

UFOs and the human mind

Dimensions: A Casebook of Alien Contact
by Jacques Vallee, Contemporary Books, \$17.95

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AN ARGUMENT could be made that UFOs are the most widely witnessed and scientifically ignored phenomenon of the 20th century. Whereas sightings of the Loch Ness monster number in the hundreds and ghostly visitations perhaps in the thousands, millions of people have now reported unidentified flying lights and objects that go zip in the night. A Gallup poll conducted last year, for example, found that one of every 11 adult Americans claims to have seen a UFO. A full 50 per cent of those polled believed UFOs were real.

Still, save for a handful of university and scientific society sponsored studies (France is the only country that currently operates an official investigative agency), UFOs remain a perplexing *phenomena non grata* among the community of world scientists at large. Jacques Vallee's latest sortie into the swamp of flying saucers is unlikely to send astronomers and physicists scrambling for their super Crays. For one thing,

unlike the sophisticated statistical studies of the subject that earmarked two earlier books (*Anatomy of a Phenomenon* and *Challenge to Science*), *Dimensions* finds Vallee anchored off the murky shoals of folklore and religion.

The French-born ufologist, bilingual in computer science and astrophysics, argues for some kind of unknown physical component behind the phenomenon, but says its real impact may lie in the realm of psychology and sociology. "It no longer matters whether UFOs are real or not," he is fond of saying, "so long as people *behave* as if they were." Such a statement, along with the vigorous debunking of the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH) he puts forth here, would seem to place the author squarely within the camp of the mildly sceptical, but Vallee obviously believes there is more to UFOs than first meets the eye.

In fact, he postulates a mysterious control mechanism behind the phenomenon, like a sort of psychic thermostat that

governs human belief systems. Spaceships from the stars are only the latest manifestation and popular interpretation of whatever-it-is that both interacts with and shapes human consciousness. Vallee traces this supposed involvement in our affairs back to at least Phoenician times and claims it more recently shaped the ubiquitous lore of the "wee folk" that surfaces in medieval Europe, as well as subsequent apparitions of the Virgin Mary at Fatima, Portugal (1917), and Medjugorje, Yugoslavia (1981 to date). Both incidents were allegedly accompanied by luminous displays reminiscent of "classical" UFOs.

The more scientifically staid will already have abandoned ship by this point. Whether they'll miss an interdisciplinary ramble through contemporary flying saucer folklore that raises interesting parallels with the past may be moot. An audience uncommitted to UFOs, extraterrestrial or otherwise, is unlikely to pay much attention to Vallee's hypothesis of a "higher" involvement in human affairs, especially when that elusive agent provocateur bears a suspicious phenomenological resemblance to what used to pass for God. □



Off beam: a Gallup poll conducted last year in the US discovered that one in 11 people claimed to have seen a UFO