

The little green creatures from outer space turn out to be sticklers for protocol. They will only visit the earth if they are received with proper formality, which is why M. Claude Vorilhon Rael, a French racing driver, wants to build them an embassy at Jerusalem.

It was back in 1973 that M. Rael claims to have had his first encounter with an extra-terrestrial. He was on a country walk in France when a spaceship landed near him and out of it climbed a handsome little four-foot-high creature which invited him aboard. Speaking in French, the extra-terrestrial proceeded to tell M. Rael all manner of strange and wonderful things about the origins of man, religion and science which M. Rael wrote down and later turned into a book.

M. Rael is now planning to visit England shortly to raise funds for the proposed embassy. The extra-terrestrials, he says, were the original creators of mankind and have therefore asked for an official welcome back to earth. His representative in Britain is Dr Marcus Wenner, who describes himself as a neurobiologist. "Although these ideas may initially appear eccentric, they do merit serious scientific investigation," says Dr Wenner. "The appeal in the Raelian Movement is that it makes sense. It is logical that human beings were created by an act of intelligence, rather than random evolution."

Although M. Rael claims to have 50,000 followers worldwide, Dr Wenner admits that he has only a few hundred in this country. The British followers, he says, may be small in number but they are unusually intelligent, including as they do doctors, scientists and psychologists. Dr Wenner is hoping that more people will be converted by M. Rael when he speaks in Bristol and London next month.

I would be more enthusiastic about M. Rael's project were I not concerned about the siting of a new religious shrine at Jerusalem. The city has suffered enough already from the attentions paid to it by Christians, Muslims and Jews without also becoming the world's first Holy Place for the venerated of little green men.