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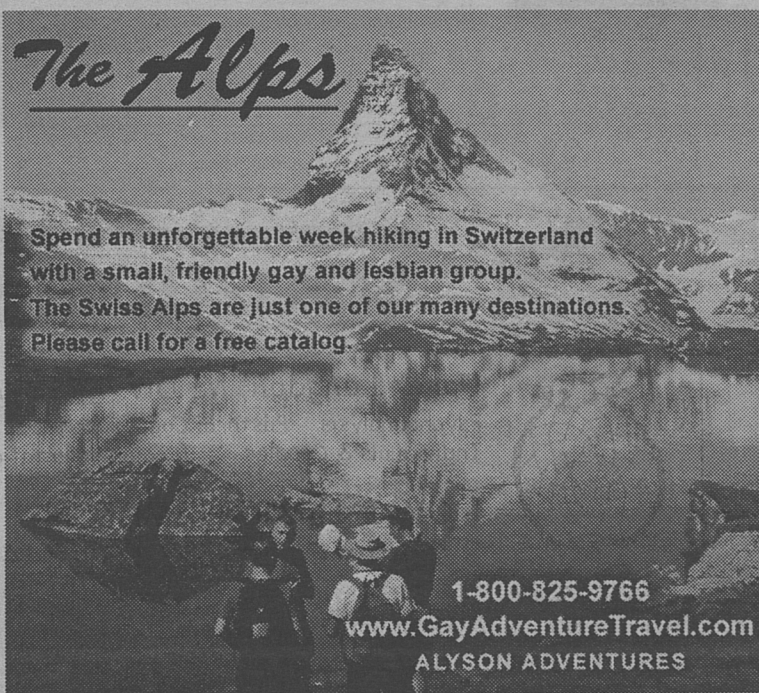
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Views: A Queer Friendly UFO Sect in Cloning Storm

Wow! Talk about making a big splash.

A company linked to a previously-obscure Canadian religious sect stunned the world two days after Christmas when it announced that an American woman gave birth to a seven-pound baby girl cloned from the woman's DNA.

If that wasn't enough of a shocker, Dr. Brigitte Boisselier, CEO of Clonaid, Ltd., also announced that a second cloned baby girl was born three days into the new year to a Dutch woman and her lesbian partner at an undisclosed location in the Netherlands.

And more cloned babies are coming, according to Dr. Boisselier. A gay-male couple hopes to have a cloned infant by next fall and plans are in the works to clone babies from HIV-positive people.

Think about that. Babies created by taking DNA from the skin cells of their parents. No father's sperm needed to fertilize the mother's egg anymore. Was it a mere coincidence that the first cloned infant – if it really is a clone – was born on the day after Christmas?

As this edition of *Out in the Mountains* went to press, neither physical proof of the two births, nor evidence that the infants were in fact cloned from their mothers' DNA was offered, nor is such evidence forthcoming anytime soon. And the mothers' identities are also being kept under wraps.

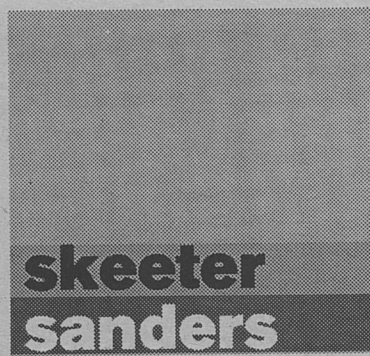
Clonaid's dramatic announcement of the birth of cloned human babies has not only poured gasoline on a long-simmering controversy over cloning, but also touched off a separate firestorm that could rock religion and spirituality to its very foundations.

These alleged pioneers of human cloning are members of the Raelian Movement, a Quebec religious sect based near Montreal that believes that the human race itself was cloned by extraterrestrials. Dr. Boisselier is a Raelian bishop.

Needless to say, Clonaid and the Raelians have incurred the blistering wrath of religious leaders across the spiritual spectrum and of government leaders who have vowed to outlaw all human cloning.

Until last Christmas, you probably had never even heard of the Raelians (pronounced RYE-ely-ens). Most Americans haven't. In fact, most Canadians outside Quebec hadn't heard of them either.

That's partly because most members of this predominantly French-speaking sect, which claims 35,000 to 50,000



skeeter sanders

members worldwide, have for years lived quietly under the media radar.

And for good reason. The Raelians are a very offbeat sect – and that's putting it mildly. Some would say that the Raelians are eccentric "space cadets." Others would say they're just plain freaky – in the old 1960s countercultural sense of the term.

So just who are the Raelians? And why have they kept such a low profile until now?

For starters, the Raelians openly promote freedom of sexual expression, a stance reminiscent of San Francisco's Sexual Freedom League in the tie-dye-and-love beaded "flower power" era of the late 1960s.

But unlike the old SLF, which predated Stonewall and whose members nonetheless still blanched at the thought of same-gender sex, the Raelians are more queer-friendly – much more.

They're a longtime fixture at Montreal's annual *Divers/cite* gay-pride celebrations. And it's not unusual in Montreal to encounter members of the sect – both men and women – who are openly bisexual.

Thomas Kaenzig, a Raelian priest who is also vice president of Clonaid, said that one of the core values of the Raelian Movement is freedom in all aspects of life, including sexual freedom. "We encourage people to fully express their sexuality, whether they are homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual ... without any feeling of guiltiness," he told *The Washington Blade*.

Yet for all of their openness about human sexuality, the Raelians' beliefs are not for everyone. To my knowledge, they are the first group to turn belief in UFOs and extraterrestrials into a religion.

Actually, "religion" isn't the right word. For religion, as generally understood today, contains two essential elements: 1) spirituality – belief in a world beyond the physical and 2) belief in a Source of all life, what most people call God. Neither exists for the Raelians.

The sect's founder and leader, Claude Vorilhon – who has gone by the name Rael for nearly 30 years – has written numerous books in which he says that life on Earth was created not by God but by a race of extraterrestrials through genetic engineering.

This race of ETs, according to Rael, are called the Elohim, a Hebrew name meaning "those who came from the sky." Rael says that the name, which appears in the Bible, was misinterpreted to mean "God" (a point hotly disputed by biblical scholars).

Rael founded Clonaid in 1997, following the birth of Dolly the cloned sheep, and appointed Dr. Boisselier CEO of the company in 2000. The Raelians also own and operate a

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theme park called "UFO Land" in Valcourt, Quebec, about 70 miles southeast of Montreal.

By its own admission, Raelianism is an "atheistic religion." Indeed, it is *anti*-theistic. It does not believe in the "supreme being" concept of God. It categorically rejects any and all spirituality, metaphysics and psychic phenomena. It does not believe in any existence beyond the physical; once you die, that's it. PFFFFT! Nothing. No afterlife. The End.

Hence the sect's foray into human cloning. Rael believes that through cloning, humans can live forever by cloning an adult person, accelerating the clone's growth, and transferring the person's memory and personality into the newly-cloned body.

Raelianism is highly critical of the organized religious establishment, particularly the Roman Catholic Church. Nearly all first-generation Raelians, including the 56-year-old, French-born Rael himself, are former Catholics, so their criticism of the church should not be surprising (I can >>