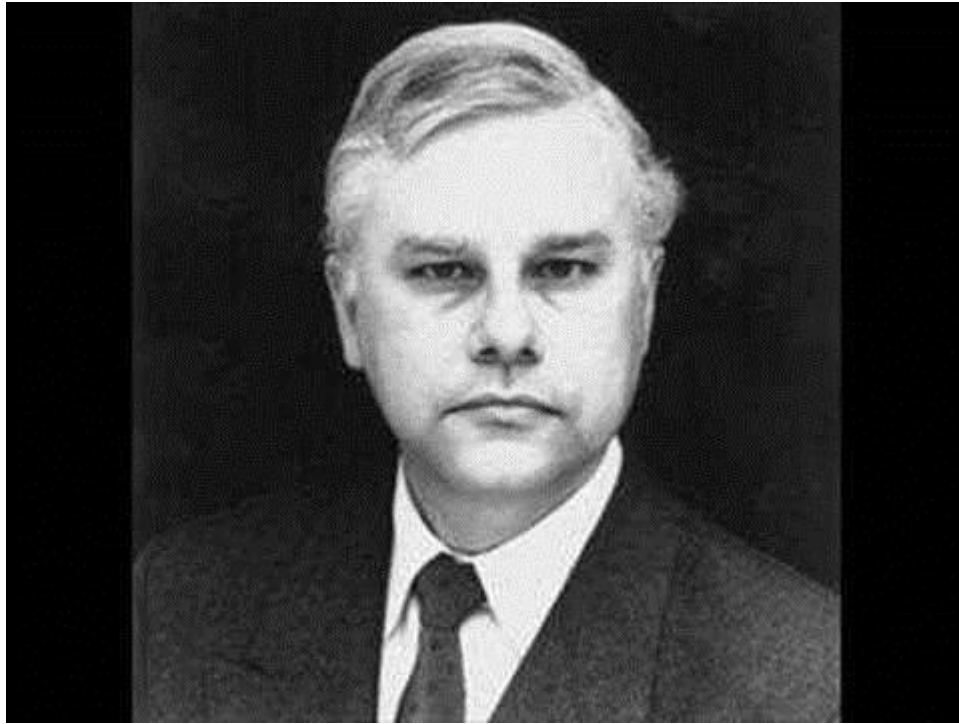


Through a Fractured Glass, Darkly

The Facts in the Strange Case of Whitley Strieber

by Aeolus Kephas, 2011

(Revised & extended version)



Part One: Will the *Real* Whitley Strieber Please Stand Up?

What are we to make of the strange case of Whitley Strieber? Already well-known for his horror fiction (*Wolfen*, *The Hunger*, both made into Hollywood movies), Strieber underwent some extremely unusual personal experiences back in 1985 and wrote a book called *Communion*, after which his name became more or less synonymous with alien abduction. Yet Strieber is far more than just a man who claims that aliens did some highly strange things to him. Looking at his work so far, from *Communion* to *The Communion Enigma: What Is To Come* (which I have not yet read), a picture emerges of Strieber as the John the Baptist of the alien paradigm—the “chosen one” of a race of preterhuman, apparently ancient, unimaginably advanced beings. Crying in the wilderness of 21st century civilization, mocked and derided by orthodoxy (in this case science rather than religion), he is nonetheless regarded with awe and fascination by a large number of devoted followers, all eager to partake of his strange baptism. (Between his website and his radio show “Dreamland,” Strieber’s followers apparently number in the hundreds of thousands.)

While many have dismissed Strieber as a liar, out for a fast buck (*Communion* was a best-seller), others, more charitable, merely suggest that he is deluded or insane. In *Communion*, Strieber himself claims he was willing, even eager, to believe his experiences were the result of a brain tumor or some undiscovered form of mental aberration, but eventually he had to accept that what appeared to be happening really *was* happening. Even back in 1986, Strieber was not alone in his claims of alien abduction. Whether collective hallucination, hard cold fact, or something that is neither one nor the other, reports of the phenomena became widespread throughout the '80s and '90s (especially in the US), to the extent that a Harvard professor, John Mack, even wrote two books about it. Mack (who died in a hit and run accident in 2004) almost lost his chair at Harvard as a result of his research, however, and orthodox science continues to regard the subject as beneath contempt, unworthy even of the time it would take to contest it.

Strieber started out as a writer of horror novels, a somewhat dubious pedigree that made it considerably easier for his debunkers to dismiss him. Strieber, they said, was a spinner of yarns, pulling the oldest trick in the book and boosting his flagging sales by presenting his latest yarn as fact. Yet comparing Strieber's horror fiction to *Communion* and its sequel, *Transformation*, one can't help but be struck by the difference. Strieber's horror novels are passable pulp, while his supposedly true accounts are powerfully disturbing; reading them, there can be little doubt Strieber is sincere in his belief that these events actually occurred. No less discerning an intelligence than the author William Burroughs—who was curious enough to pay a personal visit to Strieber in 1989—spoke out in Strieber's support. "I am convinced that he's telling the truth," Burroughs said after his visit, "no doubt about it."¹

To dismiss Strieber as insane doesn't work, either, because there were plenty of other witnesses to testify to the strange goings-on around his New York cabin during the period in which he underwent his experiences. (Ed Conroy even wrote a whole book on his investigations, called *Report on Communion*.) So if Strieber is neither insane nor lying, if what he says happened actually happened, the question to ask is: how accurate are his accounts, and why, exactly, did these beings choose a well-known author of *horror fiction* to introduce their presence to humanity?

¹ Burroughs to Victor Bockris: "I was very interested in his first books and I have convinced that this was somehow very authentic. I felt that it was not fraud or fake. . . . On the basis of that I wrote a letter to Whitley Streiber saying that I would love to try to contact these visitors. . . . I had a number of talks with Streiber about his experiences and I was quite convinced that she was telling the truth. . . . The strange thing about him is that this part of his face (from the forehead to below the nose) has a sort of mask like effect." Bockris: "*Does he have a tranquil presence*" Burroughs: "No it's not very tranquil at all although it's not disquieting. In the first place he's a man with tremendous energy and always busy. Since I've seen him he wrote a whole book, *Billy*, which is now going to be a motion picture and soon. He's always working, always busy, and walks around the property, a very active person you know, quite clear, quite definite. He seems a very hospitable and sensible person. I can't say that I experienced anything. And he told me this: when you experience it is very definite, very physical, it's not vague it's not like a hallucination, that they are there, is I didn't see anything like that."

See <http://www.interpc.fr/mapage/westernlands/dr-burroughs.html> for the full interview.

Alien Daze

“Remember this: earth has given birth to something we call the human mind. But the visitors view it as a precious resource of innovation and, ultimately, of ecstasy. They are indifferent to power, but willing to use dark appearances to give lessons.”

—Strieber, “Summer of Promise, Summer of Danger,” July 12th, 2003.

Rather than trying to sum up Strieber’s experiences, and his interpretation of them, I will let his words speak for themselves:

“The close encounters I had between 1985 and 1994 were scary, but only because they were so unusual. The people—or beings—I met were complex and, in the end, gentle. They had a wonderful, subtle sense of humor. There were many personalities involved, obviously many different individuals. My life with them was spiritually and intellectually rewarding. They responded with deep understanding to the path I was on, and worked with me as true masters work with a student on the journey toward higher consciousness. . . .ⁱ This was an extremely subtle, paradoxical and complicated experience. I encountered many different levels of being, some of them openly terrible, others more neutral, others sublime. I have no way of knowing if they were all the same or different creatures entirely. . . . The message of my contact experience is, therefore, clear: face the fear and you will get rewarded by breaking down natural barriers to perception that impede you from interacting completely with the world in which you live.^{ib}”

Having lived with the visitors for many years, Strieber describes the beings as emanating from

“a world that reaches across space and time, that penetrates not only this universe and its secrets, but many others as well, that is ancient beyond belief and, in a way that I can hardly even begin to explain, impeccable. I’m not saying that they’re pleasant. They’re as tough as nails, as mean as snakes and as dangerous as plutonium. . . . You cannot be with them without also being with your own truth. Then you see what you really are, a little fragment in a vastness so great, so various and so shockingly, unimaginably conscious that it completely swallows you.”ⁱⁱⁱ

This more or less sums up Strieber’s “objective” (mostly impartial) view of his alleged experiences with the beings: there is a dark side to them, but one that seems to provide context, or “shading,” for a far larger experience which includes positive *and* negative aspects. Overall, Strieber seems to believe that the *effects* of his “close encounters” have been beneficent to him. And although unsure how many different beings—or kinds of beings—he has interacted with over the years, he is sure about one of them:

“The woman whose portrait is on the cover of *Communion* . . . was without a doubt the greatest master I have ever known. Her being projected devastatingly powerful knowledge. . . . She has been with me for longer than life itself. I am one of her many projects. In the world of the soul, she’s rich, on a big journey in the direction of ecstasy, and seeking to travel there the only way you can, in a great chorus of free souls.”^{iv}

The Dark Side

“Ultimately, as a species, we have no escape from this. . . . In fact, no amount of struggle is going to dislodge them. For whatever reason, I think we have been left to the exploiters and the scum. Who knows? Maybe the good guys gave up or lost a war. Maybe those of us who got good treatment were simply being deceived.”

—Strieber, “Shedding Light on the Dark Side, Part Two,” December 7th, 2003.



In more recent years, however, Strieber became increasingly preoccupied with what he has referred to as “the dark side” of the alien experience. This preoccupation has colored his writings to a disturbing degree, and at times his morbid fascination with the darker undercurrents of spiritual experience seems to border on obsession. Strieber hinted at this dark side from the very beginning (his original title for *Communion* was “Body Terror”); but his general take on it was that, whatever darkness or negativity he encountered, it was sourced in his own fears of the unknown. Over time, however, he began to present a more traditional picture of evil, and consequently (perhaps unconsciously), to return to his roots as a horror writer. “Some of them are not like the woman I met and her staff. Some of them qualify as what we would call monsters, in every sense of that word. . . . What is happening now is absolutely terrifying, so much so that I have kept it to myself in hopes that I was wrong, or that it would change.”^v

Two years later, in 2003, he had this to say:

“I’m a realist and what is now real is that the only thing that appears to be left of the contact experience is the dark side. So that’s what we have to face now. . . . In any case, the experience I had and what happens now seem to me to be very different things, almost as if somebody good has left and somebody

surpassingly evil has remained here. . . . There are beings here who are hostile to one another, and some who hate us with a passion so great that it would be considered psychotic if it was displayed by a human being. There are some in a very complex and parasitical relationship with our minds, and some of these seem to me to be close enough to the human to suggest that they are hybrids of some kind. . . . I believe that this presence is what keeps us trapped here on earth, what prevents mankind from becoming a cosmic being, and what has been maneuvering us toward the earliest possible extinction. . . . something so profoundly evil that it is almost beyond imagination.”^{vi}

Apparently not beyond the imagination of a writer of horror fiction, however, as Strieber’s recent novel, *2012*, provided perhaps the most chillingly convincing depiction of spiritual evil in the annals of occult literature. So did the shift from the positive to negative aspects of “alien contact” occur in some actual, objective realm—or only in *Strieber’s experience of it*?

A Writer Divided

“We are part of a symbiotic relationship with something which disguises itself as an extra-terrestrial invasion so as not to alarm us.”

—Terence McKenna

In *The Lucid View*, I described the many pitfalls of translating experiences of Imaginal realities into actual, nuts-and-bolts events and phenomena. The process of transferring “data” from Imaginal to actual reality is how the elements of the collective unconscious become conscious, and thereby assume the semblance of concrete fact. This occurs via individual experiences that gradually amass and find a foothold in the consensus. Ufos—and most especially alien abduction—are perhaps the most profound illustration of this process, and of the dangers inherent within it.

The nature of Imaginal reality is fluid, subjective, ever-changing. It shifts to suit the needs of the moment, and of the percipient. The nature of actual reality is fixed, unchanging, objective, a take-it-or-leave-it, like-it-or-lump-it affair. While actual reality is always a question of either/or, Imaginal truths are quite happy to remain in the twilight realm of both/and. In *Transformation*, when Strieber’s young son has his own visitor experiences, Strieber asks him if he thinks the beings are real. His son replies, “They can be.” Just as religious and political organizations grow increasingly tyrannical, soulless and mechanical the more established they become, so it is with Imaginal realities. Alien “grays” are considerably less protean or magical beings than were the faeries of previous lore. It is as if the same “beings” (aspects of the collective unconscious) are slowly reduced to an almost physical, literal presence that can be understood, encapsulated, and restricted by the human mind, and in tandem with its increasing reliance upon the faculty of *reason*.

Whether the Imaginal “beings” resent being limited and literalized in this fashion, and become faintly malevolent as a response, or whether (as seems more reasonable) they lack qualities of benevolence or malevolence to begin with and merely reflect back at us our own psychological tendencies, the fact remains that alien and Ufo phenomena has always had a sinister edge to it. I believe that this dark edge comes less from the phenomenon itself than from a *distortion* that results from being filtered through the minds of individual researchers and experiencers. Faery lore was also dark, but dark in a primal, sorcerous fashion. Ufo lore, on the other hand, tends to be heavy, oppressive, and laced with despair. There is a soulless—I might even say sickly—quality to it that results when writers and researchers suck all the magical essence out of the Imaginal by imposing their own rigid (and neurotic) personalities onto it. This usually happens without their even being aware of doing so: it is an *unconscious* distortion, and it is unconsciousness that distorts.

The best Ufo commentators—Jung, John Keel, Jacques Vallee, Robert Anton Wilson, Terence McKenna, Kenneth Grant—have been aware of this pitfall, and have managed mostly to avoid it. Freely acknowledging the unfixed, mythical nature of the Ufo beast, they have treated it accordingly, allowing it to remain an essentially unknown, possibly even an unknowable, quality. Yet as a general rule (McKenna and Grant being partial exceptions), these writers have not been recounting their own personal experiences but simply interpreting data provided by others; hence they have had the luxury of distance.

Strieber has had no such luxury. He has not only had direct experience of alien abduction, he has been transformed and to a large extent “created” by it; as such, his position as a “researcher” is severely compromised. He is closer to St. Paul, struck blind by a divine presence and instantly converted to its frequency. Strieber talks a lot about objectivity, but for all his insight and intelligence, he is clearly a man on a mission (a fact he freely admits). His mission as ambassador to otherworldly beings is to help humanity prepare for contact. As such, he is obliged to present these beings as actual, concrete, literal fact, with nothing airy-fairy, pie-in-the-sky, subjective or Imaginal about them. That such a view is at odds with the nature of the contact experience is testified by the glaring inconsistencies of his descriptions, and his own almost constant see-sawing as to whether the beings are benevolent or not.

At times, Strieber seems like a man caught in a mental conundrum, trying to talk his way out of it and rarely, if ever, willing to admit that he doesn’t *what* is going on. Strieber presents so many different points of view, at varying times on his website and in his books, that it is almost as if there is more than one of him. Perhaps, in a peculiar way, this is indeed the case?

A Tidal Wave of Novelty & Strangeness

“Do you see how complex this is? Are you following the forked moral path I am treading along? How can an ‘angel’ rape and kill? Of course, they must be demons. I’ve got it all wrong!”

—Strieber, “Shedding Light on the Dark Side, Part Two,” December 7th, 2003.



Although Strieber's attempts to define the beings he has encountered are constantly shifting, even contradictory, this in no way invalidates his experiences; on the contrary, such uncertainty only confirms that, whatever he has undergone, it is beyond his ability—and maybe beyond *anybody's*—to categorize it. Strieber often seems to be oblivious to how his theories conflict, and even cancel each other out. Yet paradoxically, that lack of consistency might be seen as evidence for the veracity of his accounts, because if Strieber *were* undergoing initiation into an alien paradigm, we would expect it to confound all expectations.

In Strieber's first book, the famous cover image is of a yellow or tan-skinned being and Strieber never once describes the beings he encounters as gray. Yet he has been repeatedly referred to as a "gray" abductee and has never corrected this designation. In 2006, he wrote a novel called *The Grays* (a somewhat clumsy work with some remarkable ideas in it), thereby cementing his association with them. But if the beings he described in *Communion* are synonymous with the infamous "grays," then why the incongruity of skin color? It seems an odd discrepancy never to have even referred to.

More strikingly, in his 2001 book *The Key*, Strieber refers to the beings who visited him in 1985 as "demons." Yet, in *Transformation* and elsewhere, he writes of being in the presence of angels. Strieber's explanation for this (in *Majestic*) is that the beings are empaths, reflecting back at us whatever we have inside of ourselves.² So then why designate them either way? In *The Grays*, Strieber describes the aliens as a dying race with atrophied DNA, using humans to regenerate their species. At other times, he describes the visitors as *nonphysical*

² "These others—who appeared to us as aliens—are empaths, but not because they lack experience. They have returned to the forest, they are not men, they are beyond that. . . . In the sight of God they are almost angels. . . . We called them terrible. . . . We achieved absolute terror. . . . We have by our lies created the impression that an excursion of the pure is an invasion by monsters from the depths of our own psyche. . . . In the eyes of the others we who met them saw ourselves. And there were demons there." *Majestic*

beings, “midwifing” humanity into a new existence beyond the realm of the flesh. Back and forth he goes, rarely if ever attempting to explain—or even acknowledge—this polarity of opinion.

It may be deliberate. Strieber may be leaving it for us to join the dots and crack the riddle without his help; in which case, he knows exactly what he is doing. Yet I can’t help but suspect that, in his profound ambivalence, even confusion, Strieber is torn at a deep level. Strieber’s accounts of the beings in *Communion* and *Transformation* are not only terrifying; they are delightful and enchanting, full of twinkling humor, mischief, and love. They are the rarest kinds of works: fairy tales for adults. How could the author reach the conclusion he was writing about *demons*?

To give an example of Strieber’s inconsistency that may seem minor but which I think is telling: in *Transformation*, he describes how, after the publication of *Communion*, a bookseller he knew, Bruce Lee, encountered two apparently alien beings, clumsily disguised in human clothing, who came into his bookstore. The beings picked up a copy of Strieber’s book, made a comment about how Strieber had got some things wrong, gave Lee a fierce stare, and left. As he recounted it in *Transformation*, Strieber was enormously impressed by this event, which he considered tantamount to proof of the visitors’ physical existence. He expressed admiration for their sense of humor, and he they had let him know—via a playful piece of theater—that his interpretation of the events was flawed, but that at least he had got some of it right. Many years later, at his website in 2004, he expressed a very different point of view: “as you may remember, two of the grays showed up in a bookstore with Wm. Morrow & Co. editor Bruce Lee and let him know that *Communion* was a load of mistakes. Naturally, they were lying. It is not a load of mistakes. It is accurate, and people sensed that, which is why they responded to it.”^{vii}

Strieber’s remark is lacking in humility, but it’s also inaccurate, according to his earlier account at least—in which the beings didn’t call the book “a load of mistakes” but merely pointed out that it *contained* mistakes. The writer seems defensive and unsure of himself, and to have no qualms about calling his alien benefactors liars. To add insult to injury, he dismisses the beings as “grays,” even though one of them—or so Strieber believed at the time—was the same woman he referred to (later) as “the greatest master I have ever known.” Such contradictions in Strieber’s writings are legion, but perhaps most glaring of all are his occasional lapses into political conservatism, such as when he expressed support for the Iraq war in 2003^{viii}, or, even more bizarrely, when he defended President Bush after 9/11 and declared himself a patriot. In the post (“Conspiracy Theories: Should We Listen Now?” October 13th, 2001), Strieber indignantly dismisses any suggestion the Bush administration had prior knowledge of the attacks on the twin towers (or a hand in them) as a “crazy imaginary conspiracy theory . . . bizarre and impossible [to suggest] our current president is evil on a Hitlerian scale.” In the same post, without mentioning David Icke, he derides a belief in Reptilian beings disguised as world leaders as belonging to the same class of “crazy ideas.”

Coming from someone who has railed so furiously against the arrogance, ignorance, derision and dismissal which his own experiences have met with, this

seems an odd position to take. It became even more peculiar when, without making any overt retractions, Strieber performed a complete turnaround in the following years. Just six months after defending the Iraq war, Strieber described the US government as “in effect, the tool of an occupying power that seeks to sterilize this planet of humanity.”^{ix} In late 2005, he admitted how, over the years, he “began to see government as a machine for the killing of souls.”^x In “Was 9/11 a Hoax?” (February 2nd 2006), Strieber finally came clean and admitted that his dismissal of 9/11 conspiracy theories as “nonsense” had been premature, and speculated how “I might live in a country run by a bunch of mass murderers.” Admittedly, this is an example of Strieber admitting his error and so smoothing out the contradictions in his perception over time. But how many other contradictions or errors in judgment, perhaps equally obvious to everyone but himself, has he failed to notice?

That Strieber ever supported the Bush administration and the Iraq war at all is itself evidence of a drastic split in his worldview. While on the one hand, he appears to be blessed with a rare ability to see past the façade of consensus reality and into the abyss beyond, on the other, he continues to “vote Republican”? To me this suggests that a great deal of Strieber’s knowledge, insight, and apparent wisdom is largely theoretical, and that, for all his eloquent explorations into Imaginal realms, he is still (at times at least) shackled to a distressingly mundane perspective. Not that this is unusual, and it is perhaps even the rule for visionary writers and spokespeople. Having profound insights into the hidden nature of existence doesn’t alter the fundamentals of the personality, nor does it automatically erase decades of social conditioning. But in Strieber’s case, the gulf in his psyche seems to be unusually wide. By his own admission, he is a very ordinary guy (he called himself a “doofus” on one of his audios) who has undergone a run of truly extraordinary experiences. The struggle to integrate those experiences without losing his sense of equilibrium (and of identity) in the process must be immense. One likely result of that struggle might be that Strieber has clung especially tightly to his old views, as a means to keep himself from being swept away on a tidal wave of novelty and strangeness.

2012 & the Need for Secrecy

“In all of this, there is only one thing that we do, and that is that we deny contact. It is not the visitors who hold back, it is us who make the process impossible.”

—Strieber, “Christmas Joy: Mankind is Awakening,” December 14th, 2001.

By the time of *2012* (released in 2007), the author seemed to have stolen a page out of David Icke’s books and begun writing about Reptilians disguised as movie stars and leading public figures. *2012* was a dark, intensely disturbing work that depicted evil as real, terrifying, and blackly *understandable*. Strieber’s forecast for the coming apocalypse—the “war of souls”—seemed designed to reestablish him as a leading spokesperson for the eschaton: John the Baptist of the Alien Presence. But by now, Strieber’s descriptions of the aliens (which he called Seraph) were almost entirely negative. There were no angels to speak of, and—

what was even more worrying—no fairies, imps, goblins, sprites, or trickster spirits. For the most part, the book was unrelentingly dark (possibly appropriate for the subject matter, and considering the times), and the spirit of *play* was almost entirely absent.

If Strieber continues to be unable to decide whether his nocturnal visitors are angels or demons, it's hardly surprising if he feels profoundly ambivalent about his task as bellwether for the alien paradigm. In his early books, he suggested that, since the beings appeared to emerge from a nonphysical realm, their reality, for us, might depend on *our belief in them*. In 2012, Strieber stated this unequivocally: the “aliens” can only enter our realm once they have assumed sufficient “solidity” via our collective belief, and to emerge from the dark well of the collective psyche, they require a foothold in our *conscious minds*. Strieber even stated that the government cover-up (which he once railed so bitterly against) was a means to *protect* the world from that emergence. The day public awareness of the alien presence reaches consensus, then, alien “invasion” will not be far behind. Yet for years Strieber has been denouncing the secrecy and denial shrouding the visitors as the great evil of our times. Although he has admitted that their undisclosed presence among us would be catastrophic, he has mostly argued for full disclosure. At times he has even suggested that awareness of the beings is the only thing that will protect us *from* them.

“If the people who know the truth told the truth, we would, at a stroke, be free. I have written before in these columns about what they fear—that official disclosure would lead to profoundly unpredictable and unexpected consequences, even to a change in the nature of our world. The truth is, if they had the courage to make the official admissions that would lead the average man to know for certain that there was a presence here, that presence would become unable to do its will in our world.”^{xi}

So which is it? Both, or neither? Perhaps his most persuasive theory is that of a *complicity* of secrecy and denial between humanity and the visitors, based on a mutual desire to avoid an overly traumatic encounter. Strieber has suggested, astutely, that most humans would be utterly overwhelmed by religious awe in the presence of something as utterly incomprehensible as alien beings.

“That’s the problem that the visitors are having here. If they intervene openly, our culture totally refocuses itself toward them and all human innovation stops. We end up locked in a state of profound disempowerment that will take many generations to recover, and that will leave a permanent scar. The visitors cannot reveal themselves to us. We must reveal ourselves to them.”^{xii}

Yet in 2012, Strieber presented the invasion as a *satanic* emergence and nothing short of global apocalypse. There was little if any mention of a positive or divine alien presence. Had Strieber’s allegiances shifted to the dark side also? Why was he so busy writing books to persuade people these beings were *real* if he firmly believed they were evil and that our belief in them would only empower

them? To his credit, Strieber raised the question himself, indirectly, by including a thinly disguised self-portrait in the novel—Wiley Dale, a horror writer who has written about his own real-life alien encounters—and then revealing him as a Reptilian in disguise! Having thrown the reader for this tangential loop, he then revealed that Wiley was one of the “good” Seraph (Reptilians). With almost sinister cunning, Strieber toyed with his readers’ fears and doubts and created a shifting, kaleidoscopic meta-fiction of parallel universes in which life imitates art and fiction bleeds into fact, a world where nothing is quite real and reality is like nothing we had ever imagined before. Yet if, as a writer, Strieber is comfortable enough with his own ambivalence to play mind games with his readers, one can only suspect that he is wrestling with far deeper doubts at a personal level. Who can blame him? If he were not, we would be forced to doubt either his sanity or his authenticity.

2012 was an intensely personal work that revealed a depth of psychological self-exploration extremely rare in genre fiction. It revealed so much about its author, in fact, that it took the reader beyond mere darkness into chthonic realms of madness worthy of Edgar Allan Poe. Were it not so lucidly composed and so finely balanced a work, one might suspect it was the creation of a madman (albeit an inspired one). *Was* Whitley’s sanity hanging in the balance? Based on the kind of experiences he has had, and the kind of knowledge with which he lives on a daily basis, it would probably be stranger and more worrying if his sanity were *not* in question. Which raises the peculiar possibility that Strieber’s weakness may be that he is not insane *enough*. There can be little doubt that the burden of knowledge (and foreknowledge) weighs heavily on Strieber’s spirit, and that it may be threatening to crush the “play” out of him. Through it all, he has remained stubbornly lucid and reasonable, a writer’s prerogative perhaps, but not necessary an advantage when navigating the sorcery kingdoms. In such realms, the stronger and more durable the intellect, the likelier it is to bring about the traveler’s eventual downfall.

The Pinchbeck Debate

“Our species is in the process of making a deeply spiritual decision about whether to enter the cosmos or go extinct.”

—Strieber, “Communion 20 Years On,” 26th December, 2005



In 2007, Strieber got into a heated debate with the writer Daniel Pinchbeck (2012: *The Return of Quetzalcoatl*), whom Strieber invited onto his radio show “Dreamland.” The argument centered around Strieber’s conviction that humanity was about to undergo a massive “dieback” as a result of its aberrational activities on the planet, and Pinchbeck’s assertion that Strieber was projecting a negative scenario because of his own personal hang-ups. Pinchbeck then suggested that Strieber was unwittingly being controlled by alien beings “that do not have the best interests of the human species at heart.” Reporting on the event later, Pinchbeck commented: “On a subliminal or subconscious level, Strieber appears to have made a Faustian pact with these Mephistophelean entities, and unfortunately he is helping disseminate their negative and destructive frequency into human culture and consciousness, at this point in time.”^{xiii}

Although Pinchbeck mostly kept his cool (and had the dignity to apologize), Strieber became indignant and professed to have been wounded in his “very being” by Pinchbeck’s attack.³ It struck me at the time that, after two decades of being heckled by doubters and mocked and reviled by the mainstream media, Strieber should remain so deeply vulnerable to criticism. Pinchbeck’s perspective was easy to understand, and was probably one that was shared by plenty of people who took Strieber’s claims seriously enough to be disturbed by them. Strieber has admitted to having been implanted by the beings, and has eulogized over some of the “*siddhis*” which he has developed as a result of the implant—powers that include interdimensional travel, time travel, and reading people’s minds. If such accounts are even half true, Strieber’s capacities verge on the *Urbemenschian*. Yet his public persona, as evidenced by his radio show and many of his interviews, is at times rather unsettling, for me at least.^{xiv} I had been reading Strieber’s books for many years before I heard him on “Dreamland”; if I’d heard one of his shows before discovering his work, it’s quite likely I wouldn’t have bothered to look at it. Strieber often comes across as emotional, brash, facile, and even somewhat embittered, qualities that belie the depth and perspicacity of his writing (as did his rather hysterical behavior with Pinchbeck). So evidently, there is far more to Strieber than meets the eye—or the ear.

Whether Strieber is being controlled, and whether the forces controlling him are benign, is, as already touched upon, a question that need concern Strieber far more than the rest of us, and one which is finally beyond the scope of this piece. It also makes no difference to the quality of his writings, which can be judged on

³ Strieber: “We’re not friends anymore and we never will be. We never really were. . . . But nevertheless, I literally really could not disagree with you more profoundly as you propose what looks to me like a kind of a miserable fascism on the human spirit and a future that is enormously dreary even in the unlikely event that it should unfold.” Pinchbeck: “By the way, Whitley, I just want to say that I’m capable of having an argument with somebody and profound disagreements with somebody and still considering them friends.” Strieber: “I’m telling you right now when you attack my very being and my spirit by saying that I’m in league with evil entities, as you *did* say, that’s not, it’s not possible to maintain a friendship under those circumstances. Because this is so outrageously untrue For those of you who are subscribers to this website, who listen to our meditations and who are involved in this you’ll know how unfair and outrageous this attack that this man carried out on this radio program. It’s just disgusting, and ignorant, *absolutely* ignorant, but I don’t want to go on about it.”

their own merit and meaning. What seems to be to be both more relevant and easier to determine, however, is Strieber's own character and integrity. This relates to the question of how fully he embodies his teachings, and therefore how much we, as readers, should value them. If Strieber doesn't walk his talk, we should naturally be less inclined to put stock in what he says. Astral *Urbemensch* or not, if Strieber lacks the equanimity to deal gracefully with attacks like Pinchbeck's, it suggests that alien initiation and a vast storehouse of esoteric knowledge have given him little by way of inner peace or detachment. On the contrary, they seem to have unbalanced him to a disturbing degree. At base of this, I think, is the degree to which Strieber has assumed *personal responsibility* for communicating what he believes to be information of vital importance to the evolution, even the survival, of the race. Such a personal stake in being "the one" who delivers this vital information may be both the cause and the effect of a psychological imbalance in Strieber, and imbalance which, if we are to be fair to Strieber himself, must throw into question *everything* he has had to say until now.

In short, how reliable is a witness who is clearly strongly invested in *making* us believe his version of events?

Whitley & Mind Control

"I have really and truly been outside of mankind, insofar as I have treated with [sic] nonhuman intelligent beings. I have seen what they are, and therefore now see my own kind to a degree as an outsider."

—Whitley Strieber, "Communion 20 Years On," 26th December, 2005

Somewhere around 2003, Strieber introduced an astonishing new element into his personal saga, one that both deepened and darkened the waters while at the same time offering a profound clue to understanding them—and perhaps even the key to the mystery. The revelation centered on Strieber's buried memories of having suffered traumatic abuse as a child at the hands of the US government. Strieber reported at his journal: "I strongly suspect that the United States has for years been experimenting on children, among other things subjecting them to extreme trauma in order to split their personalities and create secondary personalities who can be accessed by controllers and used as agents, but without knowledge of the first personality."^{xv}

A few months later, he added more background:

"Recently, the Central Intelligence Agency released another 18,000 declassified documents about its mind control experiments, which included an attempt to induce multiple personalities in two 19 year old girls. Before the 1973 Congressional investigation that led to the disclosure of the CIA's notorious MK-ULTRA mind control project, [CIA director] Richard Helms destroyed thousands of documents. My belief is that what he destroyed was documentary evidence of such experiments being performed on much younger children."^{xvi}

There is a great deal of evidence that such experiments occurred (and may be still occurring), and Strieber's claim to have been part of them, to have suffered abuse expressly intended to create sub-personalities through trauma, opens a whole new can of worms regarding his other experiences. According to Strieber, the "visitors" were actively involved in his life from an early age, and selected him at least partially as a result of the ritualized and systematized abuse he suffered as a child. "They took advantage of a devastating intelligence program that was leaving some children emotionally maimed, but was also opening the minds of others to new possibilities."^{xvii}

What I wish to suggest is that, as a result of this early trauma (to say nothing of possible later traumas at the hands of *nonhuman* agencies), Strieber may have experienced a splintering of his psyche that to this day has not fully healed. Without doing him the disservice of premature psychiatric labeling, it may be that he is not fully cognizant of the multiple portions of his psyche, and that, through the act of writing, he is attempting to bring those fragments into harmony. This would explain the many contradictions, the endlessly see-sawing points of view, the abrupt shifts from guru-like wisdom to childish and petulant ego assertions, and so forth. If Strieber is seen to be *literally* divided, his writings become a painfully honest, both inspirational and infuriating description of the attempt to come to grips with the broken shards of his psyche as he struggles to put "Whitley" back together again. As accounts of the slow and agonizing process of individuation by which we seek to arrive at the totality of ourselves, his writings may be some of the most profound on offer in twenty-first century literature, even if not quite in the way in which Strieber intended.

Is "Whitley Strieber"—the writer—merely the dominant personality that has taken charge of a multitude of selves, at least one of which is an alien being ("the greatest master I have ever known")? If so, it may be through the act of writing that Strieber manages to maintain a semblance of order, integrity and coherence. It may also be that his dominant ego-self is only partially privy to the wisdom and insights of those "alien" selves that are considerably more enlightened than he is. The dominant position of his everyday ego, then (always an extremely precarious thing), would depend on a sense of consistency and continuity which writing, above all, could provide him with. The price of that literarily imposed order, however, would be that Strieber remained fragmented. So for all the knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual insight which his writing contains, Strieber may be the very last person to benefit from it.

The Gray Agenda and Whitley's Mission

"No doubt, I won't be believed, and that's all right, because, in a sense, it leaves me free in ways that belief would not."

—Whitley Strieber, "New Thoughts," 10th Sept 2005

Strieber's contention is that a small number of the children who were subjected to government mind control and abuse were selected by the visitors (for their own mysterious agenda), and that he was one of the chosen.

“There were only a few thousand of these children worldwide, but they were enough to form the nucleus of what is essentially a communications device made up of human minds that has been, in effect, ‘implanted’ in our culture. It takes the form of millions of close encounter witnesses whose experiences are brought into focus by these few thousand, who comprise the great majority of the witnesses who speak out publicly about what has happened to them.”^{xviii}

In such a scenario, Strieber becomes beyond doubt the most vocal, well-known, and influential of the “witnesses,” placing him at the very heart (or head) of the “communications device” which he describes. He becomes the human avatar of the visitors.

A year or so previous to this revelation, in 2005, Strieber made the following admission: “I have failed to link us to the visitors. I have failed to break the bondage of official secrecy, or to save the souls of the keepers of the secrets. I have failed to raise the eyes of the average man.”^{xix} Despite this sense of failure, Strieber did not give up. In 2006, coincident with the release of *The Grays* (which he claimed the visitors helped him to write), he posted the following statement:

“I will be frank with you about what I am trying to do with my life: I am trying to create a relationship between us and the grays. Right now, we do not have a relationship, for two reasons: our attitude toward them is dysfunctional; and they do not know how to reach into our culture without destroying it. My ambition is to make the relationship fruitful, and to enable them to interact with us openly without wrecking our lives.”^{xx}

Then in 2007, Strieber made what was in many ways his most revealing observation, at least in respect to his own work with, or for, the visitors:

“They will not at first address the species’ various religious ideas except in very general terms, *by communicating with us in triads, with a positive thrust and a negative thrust, leaving us to evolve the message by reconciling its two parts.* I know that this is very, very different from the way we communicate, but it works and if they do show up it will become familiar enough.” [My italics.]^{xxi}

So is Strieber, with his constant pendulum-like swings from a positive to negative “thrust,” making us familiar with the visitors preferred method of communication? Is he adhering to their strange truths about good and evil being not a matter of either/or but of *both/and*? And could this make the disorientation, fragmentation, and conflict which Strieber displays in his attempts to come to grips with his experiences an integral part of the meaning which “the visitors” wish to communicate to us?

Strieber believes the visitors intervened to rescue him from abuse at the hands of malevolent government agents. “[T]he close encounters were real . . .

they involved literally breaking through into another level of reality in order to escape the hell I was enduring in this one. Modern research suggests that parallel universes may be very real, and that they may exist all around us.”^{xxii} As Strieber sees it, he escaped the clutches of evil by literally taking refuge in another reality, which is what abused or neglected children do (it’s called fragmentation). And since those memories remained buried, under the domain of another aspect of his psyche, is it fair to say that Strieber also created a parallel *self* by which to enter his conjectured “parallel universe”? I am not suggesting that the psychological theory explains away the mystical one—on the contrary—what I am suggesting is that *both* versions may be equally accurate. Psychotherapy would say that Strieber’s psyche splintered into multiple selves and that he fled into fantasy to escape an unpleasant reality. Strieber would argue that his soul journeyed into other worlds and encountered nonhuman intelligences there. The two interpretations—while apparently at odds—may simply be two ways of describing the same event. Whether Strieber is an enlightened soul-traveler or a paranoid schizophrenic would depend on whether or not he succeeded in integrating the various fragmented aspects of his psyche, and in claiming the knowledge and power which his experiences made available to him.

As Strieber writes, “it is the foundation of all of my life at the edge of reality, and that I am presently in the process of rediscovering it [sic], and perhaps learning how to link my lives in different realities so that I can have a single, integrated set of memories that includes everything that I have done and known in the years of my life.”^{xxiii} This implies that Strieber’s experiences—if fully understood—have the potential to blow open the whole mystery-conflict of subjective/objective, inner/outer, actual/Imaginal, and to map the process of psychic individuation by which the two worlds (and the countless aspects of the human psyche) can be bridged, and so unified into a single, continuous whole, the creation of a soul-body continuum.

As it happens, this is exactly what Strieber *claims* to be doing: “I’m always getting people asking me not to write fiction. But it is through the fiction that I can gain access to the memories of the reality I have lived. My fiction, I think, contains a secret history of a secret life, and, when it is all written, will be a map, if read with objectivity and knowledge, for journeyers between the worlds.”^{xxiv}

Agent Provocateur in the Dream

“Too much importance is given the writer and not enough to his work. What difference does it make who he is and what he feels, since he’s merely a machine for the transmission of ideas. In reality he doesn’t exist—he’s a cipher, a blank. A spy sent into life by the forces of death. His main objective is to get the information across the border, back into death. Then he can be given a mythical personality.”

—Paul Bowles



When it comes to understanding the question of Ufos and alien abductions—and specifically “the grays”—the essential thing to remember is that *none of this is what it seems*. And although Strieber has himself been at pains for years to convey this very idea, for all of that he seems unable to resist the urge to talk and write about the phenomena as if it were, finally, apprehensible to reason. Strieber argues against simplistic, literal-minded, “good or evil, angel or devil” interpretations, even while many of his comments are either damning the beings as demons or advocating them as angels. Apparently, this is all part of the aliens’ chosen method of presentation: a positive perspective (Imaginal), followed by a negative one (actual), leading finally to a synthesis of both. Yet unless I have simply failed to see the method to his madness, Strieber follows this approach in such a haphazard, slipshod fashion that at times he seems unaware of what he is doing. It is almost as if he was following a hidden program, and that, in order to be effective as the scribe and spokesman for the visitors, he had been left in the dark until he achieves a synthesis of his various, fragmented selves.

When Strieber is in negative mode, he seems wholly convinced by his own rhetoric, and as such, is entirely convincing. Ditto with his positive mode. The result is that his writings are alternatively disorientating, confounding, oppressive, uplifting, lucid, obtuse, a mixture of profoundest insights with garbled nonsense, all presented with more or less the same degree of sincerity and zeal. In his last work (*The Active Side of Infinity*), Carlos Castaneda described himself as “an agent provocateur in the dream.” The author Paul Bowles, perhaps for similar reasons, once defined the writer as “a spy sent into life by the forces of death.” I can think of no two better descriptions of Strieber than these. After following his work (off and on) for over twenty years, he seems less like a man to me than a living, breathing fairy tale, an eerie, unsettling amalgam of diverse perspectives and outlandish tales, both of this world and the other. A sort of Frankenstein’s monster, he appears both soulful and freakish, a miracle and an aberration, a mind as brilliant as it is confused. Like a golem created by incomprehensible forces, he acts as a host intelligence for alchemical mysteries, mysteries which he brings

across the border, into the land of the living, yet apparently without ever fully comprehending them himself.

As such, the strange case of Whitley Strieber must remain, for now, unsolved.

Part Two: Whitley's Onion (Three Years Later)

The Two Keys

The above article was eventually published in *Paranoid Magazine* as well as *Alien Worlds*. Before that it appeared at Jeff Wells' Rigorous Intuition forum, and it was praised by the late writer Mac Tonnies, shortly before he died (not to suggest any connection), as "the most devastating and articulate summary of Whitley Strieber and his works that I've ever read." It was, so far as I recall, Tonnies' endorsement of the piece that provoked Strieber to finally comment on it (I had sent it to him before publishing, hoping for an interview, but received no response). Subscribers at Strieber's Unknown Country website had been talking about the article, mostly critically, and it was at that point that Strieber made a remark about the author, myself, being a "clever disinformation agent." (Unfortunately all traces of that discussion have been removed from the Unknown Country message board, so I cannot provide the full quote.) Despite several attempts to sign up for Strieber's message board, I was unable to join the discussion. Naturally I was disappointed by Strieber's dismissal of the article, which I believed, and still believe, was a genuine attempt to "sort through the seeds" of his experiences and separate the live ones from the duds. I was aware of many intelligent people with an interest in paranormal phenomena who stayed away from Strieber and who even (somewhat ironically) considered him to be a disinformation agent. So while Strieber and his devoted followers perceived my article as an attack on his integrity, the skeptical wing saw it more as a defense! In a way it was neither, but an attempt to get to grips with his work, and with the man himself, in order to reduce some of the cognitive dissonance I was experiencing. It was also a—perhaps misguided and so far unsuccessful—attempt to open a dialogue with Strieber.

Eventually I let the whole subject go, and a couple of years went by without any significant developments. Then, in May 2011, coinciding with the release of a new edition of *The Key*, I finally bit the bullet and became a subscriber to Unknown Country (for a three months period, at a cost of \$11.95). My reasons were two-fold: I wanted to have access to some Strieber audio files that were otherwise unavailable; and I wanted to post at the comments section and to try once again to engage Whitley in a dialogue.

The original version of *The Key* had been released in 2001, in a short, self-published imprint of a thousand signed and numbered copies. I had received one of them, and read the book countless times over the years. In 2002, as preparation for a "surrealist documentary" I was making (*The God Game: An Investigation into the Illusory Nature of Reality*), I even printed and bound several photocopies

and distributed them among my players. Strieber's contention was that the book was a transcript of a dialogue he had had, on June 6th 1998, with a small Canadian man who barged into his hotel room in Toronto in the small hours of the morning. Over the course of forty-five minutes, the little man, whom Strieber eventually named "the Master of the Key," communicated a series of profound metaphysical insights about the nature of reality, God, the soul, life after death, and the fate of humanity and the Earth. Strieber allegedly managed to retain most of the conversation and, over the course of two or three years, he painstakingly recreated it for his book. That was Strieber's story, anyway. While there were things about the book which struck me as dubious (the opening claim that the Holocaust prevented mankind from developing the technology to leave the Earth by killing the parents of an unborn engineering genius, for example, seemed especially hokey), overall the depth and novelty of the ideas supported Strieber's claim that it came from a source besides himself—his conscious self, at least.

It was shortly after the first trade release of his book, in May of 2011, that Strieber claimed there were in fact two versions of *The Key*.^{xxv} He claimed that he had only realized this when a reader of the 2011 edition pointed out some discrepancies with the first edition. Strieber insisted he had not made any such changes. According to his own account, he referred back to the 2001 edition—for the first time since it had been released—and realized that certain changes had been made without his awareness. He listed the "changes" at his website, and argued point by point how the integrity of the book's original message had been undermined. While admitting that he didn't know how it had happened—whether at the printers or while the book was still on computer file—he stated repeatedly that a "sinister" intelligence had sabotaged the manuscript. I read the various comments at Unknown Country with interest, particularly curious about a link to a long article online, called "The Key: A Minority Report." (The author of which, in an irony fitting for this whole subject, later attacked the 2008 version of this article, and in fact continues to do so.) The overall gist of the article was that, contrary to Strieber's own charges, the first version of the book was superior to the second, and that the claims made by Strieber of an alleged "sinister hand" tampering with the work were not supported by a close inspection of the two texts. The writer made a solid, point-by-point case and suggested that the new version showed more evidence of "tampering" (clumsy editing), and that it might be the one that contained disinformation. I found myself agreeing with this point of view, and increasingly doubtful of Strieber's. At best, the alleged "changes" which Strieber claimed had been made to the 2001 edition didn't seem to merit the slightly hysterical accusations he was making; and in some, if not most cases, they did seem to be improvements (that is, the new edition seemed to be the inferior one).

Without naming "A Minority Report," Strieber referred dismissively to it at one post, complaining about the conspiracies that were ruining his life and all the "insensitive, stupid swine (or people with a hidden agenda)" who dared to suggest that all of this was just a selling ploy for the book. Strieber didn't deign to address any of the points in the document, but only remarked contemptuously: "There is

even one person out there claiming that the ‘edits’ make the book better.”⁴ His diatribe continued:

“I am sick and tired of all this. . . . I have achieved something truly magnificent, which is coherent, focused contact with another level of reality. Instead of being honored for this, as I certainly deserve, I have been ostracized, demonized and hammered almost to a pulp. My books go completely unreviewed. It’s as if I’m dead . . . I’m tired of it and I want what I deserve from this society, recognition of the value of what I have done, not this continual sinister response. It is a dreadful way to treat anybody, let alone somebody who has worked as hard and as honestly as I have and has, in fact, created something that could be the basis for a new flowering of humanity, at a time when the powers that be have entirely failed and have betrayed the human race, and have no further reason to be respected in any way whatsoever.”

Once again, as had happened three years prior, I found myself being drawn into what I perceived as Whitley’s paranoia and confusion. Once again I was eager to somehow get to the bottom of it, and even, if possible, to bring about a “healing crisis” for Strieber—or perhaps for myself. My first post at Unknown Country suggested an alternative to Strieber’s belief that sinister forces were behind the edits, positing the idea that the author himself had unconsciously altered the text, via some kind of psychic interface with his software. Far-fetched as the idea was, it was something which had almost certainly happened in my own experience, and it was at least a way to challenge Strieber’s version of events without accusing him of lying (or being insane). Since I was hoping to get his attention, and because I knew from personal experience how sensitive Strieber could be, and how easily offended he was by criticism (as Pinchbeck can testify), my post was very carefully phrased. I received no response from Strieber, however, and little of interest from the other subscribers. Shortly after, I posted a response to his angry diatribe (the one quoted above) and suggested that, as a best-selling author, he might be overreacting. I warned him about the “love-bombing” of his loyal subscribers, many of whom were showering him with praise and reassurance, thereby strengthening (in my opinion) his feelings of indignation and entitlement. I wrote that people who appeared to be his friends weren’t, and that, likewise, some people whom he perceived as being against him weren’t necessarily that either. Strieber did not respond.

⁴ In “Sinister Forces in My Life,” May 26th, 2011, Strieber wrote: “There is even one person out there claiming that the ‘edits’ make the book better. Sure, get rid of anything about mind control. Stick in things about evil aliens that don’t exist to confuse people about who the sinister forces around here really are. That’s great editing! The book was CENSORED.”
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/sinister-forces-my-life>

The Cult of Whitley (Is Strieber Advocating Implants?)

Frustrated with the lack of response, I returned to the Rigorous Intuition board where it had all begun, hoping to open up a discussion with a less loyalist crowd. At Rigorous Intuition, the general view of Strieber was that he was either deluded, a charlatan, or a disinformation agent (or a combination of all three), and so once again, I found myself walking the tightrope between advocate and whistleblower. While at Strieber's site, I had wanted to reassure both Whitley and his fans that I really was a Strieber supporter, even if I felt duty-bound to point out the worms in his apple cart. While at Rigorous Intuition, I ended up taking Strieber's defense, since many people were dismissing him unfairly, based on their own prejudices. At Rigorous Intuition, I wrote that I was pretty sure that *The Key* was not simply the product of Strieber's imagination and that, ironically, his rather unstable public persona were arguments for and not against that possibility. I questioned what kind of intelligence was informing and directing his work, if not his own, and more specifically, what was behind the confusion and controversy over the conflicting versions of *The Key*.

Rigorous Intuition hosts a "nuts-and bolts" kind of crowd and as such some of the regulars there tend to view alien abduction and the surrounding phenomenon as a giant military mind control operation. With this in mind, I pointed out some of the key differences between the two versions of *The Key* that pertained to the question of mind control and implants. For example, there was an exchange in the 2011 version that had not been present in the first edition, in which Strieber asks "Am I under mind control?" and the Master of the Key replies, "The opposite. The technological intervention that has occurred in your case has been done to make certain that general fields of control will not affect you." So Strieber was now claiming, in the new version of the book, that he *was not susceptible to mind control because of the implant* he carried. (The implant was something Strieber had talked about extensively before, and which he claimed to have physical proof of.^{xxvi})

As "A Minority report" stated:

"In this case of Whitley's direct question: 'Am I under mind control' — a question which he says he remembers asking, the answer to the question states quite remarkably that he, perhaps alone, is immune to the mind control more generally applied to others 'enhanced electrically.' But what about all the other alien abductees out there? Is everyone with an implant under mind control? Are there two types of implants: one for mind control, and another to resist mind control—from other implants? It doesn't make sense. Either implants are the direct mechanism of mind control, in which case those without them are not controlled, or implants are in those who have had contact and for some reason are meant to be immune to the 'mind control.'"

About the question of whether he was under mind control, Whitley had this to say at his website:

“I vividly remember asking this question, and thinking at the time that the ‘technological intervention’ that he was referring to was the implant in my left ear. I suspect that I am among a very small band of people who are not subject to this general level of control, and that *my readers and I constitute the great majority of people who are free of this general influence*. It is why we see the world as it truly is, and why the vast majority of people around us seem strangely blind to what to us appears to be obvious reality. They are blind. They have been blinded. For whatever reason, we can see.” [My italics.]

This audacious claim is based on very little real evidence, and mostly on the contentions of Strieber himself. The new version of *The Key*, combined with the comments of its author, appears to be suggesting that the implant, commonly believed to be a mind control device in parapolitical communities such as Rigorous Intuition and even among some UFO groups, is actually a means to *protect* the carrier from mind control. Strieber thereby claims that he (and for some reason his “readers” also, though he doesn’t explain why they should be included) is one of the few people on the planet who is *immune to mind control*, by virtue of the implant he received. He is telling his followers that this special status allows him—and, as if by magical association, them—“to see the world as it truly is.” He is therefore claiming exclusive access to the truth, and subtly inferring that all those who follow him (“my readers”) will be granted similar access.

Such was my argument at Rigorous Intuition anyway, and it sparked a lively debate and received the input of a former member of Strieber’s Unknown Country community. She claimed that she had gotten quite close to Whitley before saying the wrong thing and being “excommunicated,” and her impression was that Strieber was suffering from trauma-based mind control, that he had unwittingly created a cult of personality, and that his website was being used as a “honey pot” to attract victims of mind control and experiencers of—possibly real, possibly simulated—alien abductions so as to monitor them. Though the idea seemed plausible to me, I was pretty sure Whitley would reject it out of hand, not only as absurd but as an “attack [on his] very being and [his] spirit.”⁵ So back at Strieber’s site, I took a more tentative and diplomatic approach.

I referred to the “Minority Report” document and commented that, whoever had written it, they had gone to a great deal of care and done a thorough, erudite, and balanced job of it. I invited Strieber to comment on the subject, outside of his dismissive and defensive comment of May 26th. I pointed out Strieber’s tendency to respond to anyone who questioned his version of things with emotional outbursts, either with moral indignation or angry accusations. I noted how this appeared to satisfy many of his followers, who rushed to his defense and offered the same sort of blind, unquestioning support which he appeared to invite. It did not strike me as an environment that allowed for open inquiry, constructive

⁵ The words he used when he accused Pinchbeck of doing the same, for suggesting that he, Strieber, was “in league with evil entities.”

criticism, or for the thorough examination (and evolution) of ideas. It struck me as closer to being a “cult environment.”

That made the present example a compelling—even urgent—opportunity for everyone concerned. It was also why I felt driven to speak up, knowing that I might incur Strieber’s displeasure and be grouped with the “insensitive swine” who dared to offer him anything besides slavish agreement and unconditional support. I believed that Strieber’s choice not to seriously address the criticism around the two versions of *The Key* created the impression that he was trying to cover something up. His argument was essentially based on the premise that, since he wrote the book, he was the only person who could say which version was the true one. That would be fair enough, except that, by Strieber’s own account, he didn’t so much write the book as transcribe it, and unless I was mistaken, quite a bit of it was assembled from memory. That allowed for a fairly large margin for error.

So far, I had not found Strieber’s own story persuasive; his arguments for the book being censored by dark forces were emotional and full of accusatory, inflammatory language (“censorship!” “sinister,” “sickening,” and so on), with very little logic behind them. He seemed to be hoping that his fierce conviction would be enough to convince others, regardless of how paltry the evidence was. And judging by the comments he was receiving, he was largely successful. I was among the few who were not persuaded by Strieber’s logic, and despite my best attempts to approach him in a rational and civil manner, I was aware of the likelihood of getting grouped with the fools who were trying to discredit him; or worse, of being denounced as a disinformation agent with a secret agenda.⁶

A Momentary Dialogue

One day, in the process of listening to the many audios which Strieber had recorded for the subscriber section of his website, I came across an irrefutable anomaly. It was during the fifth part of his series of audio files commenting on *The Key*, dated January 1st 2004 but presumably recorded some time before. At his website, Strieber had mentioned how, when he referred to *The Key* in the past, he had referred to a computer copy or a manuscript and not the published version, and this was why it took him ten years to realize what had happened. While listening to the audios, however, it became clear to me that he was reading from the 2001 published version of the book. To begin with, the differences were small enough and it was easy to see how he could have failed to notice them. Yet I was struck by how, while talking about the conversation with the Master, Strieber often referred back to his thoughts at the time, *as if reliving it in his head*. Then, in the fifth audio, Strieber read a particular passage about “creatures of the dark,” a line which he had decried (at his post about *The Key* being censored) as a “lurid”

⁶ Shortly after expressing these thoughts, I listened to Strieber’s talk with Jim Marrs, from the 19th of May, and discovered that Strieber did address “A Minority Report,” and even acknowledged some truth to it. His overall position—that of a sinister hand of censorship—remained unchanged, however, and Marrs never once questioned it.

and false addition. In 2011, Strieber insisted that the phrase had been added to the book by some sinister invisible hand, in order to sow fear and confusion. Yet in 2003, while making the audio (at most only two years after the book had been published), not only did he not consider the line to be inaccurate, he remarked how it had got his attention at the time because of his own experiences with “the dark.” Here was striking evidence that something was wrong with Strieber’s interpretation (or memory) of the events. Either Strieber was confused, or there was something he was deliberately concealing.

I emailed Strieber with my findings and finally received a response from him. He wrote, briefly, that he had sometimes been using the book and sometimes using his manuscript, and that he had no way of telling when he was using one and when the other. He had been left vulnerable, he said, to the kind of analysis which I was engaged in because of what “was done” to his work. He suggested that this had been at least partially the intent, since it had the effect of discrediting *The Key*. As far as his commenting on my discoveries, he didn’t see any use in it, and invited me to draw whatever conclusions I wished.

Undaunted, I wrote back and assured him that, whatever he might think, I was not a debunker but an admirer of his writings, and that I would hardly be dedicating so much time and energy to this otherwise. I suggested that the many hostile attempts to discredit him had made him overly sensitive to criticism, which was no doubt partly the intent. I pointed out that he still had not answered my question regarding his oversight, and added that I doubted I could draw any conclusions without his help. I suggested that we could both benefit from a dialogue, if only by reaching a better understanding of what was behind the many inconsistencies in his work, and possibly locating the source of all the confusion and misunderstanding.

Strieber responded promptly (the entire exchange occurred in one afternoon) by saying that I was reading things into his email that weren’t there (looking over the exchange, I’d say he was somewhat correct about that). He said that he didn’t regard me as an admirer, debunker or anything else; it was clear that I was interested in his work, but beyond that he had no way of knowing my motives. He could not answer my question, however, save to say that he had trusted his own work and had had no idea that it had been tampered with, so he had reacted to what he was reading as if it was correct. He lamented that “what was done to *The Key*” would be used to discredit it and destroy its message, and expressed sadness and regret that he had inadvertently contributed to the state of affairs by recording his commentaries about the book without noticing the difference between the two versions. He had commented on things that had been added to the published version without realizing that they were wrong, he said, “thus discrediting the whole enterprise.” As to why he had failed to notice the difference, that was a question he could not (or would not) answer.

I replied with some encouraging words and assured him that the energy behind *The Key* was what counted, rather than the exactitude of the words. I invited him to consider that what he was doing might also be having negative effects, as well as positive, if there was any confusion or unconscious intentions at work. I mentioned how, the previous year, I had shut down a therapeutic/self-

development workshop (SWEDA) I was running for precisely the same reason, because I couldn't be sure that my motives were pure (in fact I knew they weren't).

“As flawed creatures sharing and being open about our flaws [I wrote] our confusion and our mistakes can be the most valuable teaching we have to give. That's what I tried to do, and it is what I have tried to communicate to others about your work: that the contradictions and the confusion that runs through it don't lessen its value but increase it, provided it is approached with compassion and not merely intellectual curiosity. . . . For me, it's a miracle that someone could have gone through half the experiences you have been through and still be lucid and coherent at all. There's no need to conceal the cracks, if the cracks are part of Whitley's coming 'undone'—for something else to be born from that wreckage. It's trying to cover up the cracks—the mistakes & the inconsistencies—that does harm to and discredits the message, in my opinion, not the cracks themselves.”

Authenticity Is in the Eye of the Beholder

Like Carlos Castaneda, Strieber underwent some profound personal encounters with imaginal forces and did his best to testify to the world by writing books about them. Just as when I had read Castaneda's books at the age of twenty-one, Strieber's accounts (which I came upon a year or two later) resonated profoundly with my own, forgotten or fragmented experiences with the Imaginal (and/or my unconscious). I recognized truth in them. I have always been a somewhat credulous, impressionable person, and so, as was my wont, I took both these authors' accounts literally, at face value—just as the authors seemed to—even knowing (at least later on) that experiences of the Imaginal aren't so much “literal” as metaphorical. Both Castaneda's and Strieber's accounts were filtered through their authors' psyches, written out in linear, literal form, and it was those versions of “Imaginal reality” which the reader was “fed.” Insofar as I was likewise a “left-brained,” literal-minded creature, I could only take them at face value or reject them in the same way. For the literally minded, an account must always be either true or false—it cannot be both/and. This is our first mistake when it comes to approaching the Imaginal, and when it comes to understanding individuals like Castaneda or Strieber.

Imaginal writers share their particular truth, but it is not *the* Truth. As readers, if we identify with and relate to their stories (while taking them at face value), we are naturally going to try and make it *our* truth because the idea that truth is largely subjective is one a literal mind cannot allow for. It's more or less the same thing that happens, in a more dramatic fashion, when people follow a guru and try to twist themselves into the right shape to match their guru's “truth.” Sooner or later, they are going to get disillusioned, because however true another person's truth might seem, it can't ever be our truth, because it's not *our* experience of the

Imaginal. It cannot reflect accurately *the elements of our unconscious*, and so, sooner or later, something in the mix, some piece of the puzzle, is going to fail to *fit*. The only Imaginal reality that fits our psyches, that is true for us, is our own.

The test and the gift of encountering another man's version of the Imaginal that resonates with ours—as both Castaneda's and Strieber's resonated for me—is to save the baby and toss out the bathwater of that alternate version. There is only one Imaginal realm, after all, and we are all encountering the same truth, from subtly different angles or perspectives. If, as so many have done with Strieber (and Castaneda), we reject a view of reality that threatens or contradicts our own, we risk throwing out the baby with the bathwater, losing the gift, and failing the test.

Developing honest skepticism means learning to discern truth from delusion, starting with that of our parents, our role models, our heroes and teachers, and ending with our own. The “true believer” swallows the story whole (religion, democracy, aliens, sorcerers, whatever it is), gets drunk on it (becomes fanatical), and in many cases winds up sick and hung over from the excess (is disillusioned and feels lost or abandoned). It is then that the “skeptic” comes to the rescue, tries to vomit the whole “meal” back up, and swears never to touch the stuff again. Vomiting up isn't real skepticism but cynicism, however, which is the flip side of gullibility, a means to overcompensate for feeling like we have been suckered. Such cynicism denies whatever it was in us (or in Strieber, or whoever) that responded to truth, and focuses instead on how we managed to turn a little bit of truth into a grand delusion. It's not lies that fool the true believer, it's truth that's taken too literally, or too quickly to heart. When we emotionally invest in a scrap of truth, we can build a whole edifice of delusion out of that one little scrap.

The solution to being overly credulous isn't to close one's mind but to learn discernment about what we let into our minds, and above all, what we take to heart and what we adopt as our own truth. The poet John Keats wrote, “The only means of strengthening one's intellect is to make up one's mind about nothing, to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts.” To make up one's mind about nothing means to believe without believing and to disbelieve without dismissing. In the words of Strieber, it entails learning “to live at a high level of uncertainty.” Yet in our present society, certainty is power, and uncertainty is weakness. We are trained to identify open-mindedness with vacillation and vagueness, and to regard conviction as synonymous with integrity. We are taught and bred to make up our minds about everything, and to dismiss anything which we cannot make our minds up about as nonsense. We automatically respect, and even submit to, people who are more certain than we are. We are susceptible to the spells cast by other people's convictions and/or delusions. We allow ourselves to be swayed, subtly and even subliminally, so that, when we think we are making up our own minds, we are really giving over to someone (or something) else's influence.

Whether Whitley's “visitors” are aliens or elementals, angels, demons, or government mind control operatives, the long and short of it is that Strieber was abducted by the agents of his unconscious. That is not a desirable state of affairs. When the Imaginal forces come to us uninvited like that, it's all-but unavoidable for us to assign them an autonomy and an independence from our own psyches

that they do not, in fact, possess. We cast ourselves in the role of either victim or chosen one, and the Imaginal then plays the role of God or devil. But the actual nature of the experience is lost, and judging by Strieber's case, no amount of informed hindsight or post-mortem analyses can ever fully retrieve it. The damage has already been done.

That said, and whatever else Strieber's doing and regardless of how aware he is of doing it, his work raises far more questions than it provides answers, and that makes it worth paying close attention to. Discussing his experiences, or the man himself, in terms of whether he is a charlatan or a shaman, deluded or inspired, a puppet or a prophet, is a conceptual dead-end. He is both, and neither. In the same way, the broader question of whether "alien abductions" are really "mind control operations," etc., is also missing the point, because the one leads to the other and back again, making it a matter not of either/or but of both/and. The challenge then becomes to map the existing lines between the two opposing perspectives, and to trace the ways in which they overlap until there *are* no dividing lines. For me, the means to approach the strange case of Whitley Strieber has been to keep in mind that, whatever may be happening to him, it is a reflection and expression not only of his psyche but of the collective psyche, and therefore, *of my own*.

Each time I return to this subject over the years, I find myself a little closer to the nub of the mystery, and to the emotional core of my own attraction to it. For whatever reason, I feel deep affinity with Strieber, and because of that there is a desire to reach out to him, to connect with him, and to somehow bring about reconciliation. But since we have never met, and barely even had a dialogue, there is no rift as such to reconcile. Presumably, what I am seeking is some sort of reconciliation within myself, and I have hit upon Strieber as a convenient (symbolic) figure through which to find it. As with Castaneda, my attraction to Strieber has to do with the forces or intelligences which he claims to have had contact with, and with a deep desire within me—a longing—to develop a relationship of my own with them. Strieber became for me a *connection*, a go-between, by which I hoped somehow to get closer to the contents of my own unconscious, and to the hidden agents of the Imaginal or divine realms. Reading his work was a means to strengthen that connection. Then, when having a direct relationship proved not to be possible, that left *writing* about him. Deconstructing both his work and the man himself became a means not merely to get close to Strieber, but all the way *inside* that mystery!

Each time I return to the task, I am therefore more acutely aware of the sensitivity and delicacy of my undertaking, and of the potential for invasion and trespass. I experience increased doubts about my motives, and about the possible effects of submitting my subject to the laser-surgery of intellect and pen. In the most obvious and simple terms, I am concerned how Strieber will receive this piece, and anxious to present it in such a way so as not to offend or wound him, and to ensure he doesn't view it as hostile action. The more I work on his case study, then, the more I perceive Strieber himself as my primary audience, just as if I were his therapist writing the piece expressly for him. Yet all the while, I know that he is the last person likely to appreciate it. Behind this is not only my affection and concern for Strieber (which is based on my identification with him,

via his writings)—which is acute—but also my vanity and ambition as a writer-psychologist, harboring the hope that I may reach agreement with—and receive confirmation from—Strieber himself, as the final proof of my success. Since I am reasonably sure this will never happen, perhaps what I am really trying to discover is: *why do I care so much what Strieber thinks?*

The answer to that question may be the final layer of the Whitley onion.

Concretizing the Imaginal

Some of the craziest and most fragmented dreams are also the richest for analysis because they emerge from the deeper levels of the unconscious. On the other hand, the mundane, down-to-earth, coherent ones don't usually provide so much data about our psyches, because they reflect a more superficial level of consciousness. A subject like Whitley Strieber is rich for study, not *despite* the possibility that he is deluded but to a certain extent *because* of it. Delusion is the human condition after all, and only the enlightened (assuming such beings as the Master of the Key exist) are entirely free of it. The question becomes more intriguing and urgent, however, when ordinarily deluded individuals assume a role of authority and wisdom in our society. This is not only the case with priests and politicians, but also musicians, filmmakers, artists and writers. It applies perhaps especially to esoteric writers, since they are trafficking in information about hidden or greater reality. The danger is then that an ordinary delusion becomes an extraordinary one. Since such individuals are claiming to have access to higher truths, the element of delusion becomes more critical; at the same time, by persuading others to believe them and their higher truths, their delusion can go "viral." A "delusional consensus" is then created, also known as a cult.

In my last, unanswered email to Whitley, I shared with him how I had closed down a shamanic therapy group because of doubts I was having about my integrity and motivations. After hitting send, I noticed that, in place of the word "workshop," I had accidentally typed "*worship*." I fired off a quick email pointing out my Freudian typo, hoping that Strieber would recognize the parallels with his own predicament. More and more, my interest in Strieber was zeroing in on and mapping the ways in which he might be allowing himself to be co-opted, or corrupted, both by external agencies and internal power issues. Because I had seen this process at work in my own life—had been guilty of it—I felt like I knew all too well how an intellectual grasp, not only of esoteric concepts but of the language to communicate them, could reinforce deeply rooted delusions and allow them to assume dangerous proportions. In the case of Strieber (and similarly with Castaneda), the potential for self-replicating and self-propagating delusions was enormous, because the source of Strieber's experiences and of the special truth he was conveying—just as with religious authority figures and gurus—was allegedly *not of this world*. And of course, that was its primary appeal.

There were two major downsides to this: one, it meant that no one else could corroborate or question the specially "privileged" material without claiming a similar kind of access. Secondly, the otherworldly or Imaginal nature of the

experiences made them particularly subject to misinterpretation, because we lack the necessary frame of reference (the accumulated and shared data) to properly understand them. If Strieber's "aliens" represented the non- (or post-/pre-) human portion of the collective human consciousness, then, by definition, they were, like the gods, beyond our human experience. It followed that such beings would need to assume a more familiar form in order to interface with him, in the hopes of "communion" (i.e. psychological integration). Did that mean they would be obliged use the rags of *his own disowned psychic material* to do so? Perhaps it was that interface between an unknown, disowned psychic energy and the experiencer's unconscious which gave rise to the nightmare abduction scenario which he and others have described.⁷

In a similar way, Strieber might be literalizing and concretizing his own, deeply personal experiences by using them as the basis for his "ministry." He might sincerely believe that his role was to prepare humanity for contact with the Other, and be unwittingly luring other people—most especially people struggling with their own, as-yet *unintegrated* experiences of the imaginal/alien—into his own interpretation, thereby consolidating it for them. Over time, he would be building a consensus model of what "the visitor experience" really "is." As Strieber has written about, this would provide the "beings" with a nexus by which to access collective human consciousness, a kind of matrix-womb from which "they" could be born into our world. Based on my own impressions, I had little doubt that Strieber was genuinely trying to help others like him—fellow experiencers of "contact," whatever it was—by providing them with a space to share their experiences. But the road to hell was paved with good intentions, and Strieber could only be as effective as he was free from delusion, and from personal wounds and trauma. Otherwise, despite himself, he was going to use that space, unconsciously, for his own ends, as a means to feel safe and in control, by surrounding himself with people who would look up to him and confirm his own sense of authority and power. Strieber's unhealed wounds, his deeply-rooted childhood neuroses, would be the "handles" by which outside intelligences, whether human or non-human (or perhaps both) could control him, and his conscious intentions would be largely irrelevant. They would be little more than the means by which another, hidden agenda was being implemented.

Never Trust a Man on a Mission

While working on this latest version of the piece, in November 2011, I re-subscribed to Unknown Country so as to catch up on the audios. Besides readings of the first three chapters of *Solving the Communion Enigma*, there was a

⁷ One example of this (suggested to me by Cary McCoy on an early Stormy Weather podcast): if the Imaginal "beings" were trying to birth us into a new consciousness, they might be naively reenacting our own birth experiences to do so, thinking that this was how we "did" birth here. They would either not realize or not care how nightmarish and traumatic our own (hospital) births were for us, and simply be giving us what we were culturally conditioned to expect.

Halloween reading of a new story he had written, called “Darkness Visible.” Until then, I had been unable to listen to Strieber’s readings of his stories, finding them stilted and overly dramatic. On this occasion, however, I was impressed by how Strieber managed to read the story in a conversational tone of voice, as if speaking directly to his listeners, rather than reading from a page or computer screen. It seemed to be a deliberate device on Strieber’s part, similar to Orson Welles’ famous “War of the Worlds” broadcast, which presented a fictional work with the immediacy of a factual report. Strieber narrated his tale in the context of his own life, and referred to people, dates, and places exactly as he would in an ordinary address to his listeners.

The story described how Strieber and his wife Anne were having breakfast one morning in their LA apartment when they realized that they had been cut off from any kind of technological communication with the world. Strieber initially believes that there has been some sort of “terrorist attack,” some “pulse weapon” that has taken down all the electrics in the country, or even the world. When he and Anne leave the apartment, the first thing they see is a “dragonfly drone” (strange craft witnessed by many people in 2007 and 2008, and captured on film) floating in the sky, announcing the presence of the visitors. Strieber hears a voice directing him to the beach and telling him to hurry up. The couple passes some chaotic scenes of people in terror and confusion on the streets, but Strieber is told not to worry about it, that this is “not for them.” To cut a long story short, Strieber and his wife are miraculously whisked away (he doesn’t describe how) and find themselves on another planet, similar in every way to the Earth but apparently uninhabited. Strieber doesn’t know how many others have also been raptured away, and for all he knows it is only his own group (of fifty-eight people) who have been selected to populate the new world. What these fifty-eight chosen ones have in common is an ability to see and communicate with the dead. Strieber describes a feeling of peace and well-being at being on the threshold of a new world and a new life. He mentions in passing how he sensed a distant cry coming from the rest of humanity, as if in the moment of their passing, but then thinks no more about it.

As I listened to Strieber’s little Halloween tale, lying in my hammock on a November night under the Guatemalan stars, I found it vaguely chilling in its implications. On the surface, taken purely as fiction, it seemed little more than a wish-fulfillment fantasy of being rescued from the current planetary hell and starting afresh with a small group of close friends and associates in a new world. (As a teenager, I used to play a similar game with my sister, picking ten other people we would share our desert island with.) But Strieber has repeatedly stated that his fictional works are usually meant to convey more “sensitive” information, information he believes won’t be so well received as fact. And by making his audio for his subscribers, he is communicating primarily to a large following who believe, with varying degrees of conviction, that Strieber is an alien-elected prophet of the future.

The scenario presented in his story—that of nonhuman intervention and the removal of a select few from the Earth in the end times, to be relocated in a New Eden—is one which (I would guess) many of his listeners may take as literal

truth. Perhaps they now believe it all the more so, after hearing this latest tale? The story outlines the procedure to expect in the event of the rapture scenario: dragonfly drones hovering over your neighborhood and a voice in your head telling you where to go. Without indulging in too much paranoid speculation, how can Strieber be sure that he isn't preparing his subscribers for an entirely different agenda, say, oh, for secret government ships and radio-to-brain communications implementing a less "utopian" relocation plan, for example? I cite this not as a literal possibility (though it may be), but as an example of how (unbeknownst to him) Strieber's kind of "infotainment" *could* be part of larger agenda of social engineering, seeding memes in order to control and direct specific groups of people in the future. And Strieber might not know anything about it. The best tool is an unwitting one? Admittedly this is a bleak picture, and I have plenty of reservations about making it. But even on the off-chance it's true, isn't it worth upsetting the apple cart to be sure there isn't a bed of maggots underneath it? (It might explain why Strieber reacted so emotionally when Pinchbeck suggested something similar.)

Strieber strikes me as not only a sincere but also a decent and compassionate man, and I doubt he would deliberately appoint himself as a leader without the very best of intentions. I would guess that he believes he has been "chosen" for a world-saving mission, and that therefore he has no choice about it. He may even be buckling under the pressure of such a calling. In *Communion*, Strieber reported how one of the beings told him he was their chosen one, and how he reacted angrily (afterwards, during the hypnosis session), suggesting that they were trying to manipulate him with flattery. Somewhere along the way, has he lost sight of that possibility and come to believe in his status as a chosen-one? That might account for his frustration and indignation at the world's indifference.

Never trust a man on a mission. Why? Because the desire to change the world—or convert others to "the truth"—is almost always a symptom of denial. Crusaders can feel like they are holy (whole) by letting themselves get carried away by the zeal of doing "God's will." Slaughtering infidels is a great way to avoid facing up to the darkness and savagery in their own souls. A man on a mission has found a way not only to justify his egomania but to feed it with self-righteousness disguised as altruism. As a general rule, the greater the mission, the deeper the wound that's driving it, and the bigger and more out of control the ego is likely to get. Messianic delusion is something that many of the brightest minds fall prey to, and it may be a universal mind-trap which any who access divine or Imaginal truth at the very least pass by, and at worst fall into.⁸

⁸ Aleister Crowley and Adolf Hitler are two of the more outstanding examples of this. Less dramatically, John Lennon, Jim Morrison, Carlos Castaneda, and, in current times, David Icke and Whitley Strieber come to mind: all men with a mission aspiring, openly or otherwise, to be world avatars. And unless they actually are that (i.e., fully enlightened beings), the gulf between their aspirations and their abilities will invariably swallow them up. They will become possessed by the shadow of their calling, tragic heroes, cautionary tales. Castaneda's final years and his ignominious end, for example, became the capstone for his wisdom teachings and the context in which they must be forever framed.

Unraveling the Onion: The Whitley I Wanted to Be

Before finally deciding to publish this article (which I finished in late 2011), I sent it to Strieber and received a brief response, as follows (I trust I am not taking liberties by sharing this, since there is nothing private about it, or different from what Strieber has said publicly): “I am not so sure that you are ever going to resolve the questions that you ask about me. Nothing I have done is without intention. The aim of my life has been to reflect with some accuracy the complex and contradictory experience I have had. There are also other reasons, some of which you touch on in your piece, and which are also explored in my story ‘The Open Doors.’”

I replied by asking Strieber if he thought the piece was “fair.” He did not respond and so I sat on the article for another six weeks or so. It wasn’t until Mike Clelland, an associate of Strieber and fellow “experiencer,” invited me onto his podcast that I finally decided to submit the article to Reality Sandwich. I had plenty of reservations about it. For one thing, I still wasn’t sure about my motivations for writing—and especially for going public with—the article, and so I couldn’t be sure there wouldn’t be negative consequences (for Strieber and others, including myself) of doing so. For another, I knew it might stir up controversy and criticism, even hostility, and I wasn’t keen to have to deal with some of Strieber’s more vocal defenders, or with my own more strident detractors (some of whom I had already encountered at Reality Sandwich!).

Nonetheless, I submitted the article, and the next day I did the interview with Mike Clelland’s site. The interview went well, Clelland alerted Strieber about its existence, and a discussion quickly began at Clelland’s site. The initial objection to my argument, both from Clelland and his readers, was my use of the term “cult leader.” I was aware that I only had myself to blame for using such a loaded term. My policy is to always try to call a spade a spade, even knowing there is the risk that others may have different definitions for their digging implements. To most people, as I said on Clelland’s show, “cult leader” means Jim Jones, but in this article, I have used the term in a wider sense.

Here’s an online definition of “cult”:

1 : formal religious veneration : worship

2 : a system of religious beliefs and ritual; also : its body of adherents

3 : a religion regarded as unorthodox or spurious; also : its body of adherents

4 : a system for the cure of disease based on dogma set forth by its promulgator <health cults>

5 a : a great devotion to a person, idea, object, movement, or work (as a film or book); especially : such devotion regarded as a literary or intellectual fad

b : the object of such devotion

c : a usually small group of people characterized by such devotion

It’s clear, to me at least, that Strieber’s following fits into the fifth and last category. Since he is the one being followed, he then fits under a wider definition of “cult leader.” This is a more benign use of the word of cult, however, and overlaps with cult films, cult bands, etc. But the fact we use the same word for

seemingly different things shouldn't be overlooked, because clearly there *is* an overlap here.

Hearing people's objections, it struck me how there is an across the board acceptance that "cult leader" = "bad," accompanied by the assumption that there are certain telltale signs for recognizing a cult and its leader(s). The idea that "cults are bad" and that they have specific characteristics is propagated by the mass media, however, and the mass media itself is (or sustains) a kind of cult, making those who uphold it—key figures from anchor people to celebrities and politicians—"cult leaders" in a wider definition of the term. As I have already suggested in "Skywriters in Hades," society itself is a cult; but since everyone belongs to it, there's no one to point the finger and call it what it is. We can only identify a cult if we are on the outside, i.e. before we join it or once we have left it.

As described above, my concern that Strieber has the makings of "cult leader" is based on observation at his website. Unknown Country is basically a fan site, and fans, as we all know, behave "cultishly"—they worship their "leader," and s/he can do no wrong. The first indication I had of this was when my first article (which included no mention of cults) was received at Unknown Country, and by Strieber himself, as an attack on Strieber and as "disinformation—mostly, I felt, because it wasn't wholly supportive of him. (Though I have since come to recognize a certain unconscious bias in the writing of that first version, which is presumably still at work in this current incarnation.) This impression was later confirmed by observing the "love-bombing" of Strieber at his site. As unhealthy as love-bombing may be (in my opinion), there's nothing especially sinister about a writer having a place to talk with his fans and enjoy their praise and support. That is strictly in the realm of the benign sort of cult (William Burroughs was a cult writer, for example, though I highly doubt he appreciated being love-bombed!) in which a small group of followers exhibit unusually strong admiration, even adoration, for the object of their worship. Where it becomes less benign, I think, is when the "fan base" has religious, spiritual, or political dimensions to it and takes the form of some sort of social movement, however small. This is the case when the writer/leader is offering seeming truths about reality—teachings, practices, instruction, prophecy, and so forth—instead of merely entertainment. (There's no clear dividing line here, however.)

The measure in such cases is what sort of following does the writer or spokesperson attract, how much does s/he encourage (or allow) blind devotion, slavish agreement, credulity, and so forth, thereby failing to encourage *independence of thought*; and how concerned is s/he on increasing the size of the following, and so on. Questions such as this are essential to determining whether or not a person is abusing their influence and authority, consciously or not. As already described, Strieber has repeatedly implied that subscribers to his site are in an exclusive bracket of people who are tuned into higher, deeper truths and reality, and that, because of this, they are on the front line of evolution, with a more or less guaranteed place on the Mother Ship. He has even suggested that they have been specially implanted with devices to make them immune to mind

control. Isn't it naive at this point to argue that Strieber is just a very good writer with an especially devoted fan base?

A man is more than just the sum of his stories, and so those stories can only be understood in the deeper context of the man. To the degree that Strieber has used his stories to hide behind, that desire to conceal and to self-aggrandize becomes the hidden meaning *of* those stories. The medium is the message.

So then what of myself? I seem to have made it my literary mission of late to expose authors I perceive as being on a mission. How do I square that circle? Transparency has become the primary focus of everything I write. Regardless of who or what the subject may be, I am, in the end, only holding a mirror up to myself. There's the desire that others might see themselves in that mirror, but above all my hope is of eventually running out of masks to hide behind. If total transparency is my aspiration as a writer, it's also my deepest wish for the writers I'm inspired by—in this case, the strange case of Whitley Strieber, and whatever lies behind that particular mask. Strieber, Castaneda, Sebastian Horsley, John de Ruiter, all the exposés I have written in the past few years may only be a way for me to send out a distress signal, in the hope of receiving an echo-response and getting the same treatment I am dishing out. For my old outworn beliefs and deepest-rooted delusions to be gently and lovingly busted wide open by the pressure of truth, leaving me exposed, like a newborn baby with nowhere left to hide.

Perhaps the strange case of Whitley Strieber is not so strange after all? Perhaps it only appears strange, because of the exaggerated elements it contains, those of aliens, mind control, ascended masters, and abductee cults. Maybe what makes it so interesting is that Strieber—being a public figure with a large following—is just a bigged-up version of all of us; or at least, a significant portion of us. Don't we all go through a similar experience as Strieber did, and don't we all react and compensate in similar ways? To illustrate, I will outline Strieber's story in miniature, as follows:

- Traumatic childhood abuse at the hands of unethical government agents resulted in a fracture in his psyche—and his reality—by which Whitley came into contact with Imaginal (divine and/or demonic) beings.
- As an adult, Whitley became a writer of horror fiction and channeled his experiences (including suppressed memories of trauma) into his books, which then became best-sellers and were made into Hollywood movies.
- Some years later, once Whitley was fully established as a novelist, he unexpectedly re-accessed the Imaginal realm—also in a traumatic manner—and re-established contact with Imaginal beings. His experience also indicated that the beings were working in tandem with unknown *human* agencies, either military or government, or both.
- Whitley used his writing abilities to process his experiences and share them with the world, and once again he became a best-selling author. He graduated thereby from a fiction to a non-fiction writer, and from

mere “entertainer” to disseminator, teacher, proselytizer, philosopher. Most crucially, he became a spokesman for the “contact” experience, and a leader to an unofficial community of “abductees.”

- Later on, he encountered “the Master of the Key” and became a mouthpiece for an enlightened being (and by association, for God), and potentially a prophet-leader for humanity.

It’s a great story, classic, archetypal stuff. The twist which I have added to Strieber’s own version of events is that it is only the surface narrative, underneath which a darker, more subconscious current runs, represented in the narrative by the shadowy government agencies and agendas that set the ball in motion to begin with. Strieber’s handlers. The wrinkle I have added to the tale says that those agencies, having “implanted” Whitley with specific psychological “handles” by which to control him, have been doing just that throughout his life, in tandem with the Imaginal forces. That they have been subtly steering him and his work down previously laid tracks, towards the formation of a sophisticated “mind control cult” designed to keep potential psychics dancing to an intelligence tune, to prevent *a real awakening* from happening. (This last part of the story is a little murky, but I think the narrative more or less holds together.)

So what happens if we generalize the elements of the story and apply them to the average person with no (conscious) experience of aliens, government agencies, or ascended masters? What then?

Our parents are our handlers. They program us and shape us according to their own agendas, and inevitably do us psychological damage in the process, by instilling us with values and beliefs which stem from their own conditioning. These values become the “handles” which make us acceptable—and controllable—members of society. In the midst of this trauma-based conditioning, as children we all take refuge in Imaginal realms. We find “imaginary friends” to hang out with, and as we move into adolescence, we generate elaborate fantasies to escape into, fantasies of being a super-hero, a prophet, a rock star, a Casanova, a best-selling author, and so forth. As we near adulthood, those fantasy realms and imaginal/imaginary characters become ambition-drives that provide us with a sense of purpose, meaning, and destiny. As full-blown adults, we then attempt to find a respectable (self-supporting) niche that will allow room for our fantasy-based values to express and take root. (Strieber became a successful fiction writer.) If all goes well, we will eventually develop a philosophy (belief system) by which to live, and through it rediscover a sense of personal destiny that is now linked to “higher” principles which we believe are anything but fantasies, that represent truth, justice, democracy, divine law, and apple pie for all (but Paradise just for the few).

Strieber’s tale of making contact with aliens and writing books about it is like a dramatic representation of this process. It mirrors the desire and tendency in all of us to believe we have accessed higher truth and are adopting the correct principles to live by—not only for ourselves but *for everyone*. The average person isn’t abducted by aliens; the average person joins a corporation, a Church, a political party, a sports club or all of the above, and thereby gains a sense of

purpose and meaning that is dependent on their *participation*. The natural next step is to convert others to the “cause” and increase the reach and scale of their “club.” Church-goers prove their devotion by seeking new members for the congregation; corporate climbers improve their company standing by bringing in new recruits; party members enlist new volunteers and bring in more voters, and so on.

The desire to find a higher purpose that transcends oneself is the same desire that draws people, from football supporters to religious fanatics, to join cults of whatever kind. If an individual is more inclined to lead than to follow, he can even start his own following. Although Strieber’s case is extreme, it is also typical. It is as if he is magnifying collective conditions, collective patterns, so as to make them visible to anyone with an eye to see. The patterns laid down in childhood by trauma and neglect lurk beneath all such pursuits, spiritual, political, artistic, sexual, or financial, and it’s those handles and gears, working away beneath the surface and behind the scenes, which ensure that, whatever we set out to achieve, it will lead to a very different outcome.

So perhaps here is the final skin of Whitley’s onion, behind which there is no more onion? We are *all* doing a Whitley, though some of us more than others. If I was drawn to Strieber, it was not only from a desire to connect to the knowledge and mystery which his books described. It was because I wanted to *be* Whitley. I wanted to be a best-selling author with aliens for friends, to be pitted against the hypocrisy and ignorance of the world, with an adoring readership behind me, for whom I could say or do no wrong, and a loyal wife by my side to keep me on the straight and narrow. That’s pretty much all I could *ever* ask for out of life. Following Strieber’s work has led me to a deeper and more intimate—uncomfortably so—knowledge of that propensity and desire in myself, and to the certainty that I too have the makings of “a cult leader,” if only the opportunity would present itself in time! I have learned more from Strieber and his work than even *he* could have guessed: far more in fact than if he had been what he appeared, or what he aspires to be—which is the Whitley that I wanted (him) to be.

That brings me full circle, and, I hope, *out*. No more deconstruction pieces!/? Even if everything I have asserted about Strieber is true, it really doesn’t make any difference now that I know it. There’s no harm in mis- or disinformation, any more than there’s harm in works of fiction. Cults only attract people already programmed to succumb to cult mentality—which in the end is all of us anyway. If Strieber is deluded, an unwitting puppet-shill for sinister forces—human or otherwise—and if he has created a personality cult to attract and deceive people—what else is new? He’s only doing what all of us are doing in smaller ways. The only harm in it, finally, is to Whitley himself. For others, who knows? I can only use myself as an example, in which case Strieber has helped me immeasurably. He has helped me to see the harm I have done to myself by following false prophets and misguided leaders, and by seeking a connection to the divine outside of my own heart, body, and mind.

Right or wrong, it is entirely up to us which we choose to do. And the prophet, by being false, becomes true.

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- ⁱ All quotes in this article are from “Whitley’s Journal,” at www.unknowncountry.com. This one is from “The Coming of the Dark Side and How We Can Defend Ourselves,” September 7th, 2002.
- ⁱⁱ “Shedding Light on the Dark Side, Part Two,” December 7th, 2003.
- ⁱⁱⁱ “Communion 20 Years On,” 26th December, 2005.
- ^{iv} “Christmas Joy: Mankind is Awakening,” December 14th, 2001.
- ^v “Christmas Joy: Mankind is Awakening,” December 14th, 2001.
- ^{vi} “Shedding Light on the Dark Side,” December 3, 2003.
- ^{vii} “Journey to Another World,” March 12, 2004.
- ^{viii} “The Coming War,” 10th Jan, 2003
- ^{ix} “Summer of Promise, Summer of Danger,” July 12th, 2003.
- ^x “Communion 20 Years On,” 26th December, 2005.
- ^{xi} “The Coming of the Dark Side and How We Can Defend Ourselves,” September 7th, 2002.
- ^{xii} “Communion 20 Years On,” 26th December, 2005.
- ^{xiii} A partial transcript of the discussion can be found at <http://2012.tribe.net/thread/3a164efb-2bbb-4a46-9ec9-51e5020ea319> Both writers reported on the incident. Strieber’s—“War in Dreamland”—can be found among his journal entries at his site; Pinchbeck’s can be found at his blog, at www.realitysandwich.com
- ^{xiv} I am thinking particularly of his appearance on “The Veritas Show,” with Mel Fabregas, June 26th, 2009.
- ^{xv} “The Boy in the Box,” 14th March, 2003.
- ^{xvi} “The Capture House,” October 11th, 2003.
- ^{xvii} “The Capture House,” October 11th, 2003.
- ^{xviii} “Communicating with the Grays,” 7th June 2006.
- ^{xix} “Communion 20 Years On,” 26th December, 2005.
- ^{xx} “Communicating with the Grays,” 7th June 2006.
- ^{xxi} “Are They Coming and If So, What Do We Do?” March 30th, 2007.
- ^{xxii} “The Capture House,” October 11th, 2003.
- ^{xxiii} “The Capture House,” October 11th, 2003.
- ^{xxiv} “The Capture House,” October 11th, 2003.
- ^{xxv} “The Old Edition of the Key was CENSORED, the New One is Not,” May 15, 2011
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/journal/old-edition-key-was-censored-new-one-not>
- ^{xxvi} See: <http://www.unknowncountry.com/news/scientist-implant-study-shows-non-earth-origin>
Also: <http://www.unknowncountry.com/news/how-use-your-implant> I also found this bizarre news story at the site: “The implant in Whitley Strieber’s left ear that uses mind control to force him to continuously talk about it burst into flames on Monday and burned to the ground. Now it’s gone and he has no further reason to mention it in any way whatsoever for any reason. Strieber was once again telling friends over dinner about the implant when it made a crackling noise, then went up in a puff of smoke. As all of his dinner guests were asleep, none of them witnessed the event, and his camera had just been eaten by the dog, so he got no photographs.”
<http://www.unknowncountry.com/news/striber-implant-burns#ixzz1e5DoCIUI>