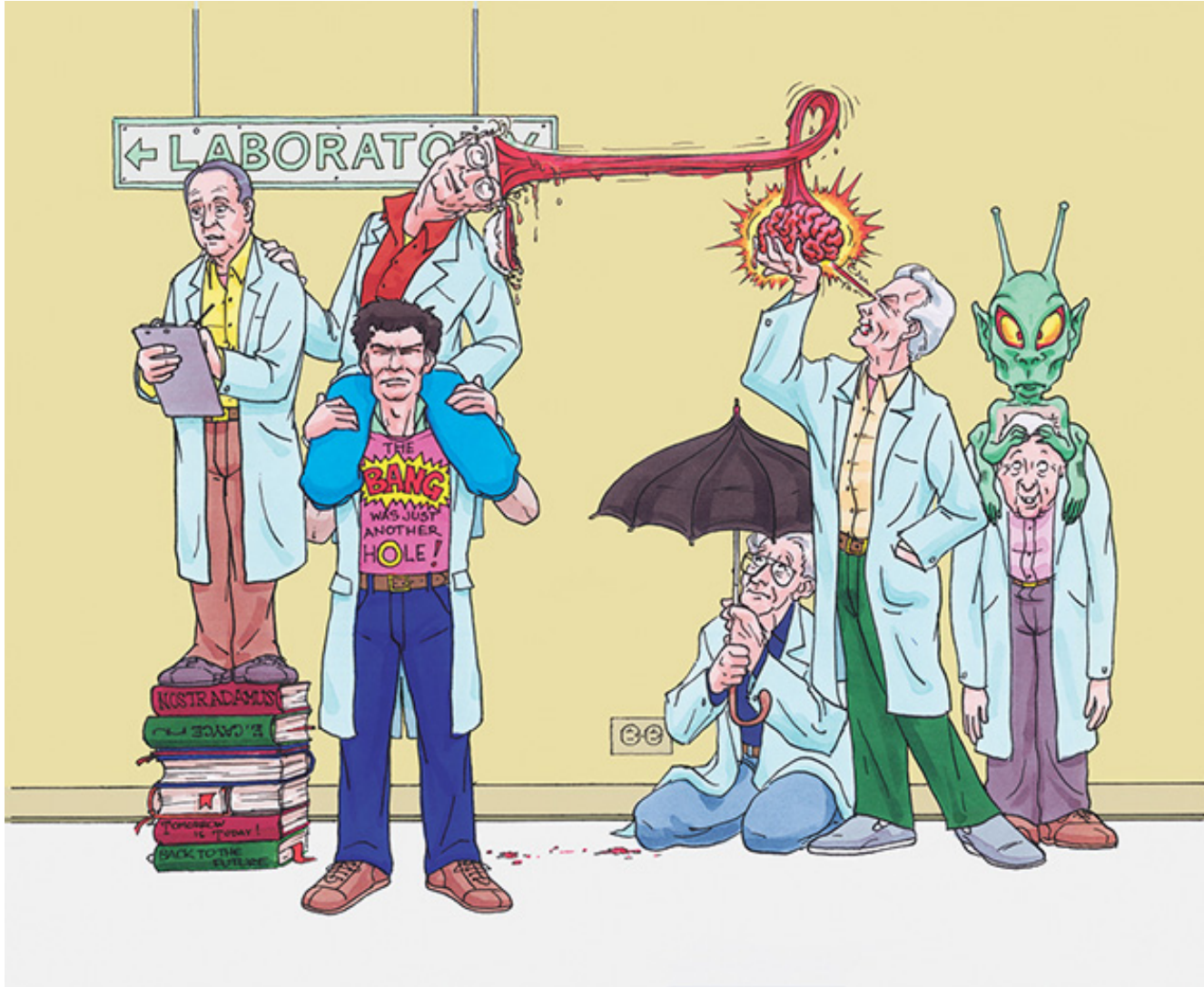


The Truth Is Out There, and the Nation's Maddest Scientists Are After It

By Jessica Cohen 04.20.09



Scientists (from left to right): Daryl Bem, Edward Kelly, Eric Lerner, Rollin McCraty, Garret Moddel, Peter Sturrock
Illustration: J.J. Sedelmaier Productions, Inc.

START

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Paranormal phenomena aren't just for [Fox Mulder](#), [Melinda Gordon](#), and [Rod Serling](#). Even top academics can't resist a good ghost story. And maybe that's for the better: Brilliant ideas often seem crazy at first. *Scientific American* dubbed the Wright Brothers "the Lying Brothers" despite test flights witnessed by trainloads of startled onlookers. More obscure findings can fare worse: Germs, quarks, black holes, and continental drift were all once considered laughable. Still, impeccably credentialed scientists persist, as Lewis Carroll's [White Queen](#) says, in trying to believe a few impossible things before breakfast—or after they've received tenure.

[Daryl Bem](#)

Professor Emeritus of

[Edward Kelly](#)

Research Professor of

[Eric Lerner](#)

President,

Psychology
Cornell University

Object of Study
Precognition

It's déjà vu in advance: In conventional psychological tests, subjects recall words they've had a chance to study better than words they've seen only briefly. Bem reversed the usual order of events and found that his subjects were significantly more likely to recall words *they would study later* than words they wouldn't study at all. Extroverts show the most precognition.

Rollin McCraty

Executive Vice President and
Director of Research,
Institute of HeartMath

Object of Study
Atmospheric effects on
physiology

Sure, a rainy day can get you down, but do storms in the ionosphere affect human well-being? Building on research that has correlated shifts in Earth's magnetic field with rates of traffic accidents and hospital admissions, McCraty is adding ionospheric measurements to the mix.

His next round of experiments will attempt to link moods to atmospheric shifts.

Psychiatry and
Neurobehavioral Sciences
University of Virginia

Object of Study
Disembodied consciousness

Can people visit faraway places without leaving their living rooms? Kelly aims to find out. In an upcoming experiment, he plans to wire EEG and MRI devices to test subjects who report disembodied experiences to measure brain functions as they "travel" to designated places. Extra points if they can confirm their visits by identifying unique markers at the sites in question.

Garret Moddel

Professor of Electrical,
Computer, and Energy
Engineering,
University of Colorado at
Boulder

Object of Study
Telekinesis

Aiming a beam of light at a glass slide in 2006 and 2007, Moddel asked test subjects to use their brainpower to increase the amount of reflected light. Expected reflection: 8 percent. Measured reflection: 8.005 percent. This represents a tiny but significant demonstration of mind over matter, Moddel says. Asked to decrease the amount of reflected light, subjects had similar success.

Lawrenceville Plasma Physics

Object of Study
Origin of the cosmos

Big bang deniers are a growing force, with Lerner at the head of the pack. The majority of astronomers believe the cosmos is expanding in the aftermath of an initial cataclysm. Lerner, whose focus now is fusion energy, claims that his analysis of data from the Hubble Space Telescope suggests that galaxies are not receding at all. This is just one of several holes, he says, in the big bang theory.

Peter Sturrock

Emeritus Professor of Applied
Physics,
Stanford University

Object of Study
UFOs

Alongside a sterling career in astrophysics, Sturrock has pursued the mystery of UFOs. He surveyed the American Astronomical Society; 6 percent of members reported experience with UFO-type sightings. More to the point, he sifted through such evidence as chemical analysis of purported landing sites and concluded that reports of alien spacecraft deserve serious study.