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Strieber's 'Confirmation' Slated By Mainstream

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Date: Thu, 30 Jul 1998 03:04:29 +0200
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>From CNN's site. URL:

<http://cnn.com/books/reviews/9807/29/confirmation/index.html>

Again I want to emphasize that this post in no way is meant as an endorsement of the views that are voiced in the article.

Stig

Strieber's exuberance falls short of proving there are UFOs

'Confirmation: The Hard Evidence of Aliens among Us'
By Whitley Strieber

Saint Martin's Press, \$23.95

Review by L.D. Meagher

Web posted on: Wednesday, July 29, 1998 2:55:43 PM EDT

(CNN) -- There's something in the sky. There's something in my room. There's something in my head. They must be connected.

That's the argument Whitley Strieber makes in "Confirmation", his fifth book about extraterrestrial aliens. Its subtitle summarizes his approach to the argument: "The Hard Evidence of Aliens among Us".

Strieber's "hard evidence" comes from three different types of experiences: sightings of unidentified objects in the sky, stories of alien encounters or abductions, and objects removed from the bodies of people who believe they have been abducted. As he recounts each incident, he tries to reflect an air of scientific detachment. He isn't necessarily arguing that all the "evidence" he cites is proof that aliens walk among us. Instead, he claims he is only marshalling arguments for a concentrated research effort by the scientific community. His mask of objectivity, however, refuses to remain in place.

Despite the author's exuberance, there's not much new to report on the UFO sightings front. He offers new photographs of unusual

objects in the sky, mostly from Mexico. They have the familiar look of earlier pictures. The objects are somewhat indistinct, but clearly disc-shaped. Strieber asserts that they are more authoritative, however, since they aren't mere photographs, but images captured on videotape. There's even video from a space shuttle mission which enthusiasts interpret as an apparent attempt by earthlings to shoot down a UFO. He goes beyond "flying saucer" imagery, too. He breathlessly recounts blurred images of "rods" that inexplicably appear on videotapes shot in the desert. Sometimes, these objects are captured on just a single frame of the tape. Strieber doesn't offer any explanation for these things. Instead, he insists the scientific establishment must investigate them.

Since he published "Communion", his first-person account of an alien abduction, Strieber has solicited letters from other people who have had similar experiences. Not surprisingly, he has received many. Some are recounted in "Confirmation". He notes that there are similarities among the stories. He insists each contains unique elements that separate it from the others. Therefore, he argues, a lot of people are having different experiences, and science should do something.

Then there are the objects removed from people's bodies. Despite his facade of scientific detachment, Strieber calls them "implants". He concentrates on a few cases in which the objects have been surgically removed. Some of them are metallic, and covered by a membrane. Others are non-metallic. One looks like glass. A few of the metal objects and the piece of glass were subjected to scientific analysis. It turns out they are made of either metal or glass. Strieber concludes the metal is like that found in meteorites and the glass is unlike any ever found on Earth. The scientists who performed the analyses stop well short of those conclusions. And they offer no suggestion that the objects have any purpose. They aren't transmitters, or homing beacons, or microchips containing the Encyclopedia Galactica.

It would be so much easier to understand, according to Strieber, if only the government wasn't hiding the truth. "In this society," he writes, "anybody who isn't at least somewhat paranoid probably isn't entirely sane." The government conducted secret mind control experiments, he reminds us. And the official explanations of "The Roswell Incident" range from unconvincing to absurd. Strieber concludes the government is hiding something about alien encounters. And because the government funds so much scientific research, the science establishment must be in on the cover-up.

In the end, Strieber casts aside his pretense of detachment. He is an advocate, on the side of those who have seen UFOs, been abducted by aliens, and had extraterrestrial hardware implanted in their bodies. All are the work of "visitors," he concludes. The visitors may not be from another planet, but he's convinced they exist. "The visitors may be at once tempting us with their theater in the sky and forcing us into action by the outrageous invasion of our bodies represented by close encounter. Whatever they are doing, it seems clear they are not preparing for some great event where they finally put in an overwhelming appearance."

More than once, Strieber invokes the spirit of Carl Sagan, who laid down the gauntlet by insisting proponents of alien visitation offer some proof to back up their contentions. Indeed, "Confirmation" seems to be Strieber's response to that challenge. But Sagan did more than simply solicit offers of evidence. He demanded they be scrutinized using what he called the scientist's "baloney detection kit." It contains the tools of skeptical thinking. As he explained in "The Demon-Haunted World":

"What skeptical thinking boils down to is the means to construct, and to understand, a reasoned argument and -- especially important -- to recognize a fallacious or fraudulent argument. The question is not whether we like the conclusion that emerges out of a train of reasoning, but whether the conclusion follows from the premise or starting point and whether that premise is true."

Strieber contends he is offering the evidence Sagan demanded. In fact, he is offering anecdotes and artifacts for which several interpretations exist, and disregarding all but those that

support his contention that "visitors" are here and doing something to humans.

"Confirmation" offers nothing that will shake the faith of those who are convinced Strieber is right. It also offers nothing that will sway those who think he is wrong. In the end, it is a bit like a religious faith. To non-believers, no proof is possible. To believers, none is necessary.

L.D. Meagher is a News Editor at CNN Headline News. He has worked in broadcasting for nearly 30 years.

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