

A Soviet close encounter of the questionable kind

AP and New York Times

MOSCOW — It is not a joke, a hoax, a sign of mental instability, nor an attempt to drum up local tourism by drawing the curious, the Soviet news agency Tass insisted Tuesday.

The usually staid agency provided a second day of details about the three-eyed aliens, with a robot sidekick, who landed by UFO and made a boy vanish by zapping him with a pistol.

But as the saga of the space invasion of the city of Voronezh continued, a scientist whose words were used to buttress the first report, published Monday, voiced doubts, and said he was in part misquoted.

"Don't believe all you hear from Tass," Genrikh Silanov, head of the Voronezh Geophysical Laboratory, said in a telephone interview. "We never gave them part of what they published."

On Monday, Tass reported that scientists had confirmed that a spaceship carrying lanky, three-eyed aliens had touched down in Voronezh, a city of more than 800,000 people about 300 miles southeast of Moscow.

Three aliens 13 feet tall left the spacecraft, described as a large shining ball, and promenaded in the park with a

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small robot, Tass reported.

A Tass duty officer stood by the story. "It is not April Fool's today," he said.

The purported close encounter in Voronezh was only the latest weird tale to appear in the Soviet media, which under the policy *glasnost* or openness have recently told of other sightings of UFOs and the abominable snowman.

But a Communist Party paper whose mission is to write about culture was the only major national daily to print anything about the UFO on Tuesday, indicating more authoritative newspapers like Pravda thought the topic too hot to handle.

Sovietsk:

age was motivated by "the golden rule of journalism: the reader must know everything."

"Of course, it's hard to believe in what happened in the town," it reported from Voronezh. "It's even more difficult to explain."

Silanov cast doubt on the Tass report that quoted him as saying the aliens left behind two rocks resembling sandstone of a deep red color that cannot be found anywhere.

"The rock they described as extra-terrestrial is in fact a piece of iron oxide which could easily have originated on Earth," Silanov said.

But he said there indeed was "a

one in Voronezh. He acknowledged that could happen as well if there were an underground pipe or cable, or an underground reservoir.

Meanwhile, a Tass editor said two Moscow-based reporters had been dispatched to Voronezh to check on the report on the UFO filed by correspondent Vladimir Lebedev, whom he called a very serious journalist.

The editor, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Tass, through bitter experience, has learned to be wary of hoaxes. In January, the news agency reported six people had been rescued after spending 35 days buried alive in rubble after the Armenian earthquake.

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ZETETIC SCHOLAR
MARCELLO TRUZZI via COUD—1