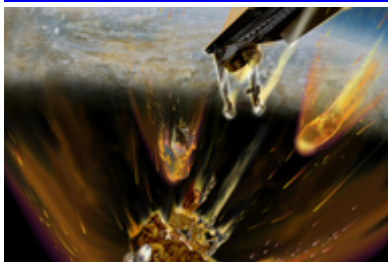


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An advertisement for the Fluke Visual IR Thermometer. It shows the device on the left, displaying a temperature of 35.6°C. The main text reads 'See what you've been missing. New Visual IR Thermometer'. On the right, there is a yellow button with a play icon and the text 'Watch videos'. The Fluke logo is in the top right corner.

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Russian Mars Probe Crash Sets Off Confusion, Conspiracy Theories

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by Denise Chow, SPACE.com Staff Writer

Date: 21 January 2012 Time: 07:00 AM ET

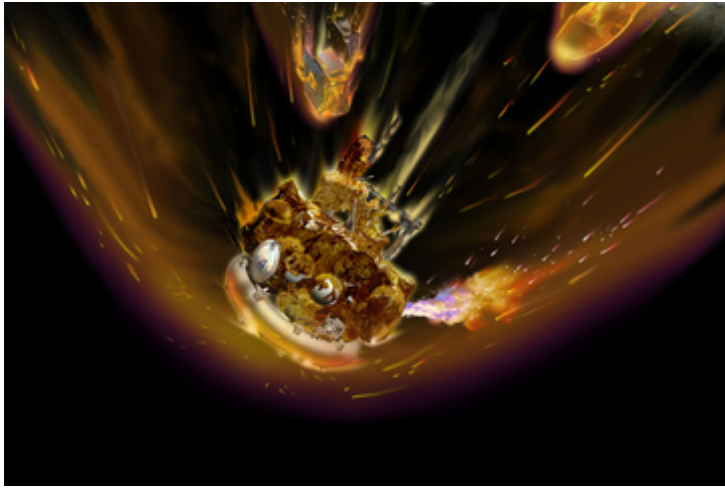
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This artist's concept shows fuel from Russia's failed Mars probe Phobos-Grunt burning from a ruptured fuel tank as the spacecraft re-enters the atmosphere.

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CREDIT: Michael Carroll

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When an ill-fated Russian Mars probe fell to Earth over the weekend, the spacecraft's untimely demise set off a flurry of conflicting media reports and conspiracy theories.

Russia's [Phobos-Grunt space probe](#) suffered a debilitating malfunction shortly after its November 2011 launch, which stranded it in low-Earth orbit for more than two months before it succumbed to gravitational forces and plummeted through the atmosphere on Jan. 15.

The \$165 million spacecraft reportedly broke apart over the Pacific Ocean, but inconsistent reports soon surfaced, which sparked different theories about [where the probe had landed](#), and what had caused it to malfunction in the first place.

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The Russian Federal Space Agency is notorious for closely controlling any information released, but part of the issue is the tricky nature of calculating re-entry predictions for dead satellites and other [pieces of orbital debris](#).

"Predicting an impact point is problematic because it involves fundamental factors that cannot be noted in advance and cannot be measured in real time, such as atmospheric density," space consultant James Oberg, a former NASA space shuttle mission control engineer, told SPACE.com. "These can only be averaged or guessed, sometimes even after re-entry. These known unknowns are more than enough to throw off any kind of prediction by thousands of kilometers."

[[Photos: Russia's Phobos-Grunt Mission to Mars Moon](#)]

A curious case

Still, the Phobos-Grunt saga was shrouded in mystery long before it crashed back to Earth. The cause of the spacecraft's

malfunction has not yet been determined, and claims ranging from accidental radar interference to outright sabotage have been reported by Russian news outlets.

Russian space officials suggested that strong [emissions from an American radar station](#) on an island in the Pacific Ocean could have accidentally interfered with Phobos-Grunt, reported the Russian news agency Ria Novosti.

But, these claims were later dismissed by a Russian scientist who was involved with the development of Phobos-Grunt. Alexander Zakharov, a scientist at the Russian Academy of Science Space Research Institute, told Ria Novosti that the radar theory is "far-fetched," and suggested instead that issues with the spacecraft itself were likely to blame.



A Zenit rocket launches into space carrying Russia's Phobos-Grunt spacecraft toward Mars on a mission to collect samples of the Martian moon Phobos. Liftoff occurred on Nov. 9, 2011 Local Time from Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan (Nov. 8 EST).

[Pin it](#)

CREDIT: German Aerospace Center (DLR)

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American experts were also quick to write off the idea that a U.S. radar station could have been the source of the spacecraft's demise — accidental or otherwise.

"I do not see any evidence that supports the suggestion that the United States somehow played a role in the failure of Phobos-Grunt," Brian Weeden, an orbital debris expert at the Secure World Foundation in Washington, D.C., told SPACE.com in an email. "I have examined the claims made about the U.S. tracking radar on the South Pacific potentially interfering with Phobos-Grunt and they are without any credibility whatsoever."

Following [Phobos-Grunt's fall from space](#), the Russian Federal Space Agency released an official statement confirming that the spacecraft had landed in the Pacific Ocean. But, the agency admitted this impact zone was based on orbital predictions, and they lacked tracking or visual [data](#).

This fueled speculation that the spacecraft had overshot its predicted landing zone and broke apart elsewhere along its orbital track, such as over Argentina or Brazil. [\[6 Biggest Spacecraft to Fall Uncontrolled From Space\]](#)

"You're never quite sure," said Emmet Fletcher, Space Surveillance and Tracking Manager at the European Space Agency.

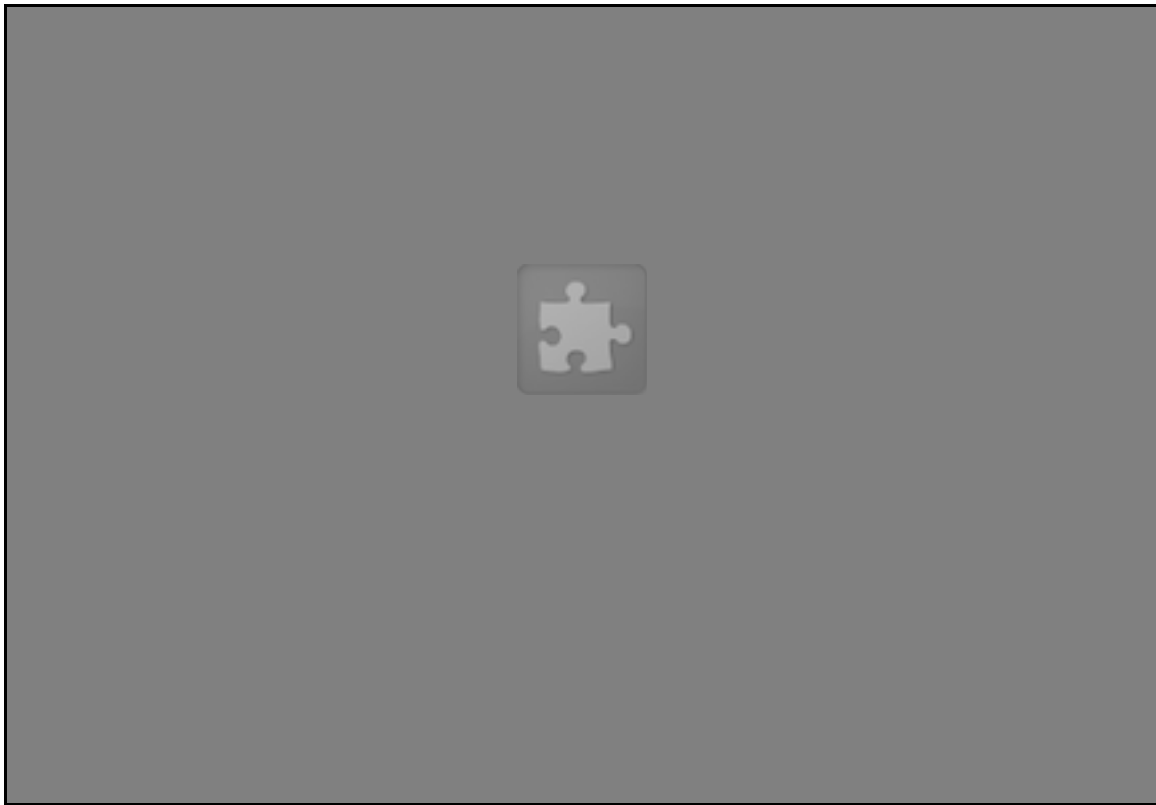
(ESA). "Eyewitness accounts are good, so if someone sees it coming in and takes a picture, that can tell you about where it lands. But, if you're fortunate and it lands in the ocean, which is where we like things to go, there shouldn't be anyone there. So, if something lands in the South Pacific, you won't have anyone there to observe it."

Tracking a falling spacecraft

Fletcher is part of ESA's [Space Situational Awareness](#) team which monitors space junk and operates a network of tracking stations. Fletcher could not comment specifically on Phobos-Grunt, but he has worked on coordinated international efforts to deal with spacecraft and orbital debris that has re-entered the atmosphere.

"It's all a learning experience," Fletcher said. "There are lessons learned and conclusions about what we can do better. A lot of work is being done to standardize data."

Right now, different agencies and organizations have different methods for calculating re-entry predictions. This has advantages and disadvantages, Fletcher said, but ultimately, a more standardized approach could help foster more efficient cooperation between entities.



But the story of Phobos-Grunt doesn't end there.

In a recent development, the U.S. military appeared to have [removed links to Phobos-Grunt tracking data](#) on a public website that ordinarily details such events.

Information about the doomed Russian probe's re-entry was removed from Space Track, a website operated by U.S. Strategic Command. The military also did not publish any confirmation of the probe's fall, which breaks with standard protocol.

This handling of the data seemed unusual, said Weeden, a former U.S. Air Force officer, who once also directed the Joint Space Operations Center's orbital analyst training program.

"[T]he final re-entry prediction data is still missing from the U.S. military's website where they normally publish the information," Weeden said. "I do not really have any idea why they would withhold this information for Phobos-Grunt. They have published the full [re-entry prediction data](#) on three other space objects so far this year, and they are continuing to publish re-entry predictions as normal for the next object, Cosmos 2176, which is a Russian Kompass-2 satellite that is due to re-enter in the next several days. "

Falling spacecraft and human error

But Friday evening (Jan. 20), a spokesperson from U.S. Strategic Command told SPACE.com that data was not, in fact, removed from the Space Track website. Rather, a human error had accidentally misfiled the information.

"All actions taken during the Phobos-Grunt re-entry were designed to improve international [data sharing](#) on this event," Julie Ziegenhorn, Deputy Chief of Public Affairs at U.S. Strategic Command, said in an email statement. "Unfortunately, shortly after the re-entry event, there was human error that led to all Phobos-Grunt entries on spacetrack.org being misfiled into the year 2011 data, which made it difficult for customers to access the information. Shortly after the error was discovered, the information was re-posted to the site and is accessible at this time."

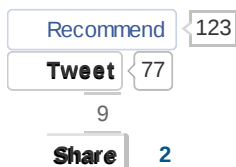
Still, experts are hoping that more precise information about Phobos-Grunt's impact zone will be released, but it's unclear which agencies will make their reports available to the public. ESA plans to release a final report on Phobos-Grunt, but officials are currently still waiting for "additional data from non-ESA sources," agency spokesperson Andreas Schepers said in an email.

The Phobos-Grunt spacecraft was [designed to collect soil samples](#) from the Mars moon Phobos and return them to Earth in 2014. The botched mission is one of several space failures that plagued the Russian Federal Space Agency over the past year.

"It was one of the boldest cavalry charges, and they said it was a cavalry charge to restore Russia's honor in space," Oberg said. "But, cavalry charges can also wind up disastrously, so the use of that metaphor was particularly apt."

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Denise was an intern at the New York Daily News and GQ magazine. She has a masters degree in journalism from New York University and a bachelor's degree from the University of Toronto.

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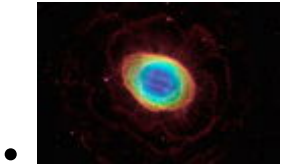
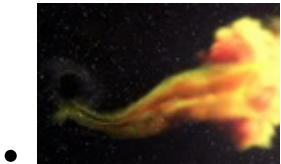


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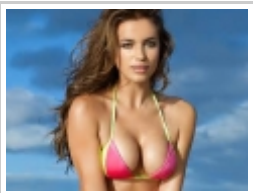
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betz_68 (signed in using yahoo)

"Conspiracy" is why my post days ago about this was deleted from space.com. The "Russian probe" object in space was an asteroid that was covered up, reported by the rigged media as a dead satellite. Simultaneously, to hog all media away from the impact, Italy's Concordia cruise ship computerized navigation system was remotely commandeered and satellite tracking used to steer the ship into rocks. Italy was chosen for the "media decoy" to punish RAI for broadcasting Rock Prophecy involvement in the death of Jimi Hendrix on Italian TV against Microsoft orders. Jimi foresaw the swarm of asteroids pummeling Earth, so moguls' top priority is to hide all asteroid impacts and report them instead as "space junk" "gas pipe blasts" "tsunamis" "earthquakes" "sinkholes" etc. They need to conceal Jimi is correct because his vision condemns their "castles made of sand" loser land as deserving of impact.

Jimi: "And so Castles made of sand slip into the sea...eventually. The establishment is going to crumble away and you'll have no world to live on. There's no running from any one place to another, no one on Earth will escape." - Jimi Hendrix.

It's why Paul Allen built STRATOLaunch and named it after Jimi's guitar, a STRATOCaster - to facilitate his escape to waiting Space Station condos, as exposed at.

rockprophecy.com/missile-moonbase.html
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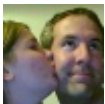
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Liberty Tamesman · Works at I don't work for you, that's all you need to know .

As a major league Hendrix fan I'm on my way to your site, Betz.

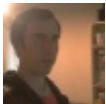
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Kendall Thorne · Layton, Utah

It all makes sense to me now .

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · January 23, 2012 at 9:50am



Mike Pennington · Top Commenter

last time a probe was sent to phobos (phobos1 and phobos2) ended in very strange circumstances but not before it had chance to take a series of unexplained to this day photos of strange things in orbit around mars and phobos check it out you don't believe me...is this coincidence?

[Reply](#) · [1](#) · [Like](#) · January 22, 2012 at 2:06pm



Ben Kroon · South Dakota School of Mines and Technology

I really wish I wouldn't have looked up what you're talking about. Sleeping with the lights on tonight.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · January 22, 2012 at 9:40pm



Mike Pennington · Top Commenter

Ben Kroon I think you will be safe to turn off your lights but something is going on at mars they don't want us to know about....

[Reply](#) · [2](#) · [Like](#) · January 23, 2012 at 4:08am



Ben Kroon · South Dakota School of Mines and Technology

Mike Pennington I dunno man.... when I turn out the lights all I see is this: http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/imagenes_marte/marte21_03.gif

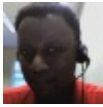
[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · January 23, 2012 at 8:18am



Dean Eaketts

I definitely think it's sabotage as the Probe started from Russia, It's either a Russian, America or their neighbours of Space Exploration.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · January 22, 2012 at 7:14am



Frank Glover · Top Commenter · Miami-Dade Community College

Of course, the Russians have always had bad luck with Mars probes...though they've done quite well with Venus.

(shrug) Maybe they have more friends there...?

[Reply](#) · [1 · Like](#) · January 22, 2012 at 9:37am



John P Edwards · Top Commenter · Senior Software Developer at Global Access Computers and Entertainment Systems

The radiation was probably spread into the stratosphere over Argentina, Venezuela and Chile. Now where are the reports of radiation levels being detected in those countries?

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · January 21, 2012 at 3:33pm



Mike Humphrey · Top Commenter

You are misinformed and helping to misinform others.

[Reply](#) · [4 · Like](#) · January 22, 2012 at 9:27am



John P Edwards · Top Commenter · Senior Software Developer at Global Access Computers and Entertainment Systems

Surprisingly or not so surprisingly, this article like so many others from the main stream media, says nothing of the crafts radioactive contents and how it was probably spread into the high atmosphere of the planet and had a major area of impact around the world. There was reactor onboard just like there was for Curiosity and the people of the planet are given no choice but to deal with it. If Curiosity had done this we would be dealing with the release of 20lbs of Plutonium!

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · January 21, 2012 at 3:27pm



John P Edwards · Top Commenter · Senior Software Developer at Global Access Computers and Entertainment Systems

Plutonium sorry. Still, the Russian probe had some other radioactive element on board and not as much but still, this shows you how little of the facts and truths actually get reported on.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · January 21, 2012 at 3:31pm



Hal Sherman

John P Edwards: ten micrograms of radioactive cobalt don't worry me very much, and that's been reported repeatedly..

[Reply](#) · [1 · Like](#) · January 21, 2012 at 8:14pm



Frank Reed · Top Commenter · Owner/cartographer at Historicalatlas.com

John: The quantity of radioactive material was exceptionally small: ten micrograms of cobalt-57. This isotope is commonly used in medical tests at thousands of hospitals around the globe. Some fraudulent press reports have claimed that 10 kilograms (about 22 pounds) of radioactive material were on Phobos-Grunt. These reports are in error by a factor of one billion. Imagine if someone told you that the distance to the Moon was only 15 inches. That's the same scale or error: a factor of one billion. There is some chance that these wildly confused sources were thinking about the Russian "Mars 96" which failed on launch (in November 1996) and dumped some Plutonium pellets (0.2 kg) somewhere over the southern Pacific or in Chile and Bolivia. No sign of this Plutonium was ever found --publicly at least. This latest mission was solar powered and did not carry Plutonium.

[Reply](#) · [3 · Like](#) · January 21, 2012 at 11:02pm

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Stewart Mitchell · Top Commenter · Rcc college



Here is my conspiracy theory.

10^7 angels = sts 107.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · January 21, 2012 at 10:37am



Mike Humphrey · Top Commenter

"before it succumbed to gravitational forces" Gravitational forces were actually what was KEEPING it in orbit. It succumbed to atmospheric drag.

[Reply](#) · [3](#) · [Like](#) · January 21, 2012 at 10:07am



Ferhd Berphal · Top Commenter · University of Utah

Let's face it. The US deployed its new tractor beam technology. The government pulled the vehicle out of orbit so as to steal and reverse engineer the Russians "superior" interplanetary space travel technology. Should that not be clear to all conspiracy theorists?

[Reply](#) · [8](#) · [Like](#) · January 21, 2012 at 8:15am



Martin Finnigan · Top Commenter · Works at Bupa

LOL, its now locked up in area 51 :P

[Reply](#) · [2](#) · [Like](#) · January 22, 2012 at 9:56am



Derrick LaCombe · Top Commenter

See...even one of the greatest space countries in the world has a conspiracy theory! LOL! It'll only grow from here in coffee break rooms, official and non official meetings, and in private homes, etc. Next, they will say Phobos didn't really crash. (That was a mock up). The REAL spacecraft is well on its way to Mars. LOL!

[Reply](#) · [2](#) · [Like](#) · January 21, 2012 at 6:53am



Julio Giron · Top Commenter · Panama City, Panama

Probably we the public or common people of the Earth will never know the truth about planet Mars "Barsoom". Thanks to NASA (Never A Straight Answer).

[Reply](#) · [3](#) · [Like](#) · January 21, 2012 at 5:57am



Marty Lester · Bridgewater College

ahhh yes, Rick, but obviously Titan and Ganymede are a total cover up :-)

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · January 21, 2012 at 11:57am



Frank Dunbar · Portsmouth

Rick Hunter ... And you know this for certain, how?

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · January 21, 2012 at 3:28pm



Francis Jorgensen · Top Commenter · Princeton High School

Frank Dunbar He knows this because that is where he was born!!!

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · January 21, 2012 at 5:23pm

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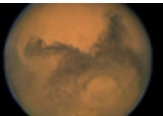
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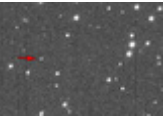
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