

GELLER

1975

Just Out of This World

Reviewed by
Martin Gardner

Book World

The reviewer is a regular contributor to *Scientific American* and the author of several books, including "The Ambidextrous Universe" and "The Flight of Peter Fromm."

Uri Geller, the young Israeli magician who says he isn't a magician, is still the world's hottest "psychic." Last October the British journal, *Nature*, published a Stanford Research Institute report of tests that demonstrated Uri's clairvoyant powers. A few months earlier, at the University of London, a group of physicists was so wowed by Geller's ability to twist metal and produce bursts in a Geiger tube that one of them, Jack Sarfatti, fired off a stirring press release. "My personal professional judgment as a Ph.D. physicist," he concluded, "is that Geller demonstrated genuine psycho-energetic ability . . . beyond the doubt of any reasonable man . . ."

It never occurred to Sarfatti then (as it has since) that a doctorate in physics no more qualifies one to detect trickery than a doctorate in home economics. Indeed, male physicists are easier to fool than their wives. Magicians have been reluctant to discuss Uri's methods — why give away trade secrets — but slowly their opinion of Geller is percolating into print. Milbourne Christopher's new book, "Mediums, Mystics and the Occult" opens with an excellent chapter on Geller. Charles Reynolds and the Amazing Randi, two

URI GELLER: My Story. By Uri Geller

(Praeger 282 pp. \$8.95)

THE AMAZING URI GELLER. Edited by Martin Ebon

(NAL/Signet 192 pp. \$1.50)

other magicians, had no difficulty observing how Geller bent a fork and a key. Reynolds's amiable account, in an article reprinted in "The Amazing Uri Geller," is one of that book's most eye-opening chapters.

Martin Ebon, who edited this valuable paperback anthology, is the author of many books on the paranormal, and a firm believer in ESP. As for wilder manifestations of psi, such as Uri's supposed powers, he likes to fence sit. "Skeptical, bewildered, and intrigued," is how he sums up his attitude. Although two-thirds of his book is pro-Geller, at least he was willing to let skeptics have their say. In addition to Reynolds's blast, there are anti-Geller articles by photographer Yale Joel, parapsychologists Robert Brier and Heinz C. Berendt, writers D. Scott Rego and Mary Bringle—all dealing with matters which, in Berendt's words, leave "no doubt about the nonparanormal side of Geller's work."

In my opinion these chapters do Geller less harm than those written by his admirers. Can anyone read Ray Stanford's "Did Uri's Mind Teleport a Mcteorite?" without being overwhelmed by Geller's ability to flimflam the gullible? Can anyone read the in-

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interview with astronaut Edgar Mitchell without being touched by how cruelly Geller has used him? It has "become impossible for anyone to exercise any significant influence over Geller," says Mitchell plaintively, "unless they can promise him money, girls or considerable fame." Even the S.R.I. report, which Ebon reprints in full, is damaging in the light of new information about the looseness of controls during Geller's testing.

Ebon's book pales into insignificance beside the stupendous revelations in Geller's own memoirs, first recorded on tape, then shaped into "Uri Geller: My Story" by John G. Fuller.

Geller-watchers had wondered how he would play it. Would he repudiate the crazy science-fiction mythology in Andrija Puharich's book, "Uri," or reinforce it? Geller reinforces. It's all here and more. The Mission Impossible tapes, on which Spectra (an extraterrestrial intelligence operating through computers in a flying saucer) speaks through Geller's vocal chords, either erase themselves or, as Geller puts it, "dematerialize right in front of us." Nevertheless, those vanished tapes bring a "tremendous message to the world." Spectra is "not a delusion," declares Geller "but it's also not a god. It must be some kind of great, intelligent, interspatial energy that is serving us and serving God at the same time. What part of what galaxy it comes from doesn't matter."

Jesus wrote only on sand, but Geller's miracles are now recorded by the Master himself. And not just the little ones, like the time he found half of Mitchell's long-lost tie pin in a mouthful of ice cream, but the big ones, like his teleportation of Puharich's dog, Wellington, through the walls of Puharich's house. Even this historic event is overshadowed by the great snatch on Nov. 9, 1973. Geller was jogging his way home on the East Side of Manhattan when he suddenly felt himself "sucked upward." He closed his eyes. When he opened them he . . . but let the Chosen One tell it:

"I found myself being propelled in the air a foot or so away from a porch screen, over the top of a rhododendron bush, about to crash through the screen at a point eight or 10 feet off the ground. To prepare for the impact, I turned my left shoulder toward the screen and put my hands out in front of me. I crashed through the screen and landed on a circular glass-top table."

Where was Geller. He was on the screen porch of I-



harich's home in Ossining, 30 miles away! Puharich checked the snow outside. No footprints. He fetched a tape recorder. The mechanical voice came on almost immediately (i.e., Geller, in a trance, speaking like a robot) and made it clear that the forces had literally transported me almost instantaneously from New York to Ossining." Geller admits he doesn't know what happened. "Was I really torn up molecule by molecule? Was I pushed through a dimension, teleported by a ray or by a spacecraft?"

We can be sure that no leading parapsychologists, from Dr. J. B. Rhine to counter-culture physicist Dr. Sarfatti, is going to buy this nonsense. Not even Geller's top TV boosters, Merv Griffin, and Mike Douglas. But there are lots of disturbed souls out there, in these days of spiritual confusion, who will. Geller has said many times that his burning ambition is to become a movie star, and he has signed a contract with the organization that produced "Jesus Christ, Superstar" to play himself in a film. Is this what Geller has been up to all along? Will the fates be kind?

