

## The Village Alien

If Whitley Strieber isn't fibbing in his new book, *Communion* (and the book's cover boldly affirms that it is "A True Story"), then it must be accounted the most important book of the year, of the decade, of the century, indeed, of all time. For what Strieber recounts in *Communion* is nothing less than the first contact of the human race, in the person of Whitley Strieber, with an ancient alien civilization that abducted him from his cabin in the Catskills on the nights of October 4 and December 26, 1985 (and on various other occasions over the years), and took him aboard a flying saucer, where he communicated with a variety of alien beings and was subjected to surgical and sexual indignities. To cover their tracks the alien abductors then implanted false "screen memories" in Strieber's mind (as they have been doing, he has come to suspect, throughout his life). Only later, in March 1986, did hypnosis reveal the true character of what had happened to him.

There have been other, similar reports of UFO sightings and contact with aliens, but Strieber's is unique in two important respects. First, as he notes himself, "If mine is a real experience of visitors, it is among the deepest and most extensive as yet recorded." Second, this is the first time a best-selling author has written his own extensive, firsthand account of a UFO experience. Strieber's early novels were horror stories, taking traditional figures like werewolves (*The Wolfen*, 1979) and vampires (*The Hunger*, 1981), and placing them in contemporary urban settings.

Both books became successful movies. Two later science fiction novels were written as collaborations with James Kunetka: *Warday* (1984) is a fictional "documentary" of nuclear holocaust, and *Nature's End* (1986) treats global ecological catastrophe on a similar panoramic scale. *Communion* seems the end of a logical progression, leading Strieber from the fiction side of the bestseller list to the nonfiction side. That assumes that *Communion* will make it onto the list, but with a one-million-dollar investment in the book, William Morrow would seem to have confidence in its success.

Skeptical readers (and I freely confess that I began as one) may feel

that the million-dollar advance paid for the book is in itself reason to doubt the good faith of the author. For there certainly could be writers who might be tempted for such a price to invent such a tale out of whole cloth and swear to its truth. Strieber does not address this question directly in his book, but he makes it clear that he deplores charlatantry and pseudoscience, and those who profit from the public's credulity:

One of the greatest challenges to science in our age is from modern superstitions such as UFO cults and people who are beginning to take instruction from space brothers. Charlatans ranging from magicians to "psychic healers" have tried to gather money and power for themselves at the expense of science. And this is tragic. When one looks at the vast dollars that go each year to the astrology industry and thinks what that money would have done for us in the hands of astronomers and astrophysicists, it is possible to feel very frustrated. Had the astronomers been awash in these funds, perhaps they would have already solved the problem that I am grappling with now. I respect astrology in its context as an ancient human tradition. Still, I wish the astronomers could share royalties from the astrology books.

Strieber is aware that there will be those who may doubt what he is saying, and even admits: "I did not believe in UFOs at all before this happened. And I would have laughed in the face of anybody who claimed contact." He maintains, furthermore, that until impelled by his own experience to examine other UFO literature, he had taken no interest in such matters. If he had read widely in the literature, the striking correspondences between his own UFO experience and that recorded by others could be ascribed to imitation. A case in point: *Science and the UFOs*, by Jenny Randles and Peter Warrington, a book that by happy coincidence he'd received from his brother at Christmas of 1985, just hours before the visitation of December 26. He did not read it at once, for "I was surprised to find that *Science and the UFOs* frightened me. I put it aside with no more than the first five or six pages read." Later, however:

I finally finished *Science and the UFOs*. Toward the end of the book I was astonished to read a description of an experience similar to my own. When I read the author's version of the "archetypal abduction experience," I was shocked. I was lying in bed at the time, and I just stared and stared at the words. I, also, had been seated in a little depression in the woods. And I had later remembered an animal [a screen memory].

My first reaction was to slam the book closed as if it contained a coiled snake.

Throughout the book, the correspondence between Strieber's and other contactees' experiences constitute one of the main criteria offered for our believing that *Something Must Be Happening*, something bigger than Whitley Strieber:

What may have been orchestrated [by the aliens] with great care has not been so much the reality of the experience as public perception of it. First the craft were seen from a distance in the forties and fifties. Then they began to be observed at closer and closer range. By the early sixties there were many reports of entities, and a few abduction cases. Now, in the mid-eighties, I and others—for the most part independent of one another—have begun to discover this presence in our lives.

Even though there has been no physical proof of the existence of the visitors, the overall structure of their emergence into our consciousness has had to my mind the distinct appearance of design.

There does, indeed, appear to be a design, but could it not be accounted for by the tacit collusion of the witnesses? Of course, we have Strieber's assurance that he was innocent of earlier testimony until his own experiences prompted him to do research. But by his own account Strieber's memory is an erratic instrument, due (it may be) to the aliens' implanting, virtually on an annual basis, of false "screen memories," the weeding out of which constitutes a very large part of *Communion*:

Many of my screen memories concern animals, but not all. I remember being terrified as a little boy by an appearance of Mr. Peanut, and yet I know that I never saw Mr. Peanut except on a Planter's can. I said that I was menaced by him at a Battle of Flowers Parade in San Antonio, but I now understand perfectly well that it never happened. For years I have told of being present at the University of Texas when Charles Whitman went on his shooting spree from the tower in 1966. But I wasn't there.

Then where was I? And what is behind all the other screen memories?

Perhaps on some level I do know. Maybe that's why I spent so much time peeking into closets and under beds. If I really face the truth about this behavior, I must admit that it has been going on for a long time, although in 1985 it became much more intense. Now that I have uncovered these memories, though, it has ended completely.

As a matter of fact, I cannot remember a time in my life when I have felt as well and as happy as I do now.

That is not to say that Strieber's life has been untroubled since the surfacing of the aliens. *Communion* records so much distress, suffering,

agony, anguish, and pain that in undertaking to write of the book I dreaded to think that I might be adding to it by taking a tone that would suggest that I am scoffing at the author. Strieber has had the same dread and in his introduction cautions against making light of “people who have been taken by the visitors”: “Scoffing at them is as ugly as laughing at rape victims. We do not know what is happening to these people, but whatever it is, it causes them to react as if they have suffered a great personal trauma. And society turns away, led by vociferous professional debunkers whose secret fears apparently close their minds.” Here is a sampling of the sufferings, both physical and mental, that Strieber has had to endure:

[Aboard the saucer] the next thing I knew I was being shown an enormous and extremely ugly object, gray and scaly, with a sort of network of wires on the end. It was at least a foot long, narrow, and triangular in structure. They inserted this thing into my rectum. It seemed to swarm into me as if it had a life of its own. Apparently its purpose was to take samples, possibly of fecal matter, but at the time I had the impression that I was being raped, and for the first time I felt anger.

My wife reports that my personality deteriorated dramatically over the following weeks. I became hypersensitive, easily confused, and, worst of all, short with my son. . . . I had a feeling of being separated from myself, as if either I was unreal or the world around me was unreal. By December 28 I was so depressed and in such a state of inner conflict that I sat down and wrote a short story in an effort to explore my emotions. . . . I called it “Pain.”

This story appears in an anthology of horror stories edited by Dennis Etchison, *Cutting Edge*, and a most revealing exploration it is. See below.

[After hypnosis by Dr. Donald Klein] I recalled seeing a landscape with a great hooked object floating in the air, which on closer inspection proved to be a triangle. Then there followed a glut of symbolic material, so intense that even as I write I can feel how it hurt my whole brain and body to take it all in. I don’t remember what this was—triangles, rushing pyramids, animals leaping through the air.

Are such experiences the source of the performance anxiety that has been detected in psychological tests I have taken, or does that have to do with the many recollections I have always had of sitting in the middle of a little round room and being asked by a surrounding audience of furious interlocutors questions so hard they shatter my soul?

Finally, this *cri de coeur*, wrested from the author during hypnosis as he relives his examination by the aliens aboard the saucer. Dr. Klein has asked, “Are they paying attention to you?” and Strieber replies:

“Yes. There’s one of them now sitting down in front of me staring right at me, and she’s completely different from the others. The others are all very small people. This one is tall and thin. And she’s sitting down. She’s all gangly. I don’t know what to make of that. I don’t know what to make of this. Where the hell—how the hell—you know, it’s like I can’t see. I just don’t know what the hell to make of this. It’s just impossible. It’s totally impossible. It can’t be like this.”

What the aliens are actually up to zipping around in their UFOs and inserting probes into the orifices of selected citizens never becomes very clear. Although he often has had the opportunity, Strieber rarely has the presence of mind to ask his aliens where they come from or what their intentions are. Once they volunteer the information: “You are our chosen one.” A more ambitious chosen one than Strieber might want to know what such an announcement portends. Does it mean he is the single person chosen from the whole human race to be the aliens’ go-between? If so, what an awesome destiny! But Strieber declines to speculate, though the bulk of the book is given over to his speculations: whether the visitors come from outer space or from some other dimension; whether they are archetypes or ancient gods conjured up from the communal unconscious; whether their natures are insectlike; and questions even more improbable:

What might be hidden in the dark part of my mind? I thought then that I was dancing on the thinnest edge of my soul. Below me were vast spaces, totally unknown. Not psychiatry, not religion, not biology could penetrate that depth. None of them had any real idea of what lives within. They only knew what little it had chosen to reveal of itself.

Were human beings what we seemed to be? Or did we have another purpose in another world? Perhaps our life here on earth was a mere drift of shadow, incidental to our real truth. Maybe this was quite literally a stage, and we were blind actors.

Perhaps. Who can say? Perhaps I only *dreamt* I read Strieber’s book. Perhaps James Landis at Morrow only *dreamt* he paid a million dollars for it. Or perhaps (it occurred to my ever-skeptical mind) human beings *are* what they seem to be, and Whitley Strieber is embroidering the truth.

Certainly in the last passage quoted he looks remarkably like a hack writer padding out a thin story with a lot of guff. Some novelists do that. Even Whitley 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.

Another thing novelists have been known to do is to enlarge, develop, or inflate a short story they have written to novel length. Sometimes they do this because they feel the story's theme has not been fully realized; sometimes simply because they have no better hook to hang the next novel from. If *Communion* were a novel and not *A True Story*, anyone who had also read the short story "Pain" would feel certain that there was such an acorn-to-oak relation between the two works, and for that reason it is worth examining in detail. It begins with a professional narrative hook: "When I encountered Janet O'Reilly I was doing research into the community of prostitutes." The narrator is circumstanced much like Strieber himself: he is a professional novelist living in Greenwich Village with his wife and three children. (Strieber himself has one child, a son, age eight, who is reported in *Communion* to have shared, with Strieber and his wife, in some of the close encounters the book describes.)

For my new book [the narrator relates], to be called *Pain*, I wanted to know not only about prostitution but also about the various perversions that attach themselves to it. There are sexual desires so exploitative that people will not gratify them without being paid even in our exploitative society. These have to do for the most part with pain and death. For death is connected to sexuality—witness the spider. Who hasn't wondered what the male spider feels, submitting at the same time to the ecstasy of coitus and the agony of death?

There follows a male spider's précis of Western culture, from the ritual sacrifice of kings and Roman emperors to Hitler's death camps and the Kennedy assassination. Then comes a fairly extensive consideration of "ufology," which is surprising in view of Strieber's claim in *Communion* that he had not been concerned with such matters at the time "Pain" was written—and had, indeed, been a skeptic. The narrator of "Pain," by contrast, sounds quite convinced that *Something Is Happening*:

There is evidence all around us of the presence of the hidden world. We reject it, though, as silliness and foolery.

Because it knows that this hidden civilization feeds on us, the gov-

ernment does everything possible to hide reality. It does not want us to know that our lives, our culture, our very history has been designed for the purpose of causing us suffering, and that there is nothing whatsoever that any of us can do to relieve ourselves of this burden.

I was astonished to see in 1983 that NSA had been approached by CAUS (Citizens Against UFO Secrecy) under the Freedom of Information Act to divulge what it knows about UFOs. Officially, the government has made a massive effort to debunk the whole notion of “flying saucers,” claiming that they are all either hoaxes or misperceptions.

After these discursive preliminaries the story begins again at its first beginning:

I met Janet O’Reilly at the Terminal Diner at the corner of Twelfth and West streets in Greenwich Village. I was there because of my research. The Hellfire Club is nearby, a haunt of New York’s sadomasochistic community. I particularly wanted to connect with some of the people who went there to make money. I wasn’t interested in the compulsive participants, but rather in the men and women who preyed on them.

Well, one thing leads to another, and before he knows it the narrator has been lured to Janet’s apartment, “a miserable filthy cellar on Thirteenth Street,” where the library contains books by Proust and Céline. She invites him to crouch at her feet, and when he demurs she kicks him in the chest. She is verbally abusive: “Unlike you, I don’t lie about myself. Now you’re here and you’re still having difficulty submitting.” Eventually, however, he comes around, only to learn this sorry wisdom:

When I go to her and submit myself, a part of my suffering will be the certain knowledge that all of their lives [i.e., those of his wife and children] will be damaged by my act. My pain will be infinitely greater for understanding that It will lead to theirs. To know that you will cause grief to those you love is a very hard thing.

As True Stories go, “Pain” has more of a ring of truth than *Communion*, but possibly that is because Strieber has had more experience as a writer of fiction than of nonfiction. It is at times hard to remember that Janet O’Reilly is an alien and not just a fly-by-night dominatrix. The narrator’s visit to her flying saucer is over almost before it begins. One minute he’s having a beer behind a cabin (how life does imitate art), and then: “The next thing I knew I was in a tiny, droning airplane with Janet. At first I

didn't recognize her. Then I saw that she was flying the plane, watching me out of the corner of one eye. She spoke in a language I could not quite understand."

The textual parallels between "Pain" and *Communion* are even more extensive and systematic than this synopsis can indicate, but it would be hard to deny the virtual identity between the fictive Janet O'Reilly and the nameless alien who abducts Strieber and, in one rather breathless paragraph of hypnotic transcript, has something like sex with him.

There are two ways I can think of to account for this. The first is that Strieber, having made the imaginative equation between the "archetypal abduction experience" and the ritual protocols of bondage and domination, realized he'd hit a vein of ore not previously tapped by ufologists, who have been generally a pretty naive lot. To have drawn such an explicit parallel in *Communion*, however, would have risked alienating the audience at which such a book is targeted, and so among Strieber's many speculations there are none that examine or allude to the metaphorical premise of the story and its relevance to the "abduction experience," a relevance that is only to be found, once again, beneath the longer narrative's surface, like a prize bone dug up and then reburied.

A second possible explanation is that the story represents the first surfacing of materials repressed by the aliens, who had, only days before the story's writing, taken Strieber aboard their saucer and given him such a hazing. This is undoubtedly the explanation Strieber would adopt if the question should ever come up, though in *Communion* he is content to let that sleeping dog lie.

That Strieber appreciates that "Pain" poses an awkward question was confirmed early this morning (Monday, February 23) by a telephone call from Strieber in Chicago, the latest stop on his extensive promotional tour. He had earlier agreed to be interviewed in New York on Saturday, but then called to cancel that meeting. I decided to begin this essay without the benefit of speaking with Strieber, but I still wanted to know more about the chronology of the composition of story and book. Yesterday, to that end, I telephoned Dennis Etchison, in whose anthology "Pain" appeared, and asked when Strieber had been solicited for a story and when Etchison had received the completed manuscript. There was nothing in the dates to contradict Strieber's account, and Etchison was full of praise for his friend and contributor (who had been "a national debating champion and studied for fifteen years with the Gurdjieff Foundation"), and for "Pain," confiding that Strieber had told him that he regarded it as "a major turning point in my life and my career."

Etchison inquired for what magazine I was writing my piece: *Omni*? I



had to admit it was the Nation, and this produced a resonant silence and an expressed wish that his remarks were all off the record. I would certainly have complied with his wish if he had not himself at once sent out an SOS to Strieber, who then left the following message on my answering machine:

Tom, it's Whitley at 8:30 on Monday morning. I'm calling you from Chicago. I still have got time problems. I also understand from other people who you've talked to that you're planning what is apparently a really vicious hatchet job on *Communion*, and I'm not sure I even want to talk to you about it. It's an awful, ugly, terrible thing to do. The book is so obviously from the heart! To think that it was written for money—it shows an absolute lack of sensitivity, and also a lack of understanding of the book market. You know, the book was turned down by its original publisher [Warner], and I had to write it knowing it had no publisher. The fact that I got . . . a good price for it . . . I shouldn't be punished for that, Tom, nor should the people that this strange experience— [Here the machine stopped recording.]

About an hour later, he called again, and this time I was doing my own answering. Without any prompting or argument, Strieber repeated his reproaches, deploring all those flaws in my character that he'd first observed when I'd taken over the PEN table from him at the 1985 Small Press Fair at Madison Square Garden. Even from our brief time-filling conversation he'd sensed a lack of human decency and feeling that had made him feel . . . sorry for me, nothing but that. He suggested that it was not too late to show some elemental respect for human feelings, that I didn't have to subject him to the agony my essay would surely cause. When he'd lost his first head of steam, I pointed out that, not having read what I'd not finished writing, he was arguing with straw men. No, he said, he could tell where I was heading just from my condescending tone of voice, and from the questions I'd been asking about "Pain." It became clear that "Pain" was a sensitive area, and without my having to state my sense of its relevance, Whitley volunteered his own, which corresponded to the "second possible explanation" given above, that the story had just bubbled up from his subconscious as a result of his encounters with the aliens. It wasn't the acorn, so to speak, but the first little oak.

What Whitley could not have imagined at that moment (and what I certainly was not going to tell him after so many minutes of vituperation) was that I was no longer a skeptic about UFOs, that, in fact, in the course of writing this essay I have been in contact with alien beings, and though

my aliens—the Winipi (pronounced Weenie Pie; singular, Winipus)—are not of the same race as those in touch with Strieber (who are known, and feared, throughout the galaxy as the Xlom), they, the Winipi, are well informed of the purposes of the Xlom and the grave danger they represent.

However, before I relate what I've learned about the Xlom and their human minions, I should give an account of how I encountered the Winipi and was taken aboard their flying saucer. It was on the same Saturday I was to have seen Strieber. I had gone downtown to get coffee at my favorite coffee store on Blecker Street, and, realizing that I was only a few blocks from the address Strieber had given me to call at, I thought I would see where he lived. It was a brick building larger than a brownstone but smaller than the massive piles of Washington Square Village, which it faces. Its facade was paneled at ground level with squares of black slate, and the lower doors and windows were secured with heavy ornamental iron gratings. On an impulse I went down the short flight of steps and entered the foyer. I pushed the buzzer marked "Strieber," thinking that he might find time to see me after all. No response. I pressed the buzzer a second time, and as I released it I felt a strange shuddering vibration pass over me, which I ascribed at that time to static electricity.

Leaving the foyer, another unconsidered impulse made me turn right (instead of left, toward home), and within minutes I found myself beside a fenced-in quarter-acre of wasteland, which a signboard declared to be a "Time Landscape." The sign went on to explain that this was "an environmental sculpture of a primeval forest, showing how this area looked in the fifteenth century." If the Time Landscape was any clue, Manhattan was in pretty sorry shape in the fifteenth century. Stunted oaks, scrawny maples, a few empty beer cans, and a broken umbrella contested with one another for the parched bare dirt.

In the middle of this primeval squalor I observed a strange phenomenon, which at first I assumed to be no more than a metallic-hued Frisbee gliding slowly in a long curve through the sickly branches of the dying shrubs. But why did it not reach the end of its trajectory? Why did it seem to hover inches above my head, emitting a pallid cinnamon-scented effulgence? (Strieber notes that the scent of cinnamon is often associated with alien contact.) Why did I seem to hear an eerie contralto voice whispering in my ear, "Sleep! gigantic Terran, sleep!"?

And then, nothing, blackness, snores. I awoke inside the wire enclosure of the Time Landscape with my green spiral notebook lying beside me in the dirt. And Strieber's words were echoing in my ears: "I don't

know what to make of that. I don't know what to make of this." I walked home in a daze. I dined in a trance. I went to bed in my pajamas—and when I awoke, that same eerie contralto I'd heard earlier ordered me, in implacable accents: "Go to your desk."

The next morning, after breakfast, I discovered that I had filled an entire floppy disk with what must be thought of as a kind of automatic word-processing. Are the words on the disk my own writing? I cannot say. They are on the disk. A brief prefatory note declares that they were written on "Washington's Birthday, February 22, 1987, 3:34 A.M.: I cannot tell a lie!" They seem to be the transcript of the dialogue I had carried on with my abductors the previous afternoon. They are, like Strieber's transcriptions of his testimony under hypnosis, unedited:

Me: Where am I? Who are you? What's happening?

Winipus I: [Giggles; then] Hello, Terran. You are in the Time Landscape on La Guardia Place between Bleecker and Houston, aboard our spacecraft, Winipi Frisbee IV. Welcome! And what is happening, Terran, is your own archetypal abduction experience. [More giggles; scurrying sounds; a burp]

Winipus II: [Speaking in a deeper, masculine voice, with a strong scent of peanuts on his breath] Welcome to the club. Just as Whitley warned you, right there in the endpapers of his book, "Don't be too skeptical: somewhere in your own past there may be some lost hour or strange recollection that means that you also have had this experience."

Me: I can't believe this! I'm in your flying saucer. But it was no bigger than a Frisbee.

Winipus I: That is because we Winipi are no bigger than peanuts. The tallest of us is not quite one centimeter. We had to use our shrink-blasters to get you inside the ship.

Me: [Confused] Shrink-blasters? But Strieber doesn't say anything about shrink-blasters. This is some kind of practical joke, isn't it? You're not aliens. You're—oh my God, no! I see you now! I smell you! You're . . . Mr. Peanut! It *wasn't* a screen memory that Strieber had. You *were* at the Battle of Flowers Parade in San Antonio!

Winipus II: We were there, yes, but we weren't threatening him. We were trying to save him from the Xlom. You see, Terran—do you mind if we call you Tom? You see, Tom, there are two alien races, us and the Xlom. The Xlom are, as Whitley intuited, humanoid insects with a hive mind. They have only one goal in their group mind, one all-con-

suming purpose, one hunger that drives them from star system to star system—Arcturus, Antares, Vega, Venus, and now Earth. They want money.

Me: Money? But if they're aliens . . .

Winipus I: [Twirling his cane] It's ridiculous, isn't it? Why would a Xlom need dollars? We've never understood that side of their characters. We only know they're insatiable, and utterly without a sense of humor.

Winipus II: That's why we have been following them everywhere through the universe. Because what we Winipi love more than anything else is comedy. The Xlom are just so funny. And in combination with you earthlings! I mean, what you never said in all those pages about Whitley's wonderful book is how funny it is. It's a classic, right up there with McGonagall's poetry or the Ninja thrillers of Eric Van Lustbader. Caviar, absolute caviar!

Me: But if what he says is true, then it isn't that funny. Clumsily written perhaps, but there's a point to all his nebulous fears. He may be in grave danger, if—

Winipus I: [Chuckles] Oh, it's much too late to save Whitley from the Xlom! He's one of them now himself. Surely you've seen *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Well, that's what the Xlom have done with Whitley. All those sessions of forced feeding that he reports? That's how it was done. Whitley's consciousness now is 95 percent Xlom. Even back at the parade in San Antonio it was too late to help him.

Me: Wait a minute. Why would the Xlom be letting Whitley reveal all their secrets? That's the major logical objection to his book in the first place: if the aliens are so wise and powerful, why is a [characterization deleted] like Strieber their "chosen one"?

Winipus II: First, there was money to be made, and as we've explained, the Xlom will do anything for money. They nearly became extinct a millennium ago when they began selling their children to the Arc-turans for spare parts. But that's a separate story. There's not just the money for the book. There are already movie offers. Whitley's certain to write a sequel. And there's an outside chance he can get a whole cult going for himself on the order of that woman in Washington, the one who's been reincarnated so many times. Didn't you notice that *Communion's* last page is an invitation to write to Whitley at 496 LaGuardia Place? What better way for the Xlom to make mass conversions of humans into Xlom minions? As to his book letting the

Xlom's cat out of the bag, do you think most sensible people will believe it? Of course not. Oh, talk-show hosts treat him politely enough. In the broadcast time allotted to Silly Season celebrities like Strieber, they're content to let him tell his tall tale, take his bow, and head back to the airport. A wink and a smile will convey their sense of what kind of goods are being sold. But to call him to account would be like trying to swim in a swamp. It's more than they're paid for. As for what we've revealed to you, your readers will just dismiss the whole thing as satire, a story you've invented as a demonstration of how easy it is to make up any nonsense and call it A True Story as long as its only probative basis is the good faith of someone who'll swear he's not lying.

Here the transcript of my conversation with the Winipi breaks off. I can dimly recall other things that took place aboard the *Winipi Frisbee IV*, including a grueling tap-dancing lesson with a large group of Winipi, for which I was forced to wear a Mr. Peanut costume. (My feet hurt terribly the next day, so strange as this memory seems, I know it must be true, and not a screen memory.) I also learned the names of many other humans who have, like Whitley Strieber, been transformed into Xlom. Some of the most notable or notorious figures in modern society are Xlom, from Wall Street arbitragers to movie stars and high-ranking White House officials! The Xlom are everywhere, and there is no way they can be detected except with the Xlom-detecting technology developed by the Winipi—which I alone, of all humanity, have been entrusted with! After the Winipi had tuned the Xlom-detector (which is in itself undetectable) to my neural patterns, and as I was about to leave their saucer and be de-shrunk, one of them said to me, “You are our chosen one.”

And then they laughed!