



Issue #10

# ORBITER

*The New England Aerial Phenomena Report*

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## COMMENTARY

In this issue of Orbiter I reproduced an article, "UFOs: Why Do Some See Them and Others Don't", authored by Dr. Arthur Petrovsky, a member of the USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. This is a very informative article. It provides a clear picture of how scientists view the UFO subject from within their own particular field and their demands for facts and scientific evidence. Also, readers should take note of the orientation phenomenon which is mentioned in the article. This could be quite relevant to casework, the relationship between the investigator and witness, and how a case is interpreted.

In another article reproduced in this issue, "When Is a True Story True", (Publishers Weekly), Whitley Streiber states that two months after Communion was published he received 25 to 30 letters per day from people who had some sort of experience. Could this in effect be related to the orientation phenomenon?

## THE GULF BREEZE, FLORIDA FILE

Because of the complexity of the Gulf Breeze, Florida events developing since November 11, 1987 (mostly due to human involvement) and the interest expressed by many associates in the UFO phenomenon community, and for the need to make as much information available that is possible, Robert Boyd has compiled a list of 133 items of correspondence (totaling 531 pages). To obtain a listing of the items and costs please write to: Robert D. Boyd, P.O. Box 66404, Mobile, Alabama 36606, USA.

## RADIO-TV LOG

July 23: Arts and Entertainment Network aired a documentary "Secrets and Mysteries" which was a dramatization of courtroom proceedings regarding the existence of UFOs.

July 27: WJAR-TV Channel 10, PM Magazine aired a segment on UFOs.

August 23: Channel 5, Good Day aired a repeat on abductions.

## CONFERENCES

The 25th Annual National UFO Conference is to be held on the weekend of Sept. 17-18, 1988. Write to: UAPA, P.O. Box 347032, Cleveland, Ohio 44134 or phone Bob Easley at (216)741-9388 for information.

October 8-9, 1988 "The UFO Experience" sponsored by OMEGA Communications at the Ramada Inn, North Haven, Connecticut. Guest speakers include: John White, Walter Webb, Bruce Maccabee, Lawrence Fawcett, Philip Imbrogno, Kathie Davis, Sherry and Brad Steiger, Rev. Barry Downing, Jean Mundy, Dr. David Jacobs, Budd Hopkins. Registration fee is \$100.00. For further information, telephone (203)239-4225 or write to: OMEGA Communications, P.O. Box 2051, Cheshire, CT 06410.

Sept. 7, 1988: "UFO's Yesterday and Today". MUFON State Director for New Hampshire, Peter Geremia, will give a talk on the latest sightings in the New Hampshire area as well as worldwide. This talk is scheduled from 7-9 p.m. and is sponsored by the Expanded Mind, New London, NH. Tel: (603)526-2925.

The CUFOS position on the Gulf Breeze case

Readers of the article by-lined Ware, Flannigan, and Andrus (though apparently written by Andrus) in the July issue of the MUFON UFO JOURNAL may get a misleading impression of CUFOS' current stand on the Gulf Breeze, Florida, CE/3 photographic episode. Our concern here is not with what we consider the author's errors in reporting privately-stated views. We wish simply to make clear why we feel it is wise to take a cautious view of this difficult case and to wait the results of the still unfinished investigation.

CUFOS considers Gulf Breeze a potentially significant UFO case, but one that remains unproven. It is essential that research into every aspect of both photographs and testimony continue. Important questions are yet unanswered and necessary avenues of inquiry yet unpursued.

Four examples:

1) On November 19, 1987, the Gulf Breeze Sentinel published Ed's original (anonymous) letter accompanying his first five photographs. His letter stated that there were "no beams coming from [the UFO]". On December 7, in his first MUFON report form, he mentions no beam in his account of this November 11 incident. It is not until his third account of the incident, completed on January 8, 1988, that Ed reports a blue beam. In fact, the blue beam--which would come to figure prominently in Ed's claims--was first reported by a Gulf Breeze resident on November 11, according to a November 25 Sentinel article. Critics are bound to suggest that Ed retroactively incorporated a blue beam into his later account of the November 11 incident.

2) Ed has given three different versions of his activity at the initiation of the November 11 sighting. Why?

3) Questions have been raised about the relationship of the MUFON investigators and Ed and his family. Some observers have complained that Ed was kept fully informed of ongoing inquiries, including those that were turning up leads that might have produced disconfirming evidence. Since all photographic cases should be considered at least potential hoaxes, it is essential that investigators operate independently from those who claims they are checking. An operation that gives claimants sufficient advance warning to cover their tracks (if there are tracks to be covered) is seriously flawed. We are not accusing the MUFON team of committing this kind of methodological blunder, but the charge has been made by others and so far has not been answered.

4) We applaud Bruce Maccabee's admirable analysis of the Gulf Breeze photographs. He deserves nothing but praise for the care and thoroughness he has brought to the problem. But his analysis is only a first step. In science replication of findings is a necessary part of the process of inquiry. It is now time for another scientist as skilled and conscientious as Dr. Maccabee to examine the photographs and to report his conclusions.

We feel that the Gulf Breeze case has generated too much needless heat. We hope that in the future ufologists will devote their energies solely to sober consideration of the promises and problems of this extraordinary series of events. Since all of us, we hope, have only one concern - that the truth, whatever it is, be found - we can put behind the emotion that has so far played far too large a role in the debate and concentrate on the work that needs to be done. Whatever the answer turns out to be, ufology can only benefit from adherence to the strictest standards of scientific study.

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ELECTRIC SNOWSTORM: Port Huron, Mich., 25 March 1930

"St. Elmo's Fire was observed at 7:30 p.m. on the 25th during a fall of heavy, wet snow. Small electric brushes were observed at the end of the arrow of the windvane, on the axis of the vane and at the tail. The hissing was so loud that it could be heard down on the main roof of the Federal Building, some 60 feet below the windvane" Climate Data, Michigan, March 1930

## ORANGE BALLS OF LIGHT: EARTHQUAKES OR ALIENS?

Greg Long

Jim Melesciuc has invited me to contribute to Orbiter. For that, I thank him.

I'd like to talk a few moments about orange balls of light (or orange BOLs). Starting in 1981 I began investigating numerous sightings of orange BOLs on the Yakima Indian Reservation in south-central Washington state. The Chief Fire Control Officer, Bill Vogel, his fire lookouts and many others on the Reservation had been seeing these bright, large glowing balls in the atmosphere for years.

I was intrigued. There were dozens of good reports, plus excellent photographs of the balls. Plus, there were reports of non-orange UFOs (many white or "strobeline"), UFO "craft," humanoid encounters and Bigfoot sightings.

Michael Persinger, a neurophysiologist in Canada, and John Derr, U.S. Geological Survey, Denver, performed a limited study of the Yakima sightings. They found a seeming statistically important correlation between low-level quakes on the Reservation and the appearance of the balls. They concluded that tectonic strain produced the airborne orange lights. Unfortunately, they couldn't--and still can't--supply the physics for generating the spheres. However, this hasn't prevented Persinger and Derr from declaring that the Yakima UFOs, and others elsewhere, are a totally natural phenomenon. In fact, the scientists have looked at several so-called "window" areas, and based solely on interesting statistics, have labeled the UFOs there as natural "luminosities." Mystery solved?

Actually not. Persinger and Derr find that reading original case reports of orange balls of light, or other UFO sightings, a repugnant exercise. Why this is so, I do not know. I find their theory interesting, yet I also like a good debate, because there is a greater problem than their refusal to acknowledge the details of human testimony: What about the physics behind orange BOL generation? How are the spheres created, sustained and moved across great distances, at high altitude and for many minutes? Why do some orange BOLs divide and merge together? Why do some orange BOLs appear in cattle mutilation areas and seem associated with Bigfoot? Why do some orange BOLs change shape, such as into a boomerang?

Most importantly, why do not orange BOLs appear in great numbers in heavy earthquake areas, such as California? One would think they should, but the opposite is the case.

To put the issue of earthquake generation of orange BOLs and other UFOs to the test (and maybe finally to rest), I am embarked on Project Orange Ball of Light. I have several objectives:

- 1.) To determine if orange BOLs appear worldwide; and if so, do they appear in earthquake as well as non-earthquake areas.
- 2.) To identify areas of the U.S. which are earthquake "quiescent," i.e., which do not have a history of quakes; then determine if UFOs, and especially orange BOLs, are seen in those areas.
- 3.) To cross correlate good orange BOL reports from around the world to analyze the reported features; the intent here is to establish a clear profile of the material features and behaviors of the BOLs, and to uncover information (if any) as to physical production.

Currently, I am working closely with several investigators on these problems. My first criterion is good photographic evidence. My second is good reports: preferably multiple, independent witnesses. My third criterion is a large number of reports (for example, a dozen or more) from one restricted locale (a "window"). This will help perform any statistical tests between quake profiles and the presence of orange BOLs.

I am asking for help from the ufological community. Here is an opportunity to study one type of UFO; to thoroughly test a theory which historically has progressed no further than repetitive assertions of its worthiness using a generalized model; and to establish the fact that ufologists can come to grips with one aspect of the UFO puzzle--presenting in a professional manner the best evidence for orange BOL reality, supported with high-quality cases and photographs. If you have reports, clippings, articles, photos or any information regarding orange balls of light, I'd like to hear from you. Please send correspondence to: Greg Long, 10755 S.W. Murdock Lane, Apt. G-12, Tigard, Oregon 97224.

Thanks for your help!

Snow & Long Thunderstorm  
St. Louis, Mo., 1 Feb. 1893

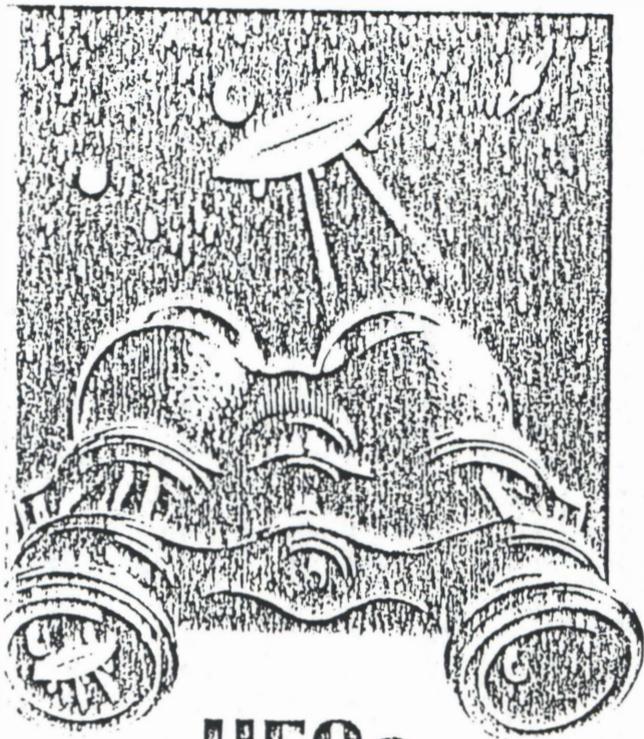
Thunderstorm accompanied by snow and sleet continued for three hours with temperature at 14°.

*Monthly Weather Review*, Feb. 1893

Snow on Fourth of July  
Portland, Maine, 4 July 1879

Flakes of snow fell--were seen by Signal Corps observer--occurred at 1700--temperature fell 15 degrees in 10 minutes in north-west wind to a minimum of 57° in evening.

*Portland Advertiser*, 7 July,  
in *The New York Times*, 11 July 1879



## UFOs: WHY DO SOME SEE THEM AND OTHERS DON'T?

Sputnik 1/83

SPUTNIK

which has been studied widely, apparently takes the form of an underlying basis of faith in all man has wanted to believe or that has been suggested to him. People possess various predispositions to these effects, but the existence of the phenomenon is undeniable.

Some time ago I was asked to join in the making of a TV film which was devoted to this underlying psychological basis of faith in miracles, *Burning Secrets of the Century*. In discussing the plan of the picture with the director and the script writer, I suggested showing how a psychological orientation to a "miracle" can create illusions where people would appear to be certain of the objectivity of their appraisals.

The film in no way attempted either to prove or disprove something specific. We invited people who claimed to have seen an abominable snowman themselves or were positive that they had received accurate information from those who had seen him. We also invited people who took a sceptical view of the matter. Those who believed in the mysterious Bermuda Triangle and those who did not. In a word, we

presented different standpoints. However, we were interested in what stood behind them - the psychological orientation - rather than in the standpoints themselves.

The film stressed that we do not know, we do not deny, we merely are examining why it all can be believed. So how did the viewers who believe in various miracles react? They took it as an open denial - due to the illusion of contrast. Because they believe in the balling and their faith did not find support, it followed that the film-makers were disbelievers who should be criticized and even condemned.

But I am not a disbeliever. If I heard that Atlantis had been discovered I would be delighted. I would be equally delighted to learn that contact with an extra-terrestrial civilization had been made. It would not be a psychological blow for me, as it might be for others. I would be no less delighted if the abominable snowman were delivered to Moscow University where I work, and if we learned whether or not he has the rudiments of speech. My only demand is scientific evidence.

by Dr. Arthur PETROVSKY,  
Member of the USSR Academy  
of Pedagogical Sciences

Condensed from the monthly ZHURNALIST  
Composition by Konstantin VICTOROV

Once a journalist I know said to me:

"You know something, I have seen a UFO."

"I believe you," I replied calmly.

The journalist was exceedingly surprised, "You don't deny such things are possible? But you are a scientist!"

"What is there to deny? All of us now and then see something unidentified flying in the sky. It would be another matter if you claimed that you had seen a craft with non-earthmen aboard. If you did, that would be something else again."

"Well, I find your stand reasonable. After all, it leaves me the hope that I have seen what I wanted to see."

"You are quite right. There is a natural yearning for a miracle..."

I don't suppose I am the best person to evaluate the puzzling and incredible phenomena which sometimes hit the pages of newspapers and magazines. Far from being a chance happening, they

respond to the human urge to overstep the bounds of the known into areas which have no direct scientific explanation. The logic is simple: once scientific and technological progress has made amazing things possible, why not take another step into the fantastic?

Not being an expert on flying saucers, the abominable snowman or the Bermuda Triangle (honestly, I do not think such experts exist), and incapable either of disproving or of confirming the existence of these phenomena, I can only suggest a common basis for discussing all this but in a totally different field. The common basis of the conversations, debates and quarrels connected with the surprising and the puzzling lies in the field of psychology.

Man has a psychological predisposition for believing in the miraculous - sometimes contrary to reason, sometimes in complete accord with it. In psychology, this general law is known as orientation.

Orientation is psychological readiness for some definite pattern of perceiving, comprehending, conceptualizing and appraising things. This phenomenon,

UFOs: WHY DO SOME SEE THEM AND OTHERS DON'T? -

In short, it is necessary to distinguish between what one wants to see, and what actually exists. There is nothing inherently supernatural either in the existence of the abominable snowman or in the arrival of a ship with non-earthmen aboard. It all lies within the bounds of the possible. However, if it is to be believed, real facts are needed and an adjustment must be made for the orientation.

A UFO is not a craft carrying beings from the stars, but an object which people can actually see. However, interpretation lies outside objective observation. It comes from man's orientation, previously accumulated knowledge and much else besides.

The more man knows the less his information shortage and the more he strives to break out of the confines of ordinary phenomena. He does not need to have holography explained to him, he knows enough about cybernetics and if there is life on Mars is no longer a fascinating question. Consequently, there is a need to shift to unknown territory.

Scientists always work on the

boundary between the unknown and the known, paving ways from the former to the latter. The greatest scepticism is displayed by scientists towards mysterious happenings in their own particular fields. For example, psychologists take a fairly sceptical view of all sorts of parapsychological phenomena, biologists and antropologists of the abominable snowman, meteorologists and hydrographers of the Bermuda Triangle, paleontologists of the Loch Ness monster. However, a psychologist can become intrigued by UFOs, a physicist can believe that the Loch Ness monster surfaces...

In other words, people are more inclined to believe in things they have no expert knowledge about.

On hearing me out, my journalist friend smiled:

"It follows that we, reporters, not being experts in any branch of natural science, are more inclined to believe the incredible than others?"

"Let's say it would be nice if journalists sometimes turned into psychologists and considered the impact of a published report on the general reader." 

cr: B.Greenwood

This is the first in a series of occasional articles on 'Publishing Issues' that will be featured in PW. From time to time, we will look at certain publishing decisions that are of more than routine interest—how they are made, who makes them and what are the consequences. It is hoped that this series will provide a forum for continuing discussion of such issues, sometimes all but forgotten in the bustle of the marketplace.

**DILEMMA:** You are a senior editor at a prestigious trade publishing house. A manuscript from a well-established author of horror and science fiction comes across your desk. The manuscript describes how the author was kidnapped, handled and examined by a number of small, robotlike aliens with shiny, black-button eyes. The book purports to be "A True Story" of the author's experiences, and it is supported by the testimony of an M.D. who says he is not suffering from "an anxiety state, mood disorder or personality disorder."

**QUESTION:** What do you do?  
**ANSWER:** If the author is Whitley Strieber, the book is *Communion* and you're in the business of making bestsellers, the quick answer is, "Buy it!"

#### The Book

Now in its 23rd week on *Publishers Weekly's* bestseller list, *Communion* is well on its way to earning out the estimated \$1 million advance paid by Morrow's Beech Tree Books and Avon for hardcover and paperback rights. Aided by publicity in *People* and appearances on CNN, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show* Whitley Strieber has enjoyed ample opportunity to take his case to the public.

If sales are any indication, the public is convinced that what Strieber says happened, happened. And this is what he said: On a number of occasions—most memorably on the nights of October 4 and December 26, 1985—three-and-a-half-foot aliens visited Strieber, carried him away and performed a number of experiments on his mind and body. He was left with a variety of visual, auditory and olfactory memories, some comforting, many unpleasant. Certain memories were masked by later experiences, but re-emerged under hypnosis. *Com-*

*Claflin is an author and the publisher of Brookside Press.*

*munion* is Strieber's attempt to reconstruct these events and other contacts with alien influences that have occurred throughout his life.

Checking up on Strieber's story, in the journalistic sense, is next to impossible. There is no way to verify the experiences he describes, except to interview other people to whom he described those experiences. (Aliens don't stand still for interviews, and don't answer calls.)

Nor is there any way to examine the evidence, since that evidence is in Strieber's memory. However, since publication of the book, he says that many people have written letters to him, revealing that they've had similar experiences. By the hundreds, according to him, they have thanked him for telling his story.

#### The Terms of the Dilemma

So, to make an editorial decision, you have to ask yourself, "Is this a true story?"

And the corollary: "Does saying it's so make it so?"

Beyond that, of course, is the question of whether you have to believe the story in order to believe it should be published. In other words, if the author hasn't convinced you to your satisfaction that the story is true, do you want to give that author a forum in which to convince others? And if you're not convinced, does that mean that you should stand in the way of publishing a well-told story?

Partly, of course, the decision will depend upon your editorial taste. But there's also the public to consider. Readers want to be enlightened, entertained and informed. Here is a book that is entertaining and informative—and, judging from sales and mail, satisfies a current need. Following these guidelines, you may decide that it is not an editor's prerogative to judge what constitutes a "true story." Let the author state his case, and let the audience decide.

#### Addressing the Issues

"There was no discussion about whether to publish this book as fiction," James Landis, publisher of Beech Tree Books, told PW. "It came in as *Communion—A True Story*, and that's the way we published it. I see it as a memoir. Whitley Strieber is saying, 'This happened to me.' I don't see any more reason to doubt this memoir than I would doubt the autobiography of

#### Publishing Issues—I

# WHEN IS A TRUE STORY TRUE?

The fact that 'Communion' is in the nonfiction column of the bestseller list raises some interesting questions for publishers

By EDWARD BEECHER CLAFLIN

a Hollywood actor or actress."

Sherry Arden, president and publisher of Morrow, concurs with Landis. "'A True Story' is the selling line we used, and that's how we felt about it. In other words, 'You may not believe it, but here's how it is.'"

Both Landis and Arden say they are convinced of Strieber's sincerity and impressed with the quality of his writing. "The language is very effective," Landis commented. "Whitley is a good writer, and any good writer will say, 'I want to involve the reader in the book.' People are reading it as a story—as a very involving piece of work. It's not on the list just because it's weird."

Arden: "Whitley is not a kook. He is a very, very credible person, with many contacts in the science community. We truly believe this happened to Whitley."

Rena Wolner, president and publisher of Avon, helped build enthusiasm for the book when Morrow and Avon were looking at the manuscript with an eye to a hard-soft deal. "This is a unique story, and that's a quality that a publisher looks for every day. Whitley had great courage to step forward and say what he has now said."

Wolner also felt the timing was absolutely right. "Six pages into this manuscript, I got the feeling that there's a need for this book—it's the right book at the right time by the right author. Whitley is one of the most creative people I know.

And he has done a wonderful job. People out there wanted someone to come out and relate this kind of story."

On the last page of *Communion*, rather unusually, the address of the author is given. Two months after publication, as *Communion* climbed toward the Number One spot on the Nonfiction Bestseller lists, Strieber said he was receiving 25 to 30 letters a day and had personally answered about 500.

"I read every letter," he told PW. "A vast majority of the people who write me have had some sort of experience—probably 90% of them. They have either experienced it personally or in their family. It's emotionally very intense."

Strieber frequently mentions the pain of people who have had direct contact with aliens and have been afraid to tell anyone about these experiences. He describes this audience as people who are "suffering intensely." Many have expressed their gratitude to him for writing *Communion*.

#### The Author's Story

The aliens, as described by Strieber, are about three-and-a-half feet tall, with "two dark holes for eyes" and either O-shaped or downturned mouths. They dress in various ways. Some wear smooth, rounded hats; others wear hoods. One had on a gray-tan body suit; another was dressed in dark-blue coveralls.

The portrait on the cover of the book is a sketch done by a police artist commissioned by the author. As in composite drawings of criminals, the drawing was created from a verbal description supplied by the witness. The alien on the cover is bald, with elongated nostrils, nonexistent cheekbones and a slightly bemused, intelligent smile in which there is no trace of irony.

Glancing at the cover, which is posted on his wall, Jim Landis notes that it is a "friendly presence." He adds, "This has been a charmed publication. We've had a wonderful time publishing this book."

But despite the appeal of their outward appearance, the aliens have caused Strieber acute distress. During his first hypnosis session with Donald Klein, M.D., a psychiatrist who is director of research at the New York State Psychiatric Institute, Strieber used the following words to describe the encounter that occurred on October 4, 1985. (Bracketed phrases in-

'This has been a charmed publication. We've had a wonderful time publishing this book'

— Beech Tree publisher James Landis



dicating Strieber's own reactions under hypnosis:

"I saw something that looked like it had a hood on it, standing over by the wall near the corner in our bedroom (*breaks into panic*) and I don't want it to be there! I don't want it to be there! Please! God, it— What's it doing to me?" (*Screams, prolonged, 20 seconds.*)

During hypnosis, Strieber writes, he felt greater panic than he had ever experienced in his life: "All I can say is that I relived fear so raw, profound and large that I would not have thought it possible that such an emotion could exist."

#### How It Played on TV

"My next guest," announced Johnny Carson on the evening of May 6, 1987, "claims he's been visited by nonhuman beings. It's a very strange, bizarre tale, and we'll hear his story tonight."

"It was a little figure three-and-a-half feet tall with a rectangular shield," said Strieber, speaking directly into the camera. "I was carried out of the room. It felt real. The creatures inserted needles and began operating on my brain. I realized my eyes were open. I began to scream. Then I said, 'Let me smell you.'"

"It was a wonderful spot on *The Tonight Show*," recalled René Wolner. "But the promotion has been a great strain on Whitley. He had to discipline himself to be able to respond to all this publicity."

"Whitley is such a wonderful guest [on shows]," Sherry Arden noted. "He doesn't look like a kookhead or a nut. He's terribly well-spoken."

Carson said he first saw Strieber on CNN and was so impressed with his presentation that he decided to invite him to *The Tonight Show*.

"There have been some very good hoaxes," Johnny pointed out to his guest. "Maybe some people out there are saying, 'How do we know he didn't just sit down and write it?' What do you say to them?"

"I know that many people are suffering," Strieber replied. "Those people have a right to relief from their suffering."

#### Strieber Himself

Strieber is also the author of six novels and (with James Kunetka) coauthor of two others. Novels like *The Hunger* and *The Wolfen* are horror fiction with (respectively) vampires and werewolves as lead characters. *Nature's End* and *War-day*, the books he coauthored with

James Kunetka, present a bleak and frightening picture of the end of the world. None of his previous books is a true story, or claims to be. But he drew on his abilities as a novelist in order to create immediacy and believability in *Communion*.

"Part of the magic of this book is that it's Whitley's words, thoughts and experiences," Landis told *PW*. "It's rather doubtful that a non-writer could spark the kind of enthusiasm that you find in this book."

"If *Communion* had come in poorly told, we certainly wouldn't have published it. In a certain way, the story itself is unexceptional. If an agent said to me, 'I've got a story of a guy who's been abducted,' I wouldn't run back to my pub board and say, 'We've got a book about a guy who was abducted...'"

"The book is well done. Some people are terrified by it and some are not. Some read it as a scientific endeavor—some as a scary book. Strieber has the ability as a descriptive writer to tell what happened to him. The embellishment of experience is what writing is all about."

#### The Skeptics' View

Bearing witness to aliens is high-risk writing, of course, and Strieber has come in for his share of criticism. The sharpest attack to date has probably come from Thomas M. Disch. Writing in the *Nation* (Mar. 14, 1987), Disch said



Whitley Strieber

Whitley is such a wonderful [TV] guest. He doesn't look like a kookhead or a nut. He's terribly well-spoken'

—Morrow prezidens Sherry Arden

'I don't see any more reason to doubt this memoir than I would doubt the autobiography of a Hollywood actor or actress'

—James Landis

'Novelists, especially horror novelists, know all kinds of ways to make the implausible seem plausible. It's what they're paid for'

—Critic Thomas Disch in  
The Nation

of Strieber: "Perhaps (we ought to at least consider the possibility) he is making up the whole story just as if he were writing fiction! Novelists, especially horror novelists, know all kinds of ways to make the implausible seem plausible. It's what they're paid for."

Gregory Benford, professor of physics at the University of California at Irvine, wrote a critical review of *Communion* for the *New York Times Book Review*. In a later interview with *PW* he commented, "This book is part of a deplorable trend in publishing. It is catering to the flagrant irrationalities of the public with tarted-up Potemkin-Village science. The re-emergence of the Shirley MacLaine/Bridey Murphy subgenre is a chastening reminder that we are not, in fact, a deeply rational society in spite of our technology. I regard these people as unwittingly in the same camp as the Fundamentalists."

Criticism of Strieber's form of inquiry has also been voiced by author Philip J. Klass, a former editor of *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, who is described in *Communion* as "a noted debunker of unexplained UFO sightings." Klass, the author of *UFOs: The Public Deceived* (Prometheus Books, 1983), has investigated UFO cases for 21 years. His research has led him to conclude, "There is not one iota of credible physical evidence to prove earth has been visited even once by unidentified flying objects."

After appearing with Strieber on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, Klass urged the author of *Communion* to file a complaint with the FBI about his alleged kidnapping. Klass argued that being kidnapped by aliens was, after all, much like being kidnapped by the PLO or any other terrorist group (though of an order of magnitude more improbable). Therefore, he felt, it should be reported to the FBI. "It is my opinion," Klass told *PW*, "that Strieber does not really believe his evidence for abduction is as convincing as he claims."

Since the publication of *Communion*, Klass has been writing a new book that examines the claims of Strieber and of UFO investigator Budd Hopkins (author of *Intruders: The Incredible Visitations at Copley Woods*, published by Random House).

"I expect to go head-to-head with these authors and demonstrate for any thoughtful person that this is a bunch of nonsense."

Klass told *PW*. His book has been signed by Prometheus Books for spring 1988.

#### Where Is the Truth?

Strieber, however, does not claim to be an authority on the subject of UFOs. In *Communion* and in his publicity appearances, he makes a point of emphasizing that he does not know who the aliens are, where they come from or what they want. As he states in the "Prelude" to *Communion*, "This is the story of one man's attempt to deal with a shattering assault from the unknown. It is a true story, as true as I know how to describe it."

Having undergone hypnosis to reconstruct the events that he experienced, he also took a polygraphy test to determine to his own satisfaction whether he was telling the truth. "The reason I carried out the polygraphy," Strieber concludes, "was to reassure readers that I honestly think that I perceived the things reported in this book. It is not fiction, and does not contain a word of fiction. My successful completion of this test in no way proves that my recollection of my experiences is correct, but it does confirm that I have described what I saw to the best of my ability."

"He is a brave man," commented Strieber's agent, Kirby McCauley. "How many authors would risk a career of this stature to write a book of this kind? Do I think it's a hoax? Not for a minute."

**THE DILEMMA** (restated): You are an editor for a prestigious trade publishing house, and a manuscript by a well-known author comes across your desk that deals with aliens.

If well published, it will surely become a bestseller.

The author will stand behind his story, and he is willing to go on tour.

He will provide testimony from a licensed psychiatrist asserting, "He has approached the dilemma of what is happening to him in a careful and forthright way and has pursued his investigation with diligence."

The author will undergo a lie-detector test.

He will quote the testimony of friends, family, colleagues and others who were with him at critical times.

He wants to call it "a true story."

**QUESTION:** Will you publish this book?

In the spring and summer of 1987, as ordinary folk went about their business, something extraordinary was taking place in America, something that would seem unbelievable were it not for the physical evidence: accounts of space-alien visits and UFO abductions landed mysteriously in the mainstream press. The reported claims bore an eerie like-

ness to stories which had been appearing for years in supermarket tabloids and which I had always lumped in the fictitious *DRAGON BABY ALIVE AND KICKING* category. Yet I have actual newspaper clippings and videotapes that prove beyond doubt that these reports indeed appeared in major news outlets, including ABC and *The New York Times*. What was going on?

For one thing, a conference on UFOs at Washington's American University in June had lured a number of news organizations, including the wires and television networks. It featured leading lights of UFOlogy who claimed, among other things, that space aliens were kidnapping people for medical study and that newly discovered documents revealed a "cosmic Watergate" centered in Washington; presidents had supposedly covered up evidence of alien visits for forty years, despite the leakiness of the federal bureaucracy and the nosiness of the D.C. press corps.

UFO press reports were also inspired by recent publication of two nonfiction books on "abduction" cases — *Intruders*, by conference participant Budd Hopkins (Random House), and the best-selling *Communion*, by Whitley Strieber (Morrow) — and by UFO researcher William Moore's circulation of a supposedly official document describing the discovery of four space-alien bodies.

Close encounters with such paranormal claims appear to afflict us reporters with a kind of journalistic schizophrenia. We are possessed by an overpowering desire to spin an entertaining yarn but at the same time are torn by a strong conflict on how to proceed:

- Should we approach the whole thing as a joke, and risk angering the growing segment of our audience that believes in the paranormal? (Forty-two percent of adults say they have had contact with the dead, up from 27 percent in 1973, according to a recent University of Chicago poll.)

- Or should we treat the matter as if it were serious and risk yielding to the temptation to state the pro-UFO case too strongly?

*The Washington Post* took the first, amused approach in two lengthy articles on "abduction" on March 9 and June

29. *Post* reporter Curt Suplee, writing of *Communion* author Strieber, who says he has been abducted, observed: "By his own account, he's a bit odd: 'I remember being terrified as a little boy by an appearance of Mr. Peanut.'") The pieces were good fun, but perhaps not totally open-minded.

ABC News followed the second avenue when it aired two lengthy reports on alleged abductions and alien visits — *Nightline*, June 24 (pegged to the conference), and *20/20*, May 14. The reports were strongly biased toward the UFO believers, who got to make their case at length. *Intruders* author Hopkins, for instance, said he had interviewed some 140 people, many under hypnosis, who described being kidnapped by dome-headed four-foot aliens, subjected to medical experiments, and released. He said that most of his subjects had never met one another, yet they had recounted details they could not have concocted independently — for example, needles inserted into their bodies, leaving strange scars; and mysterious hieroglyphics reproduced under hypnosis.

Given the incredible nature of such claims, one might have thought that ABC would give the doubters' arguments heavy weight. But according to my line count of the program transcripts, airtime for UFO proponents exceeded airtime for the skeptics by a ratio of about four to one on *Nightline* and roughly seven to one on *20/20* (which quoted more than ten UFO believers and only one skeptical source). Philip Klass, a Washington-based contributing editor of *Aviation Week & Space Technology* and the guest skeptic on *Nightline*, had hardly begun his rebuttal before the show was over. Klass, perhaps America's leading UFO debunker, had no time to present his argument that the "victims," highly suggestible under hypnosis, become convinced of the reality of what, in fact, are nightmares or delusions.

One might have thought that ABC would subject the abduction believers to tough cross-examination, but it was quite gentle. Among questions *not* asked on either program: Aren't the aliens de-

scribed by the victims uncannily similar to the ones in the film *Close Encounters*, Mr. Hopkins? Do you really expect us to give you any credence without letting us question all alleged victims and examining their scars?

ABC's approach was mirrored in *People* magazine, which devoted much of a 1,765-word May 11 UFO piece to *Communion* author Strieber, whose book details his own supposed abductions. *People* spent only two paragraphs discussing the skeptics and observed: "The introspective" author of popular horror novels like *The Wolfen* and *The Hunger*, Strieber is hardly the sort to risk his reputation in the service of mere sensationalism." Maybe not. But his reported \$1 million advance would certainly have sweetened the pot.

Something else that has inflamed reporters' imaginations is a document that UFOlogist Moore told the American University conference had been leaked to him by U.S. intelligence sources. Dated November 18, 1952, it is supposedly a briefing paper for President-elect Eisenhower prepared by "Majestic-12," a secret UFO intelligence

panel. The document said military scientists were studying the remains of "four small human-like bodies [that] had apparently ejected" from a flying saucer that crashed in New Mexico in July 1947. The document was quoted in newspapers, including *The New York Times*, which discussed it in some detail on the front page of its June 16 science section, which also carried a photo of the supposed briefing paper.

Most news accounts, including the *Times*'s, noted that there were doubts as to the document's authenticity, but suggested that it could be genuine. The suggestion irks Klass, who says that the document is such an obvious hoax, so riddled with implausibilities and internal inconsistencies, that it should not be quoted with a straight face. For instance, in July 1947, Eisenhower was Army chief of staff, in command of the officers who supposedly found the alien remains. Yet the document was written as if Eisenhower had never heard of the incident. Did its supposed author think Ike was so senile that, at sixty-two, he would have forgotten the most remarkable event of the century? This is but one of several Klass arguments that seemingly put the lie to the cosmic Watergate's smoking gun.

In his *Nightline* appearance, Klass issued a challenge to ABC: if the network thought there was only a 1 percent chance these reports of UFO contact were true, it ought to launch an all-out investigation with its fifty best reporters. If they came back with confirmation, it would be the biggest scoop of all time. But, if not, the network ought to tell the public, "It's nonsense and there has never been so great a con job done on the news media."

Klass really got the knife in with this comment, because, of course, most of us do not take UFO claims seriously at all. We might pretend to, for the sake of telling a good story, but we would not launch an in-depth investigation for fear of wasting time and becoming a laughingstock. If we are not prepared to investigate, we are in no position either to present UFO reports as serious news or to dismiss them as jokes. ■

Columbia Journalism Review - Oct/Nov 1987

## Public will see stealth bomber after the November elections

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The American public will get its first look at the Stealth bomber just after the presidential election, and the plane will make its maiden flight a short time later, the Air Force said yesterday.

Maj. Pat Mullaney, an Air Force spokesman, said the Stealth, designated the B-2, will not fly on the day of its public unveiling in California, but preparations for flight will be very close to completion by then. New planes often do not fly until several months after they are presented.

Fred Hoffman, a Pentagon spokesman, denied that the plane's unveiling had been set for after the November elections for political purposes.

Democratic members of Congress have cautioned the Defense

Boston Globe 8/5/88

Department not to make an election-year issue out of the new bomber, as was done with the B-1B. Gov. Michael S. Dukakis, the Democratic candidate for president, and Vice President George Bush, the likely Republican nominee, each have said they support the new plane.

The bomber is an unusually short plane because of its unique "flying wing" design and will take only two persons to fly, reflecting the sophistication of the new technology that has gone into its development, according to the Air Force. The B-52 bomber requires a crew of six and the new B-1B bomber is flown by a crew of four.

Published reports have suggested that overruns have pushed the price tag for the weapon up more than 20 percent, to about \$450 million per plane.

## Sputnik Mag. 6/68 Flying saucer in Mongolia

I want to recount an event I witnessed a few years ago. That summer we were working on the "Ugial" state farm. On the evening of June 27, 1964, I was returning to Ulan Bator in a very crowded lorry. Between about 10 and 11 p.m. the moon (or what I took for the moon) rose over the mountains on the north-west. Within minutes, and in full view of everybody, the object went straight up, sharply changed its course and then moved over the horizon in a northerly direction. Some 10 to 15 minutes later, the "moon" disappeared. I failed to take pictures of this strange "moon". And here is one more detail: when it hove into sight from behind the mountains it was the size of the real moon, but as it gained altitude it looked larger and larger. The object was also seen from Ulan Bator.

Haserdene Bold, Ulan Bator,  
Mongolian People's Republic

## New Flying Object Is Reported in West

### Californian Says Oval Craft Had Tremendous Speed

SAN FRANCISCO, June 30 (UP).—The "flying saucers" reported flashing through Western skies for nearly a week had a new aerial companion Monday—a strange "oval-shaped" aircraft.

A former air-line purser, Frank M. King, of San Leandro, Calif., said he and a group of friends saw "a strange-looking, oval-shaped object that gleamed in the moonlight and went with tremendous speed at about 4,000 feet altitude."

Mr. King's mysterious plane only slightly resembled descriptions of the "flying saucers" reportedly seen whizzing at "incredible speeds" at such widely separated points as Pendleton, Ore.; Boise, Idaho, and Oklahoma City since last Tuesday.

Another version of the Martian-like aircraft was given by a Lexington, Ky., physician and his mother, attending an atomic medicine class at the University of California. Dr. Leon Oetinger said he and three other persons saw a "silver ball" above the Grand Canyon in Arizona last Thursday, "too swift to be an airplane."

"It was a distinctly large ball," Mrs. Oetinger said. "It appeared to be falling."

## A. A. F. Pools Pools West's Flying Disks

### Says Army Has Nothing Like Them in Air

WASHINGTON, July 3. (AP)—A preliminary inquiry into reports that strange "flying disks" have been whizzing at 1,200 miles an hour over the West "has not produced enough facts to warrant further investigation," an Army Air Forces spokesman said today.

The official said "we don't have a thing that would give any realism" to a report made last week by a Boise (Ida.) business man. He said he saw nine mysterious objects—big as airplanes—racing over Washington State's Cascade Range with a peculiar weaving motion "like the tail of a kite." Several other persons in widely scattered localities later said they had glimpsed similar objects.

The A. A. F. spokesman said the Army has no new experimental planes or guided missiles which would fit such a description. He said A. A. F. people are inclined to believe either the observers just imagined they saw something or that there is some meteorological explanation.

However, Wright Field (Dayton, Ohio) public-relations officials said the Air Materiel Command is making an investigation of "saucer-shaped" missiles seen recently in the Pacific Northwest and Texas.

Physical evidence?

# Report of UFO over Egremont is investigated

By Erik Bruun  
Berkshire Eagle Staff

EGREMONT — In an incident reminiscent of a scene from the movie "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," an unidentified flying object reportedly was observed in North Egremont last weekend.

The sighting was the latest in a series of reports of UFOs being seen by people along the Massachusetts-New York state line, said Gary Levine, an investigator for the Mutual UFO Network.

"We've had some reported sightings along the border between Columbia County and Berkshire County," Levine said. "We've also heard of other sightings that have not been officially reported. The UFOs haven't been identified as helicopters or astronomical phenomena. No conventional explanations can be made for them."

Police Chief Michael Balcom said a "responsible" resident reported this week seeing a flying object with bright lights hovering above North Egremont. He said the sighting was made Sunday at about 8 a.m. but was not reported until Tuesday night. Balcom forwarded the information to the UFO Phenomena Research and Reporting Center in Seattle. They sent Levine to investigate.

### Physical evidence

Levine said the report seemed to be legitimate. According to the person who saw it, the UFO had an elliptical shape and bright white lights, Levine said. It remained stationary at about a 30-degree angle above the ground for between 60 and 90 seconds before departing, Levine said.

Physical evidence of the UFO may have been left, and tests are being undertaken to determine whether the evidence can be explained, he said.

"Samples are being evaluated because of the nature of the physical evidence," Levine said. "The evidence was left in a very orderly manner. There were very precise measurements involved, which would make one suspicious that it was something of significance."

Neither Levine nor Balcom would reveal what the evidence was, the specific location of the sighting or the person who reported it.

### Other reports

Levine, who said he has a doctorate and has been investigating UFOs for several years, said similar reports have been made in northern and northeastern Columbia County near the Massachusetts border in the last two weeks.

In one incident, he said, a person saw an object with bright white lights hovering over a rural area for several seconds.

If a UFO is sighted, Levine said, it should be reported and a regular procedure is followed. If the UFO center believes the report is legitimate, an investigator goes to the scene to determine what happened. Details of the sighting, such as where and when it occurred, what was seen and who made the sighting are recorded.

Levine said anyone who has made a sighting or knows of a sighting should write him at P.O. Box 1485, Kingston, N.Y. 12401.

NY Herald Tribune  
7/2/47  
cr: R. Giordano

NY Herald Tribune  
7/4/47  
cr: R. Giordano

### High-Flying Mystery

Only bold men say "impossible" these days, but surely an occasional "unlikely" will be permitted. From widely-scattered Western cities come reports of saucerlike objects hurtling through the air at unheard-of speeds, and each flurry of unsubstantiated reports gives rise to wilder theories of new planes, new missiles, new technical advances. In some of the surmises the United States is credited with a new burst of genius, while theorists of a more dour nature ascribe the work to Russia. Meanwhile, the flaws in the stories are overlooked: That weather planes, scouring the area daily, have brought back no such reports; that the flying saucers appear to have the secret of indefinite levitation and never land; that neither this country nor Russia would be likely to select a populated area for tests of a secret weapon.

With so little to depend upon, a guess as to the nature of these apparitions is dangerous, although most of the reports can safely be attributed to delusions brought on by reading earlier reports. One possible explanation may be put forth: Look into the Westchester sky some sunny week end, and repeatedly you will see glints of sunlight reflected from the silver wings of planes. Fast-moving jet planes, so high that the plane itself is invisible to the naked eye, give off the same bright flashes, and most of this country's jet planes, new and old, are based in the West. It would be entirely natural for an observer, seeing first a speeding glint and then only empty space, to think of strange missiles flying at tremendous velocities, and to spread the report among people eager to be in the swim and see the same thing. Such an explanation, guess though it is, has at least the merit of being credible.

NY Herald Tribune  
7/3/47 cr: R. Giordano

Berkshire Eagle - Pittsfield, MA. 4/22/88  
cr: J. Nyman



Alien talk shows