
From inner mind, not outer space

COMMUNION: A TRUE STORY.
By Whitley Strieber. Century.
299pp. \$24.95.

Reviewer:
COLIN STEELE.

C *COMMUNION: A True Story* was the surprise non-fiction best-seller in America in the first half of this year. Strieber, however, is no stranger to the best-seller lists, having previously written the successful horror novels *The Wolfen* and *The Hunger* and the "nuclear gothic" novel *War Day* with Jim Kunevka.

Whitley Strieber in *Communion* tells of the arrival in his remote log cabin on Boxing Day 1985 of small "intelligent nonhumans" and his subsequent experiences with them. He asks the reader to believe he is not a "UFO nut" and not mentally deranged. Strieber's background in science fiction and horror makes one wonder whether the whole thing was a carefully planned pub-

thing was a carefully planned publicity stunt with lucrative side-effects — *Communion* received a \$1 million advance payment.

Strieber recognises the widespread disbelief his account will raise. Throughout his narrative he questions his experiences and sanity, recalls the events and earlier ones under hypnosis, takes lie-detector tests, consults psychiatrists, and avoids over-sensationalising his "experience" until the conclusion.

The hypnosis revealed he was "one of the chosen" and had been visited many times in the past. Why did the "aliens" visit Strieber and what is their purpose? Strieber ends up with a variety of answers, including a hive-like group who have only been on Earth for a relatively short time but by their operating in a "time-warp" have visited Earth throughout the ages and have thus imprinted their presence on human consciousness.

None of the publicity material circulated by Strieber's publishers alludes to Strieber's pre-*Communion* interviews, for example those given in the "horror press". Douglas E. Winter in *Faces of Fear* states of Strieber: "the unwashed might find him the quintessential paranoid" and that Strieber's intent is "to stay the progress of death". His novels after *The Hunger* explored the invasion of our society by alien races and powers that were capable of a parasitic co-existence with humanity. The

co-existence with humanity. The more, therefore, one delves into Strieber's background the more one can find the seeds of *Communion*. This is not to say Strieber is intentionally hoaxing the reader, but that the elements that come to the fore in *Communion* have always been present in Strieber's fictional writings and public interviews, not least an increasing mysticism and a fear of an apocalypse.

Communion will not convince the sceptics but will and has converted those who want to be converted. It is perhaps no coincidence that Timothy Good's *Above Top Secret: the Worldwide UFO Cover Up*, just released in Britain and a less "unified" book than Strieber's, has sold a large number of copies by arguing that aliens visit us regularly and that governments on a global basis keep their existence secret. Arthur C. Clarke has argued that such writers should not simply be regarded as cranks but rather as potential threats to society with their unsubstantiated claims.

Strieber's *Communion* is not quite on this political conspiracy plane, although his historically eclectic last chapter leads him to believe he may be "chosen" to save the world. Until real scientifically quantifiable evidence is produced then *Communion* can only be regarded as a meeting place for the gullible or a traditional piece of science fiction.

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