever reason, this came into my life.'

'We're dealing here with something extraordinary from beyond, or something extraordinary in ourselves.'

We are also, of course, dealing with something which cynics might say is a load of



Communion. A True Story - Encounters With The Unknown by Whitley Strieber (Century, £10.95)

Review by VAL HENNESSY

codswallop. Not that Strieber hasn't anticipated the cynics.

'At first I thought I was losing my mind,' he admits disarmingly, 'but I was interviewed by three psychiatrists and three psychologists and found to fall within the normal range in all respects.' Forestalling further scepticism he actually reproduces these psychiatric reports in an appendix.

Furthermore, and despite the words 'A True Story' which are printed at the end of every page to hammer the message home, he even entertains the possibility that the events he describes may not in fact have actually happened.

'This may be just a very deep working of my mind,' he concedes, 'but something is here, be it a message from the stars or from the booming labyrinth of the human subconscious.'

To tell the truth I couldn't put *Communion* down. The booming labyrinth of my own subconscious perked up and pulsed at Strieber's description of long legged beasties, and things going bump in the

night, and creepy female 'visitors' with deep voices who made indelicate genital examinations and etched mysterious triangles on to Strieber's arm.

Ludicrous? Fantastic? Who cares. It's a wild, compulsive read encompassing close encounters, hypnosis, and snippets of the paranormal.

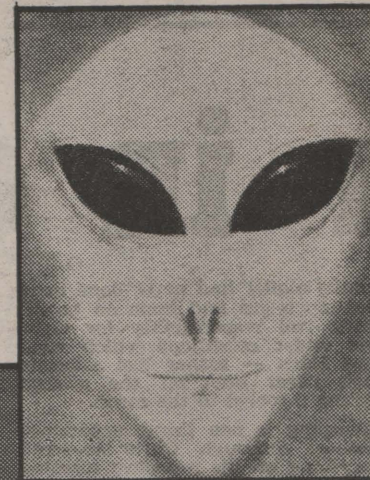
Did you know, for instance, that the word 'Chernobyl' in Ukranian means wormwood which happens to be the name of the star in the Book of Revelation that will poison a third of the world's waters?

SO what, you might say. So what, I said myself until I suddenly got scared of perhaps being woken one night by Strieber's skinny bald-heads determined to put me in my place.

Besides, if a Dr Bruce Maccabee (U.S. Navy research physicist) is prepared to stick his neck out and be quoted on the dustjacket insisting that, as a result of this book, 'we human beings must begin a re-evaluation of ourselves and our place in the history of the universe' then I, for one, am not going to poke my stick into Strieber's spokes.

'The scoffing must stop,' he says, while ruefully admitting to having scoffed about UFOs himself in the past.

So who are the visitors? Where do they come from?



A real space oddity: Author Whitley Strieber (with wife) and inset, the alien who beamed him up as a human guinea-pig for extra-terrestrial research. **BH**

Why are they here? Why doesn't Strieber whip his camera out next time they call? Alas, we must wait for the answers.

Meanwhile, Strieber, being a glutton for punishment, includes his address at the end of the book, inviting

correspondence and confidences from all the extra-terrestrially inclined.

Friends tell me he's been overworking lately. And more than that I dare not say in case one of them Out There beams me up and sticks a probe up my nostril.