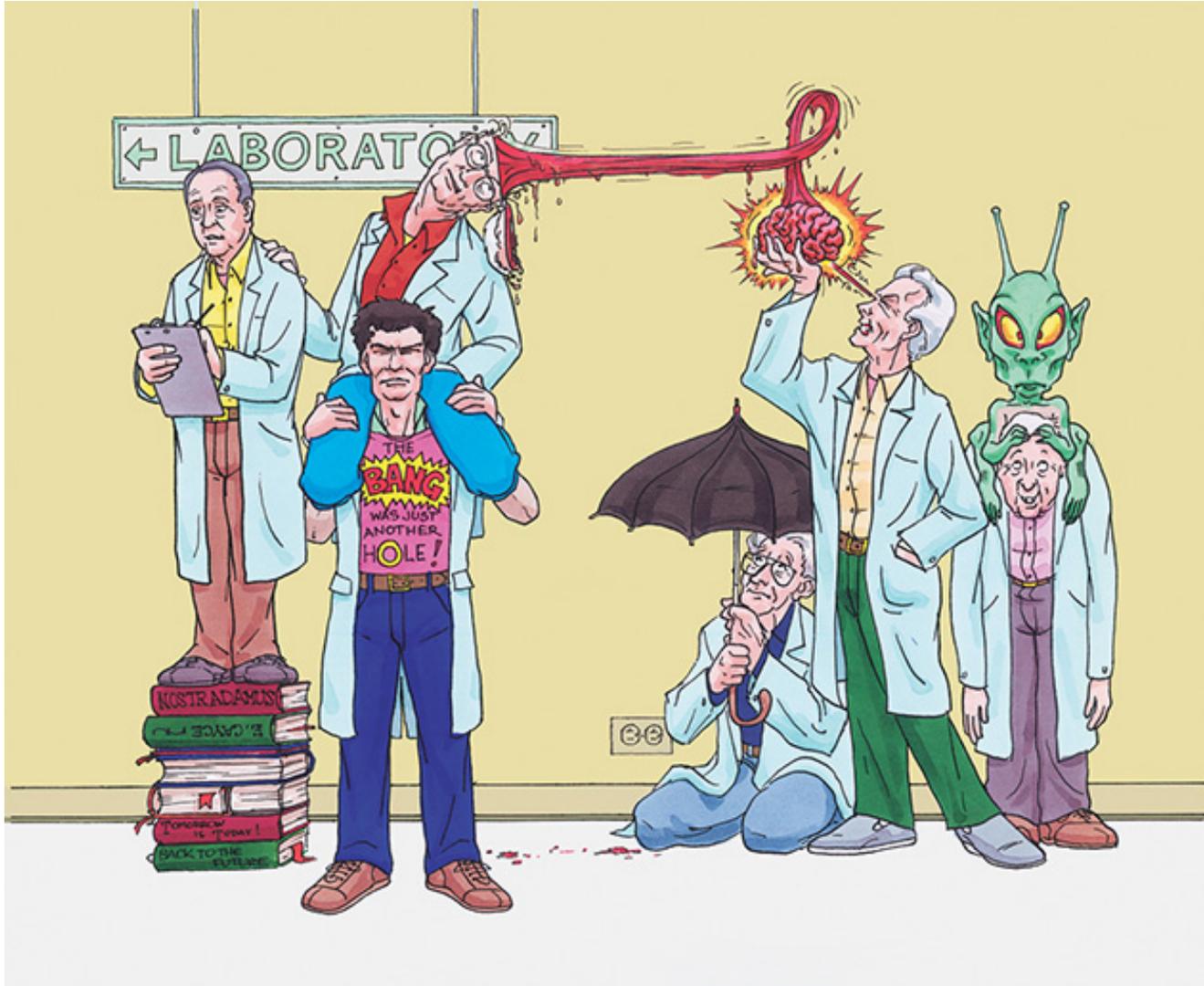


# The Truth Is Out There, and the Nation's Maddest Scientists Are After It

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

**PREVIOUS:** [What's Inside WD-40?](#)

[Superlube's Secret Sauce](#)

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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

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**Object of Study**  
Precognition

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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

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**Object of Study**  
Atmospheric effects on  
physiology

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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

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**Object of Study**  
Disembodied consciousness

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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

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**Object of Study**  
Telekinesis

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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

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**Object of Study**  
Origin of the cosmos

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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

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**Object of Study**  
UFOs

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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.