

1974

GELLER

## New Flap Over Uri

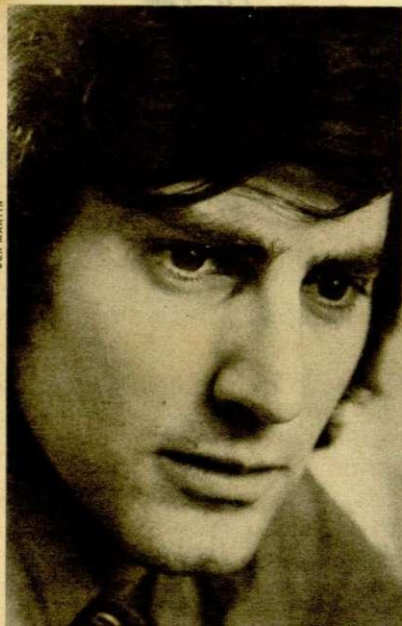
The title of the report printed in *Nature* magazine seemed innocuous enough: "Information transmission under conditions of sensory shielding." But to the world of parapsychology, publication of the paper, the first claimed proof of extrasensory powers to have appeared in that prestigious scientific journal for many years, was nothing short of a sensation. Parapsychologists and others who believe in the existence of such psychic phenomena as telepathy, psychokinesis and precognition were jubilant; in their view, *Nature* had bestowed upon them the recognition and respectability that the scientific establishment has so long withheld. Some skeptics were dismayed; they felt the mere publication of the report in *Nature* would lend legitimacy to many of the hotly disputed tenets of parapsychology.

Submitted by Physicists Russell Targ and Harold Puthoff, the *Nature* article emphasized experiments at the Stanford Research Institute involving the controversial Israeli psychic and nightclub magician Uri Geller (*TIME*, March 14, 1973). Among other things, the report claimed that Geller correctly called the roll of a die inside a steel box

eight out of ten times; on the other two rolls he declined to pick a number. The odds against his performing that feat by chance, Targ and Puthoff calculated, were about a million to one. Geller was also reported to have sketched remarkably accurate versions of drawings picked at random by researchers hidden in another room. Those claims, printed in *Nature*, did seem to make a case for extrasensory perception.

**Lengthy Exposé.** What was generally overlooked—or purposely ignored—in the reaction to *Nature's* publication, was the unprecedented almost apologetic editorial that accompanied the Stanford Research Institute report. In the editorial, *Nature's* editors not only criticized the SRI paper but also pointedly called attention to the same week's issue of another respected British magazine, *New Scientist*, which carried a lengthy exposé that undermined both Geller and the SRI report.

*Nature* said that the original SRI paper was "weak in design and presentation," that its details were "disconcertingly vague," that some methods used were "naive," and that the experimenters showed "a lack of skill." Nonetheless, after sending the paper back to SRI for modifications, the magazine finally

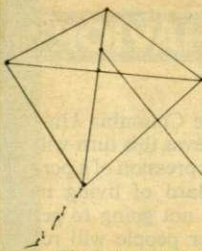


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*One in a million.*

decided to publish it. Why? It had been submitted by "two qualified scientists" with the backing of a major research institute; the subject was "worthy" of investigation; the paper would allow other researchers "to gauge the quality of the Stanford research and assess how much it is contributing to parapsychology."

*Nature* also praised as a "service" the concurrent publication of the 16-page *New Scientist* article, which was



TEST DRAWING (LEFT) &amp; URI'S VERSION

written by Physicist Joseph Hanlon after a two-month investigation of Geller, and the SRI experiments. Hanlon, who delayed publishing his article until *Nature* printed the SRI paper, cited examples of Geller's evasiveness and reports of his cheating on television and during interviews with journalists. He also criticized the controls that Targ and Puthoff used in their experiments. Hanlon noted that Geller's sponsor, Andrija Puharich, a doctor, holds 56 patents, primarily in medical electronics. He suggested that Puharich might well have implanted a tiny radio receiver in one of Geller's teeth; it could have been used to give Geller information about drawings being selected in another room. Hanlon also questions Geller's success with the die. "Knowing the inability of the SRI scientists to control the other experiments," he says, "I can only conclude that this one was just as badly organized."

Hanlon, who was somewhat inclined to believe in some of Geller's professed powers when he began his inquiry, now insists that "no matter how good they are as laser physicists, Russell Targ and Hal Puthoff are no match for Uri Geller." Furthermore, he says, the SRI paper published in *Nature* "simply does not stand up against the mass of circumstantial evidence that Uri Geller is simply a good magician."

