



How to be an alien.

either utopian — a future of world harmony, or the conquest of aging and death — or more commonly, various grisly versions of disaster. In some, such as the Raelians, Mankind's actions, or failure to act, will determine the outcome: in cults warning of disaster, however, salvation is likely to be limited to the righteous few.

The warnings are also often wrapped up with a novel and idiosyncratic reinterpretation of human history. For Raelians, the ETs are benign and what motivates them is essentially paternalism. To put it in a nutshell, they are our fathers in space. They created us and did so in their own physical image. In all important respects, we are physically identical.

For those who recall the brief explosion of interest in Van Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods*, its sequels and the wave of imitators whose writings temporarily lined the occult shelves of bookshops in the Seventies, much of the message has a curiously familiar ring. "Was God an Astronaut?" he asked. And more than five million copies later, translated into more than 26 languages, people are still paying to hear him say 'yes'. Van Daniken's speculations furnished the once bankrupt Swiss hotelier with the wealth to make of himself a widely-travelled and fast-moving target. Subsequent public recantings and fudgings on several important items of his 'evidence' suggest that he was not always quite fast enough.

Rael's ET gave a similar message. Some 25,000 years ago, a group of their scientists were in the process of creating life, when the government, in response to concerned public opinion, called a halt. A compromise was reached: the scientists could continue their experimenting on a distant but similar planet, the Earth. After creating all other life forms, the ETs finally created human life, creatures almost identical to themselves. Thereafter, the aliens largely stood back and let us get on with it.

Throughout history, man has had contact with the aliens but, lacking technological sophistication, merely identified them as 'gods' or, in time, as 'God'. In the Bible, they appear as the 'Elohim', traditionally but mistakenly translated as 'gods' or 'angels', but more accurately translated as "those who come from the sky".

Periodic attempts to inform mankind of the real nature of our genesis by sending messengers,

such as Buddha, Christ, Mohammed and Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormons, were largely unsuccessful. Finally, seeing the power of man's destructiveness as witnessed at Hiroshima, the ETs decided that we were intellectually and technologically capable of understanding, and perhaps running perilously short of time, so they determined that this must be the Age of Revelation.

Rael was the prophet appointed for this final age. If we ignore the message, he says we may well destroy ourselves. If we heed it and demonstrate to the Elohim that we are capable of wisdom and benevolence by building an embassy at which they can land and meet the world's press, they will return. The choice is now ours.



How to be some more aliens.

Van Daniken's speculations are one thing, claims like that are quite another. Marcus Wenner is well aware of the likely charge of him being a crank, and with his background so he should be. His BSc from Sussex University was in Experimental Psychology and Neurobiology. He gained his PhD in Psychology from Nottingham. Now working in Bristol as a self-employed psychotherapist, he supplements the income from his counselling work by giving

occasional workshops.

"You get used to people thinking of you as a weirdo," he explains, "and emotionally and intellectually I don't really mind what people think of me."

Does Raelism appeal to a certain type of person? Wenner believes that it probably does. "Of course you've got to be capable of suspending disbelief and not be put off just because it's bizarre," he says, "and of course it requires a certain bravery. But the main thing we've got in common is the desire for harmony. Raelians want to help to make the world a better place."

A few months after his Covent Garden ordeal, it's clear that the British version of International Planetary Week generated a satisfying burst of publicity. *Sunday Sport* and various other organs have briefly considered his cause. And, in an encouraging display of the "all publicity is good publicity" adage, the *Star* report resulted in interviews with six radio stations, including a Radio 2 date on the popular Derek Jameson show. The hundred or so letters he's received since have all been positive.

While it is easy to lampoon the claims and beliefs of UFO cultists, they clearly tap a sense of foreboding and impotence which is widespread. Individuals uninvolved in cults but who claim to have experienced close encounters of the third or fourth kind (contacts or abductions) typically report experiences which suggest a fearful loss of control to the aliens: their thoughts are controlled, a period of time is unaccountably lost, objects move around them like poltergeists, their dreams are invaded, they are subjected to a searching physical examination and so on.

For those drawn to cults, the lack of control and sense of impotence rather reflects interpersonal, societal or even planetary levels of concern. As Hynek noted, UFO cultists are mostly inspired by a religious impulse and many display a deep concern for and dissatisfaction with the current state of the Earth and a fear that things are getting worse.

For the Raelians perhaps more than for most of us, it's a moot question whether time is on our side. The Raelian dating system is not likely to catch on but is a clear pointer to their doomsday perspective: next August 6 we enter year 43 of the Age of Revelation. This New Year date is set by the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima. ■