

Lavbin reported that he knew all along that the crash had been caused by a UFO, and that his expedition had been organized to find the proof. In his scenario, there was a natural object that threatened to destroy Earth, but aliens intervened to save our planet. "I am fully confident and I can make an official statement that we were saved by some forces of a superior civilization," he explained. "They exploded this enormous meteorite that headed toward us with enormous speed." Photographs of the fragments, as well as the results of laboratory testing, may become available in the near future. This would help differentiate something truly alien from the space debris that the Russians have been scattering across the Tunguska region for the last fifty years.

Sassen's suggestion that the mysterious "space fragment" found in the Tunguska area is more likely to be of Russian origin than Martian origin is supported by decades of history during which the Soviet government tolerated public interest in UFOs as a way of camouflaging actual space and missile events. Many of the most famous Soviet UFO stories that are still promoted in Western books and on Web sites have been traced back to original—but highly classified—military space missions.

The most spectacular Soviet "UFO wave" in history occurred over the southern part of the country in 1967 and 1968, when crescent-shaped giant spaceships were reported flying across the skies. Endorsed as "unexplainable" by top Russian scientists, the widely witnessed apparitions turned out to be secret tests of Soviet thermonuclear warheads diving back from orbit. In 1978, the smoking gun of Soviet UFOlogy was a "jellyfish" UFO that drifted through the skies of northwest Russia, zapping computers and panicking predawn witnesses. It turned out to be the contrails from a rocket carrying a spy satellite from a secret space base. A similar secret launch in September 1984, seen by the crews and passengers of several commercial airliners, sparked stories of death rays and alien attacks.

At the time, Moscow officials denied that such space and missile events were occurring—and some were borderline violations of arms control treaties. Thus, it was convenient to have an explanation for ordinary people who saw them in the skies and wondered what they could have been. So for a generation of Russians, "alien visitors" became the explanation of choice for unusual lights in the sky.

CSICOP Fellow and NBC News space analyst James Oberg spent twenty-two years at NASA's Johnson Space Center as a Mission Control operator and an orbital designer. He is the author of several books on UFOs as well as the Soviet space effort, including UFOs and Outer Space Mysteries and Uncovering Soviet Disasters.

French Group Tests Man's Claims to Sense a Person's Presence

Controlled, double-blind tests of a therapeutic touch practitioner's claims to be able to feel a "signal" or "fluid" in a person he is standing near have been carried out in France. To the man's surprise, but not that of the group conducting the tests, he failed to demonstrate the claimed ability.

The tests were conducted by the *Observatoire Zététique*, a nonprofit organization made of French skeptics. A "Mr. Z" contacted the group in June 2003 to establish a serious experimental protocol for a test or demonstration of his abilities. He explained that in his practice of touch therapy with patients, he feels a "signal" or "fluid" with his hands. He sought help in measuring the signal. From initial contact to final protocol, the test took nearly a year to come to fruition.

Several constant parameters about his practice were eventually established: the signal was perceptible through clothing, the signal's location remains stable with respect to a single patient for up to an hour or more, and the signal

does not leave any "magnetic imprint" on the massage table.

Through discussions with Mr. Z it was agreed that a specific hypothesis would be tested: "In a double-blind setting, the therapeutic touch practitioner is able to determine the presence or absence of a patient provided that he has



A therapeutic touch practitioner tries to sense a volunteer during a preliminary test by French skeptics. An opaque cloth covered the screen during formal tests.

previously identified, in terms of strength and location, the signal emitted by such patient."

A preliminary experiment with nine patients failed to demonstrate his abilities, but Mr. Z was determined to continue with the formal test plan, with the intention of seeing the test results published. Six months later, on May 17, 2004, everyone gathered at a location in the French Alps for the actual randomized, double-blind experiment.

Mr. Z selected the test "subject" from the seven members of the *Observatoire Zététique* group, after checking the quality of the signal he said each emitted. He also was allowed to select two examiners and an assistant.

The test protocol was again clearly described. Mr. Z would try to determine the presence of the test subject behind a folding screen covered by an opaque cloth. A total of 100 attempts would be undertaken, 50 with her present and 50 with her absent. The number of successful "hits" by Mr. Z would have to exceed 65 in order to be deemed statistically significant. Dry-run tests satisfied him that he could confirm the presence of the fluid. With movement of his hands back and forth he confirmed that he was receiving the signal clearly, without any alteration.

Noise-attenuating ear muffs were placed on Mr. Z and his two examiners, and once more he confirmed he detected the signal.

A randomized drawing was carried out to determine whether the test subject would place herself up against the screen or not. Mr. Z and his two examiners stayed in an isolated room while the test subject positioned herself (or not). They then entered and moved to the screen. Mr. Z was given as much time as needed to test the presence of a signal. A thumbs up from him indicated he detected it, a "zero" gesture indicated "no signal." Each examiner independently noted his result. Mr. Z and the examiners then returned to the isolated room, and the second attempt began. These steps were repeated until 100 attempts were obtained.

The data were then verified. Two tries were invalidated because a pre-drawn sheet by the assistant didn't correspond to the positions noted by the subject. The minimum number of hits for the experiment to be considered a success was recalculated at 64 (recalculated range of chance expectation: $34.19 < 49 < 63.85$). The results were then disclosed.

Out of 98 valid attempts, Mr. Z had been successful in 55 and failed in 43. Conclusion: "The experiment did not yield a statistically significant result: failure."

Nicolas Vivant, a member of the French group, provided the test report to the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER. A pdf ver-

sion of the report is available at www.observatoire-zetetique.org/divers/oz-tt2004.pdf.

"Upon [the experiment's] conclusion," says the report, "the satisfaction of having implemented a complete protocol is tinged with sadness. The protocol's results, however, can be added to a succession of experiments that, since the eighteenth century, have never yielded a positive result. Accordingly, we can hardly claim to be surprised."

They complimented Mr. Z on his courtesy, passion, sincerity, and honesty. "His surprise then, comes on top of disappointment."

Professor Henri Broch of the University of Nice, the chief promoter of skeptical research in France, expressed a similar sentiment. He told the group, "Regarding your testing of the touch therapist, I feel sorry for him. . . ."

—Kendrick Frazier

Kendrick Frazier is editor of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER.

Nobelist Francis Crick, Stalwart Supporter of CSICOP and the Center for Inquiry, Mourned

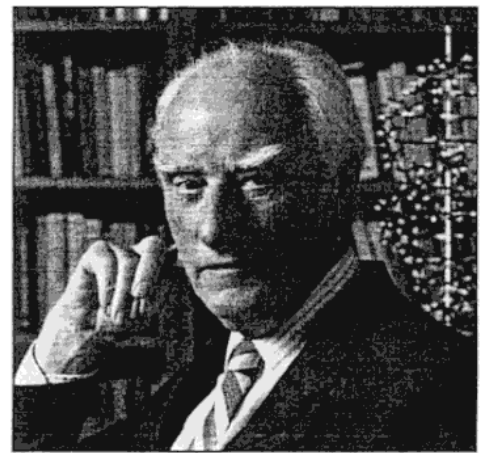
We regret the passing of Francis Crick at the age of 88, after a long illness. Francis Harvey Compton Crick was born in England on June 8, 1916. He died on July 28, 2004, in San Diego, California, where he was affiliated with the Salk Institute.

Crick deplored the widespread scientific illiteracy and he believed that there needs to be some public appreciation of the scientific outlook and the methods of science. He was elected a Fellow of CSICOP in 1983 and a Humanist Laureate of the International Academy of Humanism in the same year.

Crick is widely recognized as one of the founders of modern molecular biology. He, along with James D. Watson, received the Nobel Prize in 1962 for the co-discovery of the structure of DNA.

Indeed, many consider Crick to be *the* driving force in this research, its key intellectual leader. A whole line of crucial developments have already come out of this work—such as the Genome Project.

In his first book, *Molecules and Men* (1966, reissued by Prometheus Books in 2004), Crick raised the question of the demarcation line between "living" and "non-living" matter, a difficult issue to resolve, he wrote. He abandoned this quest and instead proposed to explain *all* biology in terms of physics and chemistry.



Francis Crick

He rejects what is known as "vitalism," the view that there is a "special force" directing the behavior and growth of living systems; or in recent years the reconsideration of "intelligent design." Crick was especially critical of religion as a substitute for science in explaining biological phenomena. He forcefully defended natural selection as a key concept in evolutionary biology, and he also rejected "the soul" or "consciousness" as immune to physical-chemical explanations.

Many observers believe that Crick's co-discovery of DNA's structure will be recognized as one of the greatest breakthroughs in science in the twentieth century, virtually equal to the work of Darwin and Mendel. The world has lost not only a great scientist, but a powerful voice on behalf of science.

—Paul Kurtz

Paul Kurtz is Chairman of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal.