Jacques Vallee - On Messengers of Deception

As mentioned recently, Daily Grail Publishing has just released a reprint of Jacques Vallee's UFO classic, *Messengers of Deception* (Amazon US and Amazon UK). Last week I had a quick chat with Jacques about the book, and the controversy it created in ufology. It was intentionally short - I could talk to Jacques for a couple of days on all manner of topics, but in this case I just wanted to address the elements of his work which have made him, as he describes it, "a heretic among heretics" - namely, his concern about uncritical acceptance of the UFO phenomenon, and also the 'psychic' manifestations found in UFO reports which suggest that they may not be "nuts and bolts" craft.

Jacques' answers are succinct and incisive - here's a few pull-outs:

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"People linked to the intelligence community of the major countries have been closely involved in studying UFO cases since World War Two. That interest is legitimate, whether it is purely personal (as most of them claim) or related to their official duties. The same is true in parapsychology."

"[T]he phenomenon comes in an environment of manifestations that include heightened awareness of synchronicities, paranormal sounds and lights and occasionally absurd coincidences similar to those described in the poltergeist literature."

"By denying the reality of the reports, brushing aside the witnesses...and treating them like fools or crooks, the academic skeptics are actually teaching the public that science is impotent at studying the phenomenon."

The full interview is below.

TDG: Jacques, thanks for talking with us here at The Daily Grail. Let's get straight to the new release: the original publication of *Messengers of Deception* in 1979 marked quite a turning point in your standing with the ufology community. Your warning that we should be more careful about embracing the phenomenon, and that its underlying qualities could well be negative and deceitful in nature rather than benevolent, was rejected by many (and still seems to cause angst to this day). I'm keen to know what acted as the catalyst for the writing of *Messengers of Deception*, and if you have thoughts on why so many in the UFO research community paint it as a betrayal of sorts?

Jacques Vallee: The evidence for an "undercurrent" of deceit behind some alleged UFO cases only becomes visible when you spend time in the field interviewing witnesses and tracking down the evidence. It became annoying to me because it represented a waste of time and a distraction from studying genuine observations. Researchers who collect reports only through books or media accounts would not necessarily encounter this level of the phenomenon and would understandably resist the suggestion that the belief in extraterrestrial intervention is being manipulated to serve political or cultist goals.

Even people who are fully aware of this negative aspect don't want to bring it up into the open because they think it will call disrepute to the subject. Many erstwhile ufologists don't want the deceptive reports exposed, just as the Catholic Church long denied instances of abuse in its ranks. Whistle-blowing is never welcome: I have even been accused of having an "addled brain" in the august pages of the Society for Scientific Exploration! My own position has always been that, on the contrary, the

best way to gain the respect of the intellectual community is to expose hoaxes, sloppy research and manipulation whenever we encounter them.

TDG: The underlying message of the book seems more relevant now than ever - in the last few years, we've had the "Serpo" case gain high traction in certain parts of the community, and now the "CARET Drones" story seems to have taken on a life of its own, despite there being little to no evidence behind either. Considering the dangers in uncritical belief that you warn of in *Messengers of Deception*, do you think high profile ufologists and media should be more diligent in exercising a 'duty of care' when presenting these cases so eagerly?

Jacques Vallee: If we do not establish a high standard for the data we publish, the entire field suffers. Then it becomes easy for skeptics to claim that the phenomenon only appears before "cranks and weirdoes," as astrophysicist Stephen Hawking recently stated in England. This is exacerbated by the increased credulity of the public and its blatant exploitation by the media. It seems that people – including some highly educated folks – are ready to believe almost anything they see on the Internet or on Larry King.

TDG: In *Messengers of Deception*, you warn people to be careful of 'psy-ops' initiated by intelligence agencies and the military - you cite the World War II case of the 'London Controlling Section' (LCS), whose sole purpose was strategic deception, often using "tricks of science". How far do we take this caution though? A large portion of ufologists, most of the individuals who have worked in researching/conducting remote viewing, and also a significant portion of parapsychologists, all have fairly strong links to military or intelligence groups. Should we therefore be highly skeptical of the claims made in regards to each topic, even if it seems scientifically sound?

Jacques Vallee: The same standards should apply here that apply in science generally: Look at the evidence behind every claim, track down the references, and test the data yourself. People linked to the intelligence community of the major countries have been closely involved in studying UFO cases since World War Two. That interest is legitimate, whether it is purely personal (as most of them claim) or related to their official duties. The same is true in parapsychology.

This only becomes a problem when that quasi-official interest goes beyond pure research and extends to actually faking sightings, disseminating false photographs or films and promoting weird beliefs, either to serve as distraction from actual intelligence operations, or as a cover for the development of advanced prototypes. A good example is given by the claims of UFOs seen over the USSR in the seventies, that were planted by the KGB to cover-up the launching of soviet satellites that violated the SALT treaties. Every nation can play this game, and has.

TDG: When we look at ufology in the 1960s, versus today, I'm not sure a lot of progress has been made (perhaps even the opposite). Is ufology a sisyphean endeavour, unworthy of our prolonged attention? You've personally devoted almost 50 years of research and writing to exploring the phenomenon - can you give a simple opinion to the question: what is behind the UFO phenomenon?

Jacques Vallee: You're asking me two different questions here. I have convinced myself that there was a real UFO phenomenon once the errors, hoaxes and occasional manipulations were screened out. We do know a great deal more today than we did just 10 years ago, thanks to dedicated researchers who have invested their time and resources to documenting the data. That is not as good as a serious scientific research

effort, but one should never underestimate what can be achieved by motivated amateurs. This being said, it would be unrealistic to expect quick solutions, in this field as in any other scientific endeavor.
I have also been interested in the nature of consciousness, and that field has not gotten closer to a solution in fifty years either. Similarly, look at some of the lingering enigmas in archaeology, or in medicine: all we can do is document our data and hope someone will make sense of it at a later time.
TDG: Turning to another aspect of your research that has made you a 'heretic' within ufology: You were one of the first to explore the idea that UFO events were as much 'psychic' in nature as 'physical'. Can you detail some of these 'psychic' aspects, and what you think the cause is?
Jacques Vallee: This is still a little-known aspect of the sightings because most investigators don't probe into this area, either for lack of background in parapsychology, or simply because they think they already know the answer, and it must involve simple "nuts and bolts" spacecraft. It takes a very brave witness to bring up such experiences in the face of skeptical researchers. I don't believe a UFO observation makes anyone "psychic," to use the popular terminology, but the phenomenon comes in an environment of manifestations that include heightened awareness of synchronicities, paranormal sounds and lights and occasionally absurd coincidences similar to those described in the poltergeist literature.
TDG: On that note, Margaret Mead once wrote: "When we want to understand something strange, something previously unknown, we have to begin with an entirely different set of questions. What is it? How does it work? Are there recurrent regularities?" I've been intrigued myself with some of these "recurrent regularities" when it comes to paranormal phenomenon - in particular the strange sounds heard, although there are other things such as strange fogs, odd tastes and smells in the mouth - but find it odd that ufology research doesn't seem to address these so much. From your own research, have you been able to identify such "recurrent regularities", which to me would provide solid evidence that there is some sort of objective, structured phenomenon at work here?
Jacques Vallee: The phenomenon is very robust in its manifestations, both physical and physiological. The former can be seen when plotting the time of day when observations are made (the "Law of the Times") and the development of specific waves or flaps. Physical traces, interference with car ignition, patterns of light phenomena and energy have all been documented by serious authors. The physiological factors include evidence of exposure to UV radiation, frequent effects on the eyes (from conjunctivitis to temporary blindness), skin blisters or injuries in reaction to focused beams of light, temporary inhibition of muscle control, disturbances in the sleep cycle, and general fatigue and anemia lasting over 7 days and life-threatening in some extreme cases.
TDG: Despite these intriguing pieces of evidence though, 'skeptics' (of the CSICOPian kind) still tend to write off ufology as a mass of "Venus sightings". Is the skeptical/rationalist movement - and academia in general - guilty of ignoring the phenomenon based almost purely on intellectual ego and fear of embarrassment? And is there a danger that by alienating themselves (pardon the pun) from the experiences of the public, they will actually enable those very beliefs? As you rightly note in *Messengers of Deception*, "When the Establishment is rational, absurdity is dynamite."
Jacques Vallee: By denying the reality of the reports, brushing aside the witnesses (including trained observers like pilots or military personnel) and treating them like

fools or crooks, the academic skeptics are actually teaching the public that science is impotent at studying the phenomenon. As the belief in the reality of UFOs grows among the population along with the evidence that a real phenomenon exists, people naturally tend to turn away from science in their search for answers, and that is a very dangerous trend.

TDG: Similarly, in *Messengers of Deception* you note that "the experience of a close encounter with a UFO is a shattering physical and mental ordeal". Are UFO experiencers unfairly shunned (and worse, ridiculed) by medical and psychological support networks, based simply on the nature of their experience?

Jacques Vallee: What these people go through is worse than being shunned. In most cases, they are left to fend for themselves, and they become easy preys for groups with quick answers. In the words of a woman who wrote to me after she had a horrible experience she interpreted as an alien abduction, followed by a series of disastrous hypnotic sessions at the hands of incompetent researchers, “the ufologists were worse than the beings who abducted me.” The vacuum that has been created by academic neglect is getting filled by all kinds of irrational belief systems, often linked to conspiracy theories and political paranoia. That was true when I wrote the book thirty years ago, and it is even more true now.

The 2008 reprint of Jacques Vallee's classic work "Messengers of Deception" has been re-edited by Dr Vallee, and also comes with a new Foreword. You can purchase the book via Amazon US and Amazon UK.

***Jacques Vallee** was born in France, where he received a B.S. in mathematics at the Sorbonne and an M.S. in astrophysics at Lille University. Coming to the U.S. as an astronomer at the University of Texas, where he co-developed the first computer-based map of Mars for NASA, Jacques later moved to Northwestern University where he received his Ph.D. in computer science. He went on to work at SRI International and the Institute for the Future, where he directed the project to build the world's first network-based groupware system as a Principal Investigator on Arpanet, the prototype for the Internet. He is now a venture capitalist, and lives in San Francisco. He continues to research the UFO phenomenon.*

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