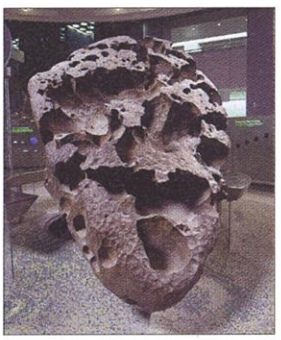
Peace Pipe Shared at New York Museum

The custody battle over the 15.5-ton Willamette meteorite is over. Under an agreement reached last month, the largest meteorite ever found in the United States will remain at New York City's American Museum of Natural History, which has had it for almost a century. But Native Americans get visitation rights and acknowledgement of their historical connection with the rock.

Last November, the Confederated Tribes of the Grande Ronde Community of Oregon filed claim to the giant meteorite under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), contending that it was a sacred object to the Clackamas tribe. Before the government moved Willamette Valley tribes to a reservation on the Coast Range in the 1850s, the meteorite, known as "Tomanowos" to the Clackamas, was revered for its purifying and healing powers. The museum said the iron-nickel chunk, which it purchased in 1906, was part of the natural landscape and therefore not covered by NAGPRA.



Meteorite stays put.

In an out-of-court settlement, the Indians have agreed that the museum can keep the rock. The museum in turn will allow the tribe to "reestablish its relationship" to the meteorite with an annual ceremonial visit. It will also establish an internship for Native Americans.

High-Profile Takeoff for French Biotech Start-Up

For the past 10 years, two French researchers have been beavering away in obscurity on a question most of their colleagues have ignored: Why do some cancer cells spontaneously revert to the normal state? Now the two, Adam Telerman and Robert Amson of the Center for the Study of Human Polymorphisms (CEPH) in Paris, have burst into the limelight. Last week they inaugurated a new biotech company, Molecular Engines Laboratories, which will try to turn their discoveries into new anticancer treatments. So far, they believe about 100 genes are involved in reversion of tumor cells, 25 of which have been identified.

Biotech start-ups are still rare in France, where few scientists are entrepreneurial-minded, and where venture capitalists have little interest in biotech. That could help explain why last week's event featured a *poignée* of luminaries including two Nobel laureates—CEPH founder Jean Dausset and physicist Georges Charpak—and French Research Minister Roger-Gérard Schwartzenberg, who has been urging French scientists to make their discoveries pay off for the nation's economy. The company's star-studded advisory board includes Charpak as well as French biologists Daniel Cohen and Pierre Chambon, and Joseph Schlessinger, director of the Skirball Institute of Biomolecular Medicine in New York City. "Your research gives us hope for the kind of push we want to give to biotech" in France, said Schwartzenberg.

Plan 9 From EuroSpace

Now you don't have to feel guilty when you plop down on the couch to watch *Star Trek* reruns. You're doing research! The European Space Agency (ESA) is encouraging all of us to scour science fiction books, movies, and art in hopes of finding technologies that will boldly take us where no man has gone before.

Sometimes science fiction can predict the future. In 1945, for instance, Arthur C. Clarke envisioned a world surrounded by geosynchronous communications satellites. ESA hopes that there are similar gems in today's science fiction, so they have commissioned a study to find innovative ideas in sci-fi, according to Arthur Woods, president of the OURS foundation, a Swiss space-culture group.

To start with, ESA, along with OURS and a Swiss science fiction museum called Maison d'Ailleurs, have commissioned reports on various leitmotifs in science fiction, from nanotechnology to antigravity and warp drives. They have also set up a Web site (itsf.spaceart.net) where the public can submit "fact sheets" on other sci-fi ideas. Scientists will eventually review the ideas for feasibility, according to Woods.

ESA is actually a piker in the wild ideas market—it's only committed funds in the "several tens of thousands of dollars" range, says Woods. NASA has already spent hundreds of thousands on antigravity research, and private firms, like British Aerospace, have gotten into the act. So it'll be tough to make up for lost time—unless, of course, someone gets that time machine working.

An idea for the future on display at the Maison d'Ailleurs.

Kyoto Prizes Announced

The man who found the homeobox is one of three winners of this year's 50-million-yen ($475,000 each) Kyoto Prizes. Developmental biologist Walter Jacob Gehring of the University of Basel in Switzerland is honored for his work with fruit flies, identifying the stretch of DNA that occurs in genes regulating development in a vast range of organisms from yeast to mammals.

Also honored is computer scientist Charles Antony Richard Hoare, professor emeritus at the University of Oxford, who has created basic algorithms for sorting data and rules of logic that underpin large-scale software programs. The third winner of the prize, awarded to those who contribute to the "scientific, cultural, or spiritual betterment of society," is 87-year-old French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, formerly of the universities of Paris and Chicago, for "an imposing construct of hermeneutic phenomenology that embraces a new concept of ethics." Those who understand Ricoeur's work say it helps analyze metaphor and narrative in formulating new approaches to interpreting mythology, the Bible, and psychoanalysis.

Awards, by the Inamori Foundation, will be presented at a November ceremony in Kyoto.

CREDITS: (TOP) AMNH; (BOTTOM) "LA REVEUSE" BY HUBERT DE LARTIGUE