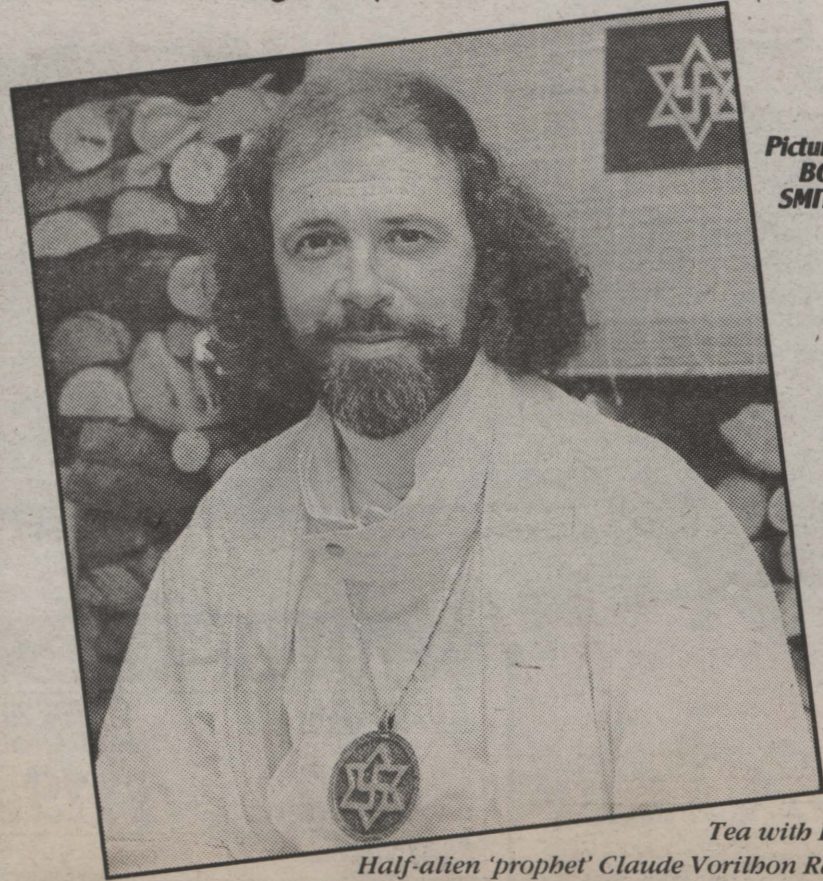


P R Thomas

simply REBECCA GOOCH



Picture:
BOB
SMITH

Tea with ET:
Half-alien 'prophet' Claude Vorilhon Rael

My encounter with an alien called Claude

DEAR Diary: Monday — Ill in bed. Watched Neighbours. Read in a book that the potato is related to Deadly Nightshade. Ran out of Lemsip.

Tuesday — Went to the dentist. Bought some Christmas decorations. Picked up a Laura Ashley catalogue. Met a man who says he's half extra-terrestrial.

No, this wasn't a drunken encounter with a well-newted loony outside an Indian take-away.

This was tea in Clifton with a French journalist and racing driver who claims to have been sired by an ET (they look like us only a bit shorter and more Chinesey, apparently) and chosen by the spacemen to set up an international movement to build

an alien embassy near Jerusalem.

You still with me, earth children?

Now, I wouldn't bother to interrupt my Christmas shopping to meet just any old UFO 'prophet', but The British Raelian Movement, named after 42-year-old Claude Vorilhon Rael, is based in Bristol and therefore I felt I had a duty to dip my brush into this pot of bunkum.

The UK spokesman is a slightly-built, boyishly-faced chap called Dr Mark Weiner, who described himself as a freelance neurobiologist and who occasionally spells his name differently "to avoid prejudice".

It was in his Clifton flat that we took tea, at least I took tea, Rael took apple juice; he believes tea will do something nasty to his body's genetic coding.

How funny, I said, trying to make small talk, the Mormons won't drink tea or coffee either.

Not that funny, he replied. Mr Big Mormon Daddy of them all, Joseph Smith, was another half-alien prophet like himself and a few other chaps whose names might ring a bell — Jesus, Moses, Muhammad, Buddha...

Ape-man

So where do I begin? You'll think I'm two fingers short of a full hand if I tell you that these almond-eyed aliens, or Elohim, created man in their own image.

Apparently, Darwin was barking up the wrong tree of life. What really happened was that a bunch of Elohim whisked man up in a test tube in a special laboratory they set up somewhere in Israel at the beginning of time.

Ah, but not just man, every living creature, Rael told me.

What about ape-man, how could he be in their image?

Ah yes, there were lots of prototypes, you see.

What about the dinosaurs, then?

Ah well, umm, maybe they didn't fit in.

It was when this white-clad 'prophet' tried to tell me that our bodies contained an infinite number of planets (yes, planets), and that he'd had a VIP lunch with Jesus on Planet Elohim in 1975 that my shorthand developed a serious wobble.

Call me a disbeliever. Call me a hopeless old cynic. But how would you react if this one-time drama student, pop singer and dreamer stared you in the eye and told you he'd been waylaid on the way to work one day by an alien called Yahve?

One minute, there he was trundling along in his Volkswagen, the next he was saying howdy-doody to a little man in a green flying suit who turned out to be the extra-terrestrial equivalent of Ronald Reagan.

In six hourly bulletins, spread over a week, this astral president passed 'the message' they wanted Claude to spread.

This eventually became a book which has sold 300,000 copies in 14 languages, so lots of royalties there.

Generously, he gave me a copy of another of his extra-terrestrial in-

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spired tomes and I wasn't at all happy about what I read inside.

There's lots of dodgy, hang-loose philosophising and preaching free love and global unification, and a few tips on how to attempt telepathic contact with the guys upstairs.

But there were a few other much more sinister pronouncements which made me feel distinctly unsettled.

Believers are instructed "in compliance with what is written in The Book" not to leave any inheritance, "apart from the apartment or family house", to their children. The rest had to be left by will to "the Guide of Guides".

Believers worried that their descendants might dispute the will are told to bestow the loot while they're alive, "in order to help him spread the Messages of our Creators on Earth".

They're also instructed that when they die they must either give their bodies to science or "be disposed of as discreetly as possible" except for a centimetre square piece of bone in the middle of the forehead which will be kept in the terrestrial embassy.

Rael didn't mind that I was thought he was mad.

"Eet's normal," he shrugged, quite immune to the diagnosis.

"Eet's not my job to convince, just to pass the message."

"Is my spaceship any 'arder to believe than eet's the body of Christ you eat when you take communion?"

Spaceman

Dangerous territory. If the message was just a re-bore of Eric von Daniken's old theory that God was a spaceman, I would have found it merely amusing.

But I sensed something altogether too insidiously showbizzy for comfort about our alien ambassador.

The British end of his disturbing movement is actually being launched tonight, when Rael gives a talk at the City Conference Centre in Small Street, Bristol.

But Monsieur le prophet will also be spreading the word in the forthcoming Lombard RAC rally, driving a car daubed with the legend "An Embassy for Extra-Terrestrials."

Dear Diary: Wednesday — Back down to earth. Phew!