

Chapter 1 / Greedy For Hidden Things?

'I believe this process. I believe that you actually broke the fork here and now.'

(Professor John Taylor, particle physicist and Professor of Mathematics at King's College London on BBC TV's Dimpleby Talk-In with Uri Geller in 1973.)

Twenty five years ago, an acquaintance, now an international banker, was a student at the London School of Economics. He remembers one November morning going into a philosophy tutorial with three or four colleagues to find that the tutor, a specialist in epistemology - the theory of knowledge - had scribbled a curious statement on the blackboard.

It read: 'Homo Sapiens ... Homo Geller'.

The tutor explained that he had happened to watch Uri Geller perform on a BBC television show the previous Friday night and had been profoundly struck, as he thought about it over the weekend, by the evolutionary implications of this excitable, good-looking young Israeli, with his apparent abilities to bend metal by the power of his mind, to stop and start watches and to read other people's thoughts.

Geller had just arrived in Britain from the United States, where he had been a media sensation, and was now taking Europe by storm. In America, he had been the subject of major pieces in Time and Newsweek, of a cautiously approving editorial in the New York Times - and an 'exposure' in Popular Photography, which managed by trick photography to replicate an ability Geller claimed, that of being able to be photographed through a camera lens cap. In Europe, now, he was the cover story in Paris Match, Der Spiegel and Oggi and hundreds of other magazines. In Britain, everybody was talking about him, and the newspapers were referring daily in front page stories to Gellermania as a successor to Beatlemania. He featured on a huge scale in everything from the most popular tabloids to the weighty Observer, which made him a magazine cover story. Even the usually sober journal New Scientist ran a cover story on Geller, with 16 pages inside - culminating in a verdict that he was simply a good magician. An article in the journal Nature, meanwhile, validated some of his paranormal powers.

The LSE epistemology tutorial on this November Monday morning had a sense of purpose, of urgency, even, which the usual leisurely stroll through academia by tutor and students lacked. After all, this man Geller was not some intellectual abstraction or a figure from ancient mythology. He was 26 and in town, hopping from broadcast studio to newspaper interview to physicist's laboratory. The media hype and public excitement was approaching that which you might imagine if a friendly Martian had landed.

Public hysteria was one thing, but a philosophy don at one of the world's most important universities and his high-flying young students had to look at this in a cool, dispassionate manner. If - a big if - the phenomena demonstrated by Geller were genuine and not a series of sophisticated conjuror's stunts, then his emergence, it was agreed, was a deeply significant development for mankind. Were there other human beings like him, the tutorial group wondered? What would happen if two beings of Geller's power were to mate? Would this mean that those of us without such a mental capacity would soon be slaves to super-humans?'

Uri Geller became a hugely controversial figure world-wide, hailed by many serious scientists as a psychic superstar, and courted by celebrities, politicians and heads of state. He submitted to exhaustive laboratory testing by physicists all over the world, some of the experiments leading to highly intriguing results. Other scientists, meanwhile, denounced the charismatic Israeli as an outright fraud, having picked what seemed to the ambivalent to be fairly convincing methodological holes in the same experiments. A number of professional stage magicians were also outraged; they, after all, made their living by faking 'paranormal' phenomena - a skill which convinced them that such miracles were non-existent in reality. No upstart was going to tell people expert in creating illusion that they might have lived their professional lives under one.

Geller worked himself to the point of illness achieving his childhood ambition, which was not so much to be a globally-renowned miracle-worker, as to be rich and have endless beautiful girls running after him. As one of his closest friends in New York, a great classical musician, confides today: 'He didn't want to be a psychic - he wanted to be a prospect' rock star'. Uri Geller certainly became one of the most

famous people in the world, even if at times, his psychic career seemed to be verging on farce. In 1973, on a live NBC Tonight show with Johnny Carson, he failed in 22 minutes of trying to make anything remotely paranormal happen. Carson is an amateur magician, who took professional advice on how he might best destabilise Geller and catch him out cheating. Whether the show host succeeded at disproving him was a matter of hot debate, and continues to be nearly 25 years later. There was certainly no question of him having been found with his hand in the till, but the encounter left Geller depressed and embarrassed - even if, crucially, for many people, the failure actually reinforced belief in him, since their perception was that real psychics are easily upset by aggressively doubting Thomases, while mere magicians *always* succeed with their tricks. With characteristic optimism, and to the annoyance of his enemies, Geller overcame his embarrassment and carried on in the US, performing, convincing people of his powers and being sought out as a friend and guru by his fellow celebrities. John Lennon still dropped round for a coffee; Salvador Dali still had him to stay as a guest. Geller even appeared on the same Tonight show at later dates, with rather more success - although without Carson in the chair.

In 1984, after a short period living on the slopes of Mount Fuji in Japan as an experiment in finding an inner peace he felt he lacked in New York, Geller was still restless, and moved with his young family to England, where today he lives in a large house with elegant grounds by the River Thames. Here, he quietly cultivates slightly mysterious business activities which appear to be of a psychic nature, but which he does not talk about very openly. His commercial ventures are manifestly anything but imaginary, however, providing his family as they do with an enviable helicopters-and-five-star-hotels lifestyle - and himself the financial security to pursue charitable

interests, as well as novel writing and the occasional small-scale public performance, just for fun.

So what *was* the Geller phenomenon all about? Could there have been something in it after all, beneath all the fun and hype, the showbiz and the commercialism? If Geller were genuine, his telepathy and psychokinesis challenged our most fundamental ideas about the laws of nature, as well as much of our understanding of brain function. If he were more than an illusionist, and science was unable to explain his abilities, then reason and science themselves would start to be regarded as an illusion. It was no wonder that conservative scientists were at one with conjurors in their opposition, some of it bordering on fanatical, to Geller.

Yet in the 30 years since Geller emerged, little has become of the new vision he seemed to offer of the human mind's unknown new capabilities. We do not in the main appear to have become slaves to a master race of Geller clones, ordering us telepathically what to do, while they psychokinetically twist the occasional suspension bridge into a tangle of junk to remind us of our lower position in the food chain. And Uri Geller himself has morphed into less of a figure of awe, and more of a tolerated eccentric, loved by the tabloids for a ready quote, but to whom the label 'Dubious' is more or less permanently attached in the mind of a considerable proportion of the intelligentsia.

The Uri Geller story is complex and, at times, baffling. The film maker Ken Russell, who recently made a rather peculiar movie, *Mind Bender*, with Terence Stamp and based on Geller's life, summed up the enigma of his subject during the filming. Was

Geller genuine, he was asked? 'Only God knows', Russell replied, 'and he's not telling.'

What we do know is that Geller is driven by the longing to be regarded as more than a charismatic man who seems to be able to bend cutlery by psychic means. A vegan, an exercise fanatic and (self-appointed) world peace campaigner, he somehow lives an ascetic life even within the luxurious surrounds he has bought. He seems determined to fight his brash image. He will travel across the country on a Sunday to open a Scout fete, and happily bend a few spoons for the people that crowd round him, even though he says it is an exhausting process.

He wants to become a kind of ambassador for the paranormal, his message that *everyone* has paranormal powers, not just him. Declining a monopoly, it has to be said, is quite an unusual course for a man said to be money-obsessed as Geller has been. But he sees himself increasingly as an enabling power, and is constantly on the look out for more young Uri Gellers to carry his message on beyond his lifetime, until, he hopes, his belief that we are all psychic is universally accepted.

Asked how he explains his powers, Geller professes to be quite bashful. Perhaps he is just kidding, but they could, he believes, be some errant UFO commander's idea of a joke. 'Perhaps they thought they'd give some ordinary guy these abilities just to see how the rest of the human race coped with it.' He claims that he does not really know what he has - and says he is sometimes scared to use his powers to what he thinks could be their fullest extent.

What follows is partly a biography of Geller, partly a journalistic investigation, and partly an account of my own wary journey of discovery into regions I had never previously visited, mysterious underworlds inhabited by paranormalists, psychic researchers, magicians - and scientists.

Most people find they have a more succinct, not to mention a more judicious, view of puzzling matters after sleeping on them for a night or two. In the case of most of Uri Geller's supporters and detractors (they have been known to swap places), the fact that Geller is still very much around after nearly 30 years has given them the benefit of a great deal of time to cogitate, assess, re-assess and then sleep on their final verdict. They have been afforded the luxury of as much hindsight as anyone could wish for. What *do* those who put their necks and reputations on the line for Uri Geller 20 years ago think in retrospect of Geller and his powers? What was done that was not revealed at the time? And what new research has been conducted on Geller?

Readers are entitled, of course, to know from what sort of position I started my voyage round Uri Geller. The answer is, one of considerable scepticism. I was the last writer I would have expected to spend two years researching a book on Uri Geller. I am proud of having written a debunking piece on UFOs for Time Magazine, have been delighted to be dismissive in print on many occasions of such people as fortune tellers and, when once visiting what was supposed to be the most haunted house in Britain, was so convinced that the cause of the 'mysterious' poltergeist effects there were in fact the non-paranormal mischief of a recessive- looking Uncle Fester character closeted upstairs, that I refused to write the article I was sent for.

I also, to the great detriment of the family finances, declined 13 years ago to embark on a book to follow up an article I had written in a British newspaper on how rabbis in Israel were using computers to discover mysterious hidden messages in the Torah, the Hebrew bible. I became convinced after writing the article that the theory behind the rabbis' work was fatally flawed, and dropped the research, despite being repeatedly asked by publishers to investigate further. A decade later, Michael Drosnin of the Washington Post developed the 'hidden messages' theory into a world-wide best-seller, *The Bible Codes*, which has earned him millions. I still think the theory is fallacious. Perhaps I'm wrong, but I hope I make my point that I think I have a decently jaundiced eye.

Two years ago, when I started researching Uri Geller, was a time marked by something approaching a world-wide paranormal orgy. The X-Files was an international cult, the UFO film *Independence Day* was the big summer hit, and a John Travolta movie, *Phenomenon*, with strong elements of Uri Geller in it, was also taking millions at the box office. Alternative medicine pages were starting to appear in serious newspapers, while factual-style TV shows on the paranormal, such as the BBC's *Out Of This World*, were achieving huge ratings. It was almost as if, with the approaching end of the Millennium, perhaps, in mind, there was a mass popular dissatisfaction with the limits that science and technology impose on what is considered possible.

To a journalist and author who specialises in writing on the wackier, more bizarre side of current trends and events, as well as on comedy and (from a strictly bemused point of view) technology, all this fascination with the unexplained seemed, frankly,

inexplicable. Was it not a perverse turn in mass thinking that what was once magical had become mundane, that while miracles such as medicine, computers, communications and cheap mass travel were being taken for granted, we were all desperately seeking new magic, new things to find mysterious? I recognised that the media and publishing were slightly culpable in this, and had always been, since long before the mid 1990s supernatural boom. I was always impressed by a sentence the 17th century London physician, William Gilbert, used in a book on magnetism, a phenomenon which was very much the spoon bending of its day, some believing in it, and others deeply sceptical. The problem was that although magnetism was clearly *something* - maybe sorcery, maybe a real physical force - people kept crediting this mysterious, invisible energy with the most unlikely qualities. Removing sorcery from women, putting demons to flight, reconciling married couples, curing gout and making one 'acceptable and in favour with princes' were just a few of these. As Gilbert complained: *'With such idle tales and trumpery do plebeian philosophers delight themselves and satiate readers greedy for hidden things.'*

Hear, hear, I thought. A sense of wonder was once addressed by religious revivals, but today, those are only for the ultra-conservative, for the frightened, and those whom a part of their personality, at least, is seeking order and reassurance without too many questions asked. Science once satisfied the inquiring mind, greedy for hidden things, by demystifying the mysterious. Now, with the scientific method of thinking having largely taken over from religion and superstition, we seemed to be seeking mystery all over again. And wanting to take our mystery with a side order of more mystery - hence the X-Files.

While accepting that science can be a little stubborn, and is marred by a highly regrettable tendency to brand some mavericks within its ranks as 'heretical' - a strange word indeed for scientists to use - I have to say that the paranormal boom had, until June 1996, left me unmoved. Indeed, outside of the mental exclusion zones we all erect for ourselves - the odd superstition, the occasional, trivial feeling that some coincidences are a little too strange to put down to chance alone - I was a devout rationalist. Scoffing at the paranormal seemed to me a perfectly respectable prejudice. After all, what was not to scoff at?

Trying to establish the real story of Uri Geller has been an arduous, although continually fascinating excursion. I have taken 22 flights, driven 11,000 miles on three continents, read (and often re-read) 44 books, done 75 interviews with Geller's friends and enemies, spent hours in libraries in London, Oxford and New York searching for obscure, forgotten articles with some light to shed on the subject. I've met some intriguing and often delightful people along the way, from Uri's nemesis, the impish Canadian magician and ultra-rationalist, James Randi, to John Alexander, a retired United States special forces colonel who studied the paranormal as a non-lethal military weapon and believes strongly in Geller, to elderly Hungarian Jewish ladies in Israel, who knew Geller as a spoon bending toddler, and after telling me about him, considered it an insult if I declined to eat an enormous meal they had prepared for me - without having previously mentioned that they planned to cook.

I have also spent days interviewing Uri, mostly while traipsing along the banks of the Thames in all weathers as he walks his dogs. These several-mile hikes, almost always in rain and thick mud, helped at least to shed some of the fat I accumulated in

Israel - as well as to develop a real liking for Geller as a man. I am pretty sure, however, that he has not paranormally warped my objectivity, or seduced me into relying on his version of events if there were other people to ask. And I am confident that the evidence I have unearthed from third parties, much of it never before revealed, will seriously challenge the preconceptions both of sceptics and believers in Geller.

Journalists have a tendency, regrettable perhaps, to be drawn by heretical thought, by lateral views and by evidence which goes against the grain to challenge received wisdom; it is our duty, I think, to swim against the tide. A 1974 poll by the London Daily Mail recorded that 95 per cent of the newspaper's readers believed Uri Geller had psychic powers, yet I think I am accurate in taking the received wisdom in the late 1990s to be that Geller is interesting, but a bit of a joker, and very possibly a charlatan.

Because I think a lot of intelligent people have come to doubt that Geller is 'real', I admit that I found it more noteworthy both journalistically and intellectually when unexpected voices turned out to support Geller, rather than when predictable voices denigrated him. Similarly, when some of Geller's less plausible-sounding stories were surprisingly backed up by independent witnesses, there was a little frisson of excitement on my part. In my defence of this, I have to say I would feel the same if I discovered Saddam Hussein was a fan of Monty Python Flying Circus - or that Professor Richard Dawkins was training for the priesthood. But there is a more important point here: the kernel of the anti-Geller argument is a perfect example of the hallowed principle of Occam's Razor, which proposes that, all things being equal,

the simplest explanation of anything is the most likely one: in other words, the heavyweight sceptics say, Geller cheats. It's a simple message, devastating if true, yet there is a limit to the number of times it can be re-stated, while the opposite argument, that he is genuine, is bound to be more interesting, even if it were ultimately wrong.

There are also, it is forgotten, more sides to the Geller story than the question of whether he is for real. For example, his position as a cultural icon is fascinating. Coming to live in England has been a great success for Uri Geller and his family in all but one respect. Regardless of where people lie on the scepticism-belief axis, there is a problem of perception of Geller in Britain, which has held back many people, but particularly the middle class intelligentsia, from taking him seriously. It is among such people that modesty, understatement and a subtle sense of irony are most admired; and even his best friends confess that while Uri Geller is many admirable things, he is not quite an exemplar of any of these three qualities. His style, consequently, tends not to be appreciated, or simply to be found funny.

It has to be said that unlike in the States, Israelis are something of a rarity in the UK. Whether people in Britain identify him as Israeli or not, his direct, typically *Sabra* style is perceived as being a little over-the-top; if Uri Geller thinks he is good at something, he has no problem in telling the world so. This is fine in the US and in Israel (where Geller is still a hugely respected favourite son), but the American maxim, 'If it's true, it ain't bargain,' tends not quite to apply in England, where you are not supposed to brag even if it *is* true. And he is not someone who has a problem with the over-ostentatious gesture, either, a facet of his persona which equally causes the British to blanch a little. Uri Geller is, it would be fair to assume, one of the few novelists who saw no credibility problem last summer in arriving at the Hay-on-Wye

Literary Festival, that most quirky and bookish of English annual arts events, by private helicopter.

In many senses, Geller has never quite ‘got’ Britain in the instinctive way he understood America, and this frequently makes him appear to the reticent British as his own worst PR man, psychic powers or none. The fact that he is a typically extrovert showbusiness personality *as well* as being a typical Israeli just about ensures that in Cool Britannia, Geller is often judged, on stylistic grounds alone, as being distinctly un-cool.

But OK, as Uri would demand in best Israeli style. So. You’ve explained where you are coming *from*, now tell us, where did you finish up? What was your verdict on Uri Geller? Is he real? Is he a liar? Can he still bend spoons? Is he as earnest as he seems, or does he have a funny side? Did all your clocks stop?

For two years now, friends and colleagues have been listening to my travellers’ tales and quizzing me on my developing personal theories as to what the truth about the world’s greatest living parapsychological exponent might be.

‘Interesting,’ they say, some believing I have given him too much credit, others angry that I have been too hard on him. ‘But in the end,’ they demand, ‘do you come to any conclusions?’

After two years of having it coming from all sides, I think I can safely say that, yes, I do.

Chapter 2 / Into the Light

'I did that.' (Uri Geller aged six, after making the watch of a schoolfriend, Mordechai, advance by an hour)

Perhaps the story begins in Budapest, Hungary, in the 1920s, where a strikingly handsome young man called Tibor Geller was always told as he grew up that, although his family was devoutly Jewish, and his grandfather was a prominent rabbi, there was gypsy blood somewhere way back in the Geller line. A corny old family myth, perhaps, and one not uncommon in Hungary, but a point Tibor would often ponder later in his life, in a different place and very different circumstances, and wonder if it just *might* explain some things about his unusual son, Uri.

Or maybe the real start of the mystery can be explained only by Uri himself, because he alone was there when it happened. And immediately, we have our first problem in unravelling the enigma of Uri Geller. Family tales of Romany blood sound unlikely enough, but Uri's account of the genesis of his story invites scepticism from the first word. For one thing, it is the account of a child of four or five years old - not that Uri has changed his strange story in nearly fifty years. For another thing,

everyone who recalls little Uri remembers a child with a famously fertile imagination, although significantly, not one who was a liar.

To put it at its baldest, Uri Geller is semi-convinced that he had a contact experience with extraterrestrial aliens in the middle of the day in a crowded quarter of Tel Aviv, Palestine, in a shady, walled garden which then existed on a spot now occupied by a modern, eight-storey branch of the Hapoalim Bank.

There is a characteristic bravery in Geller's sticking for half a century to this clearly profound memory of what we have to assume was *something*, even if it was not quite a close encounter with a UFO. Sticking to his guns over the memory has probably done this most image-conscious of men no favours, won him no friends, made him no fans or adherents, but he continues to insist it happened. 'Joan of Arc' recollections from childhood, as they are known, early visions of a flash of light, are quite common among people who go on to have highly unusual lives with a touch of destiny about them. The memories seem to be very similar. In around 1425, when she was 13, Joan, according to legend sat down under a tree once while tired from playing, only to feel her world fade away as a globe of light came down beside her and adult voices she later identified as being of Saints Catherine and Margaret and Michael began to speak to her about how she would lead France against the invading English armies. In the 1970s one of the best reputed 'remote viewers' - the US Army expression for psychics - the Americans had was a Vietnam veteran from Florida called Joe McMoneagle. McMoneagle's Joan of Arc moment came in an orange grove one night in 1957 when he, too, was tired and 'floated off' to be told by some manner of speaking light source

that he would be a strong soldier one day, who would go off to fight a war but come back unharmed.

Uri Geller, speaking even as a 52 year-old multi millionaire with powerful friends all over the world, makes no apologies for his account of the apparent event. It occurred in the shady garden of an old Arabic house opposite the Gellers' flat, which was at 13 Betzalel Yaffe, on the corner of the busy Yehuda Halevi Boulevard. In the early 1950s as now, this was a noisy, vibrant downtown area, packed with characteristic Tel Aviv apartment blocks of four or five floors, alongside shops, offices and schools. Everywhere, there were scooters and motorcycles, hooting, people shouting and arguing in the streets, dogs barking, children laughing, old ladies scuttling, and delicious lunchtime cooking smells coming from every apartment. The buildings, like the cooking and the faces on the streets, were a kaleidoscopic mix of eastern and European, modern and very old indeed. Every few metres was another dark doorway, with a glimpse of a still darker interior. For such a built-up district, nature put up an impressive show. Tiny patches of intense greenery, palms and flowers, some growing wild, but much assiduously cultivated, somehow squeezed between the buildings and defied the burning heat of the day. The kind of gardens that Uri describes were mysterious, squirreled away places, secretive little holes almost impossibly tranquil in such a frenetic setting.

‘The garden had a rough iron fence, all rusty, and inside, it was wild, with bushes and tress and flowers and grass,’ he recalls. ‘It looked like no-one had taken care of it for ten years. The day before this strange thing happened, when I was three, I had squeezed through a gap in the fence and found a rusty rifle. It was one of the happiest

days of my year. It was real and menacing-looking, and of course when I took it out I tried to hit it against the floor to see whether there was a bullet in the barrel. Just then, a police car passed by. They stopped when they saw this little boy playing with a real rifle, and confiscated it.'

'The next day, late in the afternoon, I thought I would find another one, and that's when it all happened. I went back to the garden and I suddenly heard kittens crying. My first reaction was to find them. I was very small, so going into the tall grass was like a jungle. The next thing I remember, I felt something above me and I looked up and saw a ball of light. It wasn't the sun; it was something more massive, something that you could touch. It was really weird, almost like a plane, but nearer to me, above me. It was just hanging there. Then after some moments - I don't remember how long - something struck me. It was either a beam or a ray of light; it really hit my forehead and knocked me back into the grass. It was exactly like that scene in the John Travolta film, Phenomenon. I don't know how long I lay there. But I got scared. I ran home and told my mother. Maybe I'd stayed there for another minute, not thinking, not wondering, not understanding. At that age, anything and everything is possible for a child. To me, it didn't look like some kind of phenomenon or a paranormal occurrence or a UFO. It just happened. But because it was a bit threatening, because it knocked me down, I tried to tell this to my mother, and obviously she thought I was making it up. And that was the end of that. It never ever happened again.'

There is an alternative, slightly more earthly childhood incident which happened to Uri a short time after this, and has the benefit of a still living terrestrial witness to it in

the form of Uri's mother, Margaret. And, this part of the story being of a Jewish mother and her only son, the incident almost inevitably involves soup.

'We were sitting down to lunch in the kitchen eating mushroom soup, or possibly chicken, I don't quite remember,' says Margaret Geller, who is now 85. 'All of a sudden, I noticed that the spoon in his hand was bending. I didn't know what happened. I thought he might have bent it on purpose as a joke, to make me laugh. And then he said he didn't do anything and, that the spoon got bent by itself. I just wondered. But I always had the feeling that he was not like other children. He very much liked, how shall I put this, to be independent and to boss around the other children, his friends. He was always the same, just like now.'

Uri's account of the soup spoon affair accords in its essentials with his mother's. He recalls initially dipping some white bread in the soup, and then placing the spoon in his left hand - he is left handed - and taking a few sips unhindered by any form of paranormal activity, his mother in his memory standing, in the style of every Jewish mother in history, by the kitchen stove. But then, as Uri was lifting a spoonful of soup to his mouth, the bowl spontaneously bent downwards, depositing hot soup in his lap, and then fell off, leaving Uri holding the spoon handle. He remembers calling to his mother to say, 'Look what's happened'. She replied with one of those things flustered mothers say; 'Well, it must be a loose spoon or something. 'I knew that was silly,' Uri says now. 'You don't get "loose spoons".'

Uri Geller had been born in a small hospital in Tel Aviv at two in the morning on December 20th 1946, under the sign, for those who must know these things, of Sagittarius, The Clown. The birth was entirely normal other than in one significant

and disturbing respect. Margaret Geller had previously been pregnant eight times, and on each occasion had an abortion because Tibor, who did not seem to believe in contraceptives, also oddly did not want children. Uri would not find out the extraordinary fact of his mother's multiple abortions - and that he might easily have been terminated foetus number nine - until he was nearly 40, and his mother quietly slipped it into the middle of an unrelated conversation. As an adult who believed firmly in life after death and reincarnation, it was as great a shock to Uri as it might have been to discover he was adopted. He had always felt he had some kind of guardian angel, and when he learned that he might have had eight brothers and sisters, the news made him wonder whether there was possibly more than one invisible protector there for him. Uri discovered on quizzing his mother that it had been her decision to say this time she was going to have the baby, her strength and determination to stand up to Tibor which brought him into existence.

However he felt about it, Tibor Geller seems to have accepted his fate as a father, for the meanwhile, at least. From what one can see from the Geller family photos, and nobody has spent more time looking at them with a critical eye than Uri, his father looked happy and content holding him at his circumcision, visibly proud that his first and only child had been born. Uri was named after a boy who would have been his cousin, who had been killed in a trolley bus accident in Budapest.

Uri maintains today that he is not angry with his parents about the abortions. He feels that if they had not happened, and his mother already had children when she became pregnant with him, it is most likely that he would have been aborted himself. And anyway, even if the war in Europe had been over a year, these were still highly turbulent times and unstable times in Palestine. Even in the late 1940s, Uri was

effectively a war baby, born and brought up in a violent society, with an understanding of the emotional chaos war engenders.

Tibor and Margaret had married in the grandest synagogue in Budapest in 1938. Unlike Tibor's, Margaret's family was not very religious. She had been born in Berlin, of Viennese parents. Her family name was Freud, and if the Hungarian Gellers had gypsies to provide the exotica in their genetic makeup, the Freuds could point out that Margaret's grandfather was a distant relative of the great Sigmund Freud. (Tentative as it was, the connection with the father of psychoanalysis would one day come in useful to the then unborn Uri Geller. For the moment, it was no more than a matter of family legend and considerable pride.)

The Budapest Freuds owned a moderately prosperous furniture and kitchenware business. Much of Tibor and Margaret's courting was spent rowing on a lake outside Budapest in narrow racing sculls. Inevitably, they capsized from time to time, and once, Margaret got into difficulties with her leg trapped in the boat. It was only by swimming underneath the boat that Tibor was able to rescue her as she was drowning.

Almost as soon as they were married, the Gellers set about fleeing from the imminent Nazi terror. Tibor made his way into Romania in November 1938, and talked his way onto a ship bound for Palestine. It took four months to make the trip and three attempts to land under fire from British patrol vessels before he made it on shore in March 1939. Twenty of the refugees on the ship had been killed by gunfire on the long journey. Margaret had an easier emigration, escaping Hungary through Yugoslavia, and catching a ship there straight to Palestine.

The Gellers' story in Palestine, surrounded by the vicious three-cornered attrition of the time between British, Jews and Arabs, was very typical of that of thousands of

early Israeli settlers - which is not to denigrate it, nor to pass over the stress and suffering of the Arabs and the British soldiers, trying as they were to police an unenforceable mandate. Tibor, having taken on the Hebrew name of Yitzhak, initially found work of a sort with a refugee friend who was a doctor, selling lollipops from a cart on the beach at Tel Aviv. He later worked as a taxi driver, running the gauntlet of flying bullets on the strife-torn road from the city to the airport at Lydda in a big old Chevrolet paid for, as most things would be in the Geller family, by Margaret's work as a seamstress.

Soon, Tibor was to discover that his destiny was as a man of action, and a military theme began to be woven into the family fabric somewhat at odds with his son Uri's later persona as a psychic, a vegan and promoter of all things alternative and New Age. Tibor joined the British Army soon after the start of the Second World War, and fought in the Jewish Brigade with the Eighth Army, under Montgomery. His tank unit was surrounded by Rommel's troops for several weeks at Tobruk in 1941, and he returned to Libya twice before the end of the War.

Perhaps it is unfair to Tibor Geller to say that he loved warfare, but it was unquestionably his calling, and there was all too much of it waiting to be waged in the post-War Middle East. He joined the Haganah, the Jewish underground militia, which would later become the Israeli Army, and, a dashing young military man, was away from Margaret most of the time. The abortions a closely-kept secret, she spent her time working as a seamstress, gossiping with Hungarian friends in Tel Aviv's strikingly middle-European coffee houses, and playing cards.

The sporadic street fighting and sniping in Tel Aviv did not stop because there was a new baby in the tiny flat three flights of cool stone stairs up on Betzalel Yaffe. The stairway of the apartment block even today has bullet scars in its light blue painted walls. In the 1940s, the streets of Tel Aviv were dangerous. Uri's first memory dates, he has worked out, from 1947, when he was about six months old. 'Our place was just a one room apartment with a tiny kitchen for an entrance, a big living room and a bed that would come out of the wall, which my mother had to build for me. Across the road from the apartment was the railroad station for trains to Jerusalem, and close to that was a British post, like a police station. I'll never know why but a British soldier shot two bullets into our window, but I was under that living room window in my pram, where my mother had put me. I remember the two shots, and I remember glass falling almost in slow motion. My mother had put a little teddy bear next to me in the pram, and somehow it rolled over my face and it saved me. Maybe I would have been cut up, perhaps even killed.'

With both his parents out for much of the time, Uri was afforded much freedom as a little boy, although his father, when he was at home and not off fighting, was a strict, militaristic disciplinarian. 'I remember that when I got out of bed, if my shoe was half an inch misplaced he would immediately tell me to correct that.' It was a demanding regime, but then again, Uri's father was rarely around. A neighbour was nominally looking after Uri when his mother too was out or working, but he was something of a street wise urchin, at the same time as being, by his own admission, a little strange.

When he was about four, a little after seeing the flash of light in the little Arabic garden, Uri remembers digging out the long-hidden British bullet heads from where they had sunk into the opposite wall in his bedroom. One was squashed up, having hit masonry, but the other had only penetrated wood, and was still shiny and rounded enough to spark off Uri's imagination. 'I used to go down the tiny little garden under the house, which was about ten square feet and covered with vegetation, and grass and flowers, and I would pretend that the little bullet head was a rocket, and that this was a jungle. I would pretend that the rocket was taking off and then landing on another planet. I don't know where I got these ideas from, as I was only four. We had no TV or radio. I don't think we even had comics in Israel then.'

He seemed to develop a space fixation, almost, he speculates today, 'as if something was implanted in my mind' during his Joan of Arc experience. He had started to draw detailed space pictures, with astronauts sitting in rockets surrounded controls and screens. 'Across our street was a junk yard of huge old water tanks, and there too, I used to fantasise. I used to crawl into one which was covered in big rivets, and pretend I was in some kind of capsule and was floating in space. My favourite childhood dream - and many people have it - was that I flap my hands and I could fly.'

By Uri's account two or three other strange phenomena began to crowd into his little world, aside from the alarming tendency of spoons and forks to bend when he touched them. The cutlery bending was occurring only occasionally, and apparently at random, but was frequent enough for his parents to become accustomed to it; their minds were so full of wartime worries about survival, that they seem to have demoted

its significance as a scientific oddity. The first post spoon bending phenomenon to affect Uri would, after an unfortunate start, when it merely embarrassed him. within months make him a playground sensation at the kindergarten he attended around the corner on Achad Ha'am Street. Being the centre of attention immediately appealed to Uri, and his curious ability at will to affect watches and clocks in odd ways was his best vehicle for recognition - far more reliable than the fickle, unpredictable business of bending cutlery.

Uri's facility with timepieces, he maintains, had appeared as spontaneously as his spoon bending. Shortly after he started school, Tibor bought Uri a watch, of which the little boy was, naturally, very proud. Uri Geller was bored by school almost immediately, and the watch in some way acted as an externalisation of his listlessness. One day, he recalls looking at the watch and seeing that the class was over. But a glance at the wall clock showed there was still half an hour to go. Disappointed, he set the watch back thirty minutes and forgot about it - until the same thing started to happen fairly frequently, day after day. There is, of course, every possibility that nothing more was happening than a little boy turning his watch forward consciously or otherwise in an attempt to will time forward. If this was the case, Uri was prepared nevertheless to take matters further. He told his mother about it. The link between misbehaving watches and delinquent spoons was far from obvious, so she suggested there might be something wrong with the watch. In response, the watch, or perhaps Uri, contrived to start spinning four and five hours ahead at a jump. Suspecting it was a prank, Margaret asked him to leave the watch at home. For weeks, under her gaze, it behaved quite normally. So Uri began to wear it to school again. Still fascinated by the watch and convinced he hadn't deluded himself, he got into the habit of taking it off and leaving it on his desk, in the hope of catching it running fast.

The day he finally caught his watch at it, he shouted out in class, ‘Look at this watch!’ and immediately wished he hadn’t, because everyone laughed at him; he does not remember whether the watch was actually still racing ahead when he held it up, but whatever, the incident served as an early lesson that people could be very hard and sceptical, would not simply accept his word, and would not necessarily even believe what they saw in front of them. Back at home, he decided there was nothing more to it than he had a weird watch, and resolved not to wear it again. His mother said she would buy him a better one, and after a few months, she did.

Uri says he was relieved at having a regular, working watch this time, which did not do odd, unpredictable things, and told the correct time. Then, one day, the bell rang for the end of playtime, he looked at his watch, and saw that the hands had bent, first upwards, so they hit the glass, then sideways. Convinced, now, that this was the spoon thing in another guise, his instant reaction was to keep it a secret. When he got home, his father was on one of his infrequent visits and asked sharply, ‘Did you open this watch?’ Uri swore that he had not, and Margaret told Tibor about the peculiar things that had happened with the first watch.

Uri recalls Tibor and Margaret giving each other one of those despairing looks by which parents communicate a shared feeling of hopelessness about an errant child. Tibor had strongly suggested letting Uri see a psychiatrist immediately after he started vandalising, as Tibor was beginning to see it, the hard-up family’s cutlery; now that the child had taken to ruining expensive watches too, he was all the more convinced that he had a very strange son. He was openly angry about Uri’s mangled watch. Margaret took a different tack, arguing that whatever it was Uri was displaying seemed like a talent to her, so the visit to a psychiatrist never happened. Uri, on the

other hand, was not given another watch for more than a year. (He finally gave up wearing watches in his twenties, he says, when too many incidents of them going haywire meant he no longer trusted one to tell the right time.)

The incident in the garden, the spoons, the intense space fantasies, the watches and even the humiliation of being laughed at in class, had convinced Uri even at this early stage in his life that he was special, possibly even on some kind of mission at the behest of a dimly-perceived superior power. 'It was real, it was vivid in my mind. I know to this day it was no childhood fantasy,' he insists. Life continued, however, and much of it was very mundane, happy childhood experience. 'I can remember two houses away from us was a tiny back room condom factory and we used to get into the back garden, where they would throw out defective condoms. We used to blow them up as balloons. I think we knew what they were. The first time I kissed a girl just behind that little garden. I was about seven.'

A few weeks after the showdown with his parents over the second broken watch, Uri was eating school lunch, when his friend, Mordechai, suddenly looked down at his watch and exclaimed that it had just moved an hour ahead. Prepared to risk all since he now had an independent witness with his own watch, Uri uttered what for him was a fateful short statement: 'I did that'. Mordechai, naturally, argued that he couldn't have done - the watch had never left his wrist. Uri asked if he could take it in his hand, and, he says, just looked at it and shouted, 'Move.' He made it jump two or three times, and by the end of the lunch break, had a crowd of excited boys proclaiming that Uri Geller had the most wonderful trick he could perform with a watch. The memory of Uri proclaiming in class that something had happened which

only he had seen was forgotten. The boys could see this with their own eyes, and couldn't have been more impressed. Uri, of course, would like to have explained that, actually, as far as he was concerned, it wasn't a trick, but was something far simpler. Wisely, he did not venture an explanation as subtle or downright unbelievable.

But the trick, paranormal effect or whatever it was certainly rocketed Uri in his peers' estimation. Yechiel Teitelbaum, who was in Uri's class and now runs a Tel Aviv cosmetics marketing company employing 300 people, confirms this. 'He was always different from other kids, very strange,' says Teitelbaum, one of the earliest non-family, unconnected witnesses to Uri Geller's early talents. 'He did a lot of things not every child can do, things beyond understanding; he left the impression of someone amazing, very sharp, very strong, very, very popular. He was always the leader, even in the kindergarten. We were together from four or five years old. He was always doing incredible things with in the playground with wrist watches. I also remember there were stories about him stopping the big classroom clock, but in my memory it was the big clock in the teachers' room that Uri stopped. I don't remember him bending metal, but what left the biggest impression on me was something different. It was Uri's *telepathia* - how he would tell me exact things I was thinking about.'

An apparent ability for telepathy with people, and even, or so Uri claims, with dogs and cats, was another of the bundle of allied paranormal aptitudes Uri had been born with, or possibly had downloaded into his mind by aliens, or had learned to simulate by trickery - all by the age of five. From toddlerhood, he was apparently famed in the apartment building for being able to feed the ferocious local brand of feral cat down

by the dustbins behind the pharmacy which occupied the bottom of the block, and have the cats purr and eat out of his hand. The human telepathy first manifested for Mrs Geller, as it did for Yechiel at kindergarten, with Uri's uncanny knack of saying things just before she was about to. This soon became yet another of the multitude of oddities Margaret learned to shrug off. 'She was accustomed to the idea of me being unusual,' Uri says. He would have premonitions which went down in family history as accurate; one apparently came to him on a visit to the zoo during which Uri felt uneasy and asked to leave. A few minutes after he and Margaret left, mother and son maintain, a lion escaped and spent some minutes running about terrorising the visitors. But then, for the first time, having a telepathic young son began to have its *really* practical uses.

Uri was in the habit of waiting up for Margaret to come home from her card evenings so he could say goodnight. Practically every time, she noted, he seemed able to tell her how well she had done, and precisely how much she had won or lost. Mother and son began to develop a system by which Uri's talents, whatever they might be, could be put to some practical use. And with this early childhood intervention in his mother's card games, we come upon the first major problem in unscrambling the Uri Geller story. One of the principal difficulties the study of parapsychology has faced since it began in earnest in the early 20th century - indeed, one of the reasons (although there are others far less rational) that parapsychology has spent decades in the lobby of science without quite being admitted into the main edifice - is what is called mixed mediumship. Or to put it at its most basic, the fact that some extremely promising psychic subjects are perfectly capable of cheating at the self same time as showing every sign of being genuinely psychic. Mixed

mediumship was a paradox noted by the anthropologist Knud Rasmussen in the 1920s, when he interviewed an Eskimo *shaman*, a witchdoctor, called Najagneq - who, incidentally, claimed to have gained his powers after being struck by a ball of fire. Najagneq admitted frankly to the Dane that he used some sleight-of-hand conjuring tricks as an aid to getting people to believe in him, and thereby to assist their recovery from illness. Rasmussen asked if there, then, any 'real' powers involved. Najagneq, who we must assume was in the mood for sharing, replied: 'Yes, there is a power that we call Sila, one that cannot be explained in so many words.'

Mixed mediumship is, then, the idea that paranormal powers and deliberate illusionism sometimes co-exist in the same person, and might even in rare cases be different ends of the same stick. Such a concept is an absolute blessing for anyone of a mind to debunk the paranormal. The debunkers' argument, and it is not a bad one superficially, is that if an alleged psychic *ever* cheats, *ever* tinkers with the effects he produces, be it to please an audience, an experimenter or his mum, then everything he does or ever has done and claimed as being paranormal is instantly nullified. He is a henceforth a proven cheat, and therefore a complete fraud. In reality, as we will discover in a later chapter, a large proportion of stage magicians admit in private that they rely on such paranormal effects as telepathy (sometimes calling it sheer luck) *alongside* trickery - and that the majority of psychics are also quite well versed in the arts of magicianship. In reality too, the desire to cheat, to enhance what one can do by legitimate methods with a spot of deception, is common in many fields. In the 1986 World Cup Finals, Diego Maradona of Argentina, the greatest soccer midfield player of all time, knocked England out of the quarter final with a goal he knowingly scored illegally, using his right hand to push the ball into the England net; although this is

used as an example of the Argentinian's tricky nature, it is rarely employed as an argument that Maradona was incapable of playing legitimately. In Uri Geller's case, there is substantial evidence, as we will see in his subsequent career, that like Maradona, he has the ability to do amazing things without resort to cheating. Yet from early childhood, the very nature of what Geller found he could achieve, in that it was close to what conjurors do by trickery, exposed him to the *knowledge* of methods of cheating. Sometimes, it is safe to assume, he happened on ways of deceiving audiences himself; other times, even today, magician friends, of whom he has dozens, will tell him of their methods. In an ideal world, perhaps, Uri would somehow *un-know* such secrets, but for all practical purposes, he is stuck with them.

When he was four or five, a good, if slightly wild, street kid in a Mediterranean city, it is a little unlikely that Uri was being tutored by magicians, and he had both the scope and the motivation to work out methods of augmenting his natural talents. Helping his mother financially was an overriding consideration for the little boy, a priority which he has never lost sight of; like most people who have been poor, he remains slightly obsessed with money and financial security. Margaret, as ever the natural leader of the family, was amazed at how well Uri could guess how successful she had been at cards. He was keen both to impress her, and to help the stretched family finances, so he developed a method of assisting her which was a perfect example of mixed mediumship. 'I had a system to tell her telepathically if someone was holding a joker,' Uri admits. 'But I didn't tell her telepathically, I would sit next to her and knock her knee. It's called kibitzing, when someone is playing cards and you sit next to them and you can see what they hold in their hand, and obviously, as an observer are not allowed to see what the others are holding because you are with

that person. But I would look at the person she was sitting opposite to. She - they were all women - would have a full hand of cards and I would just know by looking at the back of the cards whether she had a joker or two jokers, and would tell my mother. They played for money, and that helped her income. I also helped her by telling her not to play cards on certain evenings because she would lose.'

Uri's powers, as he saw them, could apparently be used to his own benefit too. For a child used to wanting material possessions and not getting them - for a long time when he was younger, he had particularly coveted a model Jeep he saw in a toy shop but could not possibly afford - Uri developed surely the perfect gift. 'I discovered that I could use a visualisation technique to achieve certain things. For example, I love dogs and I just wanted a dog and I would visualise and fantasise about a puppy in my mind, daydreaming. I will never forget the day when my father woke me up in the middle of the night and said, "Uri, go to the balcony and look what I bought you." And I went out, and there in a little box was a puppy. It was almost like I had a personal Aladdin lamp in my mind, that I would wish or rub and it would make my wishes come true. The puppy was a little Arabic mongrel, light brown and white. I called him Tzuki, to sound like the Hungarian for candy. Sadly, a car killed him when I was six or seven, and it was my fault in a way. I had him on a leash I had made, and it just broke away and he ran onto the road and was killed in front of me. It was very traumatic. Both my mother and I cried all day. I only realised then how much I love animals. A few weeks later, my father bought me another dog, and I called him Tzuki as well.'

Uri seemed to choose what parts of his curious abilities he revealed to different people. He happily fooled around with their watches, but never boasted to his friends that he believed he could ‘magic up’ a puppy - even with his imagination, he realised that this wish-fulfilment thing he had *could* be co-incidental. It is not unusual, after all, for a father to buy a boy a dog. The one thing Uri never discussed or attempted to perform in the school playground was the bizarre spoon phenomenon, even though it was happening with increasing regularity, as often as once a week - and was seemingly coming under his control. Bending spoons was still highly unreliable for him, and to attempt it would be to risk losing the considerable status he had gained with his apparent power over watch movements. But the spoon bending had nevertheless begun to extend beyond the confines of 13 Betzalel Yaffe. Margaret’s main pastime was drinking coffee and eating cake with her girlfriends. Uri would often go along with her, but alarming things would happen when he did. He would be quietly eating a piece of cake when spoons on the cafe table would start curling up. The waiters would quickly whisk them away, not wanting to give the impression the cafe used bent spoons - or indeed attracted naughty little boys as customers. Margaret would try to explain to her friends and the staff that such things sometimes happened when Uri was around, but the feeling that the handsome little Geller child was merely mischievous tended to prevail, albeit unspoken, and he just felt awkward and uncomfortable, as he could not explain what was happening.

Little boys are, of course, notoriously prone to embarrassment, and Uri’s feelings of the time do not necessarily mean that his qualities were not appreciated. One of Margaret’s Hungarian card-playing cronies was a younger woman, Shoshana Korn, who was at that time working in a hotel in Tel Aviv. They two met and became

friends when Margaret - Mancini to her friends - was pregnant with Uri. Shoshana, or Juji as she was known, became Uri's godmother.

'We were in a cafe on the corner of Pinsky and Allenby one day when Uri started to play with the spoons,' Juji recalls. 'He was five or six, and bent four or five coffee spoons double. 'I said, "Mancini, I hope you have plenty of money to pay the cafe owner." Fortunately, the owner was amused. I said, "Uri, you're going to ruin your mother.'" He said, in Hebrew, that it just came to his head how to do this, but his mother wouldn't let him do it in the house. All the other people were amazed. And as well as being able to do these incredible things, Uri was very smart, too. He'd stop clocks and watches, too, but then he'd always start them again. Another friend of ours, Anush, said to Mancini, "You know one day you won't have to work all night, because he's going to make a lot of money." Uri used to spend a lot of time with Anush and her husband, Miklos. I remember her saying you had to hide everything made of metal from Uri, because he'd bend it. Miklos was a handbag maker, and he would sometimes get very angry with Uri because he would bend his tools and the clasps he used. But then she'd say, "I don't know what to do with this Uri. He's a genius."

In spite of the drawbacks of feeling very different from other children because of the troubling powers he seemed to possess, and of sensing that people regarded him as mischievous and naughty (while more often they saw him as an investment), Uri still regards this part of his childhood as pretty happy - an only kid, bright, good-looking, reasonably indulged, if not materially spoiled. His life at this amusing-his-mother's-cronies-in-coffee-shops stage, nonetheless, was on the point of going septic. Psychic or not, Uri probably realised things were going wrong long before his father actually

left the family, and was very likely a less happy little boy than he appeared to be. Perhaps all the strange phenomena which happened around Uri were poltergeist effects, which are said to affect unhappy children in particular; perhaps they still are poltergeist in nature, for much about Uri Geller even as an adult suggests a damaged teenager still affected by Tibor Geller's abandonment of him, still torn between adoring and idealising the man for his strengths and despairing of him for his weaknesses. Few middle-aged men can speak with such power about coming not merely from a broken home, but a *ruined* home.

With the heady background of constant war and the rumblings of the founding of the State of Israel as his mood music, it is, perhaps, hardly surprising that the suave and charming Tank Corps Sergeant Major Geller was unfaithful to Margaret on what may well have been a serial basis, as well as negligent in other areas of family duty. 'Uri's father was very, very handsome, but liked to fool around,' reflects Juji Korn. 'He didn't work too hard, and whatever he made, he didn't give them. That's why Manci had to stay up all night sewing aprons on her machine.'

Uri knew his father was seeing other women, partly because Tibor made the time-honoured and eternally puzzling philanderer's error of trying to engineer meetings between his child and his favourite illicit lover. Perhaps Tibor was trying to legitimise the liaison by seeking Uri's approval of her. He even arranged for one of his lovers to come round to their house to meet him. When she got to the apartment block lobby, instead of walking up and knocking on the door, she was cocky enough to whistle up the stairs for him. The subtle significance of this in Israeli terms cannot be underestimated; it is a tradition in Israel that family members and intimates - but not

mere acquaintances - have a special whistle for one another to say 'I'm home', 'I'm over here,' or whatever. Margaret and Uri, for example had their own agreed whistling routine. Because she could not quite see Uri playing outside from the balcony of the Geller apartment, she whistle down three floors a few bars of the 'Toreador' tune, which he would return.

Even as a child, then, Uri was attuned to what was happening when a strange woman was whistling for his father, and he tried to make a noise so his mother would not hear her. He was only too aware of how hurt Margaret would be by it. On another occasion, Tibor was with Uri and had to make a call from a call box. Uri had never spoken on a telephone before, and was excited when his father let him hold the receiver and speak into it. Yet he realised he was talking to one of Tibor's lovers, he says, became tongue-tied and felt bad about it. It soon got that Uri preferred his father not to come home on leave because he saw the sadness he was causing his mother. The signs of the coming divorce between Tibor and Margaret were obvious even to a child.

'He took me once to a coffee shop on Dizengoff Street, and he looked so meticulous and handsome in his uniform and black beret with a tank on it and the decorations,' Uri recalls. 'I remember walking in front of him and being in the doorway, and everyone eating and chatting, and the clanging of the cutlery on the plates and the spoons stirring coffee. And as my father entered the shop behind me, there was a silence. Everyone froze. I could see it; all the women just stopped, because mostly women would go to have cakes and coffee. They stopped drinking and stopped eating

cake and just looked at him. He had that kind of presence, and looked like a movie star. It was a fatal combination.'

The divorce came, of course, and Tibor eventually married another woman, Eva, with whom he stayed and whom Uri respects and kept in contact with. But he does not blame Eva for the break up of his parents' marriage. For that, he holds responsible firstly his father - 'I blame him totally,' Uri still says - and another woman called Trudi. 'That was the woman who actually tarnished and ruined my mother's life. There were others, many others, but it was Trudi who chased my father. She was obsessively in love with him and she managed to destroy the marriage.'

The break up is still a subject Uri and his mother discuss from time to time. 'My mother revealed something really touching when she was well into her eighties. She said, "You know Uri, I really now understand why your father didn't love me. I was always heavy. I was never thin, I was never attractive. I was very beautiful, I was gorgeous, I had a beautiful face and beautiful hair, but there were women around with great bodies."

'It's was so sad to hear my mother saying that. After 60 years, she realises. She sees all these TV shows like Oprah Winfrey, and all the debates about fat and thin, and how society dictates certain ideas about how men see women. And she finally understands, practically forgives him. She hated my dad, and she tried to incite me against him, and what he did to her. She never went into detail but I knew everything. And sadly, she went on to have really bad luck with men. Her second husband died. He had had a first heart attack, but he actually had the heart attack which he died of

on my mother, making love to her. No wonder my mother never got married after that, and abstained from sex and never wanted to hear about men again. It was a double whammy on her. First my father cheating on her because she'd put on a few pounds, and then finally finding someone in her life and he dies on her.'

The final disintegration of the Gellers' marriage ended Uri's days as a Tel Aviv street kid. After a short while struggling as head of a one parent family, Margaret realised she no longer had the strength nor the resources to be a full-time worker and a mother. Although he recognised the marriage had become pointless, Uri had not taken the break-up passively. On occasion, especially when Tibor raised the question of sending Uri to see a psychiatrist over the strange happenings, Uri would become petulant and ask why he and his mother didn't see the psychiatrist instead.

Uri's behaviour at school too had beginning to deteriorate in distinctly non-paranormal ways even before the couple formally split up. One day, his teacher asked the class to bring in from home a Torah scroll, a miniature copy of the holy Jewish *Sefer Torah*, which most households in Israel tended to own. The Gellers, who were not remotely religious, did not have one, so Uri went to school the following morning empty-handed. He was immediately jealous of the other children, all of whom seemed to have a beautiful scroll. At recess, the children were told to put their scrolls under the desk. During the break, Uri sneaked into the classroom and stole an expensive white-covered scroll from under someone's desk. It was hardly the crime of the century in terms of skill, and Uri watched terrified from the balcony of his apartment as the teacher knocked on the front door of the block that afternoon. In a panic, as she walked up the stairs, he tore the scroll to shreds and threw it in the waste paper bin. It

was obvious that he was the only suspect in the theft, and to make matters worse, Uri's father happened to be home that day. He would never forget the way his father looked when he learned that Uri had stolen a Torah, and turned it into a double crime by then destroying it. 'My father was never mean or vicious, but he whipped me that day. He took me into the bathroom and really whipped me.'

It got worse for Uri too. There was a girl in his class called Naomi, whom secretly loved and used to go to the cinema with to watch Tarzan movies; she refused to speak to him any more. The other children ostracised him as well. He would spend hours with just Tzuki Mark 2 for comfort. He was quite pleased when he was told that there were to be some new arrangements for him. It was decided that the safest, most stable home for Uri would be in the country, on a kibbutz, a communal farm. Margaret discovered that a kibbutz called Hatzor, far to the south of Tel Aviv near Ashdod, specialised in taking in children from broken homes in the big city. Here, for a small fee, but in reality for purely philanthropic reasons, they would be lovingly looked after within a settled, nuclear family, perhaps start to mend psychologically, and maybe even develop a taste for the simple, healthy country lifestyle. There was even a Hungarian Jewish family, the Shomrons, ready and delighted to take in the little boy from 13, Betzalel Yaffe. Uri was packed off to the country just before he was ten, in 1956.

Kibbutz Hatzor was beautiful and quiet, a Garden of Eden in comparison with the ferment of the streets of downtown Tel Aviv. But Uri Geller hated it. He missed home, missed his dog, and hated the kibbutz way of sharing everything; kibbutzim were run on firmly communistic lines in the fifties, which took some understanding

for a city child. ‘You have to understand,’ says Nurit, the elder sister of the Shomron family, who still lives on Hatzor, ‘For these children, it was like a punishment. *They* would feel guilty for, as they saw it, breaking up the family. Uri once said on TV that the kibbutz he stayed on was a terrible place. But then in the next sentence, he said, “My family loved me very much.” And we did.’

The kibbutz was a few kilometres back from the sea, overlooking the port of Ashdod and only a few hundred metres from a busy Israeli Air Force base. It is not even set in particularly spectacular countryside, but in flat, hot fields, with industrial installations and pylons close by. But Nurit’s mother, Tova, one of the founders of the community, had insisted from the start on planting beautiful gardens to counterbalance the functionality of the kibbutz, whose industries were cotton growing and aluminium smelting, and the occasional noise from the airbase, as heavy freighters and fighter aircraft took off and landed. Thanks to Tova’s determination to beautify the kibbutz, it was soon an overwhelmingly peaceful little paradise of pines, flowers and lawns. Yet a few years before Uri’s arrival, it had not been so tranquil. Within days of Israel’s independence in 1948, the advancing Egyptian army, set on destroying the new state, had come within a few hundred metres of Hatzor, and ferocious land and air battles were fought around Tova’s gardens before the invaders were beaten back.

Ironically, considering it was Tibor who had visited chaos upon the family, the location of Hatzor was more convenient to him than to anyone else. Not only was he stationed at an army base just 20 km away, but he had the use of military vehicles to come to see Uri. For Margaret, Hatzor was an hour and two buses away - if rural

bus tricky connections worked - but she still came regularly. Sadly for Margaret, she sensed that it was Tibor's visits which seemed to leave the greater impression on Uri. He would always come bearing some interesting military item for Uri, and things seemed a little happier between father and son. One such visit in particular forms one of his outstanding childhood memories. 'Just after the Suez war, which we could hear from the kibbutz, and I was very scared about, he had phoned to say he was coming, and I was waiting for him all day. I stood in the entrance to the kibbutz and eventually, from far away, I saw of a puff of dust, and that was his Jeep. He was unshaven and dusty and he had his gun on him. He looked like he had come from war, and I was so proud. He was safe, and it was so unbelievable that he came straight from the fighting.'

Margaret's visits were more awkward for Uri. She would always come smartly dressed and wearing lipstick, which the other children would laugh at. Beneath the surface of friendliness and the socialist ethic there existed quite a strong prejudice against the city children, the *ironim*, which made a homesick Uri still more miserable. There were certainly compensations in the kibbutz life. The kibbutz schooling was much easier and less strict than in the city. The kibbutz aluminium smelter had a yard filled with old aeroplanes, some of them military, there to be broken up. It provided an incomparable playground for any child with imagination. The little bit of farm work the children were required to do, such as orange picking, was pleasant enough. The food in the large communal dining hall was excellent and you could eat as much as you wanted, something Uri, quite a chubby boy, appreciated. Hatzor also had a huge outdoor swimming pool, and a children's petting zoo with rabbits, chickens, goats, peacocks and a donkey. For Uri, a virtually private zoo was a wonderful oasis.

He would still go out at night, however, to look at the moon and think how the same moon was shining over Tel Aviv, and that perhaps his mother was looking at it.

Like a lot of town dwellers transplanted to the country before him, Uri was also a little horrified by the occasional violence of rural life. ‘I had a bad fright once. We were picking potatoes, and I was pulling out what I thought was the stem of the plant, but I was actually holding a snake, which was curled around the plant. It was a bad shock suddenly to be holding this sleek, slimy living snake in my hand. There was a tractor nearby and I dropped the snake and shouted “Snake”, and everyone was looking at it wiggle away. Then the guy on the tractor rolled over and cut its head off with a plough, and I really felt sorry and angry. I was sorry that I had made a live thing die because I alerted everyone that there was a snake.’

Uri lived, in the kibbutz manner, in a one-storey children’s house which was attached to his schoolroom. His contact with his ‘second family’ as the host families on Hatzor were called, was therefore relatively limited. But he rapidly became fond of the Shomrons, and they with him. ‘My memory is mixed with what my mother told me about him, but I do remember him being a very beautiful child, with a lot of imagination,’ says Nurit. ‘Tibor, I remember as tall and charming, always in uniform. He was about 40, which seemed old in my eyes. According to Uri’s stories, he was a hero, but people used to gossip, as a reaction, I think, to the wonderful things Uri told about him, that he was just in the administrative part of the army.’

‘His father used to buy him a lot of sweets, and Uri was naturally supposed to share everything with Eytan, my brother, who was Uri’s age. But Uri would hide his secret

little box of sweets and refuse to share. Yet for me, that was understandable. It was all the love he got. He could go to that box and feel the love of his parents, which he missed so much. His mother, particularly, was lost after the break up of the family.'

Tova Shomron was the one, as Nurit puts it, who was in charge of emotions in the family, and she gave a very good impression of loving Uri like a son, even though whatever she gave him, it inevitably couldn't be enough. 'I think it was Eytan, the middle child, who felt deprived. but instead of getting angry with his parents for allowing Uri to join the family, he would get mad with Uri,' Nurit explains.

Even if he did resent Uri Geller, Eytan Shomron became his close friend, which was a big thing for Uri, because he was not enormously popular among the other children. In the way simple, unsophisticated people will, the run-of-the-mill kibbutz children scoffed at Uri's imaginative stories and called him a liar. Eytan was a little different, a little more sophisticated himself. Today, he is a melon farmer in the Negev desert, but also a great expert on - and friend of - the Bedouin Arabs. Eytan runs desert tours for tourists with an academic interest in the ancient, vanished Nabatean civilisation. Back on Kibbutz Hatzor, when he was ten, even if he secretly half-hoped Uri's stories of the big world, the sophistication and the miracles of Tel Aviv, and his tales of his father's acts of heroism, were untrue, he also hung on every word.

'We were good friends,' Eytan says. 'I don't remember there being any tension or problem with sharing my parents' attention with him. In a small community, on a kibbutz, it's not easy to be friends with someone who is not like everybody, who is exceptional, and Uri was exceptional. He came from the outside, and then became an

outsider. He got this name for being a liar, but it's unfair. I can't put a finger on him ever lying.

In later life, too, critics of Geller would deride him with non-specific allegations of lying, while friends would maintain that he never lies. Another point of contention Geller's detractors would find endlessly amusing - not to mention highly instructive - would be his insistence that his psychic powers refuse to work unless those around him are friendly, if not actual 'believers'. Kibbutz Hatzor was the first place where Uri had found himself among rather unsympathetic people who were somewhat averse to him personally, strongly averse to anything other than the black-and-white, here-and-now - and positively against anything which smacked of religion, of unexplained, the paranormal or the supernatural. As a result, perhaps of the bad vibes, or perhaps of Uri's instinctive sense that he was not going to find a receptive audience amongst these people - he puts it down simply to the fact that he was depressed and unhappy - nothing 'strange' happened to him or around during his entire year on the kibbutz.

Well, almost nothing. There were odd incidents, which ensured that the rumour of the Geller boy's psychic powers was not entirely unknown on the kibbutz, even if they were not given much credence at the time, and tended to be elaborated upon by others only after Uri Geller became world famous. A story went around, for example, that he accurately predicted an air crash at the neighbouring base a few hours before it happened. 'My brother Ilan remembers Uri telling him that an aeroplane was going to crash tomorrow, and it did,' says Eytan. Uri, curiously, remembers saying in class one afternoon only that he thought 'something' terrible was going to happen, not that it

was a crash at the airbase just beyond the wheat fields. ‘I suddenly something very powerful in me, almost like a feeling of running out of the classroom. A very short time afterwards, we heard this huge bang. We all ran out of the studying bungalow and across the cornfields we saw smoke and we all started running towards this jet on the end of the runway embedded in the ground and the pilot inside with blood all over his face. It was quite something, the first time in my life that I encountered someone dead or dying. Actually, he survived and months later, he came over to see us and tell us about it.’

As for spoon bending and interfering with watches, Uri did very little on the kibbutz, and certainly nothing at all for his closest friend, Eytan, who only saw Uri bend a spoon for the first time some 40 years later. When he did finally see the spoon bending, Shomron was probably more astonished by it that he would have been as a child. It is almost as if Uri sensed even as a child that if he left it for a few years, he would eventually have a far greater impact on someone he was really keen to impress. The result is that in his fifties, Eytan became a firm believer in Uri’s powers. At the time, however, the whole idea left him cold. Many years after Uri left Hatzor, and was beginning his stage career, Nurit and Eytan noticed that he was performing one night in a nearby village. A group of the kibbutzniks trooped along to see the show, but Nurit and Eytan didn’t bother. As fond as they were of Uri, they didn’t believe the stories of his powers, and were not interested in magicians’ shows.

At least one former kibbutz child, however, has a very vivid memory of Uri giving him a brief preview or glimpse of what he was capable of. Avi Seton, a year younger and now a management consultant in Portland, Oregon, was walking with Uri from

the dining hall to the swimming pool one day when Uri suddenly said to him, ‘Hey, look what I can do.’

‘Uri took off his watch and held it, and the hands just moved without him doing anything. I’m not sure if he was sophisticated enough at ten years old for some kind of sleight of hand to be involved. and I clearly saw them move. For some reason, I got the feeling then and now that it wasn’t something he could really *do*, but rather something that was *happening* to him. But the funny thing was that all I said when I saw this was, “Hey, so what.” I think it was always going to be like that for him when he showed these things to kids. “Hey, that’s good, but you want to see how high I can jump.’ Why should Uri have chosen Avi to show him his secret ability? There are two possible reasons. The first was that Avi was reasonably friendly with Uri, and had once actually rescued him from a probable drowning when they went swimming together in a rough sea. The second, although it is hard to know how Uri could have appreciated this other than by some over-developed childhood instinct, was that at ten, Avi was already somewhat more open-minded than the average kibbutz kid towards the new and the unexplained. Which was why, although he has never seen Uri bend a spoon or do anything else out of the ordinary, he still feels at 51 quite sure that what Uri showed him was an example of a true psychic gift rather than a rehearsed trick.

Eytan Shomron believes all the time they were together back in the mid fifties, Uri was desperate to try to give his friend some indication that there was more to him than he had revealed. ‘I remember once walking on a dirt road in a field of wheat when Uri asked me, if I had the ability to know where the snakes are hidden in the grass, would it make me feel better. There were a lot of snakes, and they were extremely

frightening, but I said, “No, I wouldn’t want to know.” It was such a strange question. Years later, I thought it was an attempt to hint at what he could do, to signal to me that he was sitting on a secret. I think Uri Geller lived in two worlds. He tried to share his imagination with people, but they couldn’t accept it.’

Chapter 3 / Cyprus

'I wanted to share the secret of the powers with someone I didn't know too well'

(Uri Geller, on his thinking aged 15)

One morning on the kibbutz, Margaret Geller arrived in her usual Sunday best (or Saturday best, this being Israel) for one of her slightly embarrassing visits. She was accompanied by a strange man Uri had never seen before. Heavily built and in his fifties, Ladislav Gero was another Hungarian Jew, a former concert pianist, who some years previously, with his wife had formed a cabaret team and gone on tour to Cyprus. The couple had liked the lively, cosmopolitan island and had the idea of opening a small hotel there, which, now widowed, he now ran on his own. The notable thing about Ladislav Gero for the children of Kibbutz Hatzor was that he was wearing a tie, something many of them had never seen before. 'What is that cloth hanging around his neck?' they demanded. It is not inconceivable that the older ones were being disingenuous - a cocky, kibbutznik way of demonstrating how different and inherently superior was their rural, communistic lifestyle to the fast and fancy ways of the city. What was notable about Ladislav Gero to Uri Geller, aged 11, was not his necktie -

Uri was perfectly familiar with those, being a big city kid stuck in the country - but that his mother had fallen in love with the man, planned to marry him, to move to Cyprus and to take Uri to live there too.

For Uri, the plan immediately appealed, because it solved two problems at once, as well as opening some extremely important doors which he did not yet know were ajar. For the moment, he was delighted to see his mother happy for the first time, as well as to have an escape route from the kibbutz for himself. Not only did Ladislas seem a decent enough fellow, if perhaps a little dull compared to Uri's father, but he was also rather well off. The chance of end to poverty seemed to have arrived with Ladislas Gero, something Uri fully appreciated.

What the boy could not know was that the fluke of moving to Cyprus would entail him learning English in addition to the Hebrew and Hungarian he already spoke - and that having fluent, instinctive English would many years later be his open sesame to taking his powers to an international audience. By the end of his teenage years, he was even thinking in English. Because Cyprus was a British colony, he would also start to build up a great affinity with Britain, which would be an increasingly important part of his life. His early memories of his father were of him in British uniform, and now he would get used to seeing the Queen on stamps and banknotes and the Union flag flying. They all left a stirring impression on him.

The move to Cyprus would also benefit Uri in regard to his unusual abilities. At this stage, he was still uncertain whether his powers were an asset or an embarrassment. They were, he felt, too transient to rely on, failing as they did to be at his command at

absolutely all times. His depression on the kibbutz, for example, had seemingly caused them to disappear, or at least put him in a frame of mind where he was unwilling to summon them up. Furthermore, he continued, as he still does, to insist he had no idea where the powers came from or how he produced them, and this inexplicable quality troubled him at quite a deep level. And even when he could make strange things happen, as he hinted he could do to his friend Eytan, and briefly succeeded with Avi, there was always the problem that children would either fail to see what was special - or, if they were more sophisticated, shrug and say it was a trick without really having the critical facility to be sure what it was. Uri needed an adult independent of his family to see what he could do, to believe it and to reassure him that he was not a freak. At Terra Santa College, a strict Catholic boarding school on a hill high above Cyprus's capital, Nicosia, he would find several such adults - as well as several children who worked out without his specifically having shown them anything that Uri Geller was a most unusual boy.

Establishing through third, preferably unrelated, parties that Geller had special abilities as a child, be they of a conjuring or a psychic nature, is crucially important in unravelling Uri Geller's life story. His major critics would one day assert widely and confidently in gossip, in articles, in interviews with journalists, in books and eventually on the Internet, that Geller's powers mysteriously manifested only in his early twenties, after he happened upon a magicians' manual with a teenaged friend, and the two together sensed the makings of a wonderful scam.

Since this assertion is so boldly made, indeed, is the one of the first precepts of Uri Geller's detractors, if it can be shown to be untrue, the process of at least *re-assessing*

Geller, if not necessarily accepting him as a psychic, would clearly have to have begun. It is indisputable that evidence of peculiar abilities from Uri's early childhood days in Israel is a little hazy; witnesses were either too young to rely on, or related to Uri and hence bound (perhaps) to support him, or the accounts come from Uri himself. And while many of these latter pieces of testimony are often very interesting, and give a compelling appearance of being honest, a single corroborative witness has to be worth ten George Washingtons. In Uri Geller's Cyprus period, from 1957 to 1963 - which took him from the age of 11 to 18 - we begin to encounter such strong indications that he was a fully formed psychic, magician or *something*, long before his critics believe. Cyprus was also, inevitably, the scene for other major influences to come into his life. One of these was sex, the other, showbusiness. No wonder Geller looks upon his years in Cyprus as the time of his life.

It was Tibor, relieved, no doubt, that his ex-wife had found a new life, who drove Margaret and Uri to the docks at Haifa to board the ship to Larnaca, Cyprus. Behind Uri already was a traumatic parting with Tzuki the dog, who was sent to live with a friend of the Gellers who lived on a farm. Uri kissed and hugged the dog and cried as he left him. In front of him were worries about how he would get on with his new stepfather, Ladislav, and how he would survive in a country where Hebrew wasn't spoken. But Margaret told Uri that her new husband had already bought a dog for him, and Tibor assured his son that he would be able to visit him back in Israel, so by the time the Italian ship sailed out of Haifa, he was more excited than scared. At customs in Larnaca, a real surprise was awaiting Uri - a new name. 'The officer looked at my name Uri, and he said Uri in Russian is Yuri, and that is actually

George. So on the spot, they wrote down George and that was my name at school for the next seven years.’

It was not necessary to be psychic for even an 11 year-old to realise immediately that Cyprus was a deeply divided nation in a state of undeclared war. Margaret explained to Uri as he looked out of the taxi window on the drive to Nicosia that there were Greek and Turkish Cypriots who lived separately in different villages and were routinely involved in atrocities against one another. And although seeing a pervasive military presence was no shock to an Israeli boy, there were an awful lot of British troops around, as well as Americans stationed at their own base. The names and phrases which would be part of the background noise for Uri's stay in Cyprus now sound like part of the faint, scratchy soundtrack of ancient black and white newsreels; *Enosis*, the movement to integrate Cyprus with Greece, Archbishop Makarios, Colonel Grivas, the EOKA terrorist leader, Prime Minister Karamanlis of Greece ... Uri's teenage life would be touched tangentially by all these.

Ladislav's small hotel was a pleasant fourteen bedroom establishment at 12 Pantheon Street in the capital, Nicosia. It bore an ambitious name for a little place: Pension Ritz. Ladislav made sure Uri had quite an arrival at the Ritz. There was not one dog, but two waiting - a wire-haired fox terrier called Joker and a mixed breed terrier named Peter. Joker would be Uri's special companion. A package was also on a table inside for the young lad to open. It contained a blue model Cadillac, which he loved.

Uri was first sent to the American School in Larnaca, where he boarded and was not very happy. Most of his friends were English, and he quickly picked up the language. After a short time, the violence and fighting were bordering on civil war, there were frequent curfews, and Uri was brought back to the hotel for a few weeks. The Ritz catered almost exclusively for touring theatricals temporarily stationed in Nicosia to service its busy nightlife. Singers, musicians, acrobats, jugglers and dancers used the place as their digs, and Uri met and spent time with all of them during the curfews. He says he showed some his spoon bending and watch jumping, and they were duly impressed.

There was in the garage a bicycle which Uri coveted. His stepfather promised he could have it for a barmitzvah present, when he was 13, but Uri couldn't stop looking at it. The bike was immobilised with a heavy combination lock. Thinking about this, Uri wondered whether, since he could manage so many other apparent mind-over-matter feats, he could crack the lock. After a bout of intense concentration, he says he finally got the combination, opened the lock, took the machine out and learned to ride it in the car park. Ladislas was amazed he had unlocked the bike but, taking the path of least resistance, meekly said that Uri might as well have it now. He sees it today as the first practical, selfish use he had managed to put his powers to. (Uri's barmitzvah in 1959, incidentally, was a low key affair, held, in lieu of a synagogue, at the Israeli consulate in Nicosia. A Jewish friend called Peter was barmitzvah at the same time. With the bike already firmly in his possession, Uri received as presents several books and a leather pencil case, which he treasured.)

The bicycle, combined with Margaret and Ladislas' fairly *laissez-faire* attitude to bringing up Uri at this stage, opened up Cyprus to Uri. With his bike and the rickety local buses to Limassol, the Troodos mountains, Famagusta and Kyrenia, the island was a paradise to him. With one of the world's major political crises going on around him, and the frequent grim scenes of violence which that obliged him to witness, he nevertheless managed to enjoy a glorious, free, independent teenage of scuba diving on lonely beaches, cycling in the mountains, messing around in junk yards and with motor scooters, and, as he got older, of chasing girls 'I occupied myself with the things I loved, like my dog, Joker, but while I was doing that the war was going on,' Uri says now. 'So I somehow carved myself a path and a system, maybe to build some kind of entertainment into my life that would shield me from the death and the destruction that was going on around us.'

Unlike the American School, Terra Santa College was in a safe part of Cyprus, high in the hills a few miles from Nicosia. But it was not in any respect somewhere Uri might have been expected to be as happy as he was. It was very strict, was run by monks, had fairly primitive facilities and provided education of highly demanding, 1950s English standards, which came as a shock to many of the pupils, especially the few Americans. Yet Uri was content there almost from the start. One of the first things he noticed up at Terra Santa, and which he unaccountably warmed to, was that the pretty gardens at the modern school building's entrance were cut in the shape of crucifixes. The school had no other Jewish pupils, something which might have made him feel lonely, were it not for one incident.

‘I was there because it was the best school in Nicosia, but one incident melted any fear I had away. One day, Father Camillo, who was the headmaster, called me into his office and he locked the door. He said, “Come close,” and I didn’t know what he was about to do to me. Suddenly, he started unbuttoning his collar, and then he pulled out a bunch of little trinkets on a gold chain, a cross and so on. But among them was a little star of David. He said, “Look at what I am wearing Don’t be afraid of Christianity”. He wanted me to be absolutely clear that he loved and respected the Jewish people. And that was it for me. All the barriers that had built up between Judaism and Christianity disappeared, vapourised, and I realised there were no real religions, there was only one God and that was the God I believed in. I knew I was going to be fine at the school. And years later, when I went back to Cyprus, I heard from one of the fathers that before he died, Camillo said his family back in Sardinia had Jewish origins.’

Uri made up for lost time, almost instantly regaining the popularity he enjoyed pre the disastrous Torah-stealing incident back at Ahad Ha’am School in Israel. But, just as at school and on the kibbutz, Uri was distinctly wary about what he did in the paranormal line - and whom for. A consistent characteristic of Geller begins to emerge even this early in his life; he seems to show different people quite different versions of his abilities. Leaving aside for the moment enemies and those who are intellectually opposed to what he does, who if they see him perform anything can always satisfy themselves it is a conjuring trick, even his friends report widely differing personal experiences of him. Some friends, like Eytan Shomron, will happily wait 40 years after first meeting Uri to see him bend a spoon, and then find themselves amazed and shocked by the experience; others will be shown things to

astonish them the first time Uri meets them; others still will be his friend for decades without ever seeing him perform anything remarkable, even if they want to; another group of friends will make a point of never wanting to see him do anything paranormal, often explaining that they like him as a man with or without paranormal powers, and are worried that they might feel they have detected fraud if they see him perform, and that this would lessen their respect for him.

One of Geller's closest schoolfriends in Cyprus was a chubby Armenian boy, Ardash Melemendjian, who enjoyed dual renown at Terra Santa as a mechanical genius and a sexual prodigy. 'I was one for anything on wheels and anything in a skirt', he jokes. Melemendjian now lives near York, in northern England, where he works as a general repairman, is a prominent Freemason, is married to Janet, a local guide leader, and speaks in a broad adopted Yorkshire accent with an Armenian twang. He is also an amateur rally driver, having worked for the Czech Skoda car company for many years as a technical rep - he it was who undertook the considerable technical challenge of preparing Skoda's first successful rally car. Although he has not personally seen Geller since they were young, they remain in contact by phone. What surprises most about Melemendjian is that he has only ever seen his old pal bend a spoon on television. And yet he is perfectly satisfied, even as a supremely practical and rational engineer by trade, that what he sees is genuine. 'I have no doubts. I don't have to see it in real life, because of what I experienced with him at school,' he says.

'A lot of people will ask me if there is any trickery to it and I say, "You believe what you want to believe. I think it's genuine. I know it's genuine, but I can't explain

how he does it because I don't know." It must be some sort of mental power that the rest of us are unable to exercise because we don't know these things.'

'George Geller,' Melemendjian continues, 'Would have been about 12-ish when I met him. What was my first impression? That you knew him the instant you met him. It was some sort of magic that you couldn't explain with this fella. You couldn't help but like him and get on with him. He had this grace of making things nice, and people liked being with him. You'd never wrong him in any way, or do anything against him. Uri Geller was the ringleader, if you like. He got people gelling together, and when you made friends you made friends for ever.'

'And, yes, certain little things happened. The college was built in an area they called the Acropolis, all stone quarries and caves. We used to go down to these caves, Uri and several other kids. They were quite dangerous, and we were told at school that some boys had got lost and died down there once. But we'd pinch the school toilet rolls, put a stick through them and use them as a thread. Then we'd put old bicycle tyres on sticks and light them as torches. But you'd run out of toilet paper. One time on our return from the deepest caves we got badly lost. We were faced with three ways to go in the pitch black. Someone started to say something and suddenly Uri said "Shhh," and everyone hushed. He thought for a minute and then say, "This way!" and we went straight on or to the left, whichever the case was, and then we walked a long way before anything happened. But suddenly, we saw a little circle of light, and it got bigger and bigger, and that was the exit. I'm sure the rest of us would have chosen another way. I don't how he did it.'

‘There were other oddities which when you put them together, even back then, just made you wonder what *was* this guy,’ Melemendjian continues. ‘He never once got a puncture on his bike, and yet we used to ride through the same fields, the same thorn hedges. I’d get them all the time, and end up sat on the back of his bike, holding my bike while he was peddling. We’d go to the cinema to see X-rated films. I’d go to buy my ticket and get told, “No you’re too young - out.” He’d go to buy his ticket - and would be perfectly all right for him even though we are the same age and looked it.’

‘Another thing that we used to take for granted, never give a second thought to - he never revised for anything. You’d find him sat down with a text book that we were supposed to be studying and he’d have a comic inside it. But when it came to overall results at the end of the term, you could bet your boots that he’d be top. I’m not very good at maths, and we were doing an algebra exam. In one question, I kept getting this astronomical figure that I know I shouldn’t. Uri was sat next to me and said, “Just copy me.” I said, “What if Archie sees me?” Because Archie, one of the masters, used to throw whatever came to his hand, whether it was a piece of chalk or the rubber for the blackboard or a book and every time it was bullseye. I didn’t like being hit by missiles in classroom. But Uri said, “No, if he is going to see you, I’ll give you a kick on your shin sideways with my foot.” So I was looking at his paperwork and copying down what he wrote in a slightly different way so that the teacher wouldn’t cotton on that I was cheating. At the time I never thought anything about it, but years later, I started wondering how did he know to kick me if Archie is going to look? He would have had to have some sort of premonition. But he wouldn’t tell me that’s how he was operating, and I wouldn’t know because we never thought of these powers that he has.’

‘Him and basketball was yet another thing. All right, he is tall, but basketball teams would always want him on their side. A group of fellas made two groups to play basketball, and whichever side Uri was on, the other side would say, “No, that’s unfair, you’ve got him. Every time he touches that ball, it goes through the net.” Yet he wasn’t a keen basket ball player. He played it as and when, whenever it was there. He didn’t practise to be good at it or anything.’ (Uri maintains that he was able psychokinetically to edge the ball into the net. A Greek boy of Uri’s time Andreas Christodoulou, who is still in Nicosia and works as a heating contractor at Terra Santa, confirms this, and adds that in his memory, Uri could also move the hoop to help it meet the ball. ‘He would definitely move the the hoop in a way,’ Andrea says. ‘It looked as if it was vibrating without anybodyt at all touching it. You could see it move, I believe, a couple of inches when George was shooting at it.’)

Uri also became famous, Ardash recalls, as a storyteller. ‘Mrs Agrotis, our English teacher, would get him to stand up and speak for ages, and he would make stories up on the spot. A war story, a ghost story, anything. And I would be thinking, wow, this is better than reading a book..’ But as for metal bending and interfering with clocks, Melemendjian has no memory of Uri doing either: ‘If he had those qualities at school then he never showed to me. I think he probably didn’t because people would start getting dubious about him. Imagine two 12 year-old kids and one rubs a spoon and breaks it in half. What does the other one think? That there’s something wrong with him. As it was, everything he did, we all took in our stride. It was only later on when you think about it, that you think how *did* he do that? Like this being ace in school, like finding his way out of the cave, like never getting a puncture, like the odd thing in the algebra exam ... it’s too much for one fella.’

‘The only one time I impressed him,’ concludes Ardash Melemendjian, ‘Was when there was a particular type of speedometer I wanted on this armoured car we used to pass in a scrapyard. I could see it from the fence, but inside the compound there were two alsatians, one of them a real mean junkyard dog. So started saving my sandwiches, and when I went past every afternoon, I would throw them over the fence. The dog would eat the brown paper bag, the sandwich, the tin foil - gone. This went on for three or four days and after that the dog would look at me going past at that time of the day and instead of snarling, the tail would waggle. I gained confidence. Then I’d pet the dog through the wire mesh, and finally I took enough sandwiches that the dog would take a few minutes to eat. And while he was at it, I jumped over the fence, stole the instrument and jumped back again. Uri stood there watching me, leant up against his bike. He just shook his head, astounded. “I would have never done that,” he said.

Bob Brooks, now a criminal attorney in Los Angeles, gives a similar account of a charismatic, even if not necessarily psychic, young Geller. Brooks had come to Cyprus with his mother and stepfather, who was an entrepreneur. His stepfather had cut a deal with Brooks; if he stayed at the college a week, then he would have the option whether to stay on, or to try somewhere else. ‘My first memory of Uri or George Geller was of him saving my life,’ Brooks says. ‘After crying for two solid days and being utterly miserable when I came as an immature 12 year-old from Sherman Oaks, California into this physically very harsh regime with its Arabic toilets and intimidating six-days-a-week British public school traditions, Uri befriended me. He was much older, at 14, and was nice and friendly and interested in me. And it worked. I liked him instantly. He invited me to his house, and all of a sudden, life was fun. Uri was the class monitor, who sat at the back and was held

responsible for us. But he succeeded by strength of personality rather than bullying. He was taller and older than most of us, which helped.'

Again, through Brooks, we hear of an unusually popular boy, with an amazing imagination, of adventures in the caves, of going to the Pension Ritz to meet Uri's mother, of encountering Joker the dog . But of paranormal events, pretty well nothing; Brooks is yet another illustration of the strange way in which different people have perceived Geller. It is almost as if Bob Brooks was at school with a different Uri Geller from Ardash Melemendjian. 'I do remember him complaining that watches would always stop on him,' Brooks says. 'One time he just nonchalantly took his watch off and said, "That's another one that's quit on me."' But of metal bending, Brooks shakes his head: 'I can't say I saw anything like that, no.' and of Geller's basketball prowess? 'Sure, I remember him shooting hoops, but not bending anything.'

And here, another consistent element in Geller's story forms out of the mist. Bob Brooks, while being delighted to confirm his great and continuing affection for Uri, is by no means an acolyte or a total believer. A lawyer with the sceptical view of the human condition which that profession can encompass, he cheerily refers to his late stepfather as 'a conman, basically' and keeps a book on conmen on the living room shelves of his California home. He couldn't help recalling, as he watched Uri's career develop in subsequent years, his friend's affinity with the showbusiness people who stayed at the Pension Ritz. Yet, no, he is anxious to emphasise, he does *not* think Geller is a conman; 'I'm not saying what he does is magic to my mind,' he says. But neither is he keen to commit himself to a view of Geller as an out-and-out

paranormalist. It is probably fair to interpolate that Brooks still does not know what his friend is.

‘Uri visited me at the office in the early seventies and bent a spoon for me at that time, which was witnessed by four other co-workers,’ Brooks says. ‘Then he visited my home this past winter and bent a spoon for my daughter. This was done in our kitchen, near the washing machine - Uri said being near metal helped him - in front of Samantha, Linda and myself. The way he did it appeared to be without any obvious use of force and without any attempt at sleight of hand. If it was a trick, it’s the best one I have ever seen executed. Frankly, I’m still amazed by how he did this. All of this stuff is contrary to my understanding of the physical universe and, while I do not wish to dismiss it all as merely a trick, I cannot find any other acceptable explanation.’

Given these perspectives from two of Geller's closest adolescent schoolfriends, it is not hard to guess which of the two Uri has kept more closely in touch with. It has to be Ardash rather than Bob. Not so; it is Bob Brooks whom Geller has remained closer to, to whom he wrote frequently throughout his twenties and thirties, whose home he has visited, whom he goes out to dinner with when he is in LA. And Geller admits he has a tendency to cleave to people who don’t *quite* believe in him. ‘It’s often those people I feel close to,’ he says. ‘The ones I feel I have yet to convince, and would dearly love to but can’t. I don’t really know why that is.’

The thoroughly convinced Ardash, meanwhile, has had to resort to some fairly irregular methods over the years to keep up contact with Uri. ‘About eight years ago I

saw a newspaper spread about him, and he hadn't rung or written in a long time, so I thought I am going to test your powers, mate. And I got the paper with his picture in front of me, his eyes looking at me, and I stared for about five minutes and said, "If you've got anything about you, you get in touch with me." The following evening, I get a phonecall. "What's the matter? What do you want me for?" It was Uri I said, 'Nothing's the matter, I just want to say hello.'

Joy Philipou, a teacher at Terra Santa, had no contact at all with Uri for 40 years, until she wrote to him recently after seeing a newspaper article on him. Yet Mrs Philipou, now in retirement in the London suburbs, is as strong an independent witness for Geller's early psychic prowess as could be found, someone whose account would have to provide a powerful dissenting note, to say the least, in any sceptical assessment of Geller - if anyone researching such an assessment had troubled to find her.

'Uri was one of 30 children in my form,' Mrs Philipou recounts. 'He stood out. You can't have gifts like that and remain anonymous. As he was a child he used this thing he had for pranks, for fun. For example, he did this clock moving thing, not just on me but on other teachers as well. But for me, it took a long, long time before I put two and two together and realised that it was him that was doing it. I wasn't into the supernatural or anything like that, and I couldn't make out what it was. But whenever it was my turn to ring the 12 o'clock bell, I would have Uri fidgeting in the class, wanting to get out for lunch. The clock was behind me, an electric wall clock, about a foot in diameter. The class was in front of me, Uri sitting among them and he would be looking at the clock.. I would check with my watch to make sure it was 12 o'clock,

and it said the same. But as soon as I got into the staff room, they would say, “Why have you rung 20 minutes early?” I would say, “It can’t be, look, my watch says 12 o’clock. But all theirs would be a quarter of an hour earlier than mine. It wasn’t until I began to hear stories from other teachers that I began to find that Uri had something to do with this. One teacher had made him stay half an hour after every one else. She said, “You won’t go home until the clock says 4.30. So he started to get up and leave, and she said, ‘What are you doing? I told you 4.30.’” And he said, “But it is 4.30,” and she looked at the clock, and it was.

‘He also became famous because of his basketball playing. He *guided* the ball. He could shoot from almost anywhere. It never, ever missed the basket. Now that is a feat for an 11 year old. From one end of the court to another, over and over again. I thought it must be my imagination, but several people began to talk about it. Then I realised that this child really did have some peculiar power, particularly during matches which it was important to win. Suppose he would shoot and his aim wasn’t quite 100%, and the ball was just about 2 inches from the basket. He would definitely *do* something. We all saw the ball sway when there was no-one near it, or sometimes the post would sway a few inches to the left or the right, whichever way he wanted it for the ball to go in. In truth, it was really scary. There’s be a great deal of talk and argument. People would say, “Ah, no, it’s just a fluke, someone must have pushed it.” But then you’d see it happen over and over again. We had very little contact with Father Camillo in the staffroom. We mostly dealt with Father Kevin Mooney, who was head of the British section, and when we mentioned this extraordinary George, he brushed it aside somehow. It was difficult to convince him that something

supernatural was going on. But most of us could see what he was doing wasn't sleight of hand, and that this child had something extraordinary.'

It is clear from Mrs Philipou's recollection that it was the adults at Terra Santa who were more struck by the unconventional nature of Uri's apparent powers than the children. 'I suppose when something like that happens, children don't necessarily understand it,' she reflects. 'They either make a joke of it, or they start bullying whoever it is. In Uri's case, it was the former. They would laugh at it. It was the children mostly who alerted me to the clock business. In the playground I seemed to see clusters of kids around him, and he would be doing something which they would be going ha ha ha at. But for them, it was a game. They didn't realise that there was anything beyond the ordinary. It was, like, he can jump five metres and I can't. What blew people's mind in the staffroom was this ball business and the clocks moving. But also, he could read other people's thoughts. If they played cards or guessing games, it was impossible to keep it from Uri, simply impossible. They just could not win. If people were planning something that wasn't to his liking, he would know. Of course, the children would say he guessed.'

'As with all exceptional children,' Joy Philipou summarises, 'Some people loved him and others were jealous. But it wasn't like a persecution, as it is now, with everyone saying he is a charlatan, because he had nothing to prove then. He was just being himself. Every day he went to school and something new cropped up, and he just played about. I think he was discovering his own powers, and every time a new situation arose, he experimented with what would happen. Little by little you establish some sort of reputation. He didn't appear to use his powers to make people like him. The gut feeling that Uri brought out in many people was that they felt he did have

something special. If nothing else, there was that intensity in his eyes. He has the same eyes now as he had then. I thought maybe he was going to be a fantastic poet, because along with this intensity, there was an understanding that was far beyond his years. If you are sensitive to Uri's powers, this is a very powerful man.'

The young Mrs Philipou's fascination with Uri was probably exceeded by that of the more senior Julie Agrotis, an English woman in her forties married to a Greek, and who taught English at Terra Santa. By Uri's account, Mrs Agrotis took a more pro-active interest in him, and he grew quite close to her.

Mrs Agrotis's interest was sparked when a story was going round the staffroom that Uri's test papers in maths bore a striking resemblance - mistakes and all - to those of a German boy, Gunther Konig, whom Uri sat behind. Uri says he simply saw Gunther's answers 'on this greyish TV screen in my mind' by looking at the back of the blond boy's head. Uri had first noticed this 'TV screen' during his mother's card games back in Tel Aviv; it continues to be his description of how he senses the conventionally un-seeable and un-knowable. He says images tend to 'draw themselves' on the screen rather than appear in a flash. The teachers, naturally, assumed he was copying by normal means, and made him sit in a far corner for exams, under individual guard. To the teachers' bafflement, the copying continued; whoever was top in a particular subject Uri was weak in would find his answers mirrored in Uri's. Mrs Agrotis was a popular teacher, renowned as a softie who never punished children. She, nevertheless had to do her turn of guarding the habitual exam 'cheat'. It was while she was doing so that Uri forgot himself one day and asked her about some incident in the market in Nicosia which was troubling her from the day

before. She was alarmed, as she happened to be thinking about it at that moment. On another occasion, he says, he saw the word 'doctor' on his screen and for a fleeting moment, saw her in a doctor's surgery. He asked (a little cheekily, one would imagine) if everything had been OK at the doctor's.

Mrs Agrotis and Uri started to have long talks together after class. It was some while before he felt confident enough to do it, but eventually, he showed her how he could bend a key and a spoon, and she was astonished. She did a series of telepathy experiments with him, to what standard of rigorousness we will never know, but they left her baffled and wondering more than any of her colleagues just what made the boy tick. He would confide in her all his secrets, going right back to when he was a toddler and played with bullets, imagining they were spacecraft taking him off to distant stars. He told her about the episode in the Arabic garden, and insisted, with a conviction which she may well have found oddly eerie and disturbing, that he knew instinctively there was life on worlds far beyond our solar system. She would get Uri to retell his space travel stories for the younger children. One of the teachers, Geller recalls, brought in four broken watches one day, which he was able to get ticking by passing his hands over each. Occasionally, when Uri was sent to the stationary supply room on some errand, he would hear the teachers discussing him in the staffroom. One, he recalls, would say he was supernatural. Another would insist that whatever happened was pure co-incidence. Other would say it was all trickery. He got a huge kick out of listening to them arguing and asking "What is he?", since, he says, he hardly knew himself. 'I was just a normal boy with friends, except I had a bizarre weird energy coming from me which seemed really to be mainly for entertainment purposes.'

Plenty of strange things were happening to Uri when he was alone, and he learned not to tell anyone, not even Mrs Agrotis, about them. It was as if life was taking him down a quite extraordinary path, but making his experiences so bizarre that he dared not speak about them for fear of being called a liar again. Uri would argue that what was happening now was only a taster of the weird things that would start invading his life soon. He even speculates on whether he was being tested in some way (or maybe testing himself) to see if he could cope with more and more inexplicable events around him, and still maintain some credibility when he did, selectively, make some of them known. Once, he says, he got lost on his own in the caves and this time could not navigate his way out. He remembers praying to God for help, and then hearing a distant barking of a dog. He followed the barking, to find Joker had somehow made his way the three or four miles from the Pension to find him. Another time, he was out driving in the mountains with a Hungarian friend of his parents, who was putting a new MG through its paces. While his companion stayed in the car, he wandered off on his own, only to find himself being held on the ground by men with guns. He had, it seemed, stumbled upon Colonel Grivas's secret EOKA guerrilla hide-out. He was taken to see Grivas, who, he noted quite correctly, spoke Athenian Greek rather than the local variety. He told the terrorist, who had a large reward on his head, he was Israeli, and seemed to strike a chord with Grivas. He approved of the Hagannah, which Uri's father had served in, for its struggle against the British. He, too, had fought in British uniform originally, and was now obliged by nationalist politics to oppose his former comrades. Trusting the boy, Grivas sent him on his way. The Hungarian was angry and worried when Uri appeared back at the car. Where had he been? Uri told him, but he accused him of making the story up. Uri kept his cool; it

did, after all, sound ridiculous. Why should anyone believe it? *Why* were all these things happening to him? And was he destined to spend his life either keeping secrets, or suffering the frustration of being disbelieved at every turn?

It was in the middle of his time at Terra Santa College, when he was 15, that Uri's stepfather died. He remembers one of the brothers, Fr. Bernard, taking him out of a class to tell him something had happened, and then receiving the news from a friend of his mother that Ladislas had suffered a heart attack and was not expected to live. In the car back to Nicosia, he cried, not for his stepfather, who he had only a passing emotional bond to, but for Margaret. He realised that his mother being on her own yet again would mean he could no longer board, and would have to become a dayboy like Ardash. He was happy about coming to live at home, but was immediately aware that he would become effectively the man of the family. And he did. It was Uri who arranged to sell his father's half of a music shop in the city, and plough the money into starting a smaller but better Pension Ritz in a modern villa he located on his bicycle. He organised the financial side and the minutiae of the move, all in the middle of a civil war, and while still a schoolboy who pedalled his cycle to school every morning. It was little wonder that Uri Geller matured so quickly - nor that he lived to such a large extent inside his own busy head.

Like Mrs Philipou, Mrs Agrotis lost touch with Uri after he left Cyprus and went back to Israel at 18 - yet another of Uri's 'converts' whom, the job done as it were, he did not feel anxious to write to. But when Geller's fame started to be reported outside of Israel, in 1973, she wrote to a British newspaper from Nicosia. The letter is another compelling clue that Geller was active at whatever it was he did much earlier than is

generally credited. 'Dear Sir,' the teacher, who has since died, wrote, in response to an article which had reached her in Cyprus. 'Uri Geller was a pupil of mine for five years in Cyprus. Even while so young, he astonished his friends at the College with his amazing feats, i.e., bent forks, etc. The stories he told of the wonderful scientific things that could, and would, be done by him, seem to be coming true. I for one do believe in him. He was outstanding in every way, with a brilliant mind. Certainly, one does not meet a pupil like him very often. Yours sincerely, (Mrs.) Julie Agrotis.'

Of course, few teenage boys or young men could countenance for very long the idea of having psychic powers and not using them in the pursuit of the impulse which drives most such lads most of the time. Did Uri Geller use *it* - paranormal powers? oversize charisma? gift of the gab? - to help launch him into his sexual career? Or did he not need to, nature having been especially kind to him in not spoiling his childhood good looks during adolescence? He is not normally one to downplay his psychic abilities, but he accords them a pretty low priority in his account of these adventures. Perhaps saying that as far as women were concerned, he could do very nicely on his own without paranormal intervention was no more than macho teenage vanity on his part; perhaps it just happens to have been true. Or perhaps he felt he would be taking unfair advantage of girls if he used whatever it was he possessed to overcome them.

Whatever, by his mid teens, Uri was simultaneously in love with two girls, neither of them quite prepared to sleep with him. The first was called Patty, and was the slim, blonde daughter of the coach of a baseball team he joined down on the American military base. He was too shy to speak to her, but she approached him, said she liked the way he played baseball, and asked him out to a movie at the American Club. Both

in shorts, they got to the cinema late that evening and had to sit close together on a window sill to watch a film whose name he still can't remember. She put her hand on his leg, he put his arm round her. He was in love. They would swim together, dance and kiss, go bowling and eat hamburgers and hot dogs. He formed a lifelong attachment, concurrent with his love for Britain, to all things American, from the easy going lifestyle to the material cornucopia of the PX store.

At home, meanwhile, he was infatuated with a Greek American girl over the road called Helena, who was dark and tanned rather than blonde, but as pretty and intelligent as Patty, and more intellectual, which appealed to Uri. He had also been too shy to speak to Helena, and had eventually faked a ball-over-the-fence incident while he was playing with Joker. The two got on really well. Whereas with Patty, things barely got beyond kissing, with Helena, he pressed his case a little further, although she, as he puts it, 'was very successful at stopping me.' As happens with forces families, Patty's dad was called home a year or so into their romance, and Uri did not hear from her again. He was happier with Helena anyway. And then Eva, a German dancer with short, black hair fashionably cut and expensive perfume, happened to check in to the pension Ritz.

Late one hot afternoon, with his mother away, Eva set about seducing the handsome, tall Israeli boy, who was listlessly watching television. She told him it was so hot, she was going to her room to change into a swimsuit. After a few moments, he heard her calling to him through her closed door. She was standing he recalls, in a brief swimsuit and asking for some assistance with a bra catch she simply couldn't close. As he was struggling, with uncharacteristic lack of success, bearing in mind the clasp was metal, the dancer discarded the bra entirely and pulled him down with her

onto the bed. From that point on, he relied on what he had seen on the movies and heard around and about. He admits he was awkward. ‘Please don’t tell my mother about this,’ he remembers blurting out. ‘I had become a man, but my emotions were those of an adolescent,’ he says today.

Losing his virginity, as so often happens, was a mixture of triumph and let-down. He was just as enamoured with Helena before as after. ‘Ay,’ recalls Ardash Melemendjian forty years later in his Yorkshire Armenian accent, ‘It’s true. He fell in love with his next door neighbour. She was slightly older. Maria? Anna? Anyway, he was madly in love with her. I used to say, “Oh come on for goodness sake, *in love*. What does that mean?” He’d say, “Don’t you think she’s pretty?” And I’d say, “Oh all right man everybody’s pretty.” I said to him, “You save your pocket money and I’ll take you to a real pretty lady. So come the time when we had a guinea each. We peddle up on our bikes towards the American Embassy, where there were some blocks of flats. We park our bikes underneath there, into the lift, fourth floor, along the corridor and press on the doorbell. an old lady comes and opens the door and says “Good afternoon boys, come in, sit down.”

‘Next thing, an old boy comes out with a hat with two feathers in the side, says, “Have a good time boys,” and takes his hat off and bows to us, cheerio and off he goes. He was Greek. Obviously he’d paid Lola, had his fun and off he went. So the next thing I know, Uri is sat there, and his knees are shaking with nerves. I could almost hear his kneecaps rattling. It’s August, scorching hot, so he can’t be cold. “What are you doing that for?” I ask. “I can’t help it. I know where we are I know what’s going to happen.” Next thing Lola comes through, a big buxom blonde with lot

of hair and blue eyes. "Get inside there and undress yourself. I will be two minutes." Uri says, "You go first. I'll see you when you come out." I'd already paid my guinea to the madame, and so off I went. I said to him before I went, "If you're not here when I come back, I'll have your guts for garters, you'll be in big trouble." "Right, OK," he says. Two minutes later I am out and he's in. Two minutes later, he's out with the biggest cheesy grin on his face. "Yes," he says, "I can't wait to save my next guinea." We can't have been more than 14, 15 years old. She must have been old enough to be my mum. But you don't think about those nitty gritty things when you're that age, do you? Anyway, he wasn't in love after that with the girl next door, the one called Maria or Anna. I think about it sometimes and the only conclusion I come to is that we had a very happy childhood.'

The encounter with Lola - which Uri's account of is almost identical to Ardash's, apart from Uri thinking it was a year or so later and remembering Lola's fee as ten shillings, not a guinea - affected Uri quite deeply. 'Helena and Patty they were the girls I really loved, but they were not really women that I would remember clearly. They really left no impression. Funnily, it was Lola, the prostitute who left an impression. Also, the German girl who seduced me. Having real sex was the first time I felt passion and the real, sexual urge. Those are the moments you don't forget.'

So did the young Uri use his talents to help him with women? 'I don't think I could quite understand my powers then. If I knew then what I know today through life and experience, I would have probably sent my powers of telepathy to their mind and tried to seduce them and try and alter their thinking towards me. I would have tried at least to use it. I didn't need to, though, because I was basically a relatively good looking

guy. There was a stage when I was heavy, but I was always courteous and polite and nice to everyone, and they liked me for what I am. Now, I did telepathy, and I would bend things for their parents, who would instantaneously take a liking to me. So I would use my powers to impress not only girls but generally people around me, because I knew that the result was always positive. When you are surprised and astonished and bewildered about someone, you tend to want to talk to that person more, or be around that person more, find out about that person more. And that was very easy for me to achieve.'

There was a whole other side to Uri's extraordinary teenage activities on that all-liberating bicycle, which Uri's friend Ardash was not privy to. After Uri and his mother had moved to the new pension, the hotel business took a downturn. The warfare was becoming so intense and the curfews so frequent that foreign entertainers and theatrical companies were giving Nicosia a miss for the meanwhile. The new pension was, however, close to the Israeli consulate, and attracted a few business visitors from Israel. One such was a tall, well-built man in the grain buying business, Yoav Shacham. Uri became friendly with Shacham. He enjoyed speaking Hebrew with an interesting man, who also knew judo and offered to teach him some. But while they were practising moves, Uri says he had the feeling that Shacham was more than a grain buyer. He used to get mail from all over the world, and moreover, Uri believed he could see on his mental screen his friend practising with firearms and working with documents in some way. It occurred to the teenager that Shacham was a spy - something which appealed intensely to his cinema-honed imagination.

One afternoon, Uri had to go into the loft, and found himself above Shacham's room, from where he could hear a conversation with definite espionage overtones. Through a peephole in the ceiling, he saw Shacham with a middle aged Egyptian, who he gathered from the conversation lived in Israel. The two were poring over and photographing documents, which Uri could see were in Arabic. The men were speaking quietly about such matters as the Egyptian Army, something happening in the Sudan and some business concerning agricultural machinery. Uri was thrilled and excited. The dramatic Israeli connection stirred him, and somehow, knowing Shacham was a secret agent made Uri want to tell him all the more; confiding in nice Mrs Agrotis was one thing, but telling a real Mossad agent was the stuff of his dreams come true. 'I wanted to share the secret of the powers with someone I didn't know too well,' he explains.

When Uri told Shacham what he suspected he was, the agent, as might be expected was horrified, and probably quite ashamed that he had failed so amateurishly to cover his tracks. He confirmed that Uri was correct, and appealed to his young countryman's patriotism to keep it totally to himself. Heaven knows what Shacham thought when the boy he had just been obliged to entrust his deadly important secret to, said that he for his part was the possessor of inexplicable, magical powers. The Mossad man did not seem too pleased.

Uri asked him to think of numbers, which he guessed correctly each time. He made Shacham's watch hands move. Shacham invited him out for a walk. Uri told him as they walked that he would do anything to spy for Israel too. Shacham explained that he was far too young, but then truly put his life in Uri's hands and said, 'You can help

me.’ There started a routine whereby, whenever Shacham was away from Cyprus, Uri would cycle to the Post office in Nicosia to pick up his friend Yoav’s mail from the post restante box and deliver it to a specific party at the Israeli consulate. He loyally told no one what he was doing, but made the possible mistake for a spy, albeit a schoolboy one, of beginning to wear while on his missions an Israeli insignia his father had won. The consulate contact zoomed in on it, asking gently whose it was. Uri merrily told him about his father being a sergeant in the Tank Corps. The contact smoothly extracted every detail from Uri. Back in Israel, Tibor came home to find his apartment had been almost taken apart by intruders, although nothing was stolen. He had no idea what had happened. The Mossad, it seemed, had wanted to warn Uri gently through his father that everything was OK - but that he was playing with the big boys, now. Yoav and Uri, his unpaid courier, meanwhile became close friends. Uri met his fiancée, Tammi, and he promised Uri that when he had finished his military service at 21, he would gladly help him get into the secret service.

If it was completely impossible for Uri to reveal any of this to his friends or family, one arena at least did present itself in which he could show off. It became known in Nicosia not that George Geller could bend spoons with the power of his mind, but that he had uncommon motivational skills. ‘The pension was also used sometimes by football managers and one of them was a Hungarian trainer who came from Hungary to train a local Cypriot team. And he used to take me every Saturday to the dressing room to psyche the football players up. When I learned I could influence a football team, that was great because it meant to me that I could also teach people. I also think I helped motivate a Cypriot basketball team I played for. The first time I got into a newspaper was with that team. My name appeared about a millimetre high, George

Geller, with a picture of me running. It was a big deal to have your name in the paper. I think they felt that part of my powers rubbed onto them and that when they ran out there they had the energy. Who knows?’

As with all Israelis as Uri approached 18 and the end of school, there was no doubt what the next three years would bring for him - army service. He was more than happy about this. Although he had only been to Israel to see his father twice during the seven years in Cyprus, father and son were still close, and Uri's twin male role models were now his father and Yoav Shacham, both men of action. After Margaret was widowed, Tibor had been over to stay in the new hotel, and husband and ex-wife were on quite good terms too. While Uri's immediate ambition, therefore, was to be a soldier, and then serve Israel as a spy, Margaret inevitably had more conventional hopes for her only child. ‘I would have very much liked him to become either a singer, or a lawyer,’ she says today. ‘But as the main occupation, a lawyer. For he is certainly eloquent enough, thank God.’

But would the Israeli secret service be too covert, too low profile for a boy whose biggest thrills came from hearing himself talked about in the school staffroom, and seeing his name in microscopic type in the local paper? His excitement since childhood at performing in front of an audience, his naturally extrovert personality and his contact with showbusiness types at the pension combined to give him a strong impetus, curious alongside the desire to be a secret agent, to be a performer in adulthood. Additionally, the violent circumstances of Cyprus in the Fifties and early Sixties had triggered in Geller a quirky (although hardly unusual) interest in the ghoulish.

‘Seeing death everywhere, seeing people being blown up and shot and body parts interfered a lot with my psyche,’ he admits. One of his first experiences in Cyprus was of seeing a young British soldier walking along a street with his young daughter on his shoulders, and a Greek gunman coming out of a doorway and shooting the man in the back. He was deeply sorry for the man and the child, but was equally affected by seeing the tragedy in a less predictable way. ‘Witnessing someone getting killed when you are only 12 or 13, and daily waking up and opening the papers and seeing pictures taken in morgues becomes a very powerful influence on your mind. There is one picture that haunts me even today. A whole Greek family was slaughtered in a village, and their bodies were thrown into a bath tub.’

Because of this slightly macabre tendency, he was fascinated by another picture in a book of a half rotted-away ancient Egyptian mummy. Much later, when he was in the army, he took a photograph, along with all the usual soldier’s mementoes of his friends atop tanks and so on, of the top half of an Egyptian soldier in the desert, blown apart and burned black, his hands clawing at the air. He still has the tiny print among dozens of bags and boxes of family photos.

‘My dream as a young man was to become a horror film actor. there was a whole morbid side to my fantasises. I loved monster movies. My favourite one was Tarantula [a 1955 black and white film about scientists creating a giant spider which rampages through the desert] When I was a boarder at Terra Santa, they took us to see it. For weeks afterward, I was frightened to death in the dormitory by the monsters I thought were lurking in there. It was something that I built in my mind. It went to

such an extent that I saw a comic at the American Club with an advertisement for these rubber horror masks and I ordered one from America. It took ages to come, but when it did, it was my most important possession. It had big bulgy eyes, big white teeth, blood dripping on its face and warts and all that. I used to scare people. I loved scaring my mother's friends. I even went to one of those automatic photo machines with it on. It was a real fascination with horror. Boris Karloff and Peter Lorre were my heroes, in a way. That was what I thought would make me famous - being a horror actor. I knew there was something that could make me well known, and it was not necessarily my powers.'

Chapter 4 / Starting Point

'Look, look, it's bending ...' (Uri Geller as he held the author's spoon, July 1996.

It wasn't bending.)

Do we believe what we see? Or do we see what we believe? When we watch a conjuror make a rabbit disappear, we know perfectly well that in reality, bunny is safe and well, even when he seems to have dematerialised. In other words, we see what we believe - that conjuring exists and is a skill which enables people to create clever, convincing illusions. Uri Geller asks something different of us. He demands that we believe what we see, that we accept that he is honest when he says he isn't cheating, and that he can genuinely do things which the most elementary physics states are impossible, and anyway, can be duplicated rather effectively by regular conjurors. It's a tall order, but over the decades, a lot of people - tens of millions, in fact - have been adamant that they witnessed something very rare and special watching Geller. Yet - and this is the fundamental question about Geller, the crux of the entire, almost fifty-year phenomenon - when he seems to do amazing things, do we end up merely seeing what we believe? Does Geller, by strength of personality, by quickness of hand, or even by some form of hypnosis, convince us initially that he has paranormal powers,

then strike quickly while we are vulnerable and cause us to believe that an illusion he just performed was actually *not* an illusion, but something real?

The process by which I became interested in Uri Geller illustrates, I believe, most sides to these questions. When I started out, I do not believe I was remotely receptive to him. I am not religious, had never had a psychic insight into anything, seen a ghost or experienced so much anything more than the mildest, silliest spooky feeling about anyone or anywhere. I had, I suppose, had the odd suspect-ESP experience, but when pressed, put each down to co-incidence. I had certainly never seen anything as way-out as a UFO, and was deeply suspicious of what I believe to be the personality types which claim they have, especially after once going as a journalist to a group for UFO ‘abductees’ in New York. All of the people in the group seemed to me to be in the throes of a complex rape fantasy, in which they convinced themselves they had been interfered with sexually by male aliens. Indeed, if there was one thing I found truly amazing about the paranormal, it was the astonishing number of people who *don't* have paranormal experiences, even though 70 per cent of us apparently admit to believing *in* them.

I was quite irritated, therefore in 1996, when my son, David, then 14, became interested in the paranormal, and especially in the person of Uri Geller, whom I imagined was dead or in hiding somewhere, his fraud and trickery in bending spoons humiliatingly exposed decades ago by science. I was amazed to hear Geller’s name being spoken at all by a 14 year-old. I was about 18 when Geller first became known in Britain, and considered myself rather above conjurors, pseudo-psychics, or whatever he was supposed to be. Uri Geller was someone who irritating 14 year-olds

into magic would harp on about; but that was in 1973. Geller must be about 50 now; where had my irritating 14 year-old heard of the rogue? It turned out that Uri Geller had been bending spoons on an afternoon TV show, and David was hooked, just as boys had been in the heyday of flares.

Now, of course, the irritation factor was even greater, because of the World Wide Web, on which I was astounded to discover some 3,000 sites concerning themselves with Uri Geller. David pointed me to Geller's own Internet site, and told me that publications from the Sunday Times to a bunch of computer magazines had that year voted the Uri Geller's Psychic City site among the best in the world. I tried to explain post-modern irony to David, and how even the more intellectual media were going through a phase of re-assessing unfashionable Seventies icons like Max Bygraves, Gary Glitter and, come to mention it, Uri Geller. He had to understand that it was all strictly tongue-in-cheek, to be read as if in inverted commas. Getting excited about Uri Geller's Website was a just a sophisticated, grown-up joke, like lava lamps. David didn't get it.

A few days later, on a warm May Monday evening, I had to drive out to a town near Cambridge on a story for the Sunday Times. I was going to see a millionaire electronics manufacturer called John Knopp, and David came along for the ride. Knopp was doing some interesting work, ended sadly by his death a year later, on a potential electrical cure for cancer. Although he was a country boy, who left school unqualified, conventional scientists I spoke to about him were anxious to explain that Knopp was a genius at observational physics. Michael Laughton, professor of electrical engineering and dean of engineering at Queen Mary and Westfield College,

London, regarded him as 'very likely the greatest inventive mind Britain has produced this century, a national hero, but an entirely unsung one'. Another contact, a London University lecturer in physical chemistry, said of Knopp: 'Any academic who looks down their nose at him because he doesn't have letters after his name and a string of publications is basically a prejudiced old git. He is very, very impressive.'

But what impressed - or to be utterly accurate, *depressed* me - that evening was when John Knopp got talking to my son. 'You know who you remind me of slightly, about the eyes?' he said in his broad rural Essex accent. 'You're a dead spit, you are, for my good friend Uri Geller.' David was fascinated, as one might expect. Did he think Geller was real, he asked.

'Well,' Knopp replied, 'I used to think he was just an old magician, but I totally believe in telepathy and in people having a psychic affinity for certain other people, and I think he is genuine, yes. He made my key bend right here in my own hand while I was holding it, and there was *no* way on Earth he could have done that by trickery. My argument with Uri is that I can't see the point in it. If he could straighten a bloody key, now *that* would be something.' Before we left, John took our phone number and promised he would get Uri to phone David.

On the way home, I restated my position: 'Uri Geller is a fraud, a proven fraud. Don't waste your time thinking about him. he's a conman, he's history. I don't know what John Knopp was on when he told us that, and you'll never find out because Uri Geller is not going to telephone you. Ever.' There was a moment's silence. 'OK,' David said. 'If Uri Geller is a proven fake, prove it..'

I started to search through various databases for recent articles from serious British newspapers and magazines. All had done their best to be scornful of Geller, but in each case, sceptical journalists had admitted to leaving meetings with Geller a little crestfallen, because he appeared to be able to do just what he says - bend metal and read minds. It became more intriguing still. I was convinced that Geller's powers had never stood up to scientific scrutiny, but the evidence, forgotten or deliberately ignored by me and rationalists like me, is almost precisely the opposite. As far as I have been able to discover, barely a scientist in 30 years, after running tests on Geller, has disputed that he has powers which, as they cautiously put it, are worthy of further examination.

The late Dr. Wernher von Braun, the renowned NASA rocket scientist and father of the US space programme (not to mention the Nazi V1 and V2) was on record as saying. 'The evidence based on metallurgical analysis of fractured surfaces produced by Geller indicates that a paranormal influence must have been operative in the formation of the fractures.' Dr. Wilbur Franklin of the Physics Department at Kent State University in the States had announced after testing him: 'As a result of Geller's success in this experimental period, we consider that he has demonstrated his paranormal, perceptual ability in a convincing and unambiguous manner.'

On the other hand, in the same articles, were quoted the professional conjurors who opposed Geller doggedly, and at every turn. They said he is a cheap fraud, who has managed to convince a gullible media and public that a variety of well-known, simple tricks are paranormal. The magicians insisted that they could do the same as Geller by

using conventional sleight-of-hand methods. Now, *that* was the kind of argument I was receptive to. They explained, convincingly to me, that there was nothing to Geller's trick - all he did in essence was bend the spoon behind his back when you weren't looking. Nobody has ever *seen* Geller bend a spoon in front of their eyes, they stated confidently.

The scientific and journalistic accounts were a little troubling, however. I couldn't speak for the scientists, but I had worked with some of the journalists who reported being baffled by what they had seen Geller do, and know them to be hard-boiled to the point of quite unpleasant cynicism. One writer I didn't know had reported in 1990 in the magazine *Punch* that he had brought his own large tablespoon to Geller's house to try to catch him out. 'He held it with one hand and stroked it with the finger of the other,' he wrote. 'It wilted like a flower. He gave it back to me, and it slowly continued to curl like a British Rail sandwich.' A sceptical photographer from The Independent had come away from meeting Geller to find the keys in his pocket were bent.

One of the most intriguing reports for me on Geller's mind bending was by Nigel Reynolds, the Daily Telegraph's arts correspondent at the time, and someone I regard as very sensible and grounded. Nigel gave over a lengthy piece to an investigation he had done into how an appalling play, which closed after a few appearances at the Hampstead Theatre in London, succeeded in getting rave notices from all the critics who attended on press night. The play, *Some Sunny Day*, by Martin Sherman, starred Rupert Everett and Corin Redgrave, and had a paranormal subject, which Geller had been asked by the producer to advise on. The story Reynolds uncovered with some

difficulty - even Geller was cagey about it, he says - was that Geller was present on the press evening, and managed to 'bend' the critics' minds.

The evidence seemed to be there in the theatre crits. 'It is fun and, in its demented way, original,' wrote The Observer. 'It's the superb playing which makes the evening worthwhile,' gushed the Evening Standard. 'Brilliantly witty new play,' reported the News of the World. 'The play left me in an accepting, upbeat mood, but I did wonder. I really did,' said The Times man. Most enthusiastic of all was the Telegraph's critic, Charles Spencer, who announced that *One Sunny Day* was, 'Without doubt, one of the most entertaining and unexpected plays of the year.'

Reynolds was fascinated by the notices, and how they contrasted with those of critics who came the next night, when, as he discovered, Geller was not present. 'Absurd mish-mash. If there is method in Sherman's madness, it escapes me,' the Sunday Express reported. 'I am not at all sure what this adds up to,' concluded The Sunday Times. When Reynolds discovered Geller's involvement, he put it to Charles Spencer, his own critic.

Spencer was quite candid. He actually thought the play was 'preposterous', and admitted that he 'would not rule out at all' that his mind was taken over by Geller's, even though he did not know he was at the theatre. 'There was definitely a good spirit, good vibes, in the air that night, and for a reason I can't explain, I was in an uncommonly good frame of mind,' Spencer said. 'I was writing for publication the next morning. I normally find that torture, and I am usually in a complete panic, but I was relaxed and calm that night.' Spencer even confessed that until he sat down to

write his review, he had been unsure of whether to call the play a hit or a flop. And he was now 'surprised' by the depth of passion he had felt for Sherman's play.

Even one magician, it seemed as I ploughed on in my attempt to prove to my son that Uri Geller was a phoney, had been convinced by Geller. Leo Leslie, a professional conjuror in Denmark and a leading light of the Danish Magic Circle, did tests with Geller in Copenhagen and concluded: 'The judgement of all of us who were present for what occurred was one of total endorsement of Geller's paranormal claims: both his ability to bend metal and his talent for receiving telepathic signals. When I am asked about the strength of my own conclusions as to what I witnessed, I can answer only that while Geller was in Copenhagen I did not catch him in any deceptions. Therefore I have to continue to rely on my own judgement and experience as a mentalist; they tell me that Uri Geller is genuine.'

David was triumphant at my discovering all this, but meanwhile, another week passed, and Uri Geller still hadn't phoned. I might yet win the battle of wits with my 14 year-old. Perhaps he'd forget about all the pro-Geller stuff I'd unearthed, and finally believe his father, when the promised phone call turned out to be more Geller moonshine.

But Geller did call. After talking with him for at least twenty minutes, David handed me the phone, telling him, 'I'm going to put you on to my dad. He's the journalist, the total sceptic.' I felt ridiculous talking to Geller. What was the point of it? I felt I was wasting his time. But Geller didn't seem at all awkward. He was pleasant and enthusiastic, with a light, very Israeli voice. I apologised to him for David having

taken up so much of his time, to which he protested that far from it, he was delighted to speak to him. He promptly invited the whole family of five round for tea one weekday afternoon. I was even less comfortable at this, since David had obviously told Geller how implacably opposed I was to him. But I found myself accepting and making a date for a Tuesday a couple of weeks hence.

Perhaps he placed in my head the idea of writing a biography of him. All I know is that in the space of a minute, I went from wanting to do nothing less, to thinking it would be a good idea. The extraordinarily opposed position of Geller's supporters and detractors, along with the whole unresolved enigma of the paranormal were deeply intriguing. And, although I had paid it no attention, there *had* been a remarkable revival of interest in Geller in the preceding months. Broadsheet newspapers and respectable magazines had been featuring him one after the other, there having been almost no mention of him for nearly a decade. The Independent, The Daily Telegraph, The Times, The Sunday Times, the Sunday Telegraph and the Sunday Telegraph Magazine had all interviewed him in quick succession. In each case, the journalist assigned had concluded, often with some reluctance, that there just might be something in Uri Geller after all. Wouldn't it be interesting if I could prove conclusively that he was a conman? Or that he wasn't?

On the appointed day, the whole family drove to where Geller lives by the River Thames just outside Reading. We were late. There were plenty of jokes in the car about it not being necessary to phone to say we would be late, as he would doubtless know already by his psychic powers. I still felt distinctly embarrassed about the whole thing. The chance of him giving such a doubting Thomas as me the access I would

need for a proper biography was, surely, minimal, and then he would almost certainly be a control freak who would strike out anything vaguely critical of him from the manuscript. I would mention the book idea, I decided, out of politeness, but in such an unenthusiastic way that he would not take me up on it.

We didn't need to go through the charade. Mr. Uri Geller was not at home. We learned this from a puzzled Israeli voice on the entryphone, which was on the wrong side of a fearsome-looking set of electric security gates. He was not expecting anyone, we were told. He had gone to London. He might be back tonight. We returned home in silence. My wife and I didn't say so, but we were clearly sharing a comforting thought; we had wasted an afternoon, but on the other hand, at least we wouldn't be hearing about Uri Geller from David ever again.

The phone was actually ringing as we got home. It was Uri Geller from his mobile, with the one of the more impressive excuses I have heard for a missed appointment. It was the day before the Euro '96 football semi-final between England and Germany, and Uri had been to Wembley Stadium to plant energised crystals under the goalposts to help England, because he was worried they were going to lose the following night. 'You'll read about it all in the papers tomorrow,' he said. He had completely forgotten we were coming, was terribly sorry, and re-invited us a week the following Sunday.

Minus my wife and younger daughter, who had both retired uninterested, we arrived at Geller's house mid morning. Geller is a lean, intense man, who looked nearer 35 than 50. He struck me, David and Ruth, who was then 17, as an eager man, quite disorganised, but very hospitable and thoughtful. We were introduced to Uri's

manager and brother-in-law, Shipi Shtrang, a smiling Passepartout, who from the first moment, reminded me of a cautious Boo Boo Bear to Uri's impulsive Yogi. Then there was Uri's wife (and Shipi's sister) Hanna, a pretty, blonde, shy woman who I felt would be quite difficult to get to know, his mother Manci, in her eighties and speaking only Hungarian, hence quite difficult to form any first impression of, and the two polite, attractive and beautifully behaved children, Daniel and Natalie.

The house was huge and modern, in colonial style, with a sizeable gravel forecourt and several cars and dogs around. Inside was immaculate, and full of strange, New Age pieces or art and countless crystals, some of them enormous, man-sized specimens. It was plain that this was a house built by, inspired by and largely a monument to Uri Geller's gifts and talents, a place in tune above all to his needs and desires. Although there was an earnestness in all the New Age artefacts, there were also quirky things everywhere, which suggested a family with plenty of humour. Fixed high up on a wall in the entrance hall was what looked like a bicycle from the Starship Enterprise, an amazing space-age machine which Uri told us was the world's fastest bike; on display in another room was a huge, eight-foot wingspan model of a Boeing 727 in Libyan Arab Airlines colours, which Uri had somehow 'liberated' from the airline's Piccadilly office when it closed down after Britain severed relations with Col. Gaddafi. The furnishings throughout looked as if someone had run riot with an open chequebook in an extremely expensive store somewhere in the Mediterranean. The items were colourful, ornate and clearly costly - yet it was all perfectly comfortable in a way such millionaire homes often are not. There was a pleasant smell of some kind of incense in every room.

Uri asked if we minded him using his exercise bike while we had coffee. He is a fitness fanatic, as well as a vegan. The exercise bike is in the conservatory, where we sat looking out over a pool, which was covered although it was the middle of summer, and across vast, trimmed lawns down to the river. We chatted over the whooshing of the bike, which was less off-putting than it sounds; he punishes himself on it for an hour a day, working up a sweat, but talking easily without puffing. He seemed to have guessed, or mind-read, or something, that I was thinking of writing a book on him; so much for leaking the idea gently into the conversation. But we left the idea hanging. He talked mostly to the children.

Geller doesn't need to be psychic to know that most even social guests are hoping that at some stage it will be show-time. As he was cycling, he tossed a pad and a fibre-tipped pen to David, who was sitting about ten feet away. 'David, draw a simple figure on that while I turn away with my eyes closed,' he instructed, 'then place it face down on the table, make sure I could never possibly see it, and try to transmit the picture to me mentally.' David drew something, shielding it with his hands, although Uri had now stopped cycling, turned his back to us and had his hands over his eyes. David placed the drawing face down as instructed, and Uri turned round and started to concentrate.

I decided at this stage it could be interesting to try to sabotage the supposed ESP demonstration by thinking of spurious images and beaming them in the direction of Uri. Of course, if Uri picked them up, it would be the opposite of sabotage, but this wasn't a controlled experiment. I thought very hard of hippopotamuses, dollar signs and Stars of David. I do not know why these images sprang to mind, but immediately

Geller asked if I would mind stopping 'all that junk' because he couldn't read David's thoughts. Quite impressive, but possibly a worthwhile gambit on Uri's part; maybe most journalists try to interfere in the way I had. If I had said, 'What junk?' he could simply bluff that my mind was too active, and I should try to think of nothing.

David did another drawing as Geller looked away again. This time, after the paper was firmly face down, Uri turned round, smiling. 'You've drawn a stick man,' Geller said, immediately grabbing a pad and pen of his own from the untidy ledge above the speedometer of the exercise bike. 'It's something like this.' He scrawled briefly and the two held up their sketches simultaneously. Geller's was a perfect copy of David's - so exact that when we measured them, the height, 6 cm, and the width of the head, 1.8 cm, were identical. Uri cycled on for a few moments as we tried to work out if we had been fooled. Then he stopped, and asked the very thing we had, of course, been hoping for.

'Would you like me to bend a spoon for you?' he asked. We would, we confirmed. 'Just a minute, I'll go and get one,' Uri said. At which point David, like half the visitors, I imagine, to the Geller place, produced one we had selected from the cutlery drawer at home. It was an oversized tea spoon, chosen because it was thicker and heavier than most. Geller's brow furrowed fractionally, in what I suspect is his customary reaction. 'It's a little thick,' he said, 'but I'll try.' He steered us all over to a radiator, saying it sometimes works better if he's touching metal. He then put his right hand on the radiator (which at least kept it out of the way for illicit bending purposes) and held the spoon half way down its handle between his thumb and forefinger.

I was amused to note that nothing happened. Fifteen or twenty seconds passed, the four of us in a close huddle. 'Look, look, it's bending,' Uri said. If it was, none of the three of us could see it. 'David, hold out your hand,' Uri said. He placed the spoon flat on David's hand. I dipped my head down to see if there was some slight bend which I could at least be polite about. Viewed side on, there was a barely perceptible warp of perhaps a few millimetres out of true. It was sufficiently bent, let us say, that we could have congratulated him, if half-heartedly. 'Wait, wait,' Uri said. None of us noticed if he was smiling or looking anxious, because we were staring at the spoon, wondering what precisely there was to wait for. What must have been two or three seconds passed, but seemed like much longer. And then, like a miniature Loch Ness Monster arching its back upwards, a point a couple of centimetres south of the spoon's bowl simply, spontaneously and rather graciously rose, until it was bent at a ninety degree angle and standing up from David's hand in an upside-down V. We gasped. To see a spoon bend in Geller's hand, as everyone has on TV, is one thing. It could be a special spoon of some sort, he could be in collusion with the TV people, anything, But to watch your own spoon actually in the process of bending and without Uri touching it at the time was truly disturbing. I picked it up to try to feel if it was at all warm, or had some caustic chemical on it. There was clearly no chemical. I touched the bend point to my upper lip, a specially heat-sensitive spot. It was cold.

Uri held the spoon to look at it horizontally as if to assess his handiwork (or whatever you call it - mindiwork, perhaps) and seemed particularly pleased. (I later measured the bend; the tip of the spoon handle had travelled 12 cm - five inches - under our gaze). He signed inside the bowl with an indelible marker.

It was a remarkable moment, and I judged it the time to leave, as we had now been at the house over an hour. Ruth, either through teenage truculence or genuine puzzlement, had her arms folded, an elementary piece of body language Uri noticed, because in the hall on the way out later, he touched her on the elbow, smiled, and said, 'Ruth, there's something that will interest you in this room.' He led us in, and gestured theatrically, as if introducing a turn on the stage, to a pair of chairs in pride of place, in the centre of the sitting room. They were made of hundreds of layers of crystal glass, laid horizontally one on top of the other. What was remarkable to Ruth and to me about the chairs, made by an artist called Dani Lane, was that two weeks previously, on an A-level art trip to The Craft Council in London, she had bought a postcard showing one of them. She liked it so much, she had put it up in her bedroom. A little shocked, we left and promised to keep in touch.

It had certainly been a persuasive finale. How could he have known that the chairs were special to her? Did he rummage around in her mind until he found some unusual item filed away within it which he happened to have in the house? Was it purely a lucky guess? What would have happened if she had shrugged and failed to react to the chairs? A rigorous scientific approach, of course, would have to conclude that Geller must have surreptitiously prepared the entire morning by applying some undetectable caustic chemical to our spoon, installing hidden miniature video cameras all over his conservatory, and burgling our apartment to see what we had on display in it, before hurriedly buying two priceless arty chairs. My own version of rationality, however, could only deduce that we had either seen three genuine examples of paranormal powers, or some exceptionally high-class magicianship. What militated against the latter was that the magicians whose comments I had read on the Internet mostly said

he was a very poor conjuror indeed. The legendary Penn and Teller, for example, had described spoon bending as 'a lousy trick for lousy people'. Could they really be talking about the same thing as we had just seen?

I wanted to accept the rule of scientific law, yet what three of us simultaneously saw (or believe we saw, or saw what we believed) Uri Geller do that morning calls two established facts into doubt - indeed, strictly speaking, disproves them. It is beyond question that rigid metal at room temperature cannot bend by its own volition, and silent mindreading, without any known form of communication does not and cannot exist.

The following week, early on Monday morning, Geller phoned me to ask if I had had any psychic experiences since meeting him. It often happened, he said. I replied that I had not, and had a strange feeling I was not going to. He either missed or ignored my little joke. Had I had any odd dreams, he continued? I said that the previous night, I had dreamed about an Alitalia A300 aircraft crashing after part of its tail was blown off. He said I should watch out, because he feared something like it would happen in a few days. He added that he thought there would be a large earthquake on the west coast of the USA that week too. (On the Wednesday, the TWA 800 Boeing 747 crashed off Long Island after an explosion on board; it obviously wasn't Alitalia, but it was, as Uri excitedly pointed out, carrying a party of Italians on a cancelled Rome flight. On the Thursday, an earthquake measuring 10 on the Richter scale hit the west coast of *South* America. Well, all right.

I took the opportunity of Geller's calling to say I had been thinking more about writing a serious, objective biography of him. Has the time not come, I argued, for Uri Geller, as a middle aged man, to be thoroughly reassessed? He seemed receptive, but guarded. Over the forthcoming weeks, he warmed to the idea, finally accepting three weeks later. It was agreed, most crucially, that I would have his full co-operation, but would be at liberty to interview whichever of his fiercest opponents I chose. He would also have the right to read and correct the manuscript if it was inaccurate, but could not censor it.

Now I had to write a proposal and find a publisher. It was August by this time, and we were going on holiday to a borrowed apartment in Torquay, on the Devon coast. Anxious to get my thoughts down, I slipped my three month old IBM Thinkpad computer into the car, and decided to get up early each morning, while the family were still asleep, to write the treatment. There was a lot to sort out in my mind even then, before I had started researching properly, about the experiences on July 7th at Uri's house, and the mass of material I had read on the Geller phenomenon.

The plan worked out well. I would get a couple of hours done before breakfast each day, and the children never even realised their dad was doing what they hated - working when we were on holiday. On the fifth morning of this routine, I reckoned I would finish. I happened to mention towards the end of the proposal on this last day of writing that Uri was not the most intellectually brilliant of men; a fair observation I thought at the time, but one, I suppose he might be hurt by. He was, as I later discovered, extremely bright at school. At about 8 am, I finished, read the proposal, was happy with it and went to make some tea. While it was brewing, I went back to

the Thinkpad to alter a couple of words. It was turned off. That was odd, I thought. I didn't remember doing that. I flicked the switch to re-boot. nothing happened.

Assuming the computer's battery had run down, I plugged in the mains supply. The machine still refused to turn on. I checked the fuse in the power supply plug. It was fine. I tried another socket, having first checked that it was live. Still no luck.

I began to sweat. For some stupid reason, I had failed to back up any of the proposal onto a disc. The IBM had been so reliable up to that moment, that it seemed unnecessary. I called the helpline in Scotland. They ran me through dozens of tests before declaring the machine had suffered a major hardware failure and needed to go back to London for repair or replacement. 'I hope you've backed up your documents,' the IBM man said.

By now, the family was up and wanted to go to our favourite beach, half an hour's drive away. David tried to get the Thinkpad working, to no avail. 'Why don't you try the Uri Geller method?' he asked. 'Just shout at it: "Work! Work! Work!"' Despite all I had learned in the past three months, this reference to Gellerana still irritated me, and I brushed it aside. He persuaded me, and feeling rather foolish, I did it anyway. The computer instantly came to life, not even going through the re-boot procedure, but opening straight up, in the word processing programme, and with the document open. It was as if none of the trauma of the past two hours had happened. I put it down to co-incidence.

The drama over, I saved the proposal to disc, and then tried to fax the proposal from the computer to my agent in London. This took another hour; after every page,

the fax software went into spasm. The document eventually went across in eleven separate takes.

It was now 11 am on a beautiful day, and I was exhausted and far from popular with the children. My wife went into the kitchen to make some tea. Seconds later, we all heard a loud crash from the kitchen, and Sue shouting, ‘Oh, my God’. We rushed into the kitchen. A plastic wall clock had somehow detached itself from the above the cooking hob, where it was hanging at a height of about six feet, traversed the room to a point seven feet horizontally from where it started, and smashed down onto the ceramic tiled floor - all without cracking or missing a tick. Although Sue was only aware of the accident it when the clock hit the floor, it seemed to have fallen impossibly. If the fixing had become loose, the clock would simply have slid down the wall and onto the work surface.

We assured each other that it was just a co-incidence that I had written a line which was incorrect and that Uri would have been angry about; and that the computer had promptly malfunctioned in a bizarre manner, and that then a clock, of all the cliched Uri Geller things, had then misbehaved seriously. But the spoon, the drawings, the glass chairs; did all these have a banal explanation, too? Did three of us suffer a simultaneous hallucination when we believed we saw our own spoon bend five inches on its own? Was identifying so spectacularly a rare item special at the time to my daughter a mere confidence trick? Was I simply being open-minded and believing what I saw. Or had I started on the slippery slope downwards towards unreason, towards seeing what I believed?

Chapter 5/ The French Hill

'Kill the Jews wherever you find them!' (King Hussein of Jordan to his troops, on Radio Amman, 12.15 pm, Wednesday June 7th 1967, the third day of the Six Day War)

Two almost concurrent little rites of passage towards the end of 1963 - Uri's one guinea afternoon tryst with Lola, the bleached blonde Nicosia prostitute, and the handing over of his British GCE (General Certificate of Education) by Father Camillo - marked almost the end of the Gellers' time in Cyprus. On the macro scale, meanwhile, the island had become simply too dangerous to be there voluntarily. Two hundred Turkish Cypriots had been killed in inter-communal fighting, and hostile fighter jets despatched from mainland Turkey were making menacing passes over Nicosia. Three attempted Turkish naval invasions were only thwarted by the alert American Sixth Fleet, and civil war seemed inevitable. The British Colonial Secretary, Duncan Sandys cancelled his Christmas holiday to fly to the Island. Shortly afterwards, in the early spring, UN troops started to arrive, and Margaret and Uri began to settle their affairs in Cyprus. There was no longer any point in being there. Uri was close to finishing school, there were virtually no visitors any more, not even undercover Israelis, and certainly no travelling show people to make the business

worth running. Hotels were closing down all over the island. In addition, Uri would be 18 soon and have to return to Israel for his military service.

The Pension Ritz's shabby furniture was sold off, and a buyer found for the building. Margaret's relatives in Tel Aviv located a modest city centre flat for her to buy. Mother and son shipped their heavy goods, including a white Vespa scooter Uri had bought, ahead to Limassol. On the day of sailing, Uri and Margaret got cars to take them, their suitcases and Joker to the port, where a mini disaster ensued. The customs people decided to examine the suitcases slowly and carefully, and somehow, the ship, with dog and most, but crucially not all, of the Geller household aboard sailed for Haifa. Uri cheerfully suggested, as they had some money, that they fly, but there was no aircraft leaving for Israel for another two days. They ended up that night back at the Ritz, camping out in the empty hotel with its new owner's permission.

But these complications are inevitable during such a major move, even for those with psychic powers, and soon the Gellers plus Joker were safely reunited in Israel, and installed in the flat. This was a little cramped and dingy, but was in a reasonable location on Trumpeldor Street, 500 metres equidistant between the beach and the central business, restaurant and entertainment hotspot of Dizengoff Circle. It was an exceptionally noisy street, narrow and with buses roaring past every couple of minutes. But immediately opposite the flat, behind a three metre high stone wall, was a relatively quiet, and very grand, ancient graveyard, where many of the famous pioneers of the Israeli state rest in a semblance of peace.

Practically the first thing Uri did was to ditch for good his adopted Cyprus name. George Geller was no more, and doesn't welcome even old Cyprus friends using the name today. ('I called him George on the telephone once, about five years ago,' says Ardash Melemendjian, 'and he said, "Don't call me that my name is Uri." I replied, "OK, I didn't know you minded." I was surprised by how he obviously felt about it.')

However, coming back to Israel was not really a matter of re-establishing an old identity. He had left Israel as a bewildered, confused and unhappy little boy and come back a rather more confident man. He had no particular old friends to look up, and indeed, at this point, had the choice of re-inventing himself as pretty much anything he wanted. As someone who was a fully-fledged Israeli, but still an outsider as a result of spending his formative years abroad, and was also a loner for at least three reasons (only child, no friends in Tel Aviv and feeling, at least, haunted by perplexing supernatural powers) the idea of being in the Israeli Secret Service seemed oddly more suitable than ever. He had this possible career path in mind thanks to one of his role models, his friend Yoav Shacham, but this was not to forget the military ideal which his father represented. Most sons try to imitate their father, to gain their approval, and Uri Geller was no different. He knew he had to build a shining army career before the Mossad would consider him; and, if being a James Bond didn't eventually work out, Uri, being no intellectual, was perfectly willing to set his sights on the army and simply follow Tibor. But the problem, as it turned out, was that Uri was no great soldier. Not that he was a wimp; he could do the physical stuff easily. But his innate individualism, which as a kid had made the communalism of the kibbutz horrific to him, similarly made the army and the whole ethic of teamwork highly unappealing. The Israeli Defence Forces and Uri Geller were not, at the end of the day, quite made for one another.

For the moment, however, in the spring of 1964, Uri couldn't wait to get into uniform. He kicked happily around all summer and autumn, awaiting his 18th birthday, doing odd jobs to make money to help his mother out, building a social life and going through his army medicals. In the evenings and at weekends, Uri played basketball again, and became known for what was called his 'golden left hand'. But, psychic prodigy or not, for the time being, Uri Geller, international superstar-to-be, was just another Mediterranean teenager whizzing noisily and irritatingly around the streets on a scooter. 'My first job was as a construction site worker,' he recalls. 'I used to carry cement in buckets from the truck to the building site and then pour them into the site. Every bucket weighed about 100 kilos, but it was fun. I looked at it positively, and I started bringing some money home. My second job, my father arranged for me. I was to be a desk clerk at a hotel in Eilat. So I went down and had the time of my life, because there were hippies there and all kinds of beautiful girls from all around the world. I was 17 and had my own room in the hotel. It was warm in Eilat, there was the beach, and every night, I had another girl.'

Back in Tel Aviv after the summer, the Vespa came into its own. 'I worked as a delivery boy delivering architectural plans in long tubes around the city. I had a really bad boss. He was just ruthless. I was so angry at him - everyone was - that one day when he asked me to make him tea, I peed in it. I am a good natured person, but I needed revenge on that occasion. I could have done a lot of mind stuff to him. Today, knowing what my power can do is awesome, but I don't think I realised then that I could activate these powers. And anyway, I don't seem to be able to do anything negative. And making my boss's watches and clocks move, I think, would only have

entertained him rather than angered him.’ (It was interesting that the thought of using or attempting to use his mental powers, or the belief that he had such powers, for malicious purposes had not occurred to Uri more often in his youth. He is able to rationalise things now, as an adult, and conclude that, for some reason, he seems unable to do harm; however, there must have been a certain irritation on his part as a boy that he could ‘bend’ basketball rings in his favour and snap spoons in half for entertainment, but not, say, snap his boss’s brake pipes. His feeling that he ‘could have done a lot of mind stuff’ to this unpleasant boss may, then, be an emotion a little in the mould of poor King Lear - ‘I will do such things - what they are, yet I know not - but they shall be the terrors of the earth.’)

As the time of Uri's military induction approached, he toyed with alternative specialities to apply for within the forces. Having enjoyed scuba diving in Cyprus, being a frogman appealed. So did flying, but above all, being a paratrooper. In that way some parents have, Tibor put pressure on his son to achieve what he had been unable to. Tibor Geller was one of life’s master sergeants - able, brave, dedicated, long-serving, but never quite officer material. Sometimes, he thought it was the strong Hungarian accent which had held him back. Uri didn’t have this, and Tibor openly told the 18 year-old that he would love him to be an officer. The paras, appealed to Uri for the best of reasons; he loved the image - the green beret, which was exchanged for red when you got your wings, the different kind of shirt from the regular grunts, the special boots with crepe soles. The paras’ mystique was part of the image. They were an entirely volunteer force within the professional army, trained in the art of killing swiftly and silently, with unconventional weapons, often at night, as the enemy slept. Uri's father warned him that the paras would be tougher than he could imagine, but the boy’s mind was already set.

December, the month of Uri's birthday, came. He went off by bus to the processing centre in Jaffa, was allocated service number 9711 71, and by the end of the day, was settling into a tent with seven strangers at a boot camp. The camp, a flurry of moustachioed, yelling sergeant majors and frantically running recruits, contained blocks where rookies could volunteer for the different branches of the services if they aspired to being more than a regular trooper. There were desks where you could apply to the air force, to the navy, to the infantry - or the paratroops. A couple of days later, Uri was on the back of a truck heading north for Netanya, where the paratroop training camp was. Weeks of running around the base at the double with a 40 pound kitbag (you weren't allowed to walk anywhere for the first three months), of obstacle courses and of lengthy marches (which Uri particularly hated) led to the purpose of it all - the first parachute jump from an aircraft. Paratroopers had to make seven jumps before they could wear the red beret. Recruit Geller's first jump, on a hot day at a nearby airfield, went perfectly. They got progressively worse from then on.

On his second, he panicked and fell clumsily, jarring himself. A subsequent jump, at 4 am in the Negev desert almost killed him. He was already edgy before the jump. He had had a dream the night before that he was going to die that morning. Uri, in what some might say was a rare case of him not placing the most supernatural possible construction on a seemingly prophetic event, says he appreciated that dreaming of dying on a jump was a fairly normal thing for a paratrooper to do. But as he and his colleagues were on the way to the airfield, a white dog ran out in front of their truck and was killed, a moment which added to his unease by reminding him of the death of his first dog, Tzuki. Thoroughly rattled now, he messed up the jump, banged into the

side of the aeroplane and went into a spin. His main chute failed to fill with air properly, leaving him in the graphically-named and deadly 'candle fall'. He then failed to deploy his reserve chute properly, and was convinced as the desert floor approached, and with the reserve tangled around his face, blinding him, that he was milliseconds from death. But at the last instant, the big chute had opened, and he landed praying that he would never go through such an experience again. The experience did not stop him from completing the course with a last jump, with which he got his wings.

Immediately after this came a fascinating incident, one to which there is not a single witness - but about which both sceptics and believers in Geller may well find themselves feeling it proves their point. Practically nothing psychic by Uri's definition had happened to him or around him since he came back to Israel. That part of his life almost seemed to be behind him, in adolescence, as if the things that had been happening to him since he was three were, maybe, the type of poltergeist phenomena which occasionally occur around disturbed, unhappy children (perhaps because they are merely misbehaving) and vanish in adulthood. Uri puts the disappearance of his powers at this time down to pressure of time. 'You are constantly occupied and busy in the army. You wake up at 4.30 in the morning, you have to clean your gun, you have to shine your shoes, you have to quickly have breakfast and get off to manoeuvres. This is a non-stop three years. There is no time for nothing except maybe to write a letter. My big moment of freedom was when I was able to jump to the canteen and buy myself the equivalent of a Mars Bar and take off the thin silver foil wrapper and just indulge in the taste of that chocolate melting in my mouth. That was my pleasure. There was no time for thinking.'

Uri's first assignment as a para, he says, was a 110 km march into the Negev as a heavy machine gunner, carrying with two other men a Browning machine gun some 80 pounds in weight. The gun broke down for transport into three parts, body, legs and ammunition, of which the heaviest was the body, and was Geller's responsibility to carry. Worse still, it was his job to parachute jump with the gun's body, which army tradition maintained was the hardest task in existence. The plan for the exercise, which would, if successful, gain him his corporal's stripes, was this: once down in the Negev, the team would be taken by truck out further into the desert with kit bags, then make a jump with the Browning equipment and march back 10 km to their base camp carrying it.

Let us say at this point that all young men, in virtually all societies, are adept at thinking up dodges from their responsibilities; it is almost part of the young male condition to circumvent imposed rules, while gaining the maximum advantage or pleasure for oneself. Yet at the same time, Uri Geller in his paratroop unit was - or, perhaps, ought to have been - a very unusual type of young male. Here he was, a volunteer in a crack unit, with his own military reputation at stake, by which he set great store. Here he was with his much loved and admired father's standing in the army at stake too, and his relationship with his father, *and* his standing in the eyes of his other significant role model, the secret agent Yoav Shacham, whom he planned one day soon to emulate and to be going to for a job. Here he was, additionally, with a small part of Israel's precarious security in his hands; for an Israeli, in an imperilled, besieged nation, to duck and dive on military service is a much more serious matter than for, say, a US serviceman to do a Sergeant Bilko, and have a free ride at the

expense of Uncle Sam. But bearing all this in mind, Uri decided to cheat - big time. He hatched a plan to get off a duty lightly - yet in being rescued from the consequences of his dishonesty, he experienced what he regards as the second most profound paranormal occurrence of his life, to be topped only by a staggering (and in this case semi-witnessed) event many years later in New York.

His working out of a cunning plan of deception in the paratroopers was not only foolhardy at the time - for what he did, he could have been flung in a military prison for months and suffered a stain on his record for the rest of his life. It will also reflect rather poorly for some critics on how he should subsequently be regarded in his psychic career. If, after all, we are to believe what we see in Uri Geller rather than see what we believe, we need to know that he is fundamentally honest; if we accept him as a separate species from the run-of-the-mill conjurer, we are required to believe him when he protests his innocence from the knowledge of conjurors' tricks. Yet what he did on a tough Negev army exercise, albeit as the act of a young, inexperienced former Tel Aviv street urchin, *was* not just fleetingly dishonest, but was a carefully prepared plan of deceptive action, aimed to pull the wool over several people's eyes. All a little disturbing - except for one major point: this account of what happened does not emerge as the result of surreptitious investigation. Geller tells it himself. Whether we believe the paranormal part of it or not - and he admits candidly that it takes some believing - it is his own account. And if a miscreant is honest about his own dishonesty, for many people, a certain superstructure of trust is immediately constructed. Thus it may even be (if we rule out, for a moment, some complex double bluff) that by admitting the shady circumstances which preceded the following, Geller will gain some credibility. .

This, then, was Uri Geller's plan, and how it fell bafflingly apart. The Browning gun body, he realised when he looked carefully at its construction, could actually be broken down still further. If the heavy tube *inside* the gun barrel and the mechanism which fed the ammunition through were removed, the shell of the gun could be placed in its canvas bag so as it looked from the outside like the full body, but weighed tens of pounds lighter. Since the exercise of dropping with the full body of the gun was purely a fitness test, and they were not going to need to use the Browning after they landed, and since he was still edgy about parachuting after his near-lethal tangle of a few days previously, why not, he figured, remove the innards of the gun and leave them safely in his kit bag back at base camp? He could then carry at a stroll the canvas bag on the 10 km hike after the jump. He ran through the physical reality of this tempting plan as carefully as any magician plotting a complex stage event. He would have to make certain that none of his comrades got to carry the bag, as they would be likely to feel it was underweight, and he daren't risk anyone discovering his secret. But - significantly again, for critics of Geller - he calculated that he could get away with it.

The moment of the jump came, and passed safely. The case, which was heavy enough, he winced, without its essential contents, was strapped to Uri for the jump, and let loose on a five-metre cable for the landing, to avoid him being injured by it on impact. He packed up his chute and slung the useless Browning over his shoulder for the march. Soon came the first problem - and with it, the first fascinating indication to Uri, perhaps, that people could, as magicians always say, be convinced to see (or in this case, feel) what they believe. Seeing Uri striding ahead robustly even though he

was supposedly carrying the lion's share of the Browning, one of his pals insisted on helping him; 'Look at poor Geller, they were all saying, he's carrying that bloody thing on his own.' So, wary of protesting too much, he let his friend carry the bag up a hill. But far from working out that Geller had cheated and wasn't carrying a full load, the young man mis-perceived the situation, and marvelled that he had never been able to carry this part of the gun further than a few hundred metres without a rest, but now could. He must, he puffed as he handed the gun back to Uri at the top of the hill, be getting stronger. Uri was trying, he now recalls, to suppress himself from laughing, when he saw something which made him practically throw up with fear.

A Jeep scrunched up alongside the group of men as they rested on a cliff edge. In it was a General. Uri knew at once that his game was spectacularly up. Very occasionally on such a dummy run, the commanders would spring a surprise on a random bunch of soldiers, and put them through a full-blooded manoeuvre, in which they would have to shoot with live ammunition at an imaginary enemy ambush. It was an excellent way of keeping the men on their mettle even during a relatively benign training routine, as well as giving them a chance to try their skills against the kind of danger that very well might face them; in 1964, Israel had not been at war for eight years, since the Suez campaign, but a well-armed and angry enemy was never more than a few miles away, even in the heart of the country, down in its southern desert.

The staff officers ordered Uri's platoon to spread out and set up the guns, ready to fire. He was severely scared, and beginning to shake. He did not even want to take the empty gun case, minus its barrel and firing parts, out of the canvas. As he did so, his mind racing to think of some way out of such appalling trouble, he could see daylight

through the thing. His companion handed him the ammo belt; he fed it into the useless shell of the gun and cocked the non-existent mechanism. Through the lid of the gun, he looked again, in despair now, at the first bullet waiting to be fired by nothing, hoping ridiculously that something might have changed, or that it was a bad dream he was about to wake from. The first group were ordered to fire their gun; the end of Uri Geller was seconds away. The way ahead was clear; he would be taken away, court martialed and jailed, then, at the end of what would have been his military service, he would be dishonourably discharged. His father would certainly never speak to him again. He would have no friends beyond the riff raff he met in the prison camp - if he was not actually kept in solitary. His mother would doubtless take pity on him, but would never be able to hide her tragic disappointment, let down by her husband first, then her son. If he were lucky, a job as a street cleaner or a lavatory attendant might be his into old age. If he could not even find anyone to trust him that far, he might end up joining the few tramps and bums who existed even in such a young, vital country. The general and the staff officers were hovering just behind him, their medals gleaming in the sun. As his mind was in freefall, the sergeant major continued barking orders: 'Company B ... FIRE! Company C FIRE! ...'

He had a brainwave; it was not one likely to work, but it was certainly evidence, for all the good it would do Geller, of the quick thinking the young man was capable of when his back was against the wall in the middle of a deception. He decided to take his small side arm, a standard-issue Israeli-made Uzi, and surreptitiously place it next to his dead Browning. When the order came to fire, he would pull both triggers. The report of the Uzi would be feeble and too sharp to be mistaken for that of the Browning, but in the noise and confusion and cordite of so many heavy machine guns

firing simultaneously, he might just get away with it. A bit of chaos, an instinct told him, might work wonders at concealing what he was doing, perhaps even from the eagle-eyed top brass behind him. They, after all, weren't expecting the *wrong* sound to issue from soldier Geller's Browning. They were expecting the *right* sound. And it was just, faintly possible, they might hear what they believed.

He heard the command to fire and pulled both triggers. What unfolded in the next few seconds was a sequence which he claims he still relives 35 years later. He insists vigorously that it was not a fantasy or a daydream. Yes, he knows he was always famed for his imagination as a child; he admits willingly that he had a wondrous ability as a young teenager to spin compelling stories out of nothing and to keep an audience rapt; he needs no reminding that what he maintains happened out in the Negev sounds suspiciously like one of his science fiction flights of fancy. *Both* guns fired. The spent cartridges spat out of the Browning until there was no ammunition left. His first thought was that God had intervened, and as he has never had any other explanation for it, that tends to remain his belief. An officer behind Uri, impressed no doubt by the young man's gusto at loosing two firearms simultaneously, even leant down to tap him on the helmet and say, 'Good shooting, soldier.' Trembling, Uri put his hand on the hot gun, which was now dripping black oil, and kissed it. There had been an incident not unlike it once in the past, when as a boy, he visited his father, who was in charge of the gun storage at his base. Having carefully checked the that a machine gun was empty, Tibor let Uri handle it as a treat. Uri pulled the trigger, and a single bullet shot out; badly shaken, Tibor put it down to a mistake, and Uri to just one of the strange things that happened to him around metal. The incident with the Browning, however, was immense in comparison, yet there was no-one he could tell, not even in the rush of satisfaction and good humour which swept through the men as

the officers drove off, leaving them with a short march back to the camp. He had told his closest army friend, a man called Avram Stedler, something about his powers, and his dream of being a spy, but knew that if he tried to tell even Avram such a story as this, he would probably abandon Uri as a friend.

What happened, or what Uri perceived had happened, would already be enough to unhinge most people. When Uri got back to the camp, he was naturally anxious to examine whatever it was he imagined he had so deceitfully left in his kit bag. And now came, if such a thing can be imagined, a still greater shock. He peeped into his kit and saw the barrel and firing parts of the gun, exactly where he had left them. He went back to the canvas bag to look at the Browning again. The case was empty, just as it had been on the cliff edge when the general and the officers pounced on his unit. He returned to the kit bag and drew out the internal gun parts. The apparatus had been clean when he left for the exercise a few hours earlier; it was now oily and blackened - just as it would have been had it been fired. The mechanism had clearly been fired; it even needed cleaning. Yet by any rational standards, it had not left the kit bag.

The sequence of events as he saw it gave Uri, to put it mildly, a few things to think about as he cleaned the gun. His mind was full of Cyprus, of the light in the Arabic garden when he was three, of the bent spoons and the telepathy with Mrs Agrotis. What had happened presaged the kind of bizarre madness that would happen around him - much of it with witnesses - over the coming decades. But in his tent in the Negev, anxious as he was to unburden himself, there was absolutely nobody he could share it with. Could he talk about to someone else? Perhaps Yoav, if he saw him again? But that would mean admitting the dreadful deception to his macho-man

military hero. 'I knew no-one would believe me. What would I say to someone? That I left the barrel in my kit bag and then it reappeared shooting? I just decided not to think about it, because it might make me insane. I thought, maybe I am crazy and I never really hid the barrel; I only think I did. But I know I didn't. I *am* a logical person; I know my deeds. I don't take drugs, I don't drink, nothing can alter my consciousness or subconscious or clarity and thinking. When something like that happens you are amazed and shocked, and because of the shock, you erase it and try not to think about it any more. Lots of soldiers find all kinds of tricks to ease their struggle through military. If I thought that I was going crazy, what would others think?'

His military service continued untouched by paranormal phenomena. He got his corporal stripe, and was recommended for officer training. Sometimes, he says, something like a knife would bend on the table in front of him without him trying to do anything. But so long as they went unseen by his colleagues, these events served as a micro reminder of what he strongly believed by now - that he was under the protection of some outside force, which was unfathomable, but at least was not malevolent towards him.

He went off to officer school. Out on a field exercise in teeming rain one day, he was overjoyed to come across Yoav Shacham. Shacham was doing a stint as a paratroop officer, and was delighted to hear that Uri was taking the path he was. He asked if Uri was still doing telepathy, and reasserted his feeling that Uri's abilities could be put to good use in due course. Uri confirmed that he still dreamed of being a spy for the Mossad. Yoav encouraged him to put all his effort for the moment into

officer school, then to go back to the paratroopers and establish a fine record there as an officer. They parted. A short while later, two tragedies, one minor, one cataclysmic, struck. Firstly, while Uri was at home on leave, Joker the dog had to be put down by the vet, as he was dying of old age and in pain. Uri had to control himself, aware of being a para even when on home leave, from crying in the street outside the vet's. Then, as soon as he got back to camp after the same leave, he picked up a newspaper to read of the death of an Israeli officer during a cross-border raid into Jordan. The officer, who was the only casualty of the raid, had been killed by a bullet in the head. He was named as Joav Shacham.

A substantial part of Uri's world had crumbled. By his account, the bereavement led directly to his performance at officer school beginning to tail off sharply. He fell asleep on a night exercise, had to be kicked awake by an officer, and was thrown off his training course the next day. 'Yoav was the key to the door for my future,' Uri says. 'His death in this really small raid sank me into despair, firstly because I loved him I cared for him, and then because I knew my career was down the drain. Only he really knew of my powers. So I couldn't care less any more about officer school, and apart from telling my father, who was devastated but advised me to try again, leaving and going back to my unit was a great relief. A big responsibility was lifted, and I felt fine about it.'

A certain amount of what might be termed interesting dissonance surrounds two areas of Uri's time at the officers' academy; and as with his admission of cheating over the Browning gun incident, there is again scope for several ways of looking at

each. What follows can be seen as both pro and anti Geller - depending, as does so much in assessing the Geller phenomenon, on one's viewpoint.

The first of these questions concerns precisely why he left officer school. Uri says himself that his departure was very much under a cloud, but a rumour persists in Israel that there was more to it than his simply falling asleep on an exercise. 'When Uri left,' says Eytan Shomron, his childhood pal from the kibbutz, who briefly bumped into Uri at the academy, his friends in his platoon said that when he did the sociometric tests, when you had to make a list of your best friends, he was the lowest, and that was why he was thrown out. I'm not at all sure it was the truth, but that's the rumour. You know what such rumours are like in Israel.'

Another ex-student at the academy, Miron Givon, who was actually on Uri's course, although not in his classes, fleshes the story out a little. 'Uri Geller's reputation as a potential officer wasn't really very good,' says Givon. 'He was one of the first cadets of whom the cadets themselves recommended under this new system of appraisal they brought in, that maybe he was not suitable to be an officer in the Israeli army.'

'I don't think he enjoyed the reputation of a serious person. At that time it was very important that you had to be an example to everybody, and what I heard was that he wasn't always very loyal to his friends and he tried to do everything for his benefit and not for the good of the group or the team or the class he worked with. You have to understand that at that time, most of the cadets came from either the kibbutzim or the moshavim [collective villages], as I did. So Uri was from a completely different part of the society, which meant that he wasn't regarded from the start as classic material

for an officer at that time. We always tried to volunteer for all kinds of missions without thinking about ourselves. We thought it was a good cause. We were very naive at the time, but he wasn't the type to jump if he wasn't going to get some benefit out of it.'

A note might be appropriate at this point, as Shomron suggests - and Miron Givon also warned - about the whole question of rumours in Israel: there is a saying which goes, 'Two Israelis, three opinions.' National generalisations are dangerous territory, but Israelis themselves do complain about the extraordinary disputatiousness of their people, along with a preponderance of gossip, often malicious and jealousy-based, at every level in their country, from the coffee bar to the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. This is partly because Israel is a far smaller country than people realise - it is very much a village. But there is a deeper, more pervasive culture of embroidering truth for the benefit of the listener, which comes as a surprise to those who expect this hugely technological, modern nation to display every characteristic of the west. In the west there is an assumption (often flawed) that people by and large tell the truth about one another. In Israel, you have to be rather more careful. At the most important level, people are deeply honest - there is for example, almost no street theft, and among friends there is a profound code of truthfulness. Yet to strangers, or when a subject does not matter as much as telling a colourful story, tongues wag unfettered, and there is often a rampant flexibility with truth.

This problem has led many unwary and gullible, especially foreigners, who have tried to research Uri Geller's background into deep difficulties. Some ten years after the events we are now looking at, a respected Tel Aviv newspaper published what

appeared to be a devastating expose of Geller. The piece is still bandied about by some as the definitive proof of Geller's fakery. However, within two years, the then editor had admitted publicly that the entire story, quotes, sources and all, had been made up. Later still, there was great excitement when a former manager of Geller admitted to having connived at helping him cheat. He later apologised, said he was upset with Uri over a financial matter at the time and had invented his story. Needless to say, the story of Uri Geller being thrown out of officer school has been seized upon widely, in various exaggerated forms, by those anxious to construct a case against him. They often say that he was 'cashiered' and thrown out of the paratroopers, which is, of course a lie - despite the irony that by Uri's own admission in the Browning gun case that he *should* have been.

However, one item of gossip in Israel about Uri's military service which is of considerable interest, yet has been missed in the past, does turn out to contain an element of truth. A story has it that in bored moments at the officers' academy, Uri would sometimes perform card tricks. This may seem to be a minor observation - what young man does not occasionally take an interest in cards? - but in Uri's case, it is not something he likes to emphasise, anxious as he is to distance himself from any kind of routine conjurors' skills. Asked about this rumour, Uri says it is quite possible he did mess around with cards - they are hardly in short supply in the average barracks - but that he has no memory of being very adept with them. Yet Miron Givon, who left the army a lieutenant, read economics and business management at the Hebrew University, and now imports Israeli kibbutz-manufactured plumbing supplies to Britain, does have a clear recollection. 'I remember Uri well from among the 120 other cadets because even at that time he had started to do his tricks, or

whatever they can be called. I don't remember any spoon bending, but he did card tricks, at which he was quite good.'

'He also used to perform seances. People would sit round a table and he took a cup and put it on the other side and everybody put his finger on this cup and it started to move it around the table and tell all sorts of stories about everyone round the table, and what may happen in the near future and all those kinds of things. I don't think we took it too seriously. It's hard for me to say whether he did. The interesting thing was that he said, 'I am not a magician', and what I think about Uri - and I never changed my opinion - was that he tried to be very honest. That was my feeling. He said he believed he had some kind of extra powers that everyone has, but not everyone can utilise yet. He didn't try to play God at all, and to me, some of what he did looked like magicians' tricks, but I'm not sure. Maybe he's right. Actually, it's not something which bothers me too much. But I don't have any answer for it.'

Palpably relieved that the strain of officer school was over, Uri accepted for the first time that he probably was not going to be a great soldier. As pleasurable as following in a father's footsteps can be, making the decision to take a different path altogether in life can be equally satisfying. During a week's leave, Uri took some time off to help his mother move into a smaller but quieter apartment on a street called Merkaz Ba'alei Melacha, just a few blocks from his childhood home, and a few metres from the lively Sheinkin Street, now one of the most fashionable in Tel Aviv. Margaret was now in her mid fifties, and was supplementing her garment machining work by waitressing in a coffee shop, something Uri found quite distressing. He wished he could make some money so as she could stop working, but realised there

was nothing he could do about it until he got out of the army. Then, he made up his mind, he would.

People's life stories in times of global trouble always have a micro and a macro level. Uri's return to his unit, his head full of career plans for the following year, when he finished his service, came a few months before the 1967 Six Day War with the Arab countries. Israel was on the point of having to fight for its life in what promised to be a David and Goliath struggle far more uneven than even Britain's lonely fight against Nazi Germany a few years before.

Israel's forces were, in many ways, a motley crew, made up of dozens of different nationalities. Many of the more senior soldiers were concentration camp survivors, and they were trained unconventionally compared to most armies. Their equipment came from mixed sources, and much of it was obsolete, and their supplies of fuel and munitions were limited. Ranged against Israel were the armies of 14 encircling countries, thirty times greater in number, and equipped with the latest Soviet equipment, much of it tried and tested to the highest contemporary standards in North Vietnam against the Americans. The Egyptians, Israel's most populous enemy, had the benefit not only of the Soviets behind them, but of a large number of high ranking former Nazis who came to Cairo to give quiet military and propaganda advice. It was public knowledge that Israeli intelligence calculated that if war came, the Jews would have to begin to push the Arab armies back on every front within ten days to stand a chance of survival. It was a ridiculously unrealistic target, and consequently, there was a widespread fear that Israel faced total extermination - something which today, when Israel is perceived internationally as the aggressive Goliath of the region rather

than the David, is often forgotten. The unbridled international delight at Israel's crushing six day victory in June 1967, may well have ensured that anti-semitism did not prevent the rapturous reception which a good-looking young Israeli called Geller received when he went off on a world-wide quest for wealth and fame a few years later. For many years, these vigorous, talented Israelis and everything they stood for - sunshine, oranges, socialism-in-action kibbutzim and now, great bravery against ugly aggression - were exceptionally popular. This was a cultural trend which two rather naff but good-looking singers called Esther and Avi Ofarim hitched a ride on in 1968 when they launched themselves on the world with a twee, jolly little song in English, 'Cinderella Rockafella', and were met by a flood tide of goodwill, culminating in their winning the Eurovision Song Contest. The world outside Israel, which had little real notion of what Israelis were like before the Six Day War and the Ofarims, suddenly couldn't get enough of them. In Britain, it was not uncommon to come upon people who professed to hate Jews, but thought Israelis were wonderful; they would be profoundly sceptical when it was pointed out to them that, actually, Israelis *were* Jews. Thus it may well be that Israeli nationality did more than merely fail to hinder Uri Geller from succeeding; being Israeli at a crucial time may have tipped him towards the critical mass which constituted international stardom; a point to ponder might be whether Geller would have been as successful had he been Egyptian.

With the war brewing, Uri was made a sergeant in overall charge of a few command cars and a dozen soldiers. He was just back into his old routine, when he came down with severe pneumonia. He was in hospital for a month, where they were already taping up windows and preparing emergency operating rooms, and then went to an army convalescent station for a few weeks. There he met an already engaged girl

called Yaffa, an army officer who helped run the convalescent unit. Yaffa had black hair, green eyes and a beautiful body; Uri and Yaffa went to her room and made love together within hours of meeting, and he fell deeply in love with her. In the intense few pre-war days they spent together, she said she loved him too, but felt she could not break off her engagement to a man she had known since she was 13. Nevertheless, when Uri had to go home for two days' prior to returning to his base, they made elaborate plans to keep in touch and see each other whenever they could. She gave him a list of everywhere she expected to be in the following months, and he left. It was two days before the Six Day War broke out.

The sirens ordering all Israelis to report to their units went off throughout the country early in the morning of Monday June 5th 1967. Uri leapt onto his Vespa and ran every red light in the city, his hand permanently on the scooter horn. Because he was out of training, it was quickly decided to put him in charge of eight men in a command car rather than to let him drive an armoured vehicle. By late afternoon, all ready and dressed in camouflage gear, he and his platoon sat and waited for orders. Even the officers did not know which front they would be sent to - the Golan Heights to fight the Syrians, the Sinai to engage with the Egyptians, or the border with Jordan, whose armies were the best trained and technically competent of all the Arabs, and comprised by far the most dangerous of Israel's enemies in close ground combat. Like every citizen in Israel, Uri Geller and his platoon listened to the news on transistor radios. It was to be eighteen hours before they got their orders, a period in which much had happened, as the waiting soldiers heard on the news. Squadrons of Israeli jets had burst out of bases which most citizens did not even know existed, and in three hours of the early morning, had destroyed on the ground almost every gleaming new

Soviet MIG the entire combined Arab air forces owned. Flying their sleek French aircraft eight missions back to back, in radio silence and as low as 500 feet, the air force pilots, who ranged from tanned teenage kibbutzniks just off their tractors to sequestered El Al 707 captains in their forties to grizzled middle-aged RAF veterans, destroyed 300 Egyptian planes (of which just 20 were in the air), 52 in Syria, 20 in Jordan and seven in Iraq. The first part of the Israelis' master plan, total air supremacy, was therefore theirs before supper time on the first day. Israel was saved; now the country's military commanders wanted to make further wars unnecessary by pushing their enemies back from their borders. That meant ground fighting, which would take another five days.

The land battles, however, were a much harder matter than pulverising the Arabs from the air, and none of the ground attacks the Israelis undertook was more difficult than the defence minister General Moshe Dayan's bold attempt to take east Jerusalem and the entire west bank of the river Jordan, which had been a source of constant bombardment from the Jordanians for years. King Hussein of Jordan already felt badly let down by the Egyptian leader, Nasser, over Egypt's total military collapse within hours of the war starting, and the Sandhurst-trained monarch badly wanted his troops to give a better account of themselves.

Geller's unit was ordered at three in the morning of Tuesday June 6th, to head for a point between Jerusalem and the town of Ramallah to the north of the city, to try to prevent the tough Jordanians getting supplies through to their renowned legionnaires in Jerusalem. Although he was not to know the entire picture, he formed part of the northern jaw of a pincer movement designed to encircle Jerusalem. Ramallah was a

cool, summer retreat favoured by rich Arabs, and where King Hussein was building a summer palace until the war intervened. On the slow journey across country to Ramallah, which took all of Tuesday, Uri thought continually about Yaffa, about his mother and father and about the strong possibility he sensed that he would be injured. He had a feeling at the same time, he says, that he would not be killed. Somewhere on the road, where they were refuelling the vehicles from a tanker, Uri saw Avram Stedler and became convinced that his friend was going to die. 'Avram,' he called out. 'can I shake your hand?' Stedler was puzzled and asked, why. 'Just shake hands with me, please,' Geller demanded. He felt sickened, he says, by the burden of somehow *knowing* so much he was not supposed to.

At lunchtime on Wednesday June 7th, King Hussein made a stirring broadcast to the men of the Royal Jordanian Army over Radio Amman. 'Kill the Jews wherever you find them,' he said in his deep, restrained baritone. 'Kill them with your arms, with your hands, with your nails and teeth.' Hussein had given up the struggle by that night, but in the afternoon meanwhile, at a spot called Tel el Ful, near an elevated position known to the Israelis as the French Hill, several of his loyal units attempted to do their king's bidding when they ran into the outfit Uri Geller served in. They ambushed it and nearly wiped it out. Sheltering in a graveyard, as hastily called-in Israeli tanks engaged with Jordanians and Israeli aircraft bombed the enemy with napalm, Uri took a bullet through his left hand. Another soldier tore Uri's shirt off to see if the profuse blood was coming from anywhere else, and, seeing it was only a flesh wound, tied his hand up. Minutes later, Uri watched as one of his group's semi-light armoured cars came head to head with a Jordanian Patton tank. It could have been his vehicle, had he not caught pneumonia and been deemed out of practice after

his long sick leave to drive it. As it happened, the car contained Avram Stedler. Avram, who was the gunner, could only get his shell to within a few metres of the tank, where it exploded harmlessly. Uri then saw the tank fire at the car from close range and watched helpless as Avram's vehicle tilted and shuddered. What he describes as a strange rattle could be heard before a rumble from inside the car, followed by smoke and flames. Uri and another soldier ran to the wreck to see if anyone was alive. The bodywork was red hot. The driver and the captain were dead, but Avram was still alive. As they pulled him out, an Israeli tank shell fired from a distance away hit the Jordanian Patton and destroyed it. The shock wave knocked Uri's rescue party off its feet.

'I saw Avram's left leg was blown off,' Uri recounts. 'He was very pale, but conscious. As I dragged him, all he cared about was his penis. He kept saying, "Is my thing all right, is it still there?" I opened his trousers and looked. It was all blown away with the leg. I lied to him, and said everything was fine. We got him to a house. He asked if there were helicopters coming.' Geller grabbed a walkie talkie which had two bullet holes through it and called into the dead radio to pretend to ask for a helicopter with a *chovesh*, a medic. 'I said a helicopter was on its way to pick him up and he'd be fine. Later on, of course, I found out that he'd died right there.'

There were urgent things to attend to. The fire which was still pinning the group down was coming from a Jordanian pillbox above them, and Uri decided to lead a party up to knock it out. As they sneaked up the hillside, a soldier jumped from behind a rock and shot twice at them from 30 metres, but missed. Geller pulled his gun up to waist height, and looked the soldier in the face. He noticed he had a

moustache before he fired accurately, killing him instantly. Some moments later, in the confusion, with explosions and flying bullets all around, Geller was hit again, this time badly, by lumps of metal flying off another stricken enemy tank, or possibly bullets. It was never established which. He felt a blast, sensed something entering his right arm and the left side of his forehead, and, as he blacked out, assumed with resignation that he was dead. He remembers being surprised at how easy it was.

He was next aware of being in a bed. The first thing he noticed was that everything around him was clean. His arms were both bandaged, as was his head. He heard from the radio that the war was not quite over, but was moving rapidly towards a victory. He thought immediately of Yaffa. He saw other wounded soldiers in beds around him, most hurt far more seriously than him, and requested a phone. He called his mother to say he wouldn't be home for a while, but was fine. He didn't say where he was, as he knew Margaret also had Tibor to worry about - his father was fighting somewhere, probably in Sinai. He then phoned Yaffa, and to his delight, reached her. He immediately went back on his resolve not to tell her where he was. She wanted to see him as soon as she could.

Uri had been lucky, the wounds just stopped short of being serious, although his arms were going to need plenty of attention before they worked properly again. More than 30 years on, he still cannot fully extend his left arm. During his three weeks in hospital, he thought a lot about the Jordanian he had shot. 'It was a split second. You don't have it in your mind that you are killing a person. You don't think. You just know that if you don't pull the trigger, you will be killed, and you are saving your life. Even today, thirty years later, I still have a recurring dream of that Jordanian

soldier coming to me. He grabs my lapel and shakes me, and he is crying. He actually talks to me in Arabic, but I understand him. He says, “Why? Why did you do it to me? Why did you take my life away from me?” I don't say anything and he is shaking me and I am horrified and I wake up. I don't wake up in any great sweat, but I am disturbed, and that day I feel depressed.’

Other things from his past naturally swam into his mind in hospital. He wanted to contact his old friends from Cyprus, especially Ardash, who left the island for England and had not had time to exchange addresses with Uri. One day, at his digs at number 13 Landsdowne Road, in Chingford, east London, Ardash received a letter from Uri, writing from his hospital bed. In his reply, Ardash asked how he got the address. ‘He said he thought of it whilst he was in bed in hospital. How could he have known my address?’ Ardash still wonders. ‘I was living with my brother’s mother in law and father in law.’

Geller's military service wound down quite gracefully. He left hospital with his left hand and arm in a cast, but the right healed. As part of his recuperation, he spent the rest of the summer as an organiser at a holiday camp for children. He kept seeing Yaffa whenever he could, but the relationship was clearly doomed. He was discharged wounded by the paratroopers, and went to the induction camp where he had started his service. Here, he resumed light duties, while still receiving physiotherapy. He was quite happy. He was assigned a job tracking down army deserters. He would normally be expected to do this travelling around on the bus, but instead found an old motorcycle, got his father to fix it up in his tank workshop, and set himself up as a sort of DIY military policeman. ‘I had this helmet and I felt superior on my

motorbike. The camp was attached to a hospital, and there were beautiful nurses there. Every morning whenever I wanted to pick up a girl or find some new girlfriend, I would ride the bike between the nurses' bungalows. I would look very impressive, just like my father.'

As for being exactly like his father in terms of staying on in the forces, if only in some minor, NCO capacity, the injured left arm finally put paid to that - and in very socially acceptable way. Flunking the army was one thing, but being a wounded veteran was another. Geller had cause to be rather pleased with the way things had worked out. 'You know who really saved my life,' he reflects, 'was the officer who kicked me awake and said, "Uri, get up," when I fell asleep. If I had not been booted out of officer school, I would have either I would have died in one of the wars or I would now be some general in the Israeli army with an army house and a little Ford. I met the guy who woke me up in New York once, in the lobby of the Lexington Hotel. I was already on my way to stardom and he was working as an El Al security guard. I walked up and said, "Weren't you the guy that kicked me and woke me up?" He said, "Yes, Uri, of course." So I shook his hand and said thanks for starting my career off.'

Hanging around for official discharge on his very last day as a full-time soldier of the Israel Defence Forces, Uri met a younger man, Ygal Goren, whom he had never come across before. In the odd way that these things sometimes work out, the two young men got on, and Goren is today one of the few army pals whom Geller still looks up when he is in Israel. There was a strong link between the two; it turned out that Goren had also been fighting near the French Hill the day the Israelis took that terrible pounding at the Jordanians' hand, and had been wounded close to the same

spot. Yet oddly enough, they did not discover this until several years later, when they were talking, as they always do, about their army days, a period Goren has noticed that Uri seems to find especially important to him. Goren had gone on from the army to the Hebrew University to study political science, become a journalist, rose to be the diplomatic correspondent of Israel Television, and now has private TV documentary production company in Tel Aviv.

Not knowing at the time that they had nearly died in the same Arab village, and knowing nothing either of the strange powers Geller believed he possessed, what stuck in Goren's mind after meeting Uri Geller in 1967 was an odd thing his new friend had told him within minutes of meeting 'To tell you the truth,' Ygal Goren says, 'I didn't know what this 21-year-old was talking about. I was laughing at him, just to myself. I had asked him, as you would anyone on their last day in the army, what he was going to do now. And he just said to me, straight out, "Ygal, I am going to be rich and famous."'”

Chapter 6 / Word Spreads

'The jeans, the T shirt, the simple, amazed nature ... it was a brilliant idea.' (Guy Bavli, Israeli magician - and sceptic.)

Events and circumstances had conspired by his late teens to make Uri Geller something of a loner. But in the summer of 1967, as he was recovering from being shot up in Jordan in the Six Day War, he met the man who was to become his devoted and loyal *de facto* kid brother, life-long business manager, friend and confidante. Or to put it another way: if by any possible chance Uri Geller has been pulling the wool over the world's eyes these past 49 years, Shimshon Shtrang is the one person on the planet who, as they say, knows where the bodies are buried.

It was a curious sort of meeting, which these days might even raise a cynical eyebrow or two. Shipi, as Shimshon has always been known, was 12; Uri was 21. Shipi had been sent by his parents for ten days to a children's camp and hour out of Tel Aviv called Alumin. Uri, with his arm still in plaster, and hence not ready to return to the army, was a camp counsellor.

Uri was not taken on that summer to instruct in any particular subject, but just to supervise in the dining room and to keep the children generally occupied and happy.

One of the best ways he had found to while away a few hours was to take a group of kids out onto a patch of grass in the middle of the camp and tell them some of the stories he had made up back in Cyprus for Mrs Agrotis's younger forms. Among the children at Alumin, Shipi Shtrang was most responsive to Uri's imaginative, scary science fiction tales, and was constantly nagging him to tell another story.

Uri didn't only tell gripping stories. As a paratrooper, albeit an injured one, he was capable of organising some unusually exciting and ambitious outdoor games. 'I remember very vividly that we used to go at night into the orange groves and Uri would divide us into two groups,' says Shipi, an easy-going, smiling, patient man, who speaks slowly, says little, and has a certain aura of wisdom about him. 'One group was supposed to be looking for us, capturing us. I'll never forget Uri had this idea; he got us to lie down under the orange trees. It was cold and at night, and it was really scary. We were 12 and this was Israel, where there are always terrorists, and it was all up near the border, and the next thing I knew I was captured. Two guys pulled me out and they hit me with an egg over my head, and I can still feel the egg yolk running down my face.'

What really fascinated Shipi about Uri Geller, however, and what had him chattering excitedly to his parents on the phone in the evenings about the wounded soldier who was looking after his group, was not that he told good stories or invented great activities. It was that the soldier had been performing some extraordinary mental experiments with his group. 'In between the stories, he would ask someone to think of something or draw something,' Shipi explains. 'The whole subject of telepathy and

mindreading was really new to us, and I suppose we looked on it as magic tricks, as part of entertainment. But it was amazing.’

More amazed still was Uri, who was staggered by the results he could achieve with telepathy when he conducted tests with children, and most especially with Shipi. Shipi would get numbers which Uri had written down and sealed in envelopes; the little boy would then go upstairs in a nearby building, draw his own pictures and apparently be able to transmit them to Uri outside on the lawn. He started showing the children his bending abilities, and again, when Shipi was close by, or holding the spoon or the key, the distortion in the metal would far exceed that which occurred with any of the other children. The two experimented with nails, watch hands and any metal they could lay their hands on. ‘It seemed to me that Shipi was some sort of a generator to me, like a battery. The telepathy between us blew the other kids’ minds because I didn’t know him well. It wasn’t as if we were friends or relatives.’ This symbiosis between Uri and Shipi would later become a matter of fascination to sceptical investigators, who wrote (100% incorrectly) that Uri could *only* function when Shipi was with him. The story, still quoted as gospel by some eminent researchers, was born that Uri’s ‘psychic’ abilities first came to light only during this summer camp, that Shipi introduced Uri to a book he had on magic, and that the two jointly cooked up the scam which was to become the Uri Geller stage act. Some researchers even claim to know which book it was - a magicians’ textbook called ‘Thirteen Steps to Mentalism’ by Tony Corinda, which was published in England in 1958.

Today, even friends of Uri have an in-joke that actually, Uri *is* a fraud - and that it has been Shipi all along who is the psychic. But the myth that the Uri Geller

phenomenon only started at Camp Alumin when he and Shipi met is worth considering, even if there is no evidence for it; absence of evidence, after all, as any wise scientist or lawyer will confirm, is not necessarily evidence of absence. The source of the story was a fabricated 1974 Israeli newspaper investigation, which we will examine later, but which has still had an enduring appeal to its believers. Yet it is not, even for the devout sceptic, a very likely story. For one thing, thin and not fully satisfactory as their evidence is, there are simply too many long-pre-Shipi witnesses to discount, who attest to Uri demonstrating either paranormal effects or unusually precocious acts of magicianship going right back to childhood. For another, struck as Uri was by young Shipi's complementary abilities in the psychic field, he was only a 12 year old kid, and hardly the type a serving paratropper would be likely to look to for careers advice. For yet another, Uri being Uri, he was actually rather more interested in Shipi's 19 year-old sister, a pretty green-eyed redhead with a touch of the Faye Dunnaway about her.

Uri Geller first met Hanna Shtrang at a parents' day, when the whole Shtrang family came over from Tel Aviv to see Shipi. 'We were all sitting on the lawn and, I introduced my sister to Uri, they talked a little bit, and that was it. My sister used to be like a hippy she had little round glasses, and long hair and was into the Beatles,' says Shipi. Uri and Shipi demonstrated some of the psychic stuff they had been doing together in the camp, and Hanna was hooked, even though with her, the experiments did not work particularly well. For the next 24 years, Hanna, then a supervisor at Motorola electronics office in Tel Aviv, would be Uri's on-off girlfriend, then full time lover and mother of his children; the couple married in Budapest in 1991. 'Hanna invited me over to her house that first time we met,' Uri says. 'I liked her very

much, but I had girlfriend at the time, so I didn't take it too seriously. But neither did I forget her.'

When Shipi went home, he and Uri swapped addresses, and Uri promised to look him up. Although Uri believed he had his powers long before Shipi came on the scene, and was clearly shopping around on the paranormal fringe in early adulthood, as his seances at the officers' academy show, there was, nevertheless, a definite Archimedes moment at Camp Alumin in the summer of 1967. What came as a complete revelation to him was the entertainment value of what he could do. 'I suddenly felt like an entertainer for the first time in my life,' he says. He also realised once and for all that even if things had worked out in the army, he would have been far too extrovert for the anonymity of the secret service. In his last weeks at the camp, Uri was thoughtful; he really shone at entertaining, and had done, he realised, ever since Mrs Agrotis got him to make up stories for the children at Terra Santa. Was there the basis of a bizarre new stage act in his special abilities? He would give the matter a great deal of thought in his last few months back in the army, the rather pleasant period which he spent driving around villages chasing up those who had not turned up for their military service.

Although Shipi was still talking endlessly about Uri Geller back at home, and Hanna was more than keen to hear from him, Uri was tardy about getting in touch again. Uri had grown to superman proportions in Shipi's mind; he was his hero. Yet he noticed, to his distress, that other people would laugh at his stories about Uri, and say it was all trickery. He would insist it was real, and Shipi would promise that one day, he would bring this amazing man for them to see. By a lucky chance, Shipi was

able to do just that a couple of weeks later. Uri's father was by now living in a bachelor apartment in Givatayim, a flat Tibor seldom used, giving Uri the opportunity to go there with his girlfriends. Although Tibor could hardly be bothered with Uri as a child, later in life, the bond between father and son grew ever stronger. Uri was once giving a lift on his scooter to a girlfriend of his father, when, a few yards from the bachelor apartment, he almost ran someone down in the street; it was Shipi. 'I almost fell off the scooter,' Uri says. 'He jumped on me, and I said, "What are you doing here?"', and he said, "I live here." He lived about 150 yards away from my father.'

Shipi invited Uri and his father's girlfriend up to the Shtrang apartment, where Uri talked some more with Hanna. From that point onwards, Uri gradually became effectively an adopted son of the Shtrangs, with undertones of a romance between him and Hanna. Uri had all kinds of other relationships on the go with glamorous girls in the city, but Hanna, who lived out in the suburbs and came from a regular family, was increasingly his central point of reference. As he tellingly puts it, 'I loved Hanna in a different way. She was fragile and a good girl, and we were very close.' Shipi slipped into the role of slightly put-upon kid brother. Once in a while, Uri would let him come out on the Vespa with him, but, as Shipi says: 'Basically, he met my sisters. They used to go over to his father's flat dancing and would never let me come. I used to get hurt by that.'

Naturally, it was not long before Uri was doing his psychic stuff for the whole Shtrang family and friends. 'We started getting more amazed at it,' says Shipi, 'And when he explained to us that it wasn't a trick, even my parents began to believe in it. My father was a welder with this huge conglomerate, building bridges. He used to

work a lot in Eilat and came home at weekends. My parents were regular people. They were not philosophers. I think to begin with, they didn't take much notice of the things Uri could do. But when we got to do it under better conditions, and he would tell someone to go out of the room and he would still read their thoughts, they started to see there was more to it.'

Uri was quite consciously now working out the rudiments of a stage act, and Shipi, although he was still only a schoolboy of 12, was quietly engaged on the same project. 'When he got back to school Shipi obviously told all the kids and the teachers that there was this guy who was his instructor who can read minds and do telepathy. One of his teachers told him to ask me to come over to the school.' What had actually happened was that none of the teachers believed Shipi, but the boy had prevailed upon them to ask Uri Geller to come as a speaker. Uri would even be paid 36 *lira* (about £4) from a speakers' petty cash fund - the first money he ever received for a professional engagement, and the first time he had ever been on a real stage. 'I had nothing prepared nothing or rehearsed. I just walked up, and there was a blackboard and I said, "Right somebody come up and write a colour or a city or a number and I'll turn away and you'll all project it into my mind. So right there, I formed myself an act, starting with telepathy, which really impressed everyone. Then I did the rings - spoons weren't in my thing then. Everyone was wearing rings, so I started bringing people on the stage and bending them. I was obviously a natural-born ham, because I really found myself enjoying it.'

Shipi, too, was enjoying it from the audience; he could see a showbusiness phenomenon clearly in front of him, and it felt as if it was partly his property. Particularly delicious was seeing his teachers and friends, who had been so sneering, suddenly change tack during the two hour show, and become complete converts. ‘I kind of accepted by the phenomena now. It just became very natural. What amazed me was the different ways everybody reacted,’ Shipi says. Some people, he noted, would refuse outright to believe what they what they saw, while others would demand to see more and more, as if just one more demonstration if they watched it *very* carefully could help them work out in their own minds if they were being entertainingly duped, or if this was a real scientific phenomenon.

The teachers asked intelligent questions, the same as everybody has for decades. Did he guarantee it wasn’t a conjuring trick? How did these phenomena start? What else could he do? Interestingly, although Uri mentioned the spoon breaking in his hand when he was three, he had not yet made the final mental breakthrough of seeing that spoons, banal and everyday objects that they are, would make a wonderful central image for him to project his act. He also held back from telling them about the light in the Arabic garden; he still felt at this stage that this part of his childhood sounded too weird to bring into his CV.

What Uri maintains amused him about all this earnest inquiry, of course, was that he knew there was simply no explanation for the school audience to search for. This was just the stuff that had been happening to him on a daily basis since he was a child. Even though there had been long periods when he experienced no phenomena, something now - be it his contented state of mind, the fact that he was surrounded by

enthusiastic, receptive children, the presence of Shipi, or some other factor he couldn't control - was making it possible for him to produce the phenomena more or less at will. Cynics would say the only factor making it possible for him to do so was the urgent requirement to make a living when he left the army in a few months' time. But to a large extent, he realised, people being dubious or suspicious of him didn't matter; they would still pay their entrance fee to see him, even if it was only to go away thinking he was a novel type of fraud, a conjuror who pretends to be a *real* magician. Controversy, Uri and Shipi rapidly learned in the space of that afternoon, was not a drawback. It was their act's biggest asset.

And yet while Shipi, who was just coming up to his barmitzvah (which Uri, of course, attended) was making big plans in his mind for the act, Uri still had no real conception of his paranormal party trick as being anything more than a money-spinning sideline. Israel, with its famously expensive cost of living and high inflation, was a hotbed of what we would now call multi-tasking. Uri had his military service to finish, and the offer of a job - in the export department of a friend's father's textile business, a position which he took, as it gave him a chance to capitalise on his good English. He also had a mightily complicated love life to attend to, and two second string sidelines developing along nicely - as a male model, and - almost - as an actor.

Modelling was one of the funnier interludes in Uri's life. 'It came about through another girlfriend who was a model,' he recalls. 'She had a shoot one afternoon, and I drove her there with my scooter and I went into the studio with her. The male model never showed up, so the photographer looked at me and said, "OK you do it". I said "Me?" I didn't really know that I had good looks. I only realised it when I saw how wanted I suddenly was for all these adverts.' The advertisements look unbelievably

naive today; it was, after all, only the late 1960s, and Israel, for all its technological and intellectual sophistication was still in many ways a typically Mediterranean country, with a eye for the gaudy and unsubtle. ‘The first picture I was in was for a company called Ata that made towels, and it was shot on Tel Aviv beach,’ Uri says. ‘The photo was of me standing with a girl and a child at sunset, and wrapped around us is a big towel. It was unreal how the assignments started coming, from one photographer to another.’ The Ata ad was run in all the newspapers, even though today looks like a rather bad holiday snap. Subsequent advertisements Uri starred in were no better aesthetically. There was one dreadful studio shot for a brand called Kings Men underarm deodorant, in which Uri is seen beaming as he applies deodorant to a hairy armpit, while watched adoringly by some forgotten sixties beauty with long false eyelashes, and her head at the level of his crotch. In another, for a clothing company, he is seen in the latest, swinging-est Terylene jacket apparently caught in the act, under full studio lighting, of either doing *The Twist* or hailing a taxi - it is hard to tell which. He also modelled for postcards; one, of Uri and a girl in army uniform, posing with Jerusalem in the background in about 1970, could until very recently still be found in the more flyblown kind of souvenir shop in the Holy City.

Although it may seem in retrospect like a carefree kind of hobby, Uri was actually taking his modelling very seriously. He still has a notebook from 1969 with every job he did carefully recorded with the name of the photographer, the address, the telephone number and how much he got for it. He had no way of knowing that this, rather than bending spoons, might his destiny. ‘To me, you have to understand, the modelling was like a whole new world opening to me. Remember my real dream, my real yearning was to become a horror film actor, and I always looked for some sort of

a window, a hatch that would lead me into the world of movies. One time an Italian movie production company came and they wanted me to act in a film, I don't know why that never materialised. I still wanted it so badly that I went through what was supposed to be a screen test, but was actually a rip-off. In the street that I lived on there was a producer who used to do screen tests. He would put up a camera and film you and, say they would tell you they would check your acting out later, when they had found a movie for you. I felt so high about this that I did it a few times. But I never saw the film. Later on, I found out that there was no film in the camera. The guy was charging young kids who had a dream and cheating.' (Alert sceptical readers will wonder how Uri managed to be cheated by such a simple scam; others may be encouraged by his honesty in admitting that even psychics can sometimes miss a trick..)

The appearance of the advertisements had a couple of immediate benefits for Uri, the money aside. He began to be recognised in the streets, something he found very much to his taste as a young man whose principal employment, from the beginning of 1968, was technically as an export clerk; and he found his pulling power with women increasing yet further, sufficient to complicate his emotional life to a ridiculous extent. Although he had shied away from pursuing Hanna because he 'already had a girlfriend', it would seem that he was really trying to give her a kind of special consideration, protecting her from becoming involved with him for the present. He had already decided that Hanna was his best long-term bet as a life partner, but he still had fields full of wild oats to sow, and had no wish to put Hanna through the serial infidelity his father had subjected his mother to. Uri was still seeing the now married Yaffa on a regular basis, as well as going out with a succession of Tel Aviv beauties and models. In addition, he had met a new girlfriend in a pavement cafe. She was an

exceptionally pretty part-time model and beauty queen, with huge, grey-green eyes and a fascination with the supernatural, UFOs and psychic abilities. Her name was Iris Davidesco, and she and Uri fell deeply in love the day they met. They spent hours walking on the beach, sitting in cafes and talking about the paranormal, as well as having innocent fun watching the world go by. They even once starred together in an advertising photo for some brand of beer. An early problem in the relationship came as a shock to Uri; he had thought Iris was 20 or so, but, in another uncharacteristic failure of psychic powers, he had only later discovered from her parents that she was just 15. They, understandably, disapproved of Uri, just to add to his self-chosen troubles. 'It wasn't easy to manoeuvre between the people I loved, and believe me, I truly loved them all. But each love is different. I still somewhere in my heart love Iris, and whenever I remember Yaffa, there is a little thing in my heart too. You can't erase these things from your inside. I told Hanna that some day I'd marry her, because I knew that Hanna was the only girl who was really stable for me.'

At the same time as all this glamour and emotional drama in 1968 and 1969, Uri's professional psychic career was inexorably forming out of the mist, in great part thanks, incredibly, to the steady, focused approach of the 14 year-old Shipi. Shipi had been so delighted with the initial performance at his school in Givatayim that he arranged for more shows in other schools, as well as demonstrations at private parties. In each case, he would earn no more than a few dollars, but for Uri, the increasing frequency of the appearances made him more and more confident that the phenomena could, within a reasonable margin of error, be summoned up on demand. To those, of course, who reject the paranormal hypothesis, this could equally be seen as a training period; what was for sure was that if Uri Geller was to make his living at this kind of

thing, someone, either he or the mysterious external powers which he was convinced were the source of his abilities, needed practice.

By the middle of 1969, the penny had fully dropped for both Uri and Shipi over the importance of the bending of spoons and keys. They were increasingly forming the central plank of Uri's performances; there was something about the spoon in particular - its familiarity, its total novelty as a stage prop - which just happened to resonate for people across all sectors of society. And the strange, unprecedented kind of show the boys had put together was playing amazingly well with both up-market and down-market audiences. Was it a science project? Was it a magic show? Who cared? It was a unique happening for your party. While Shipi got Uri bookings in the Tel Aviv suburbs, Uri, partly through Iris's connections, partly through his own, cracked the socially smarter set in the city, the photographers, models and showbusiness parties.

There was very little money in it - Uri still used to ride to performances on the ubiquitous Vespa from Cyprus - but there was a joint conviction between Uri and Shipi that a very profitable little sideline was practically within their grasp. Uri began seriously to think that capitalising on his strange abilities could make him rich - rich enough, he dreamed, to keep his mother and perhaps even to open a little coffee shop. And he had already developed a taste for material ostentation. He bought a fancy hi-fi, and, always a big eater, indulged his appetite for food almost to the point of becoming chubby, like he had been at times as a child. The son of his employer at the textile plant had a big Plymouth, which he allowed Uri to drive. 'I used to come and take Hanna for a spin in the Plymouth all over Tel Aviv,' Uri recounts. 'It was automatic, and a really big deal, with power steering and those big wings with the red lights. By late 1969, with his face appearing regularly (albeit anonymously) in artistically

dreadful but highly visible advertisements, and his performances becoming quite a little cult thing in and around Tel Aviv, Uri was perilously close to being famous, and he did not just love the sensation; it was the best thing he had ever known in his 22 years. Fame, money, as much sex as he could handle with the pick of the Tel Aviv *belle monde*, and even a pretty, sensible girl waiting in the background to settle down with and have his babies. What more could a young man want?

‘Israel is so small that it spread like wildfire,’ Geller says, and even his critics in Israel agree he became a minor sensation. ‘People were saying, have you heard about this guy, he does these amazing things? Suddenly from these little parties, the publicity and added to the word-of-mouth buzz. A newspaper wrote about me, because there was a journalist in the party, then suddenly every newspaper was writing about me.’

He started doing semi-professional shows in local public halls - the first was in Eilat in December 1969, when he was approaching his 23rd birthday. The element of controversy, which Uri and Shipi had realised was such an asset, was a gift for publicity. Theories abounded in the press as to what this man Geller's trick could be. Lasers, chemicals, accomplices in the audience and mirrors were all put forward. Uri continued to insist that it was all ‘real’, but understandably, a large proportion of people disbelieved him, assuming this was simply part of his patter. Importantly, though, even the sceptics were fascinated by his act all the same. He was managing, he estimates, a success rate with the bending, telepathy and watch stopping and starting of 70 to 80 per cent. Who had ever heard of a magician, part of whose success

was based on his tricks only working some of the time. Even the cynics had to admit, it was a devastatingly clever idea.

Uri Geller still wasn't exactly a big name, but the question of professional management inevitably arose as the word spread about him. Shipi would have been ideal for the job, but at 15, clearly had to step into the background for a while and concentrate on his school work. A couple of small-time managers offered their services, and Uri slipped into strictly informal agreements with them for a while. Thanks to their efforts, suddenly, he was being booked into big theatres, and getting big audiences. 'Although I was basically ripped off, I didn't care. Suddenly from earning next to zero, I was making three or four hundred lira a night. The money was motivating me. I was thriving on it.' He bought a second hand Triumph sports car and told Margaret that if she wanted to work, she was welcome to, but from now on, she had absolutely no need to. If a little bit of Uri's mother and father still thought he was basically a naughty little boy who broke all their cutlery and never grew out of this bad habit, they had to be impressed now. In fact, both had come to believe in his special powers, although had not been inclined to speculate on what they actually were.

The performances were pulling in some money, but it was private parties which were upgrading Uri's social standing at a dizzying rate. Perhaps the most unlikely of the new friends he met at an exclusive social gathering was the dean of the law school at Tel Aviv University, Dr. Amnon Rubinstein. Dr. Rubinstein was an academic who, as occasionally happens, also had a flair for the media. He wrote for a number of newspapers, and additionally, hosted a popular TV talk show called Boomerang,

which covered the arts, science and intellectual matters. Rubinstein was not only convinced by what he saw, but went on to become one of Uri's great champions, writing articles about him widely and inviting him on to his show.

Now a prominent left-wing member of the Knesset (he served as a greatly admired Minister of Education in Yitzhak Rabin's Labour government) Rubinstein was introduced to Uri at the party by a friend, a respected newspaper columnist, Efraim Kishon, who was also deeply impressed by what he had seen of Uri's abilities. 'Everyone was sceptical in the beginning, but these were amazing things we were seeing,' Rubinstein recalls in his office in the Knesset building, overlooking Jerusalem. He speaks with great passion about Geller.

'I had no specific interest in psychic things. I am a totally rational, sceptical person. So I am not a fall guy, but I am open-minded, and I saw things that I couldn't explain. I first saw him at Kishon's place and I immediately saw that there was something in it, that this was not mere conjuring. He was not a trickster. I imagine the spoon bending is some sort of strange energy which we haven't even begun to measure, but I suspect it's subject to rational terms. I have since seen Uri do it hundreds of times. It has become almost routine. A magician told me that Uri supplies his own spoon, which is not true, but anyway, that wasn't what interested me so much.'

'The thing that amazed me more than anything else is that he could write something ahead of time on a piece of paper and hide it, and would then tell me, my wife or my children or my friends to write whatever you want. It started with a very limited scope - any number, any name or any capital city, and without exception he was right. He

could somehow plant a thought right in our minds. Then he moved on to drawings, and again, was right in detail, every time. To me this is much more significant than spoon bending. This was one single phenomenon which cast doubt on many of the foundations of our rational world. There are things which cannot be repeated by any trick. It's one thing to be a David Copperfield, but here was something that was done in my own home, not in another environment, on a stage which was organised and controlled as someone like that would require. There was nothing there that could deceive me, and it happened so often. We invited him time and time again. All sorts of people got involved and overnight, he became a celebrity. Then he developed it. He started when I met him as very limited, but then his powers increased. He came into my office once, and one of the professors came in and said, "You're Uri Geller, but I know your tricks." So Uri said, "OK, think of a number," and he said "Ten thousand three hundred and something, and Uri opened up his palm and it was written there. My colleague was staggered.' (The puzzling question of Uri's powers seemingly increasing as he became more famous has probably not been seized on by sceptics as much as it might. It could, on reflection, have been due to a lot of factors - increasing confidence and increasing fraudulence among them. It could equally be said that naturally talented athletes also build not only their skills repertoire, but their basic aptitude as a result of playing in a higher league.)

The power and vehemence of the reaction of an ad hoc coalition of magicians and scientists against Geller was remarkable, considering that even a year into his professional career, he was still not quite a household name. The man who would soon become his first serious manager, for example, had as late as 1970 never heard of Uri Geller. Yet the word was getting round rapidly among Israeli magicians that a

fraud was at large, claiming that he had paranormal powers. Spoon bending was a completely novel trick, which had never been seen before in magic, but for many skilled sleight-of-hand conjurors, it was really no great shakes.

They were soon tripping over themselves in the race to duplicate Geller's trademark effect, and none found it very difficult to come up with something which looked similar. Compared to the elaborate trickery they were used to, seeming to bend a spoon was nothing at all, and it frustrated them immensely to see this upstart youngster rising to fame solely because of it. Just as those inclined to believe in anything paranormal saw in Geller something akin to a guru figure - and that kind of thing did happen in isolated cases - magicians in the main saw precisely what they believed - and they believed powerfully that they were seeing a rather mediocre trick performed by sleight of hand. The older magicians were also baffled at the time by how Geller could be so successful when he looked so scruffy and amateurish, 'like a kibbutznik', as one schoolgirl who met him at a party puts it. Where was the hocus pocus, the top hat and the showbiz pzazz? Not only was Geller a magician, they felt, but he was letting the side down by not according the craft its due pomp and ceremony. (This was not the view of every magician. The younger aspirants saw the new phenomenon a little differently. One very successful young Israeli conjuror, Guy Bavli, who as a toddler rated Uri Geller as his hero, thought his informal style was his greatest trick. Bavli, who at the age of 28 often plays Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, expressly does not believe Geller is a paranormalist, yet, a little alarmingly, compares Geller to Moses. 'Here was a simple person with a stammer, who suddenly started doing amazing things - parting the Red Sea, apparently conversing with God. He wasn't a performer, and neither was Uri. The jeans, the T shirt, the simple, amazed nature ... it was a brilliant idea, and I admire him enormously for it.')

Scientists began to join the onslaught on Geller at the behest, largely, of journalists assigned to reassess the Geller phenomenon after the first flush of media excitement had passed. Established scientists were not inclined to believe what they saw, nor to express doubts on the fundamental laws of physics after receiving a phone call from a reporter; they therefore, naturally, suggested conjuring as an explanation. Conjurors were only too delighted to concur that the Geller effect could be created, or duplicated, as an illusion. For science at this early stage, there was no further case to answer - a cause had been found for the effect. The subtle point that replication by itself meant next to nothing - that just because there are wigs doesn't mean there's no hair - had not yet taken root.

Uri's appearance on Rubinstein's Boomerang programme, in accord with the show's name, came back on him. In the interests of balance, Rubinstein had invited a number of voluble sceptics into the audience. Assuming a civilised discussion would ensue, he started the show to find the anti-Geller people howling Uri down. 'It was the first TV show I had ever done, and it would have been OK if they just didn't believe me,' Uri says, 'but they were attacking me, really violently, with personal abuse. It was the first time I'd had direct, physical contact with these people, and I was really scared. Then I realised it was in my power just to walk off, so I did. Amnon followed me out of the building and he actually started crying, because he believed in me so much and it totally devastated him.' the taped show was abandoned and never aired.

'He was very infantile,' Dr. Rubinstein recalls of Uri's personality, 'but highly intelligent and knew how to sell himself. He had a commercial knack. His intelligence was basic, animal intelligence, what you might call emotional intelligence. He was

not a great thinker, but he was not a fool. He was very limited in his education, but it was easy to see how he catches on. He also spoke English very well from the start, which was important, and he knew how to handle audiences and journalists. The remarkable thing about his personality was that he makes friends very easily. When he first started I hadn't seen him do a public appearance, but people told me he would win the audience over in no time.'

Efraim Kishon, who was probably the most distinguished journalist of his day in Israel, seemed to have taken it upon himself to take the young Geller on a Cooks tour of the country's elite. There may have been a touch of the Hungarian old boy network operating here. Kishon was of Hungarian extraction, as was Yosef Lapid, a bright young broadcaster working at the time on the army radio station. Lapid, who is known as Tommy Lapid, and is now the Efraim Kishon of his day, was introduced when a young man to Geller at Kishon's house. 'I was one of the first to interview him,' Lapid says. We did a number of experiments with Kishon, but it was something he did in my car which I found remarkable.'

Lapid had a brand new Ford, of which he was especially proud. With Geller blindfolded at his own request with a sweater, and Lapid 'frozen with fear', as he says, Uri drove the car nearly 500 metres across the centre of Tel Aviv in busy night-time traffic, from Sderot Hen to the Town Hall on Ibn Gvirol. At one point, he ran over a newspaper in the street, and panicked about having run something over. 'I think he thought it was a person,' Lapid laughs. 'I'm telling you this despite my not believing in these things. But if it was a trick, it's one I've never been able to fathom.'

Just as magicians had no difficulty in duplicating Uri's spoon bending, blindfold driving was another arguably unwise skill for him to demonstrate. It was already a favourite standby of regular magicians, who do it by exploiting the surprisingly easy sight-lines a poorly tied blindfold permits. It may be that he could have both seen and heard the newspaper which he drove over in Tommy Lapid's car. Yet on other occasions, Uri could do it with tighter and tighter blindfolds, as well as with the windscreen blacked out - and on pitch dark, unlit desert roads at night. But although he could do it better and more convincingly than the average magician, demonstrating blindfold driving as a paranormal event still led him directly into the magicians' trap. It was almost as if he was completely unaware of the standard repertoire of illusionists - or that he wanted to create the illusion that he was unaware of it.

As he was cutting his unlikely swathe through Israel's intelligentsia, Geller's relationship with Amnon Rubinstein was scraping the rocks in private. One of the agents Uri was working for at the time made the observation that if there wasn't soon more substance to his routine, people were going to get bored with it. He suggested that Uri 'fatten up the act', as he put it, by the inclusion of a trick he had devised. Uri claims that he balked at the suggestion on the grounds that the very basis of his act was that it was genuine. The agent, Baruch Cotni, however, who has since died, appealed to Uri's manifest desire to make more money, as well as warning him again that his livelihood was at risk if he did not innovate, and quickly. Cotni's plan was to watch audience members as they got out of their cars outside the theatre, write down their licence plate numbers, and pass these to Uri, having shepherded the stooges to specially reserved seats. It wasn't a sophisticated scam, and, as ever, Uri's agreement

to go along with it can be subject to several interpretations. It could be the key proof that by nature and training, Geller was a trickster. Yet many of his magician critics were arguing that he was already a *sophisticated* magician; if that were the case, surely he would not need to fall in with an overcomplicated yet unconvincing plan such as Cotni's? The decision to go with Cotni's idea could equally be viewed as evidence that Geller really knew nothing about magic, and as a rash, naive young man, was prepared to seize any opportunity to rake in money. Or perhaps Geller tells this story about himself because he deviously *wants* us to believe he was hopelessly unaware of the wiles of conjuring? Whatever, it came perilously close to losing Uri the support of Dr. Rubinstein, probably his most important champion.

He began to use the licence plate trick in his act, and it seemed to go down well. Now, while we may be dubious over quite why Geller tells this story apparently against himself, two things we now know for sure; firstly, the fraud was not discovered even by any of his pursuers, since none of the debunking accounts have mentioned it; secondly, after a few successful evenings, we know that Uri went to confess his guilt to Dr. Rubinstein. He says he went disconsolately to the law professor's office and told him 'to forget Uri Geller, that Uri Geller is no damned good.'. He explained what the agent had pressurised him into doing. Rubinstein then took Uri by the shoulders and said, part menace, part disappointment, 'Uri, you've done things neither you nor I can explain. You don't need to add tricks to it. All right, that's a trick. But how did you do all the other things? The spoons, the keys, the numbers and drawings you beamed into my head?' Uri replied with what many people regard as his strongest, least challengeable explanation: 'I don't know'.

Rubinstein confirms this account entirely: ‘Uri said, “I am a fool, I can’t explain it, I got bad advice.” I was very mad at him for this. I gave him a piece of my mind. I said he had deceived me. Even before that I began to suspect that he was using trickery, maybe mixing it in with the other things. There were a few things that I thought were foolproof, which couldn’t be done by trickery, and now he was admitting to one. But then he was a young boy. To me the pre-cognition is much, much more important. I asked him how do you do it, and why is it so accurate, why can you predict what I will be doing in two minutes? He said, “Because I see. It is very disturbing.” He said this is not a trick. He was adamant about that.’ Rubinstein suggested to Uri that, in the light of this mistake he had made and the uproar his paranormal claims were clearly capable of making, he must sooner or later legitimise himself by having his powers tested by scientists. Uri took the message on board, although it would be a while before he did anything about it, because by luck, nobody had caught his hand in the till - and there was still plenty of money to be made - largely as a result of the timely intervention of Mr. Miki Peled, who at the time was rapidly establishing himself as the ambitious name to watch among young Tel Aviv theatrical agents.

It was bound to happen sooner or later that Israel’s rising Mr. Showbiz would cotton on to the Uri Geller phenomenon. Peled, who was just 30, had just staged a big charity evening at the prestigious Mann Auditorium in Tel Aviv, and was talking after the show in the Scala coffee shop with Shlomo Hillel, the Police Minister and various actors and other artistes. For an hour, Peled recalls, most of the talk was about Uri Geller, whom Peled had never heard of. ‘People were so excited talking about this boy, and I asked them who he was, and where could I meet him? They didn’t know,

but a friend of a friend had seen him at a party, where he'd amazed everyone. It was said that his mother worked in an espresso bar in Allenby Street. The next day, I told someone from my office to try to locate her. There were only five or six coffee bars on Allenby, and they found her.'

Peled got Geller to come round to his busy ground floor office close to the town hall within two hours. 'Uri was wearing a short-sleeved shirt - it was summer - and the first thing he asked was whether I knew what I had in my briefcase. I did, of course, and he wrote on piece of paper a complete list of everything, in detail. It included some medicines, some pictures of my family, bills, the exact number of keys. He knew everything. I couldn't believe it, and also he knew all sorts of things about me. Two hours before, he had never heard of me, and neither of us had any idea we would be meeting. There was no possibility for him to have looked in my briefcase. I asked my wife to come round, because there was something she wouldn't believe.'

Obviously, the idea of a show was paramount in Miki Peled's mind, even though he was primarily in the music business. But one thing was obvious to his experienced eye which was not entirely so to the other agents and managers who had dealt with Geller. He was not yet a performer. Peled explained this to him and how as a producer he could transform Uri Geller into a professional stage act - without dictating that he include conjuring tricks, or putting him into a tuxedo and top hat. Nuances of presentation were the difference for Peled between a one-season novelty act and a showbusiness phenomenon. Uri was impressed by someone he saw as much as a mentor as a meal ticket.

Peled offered him a formal management contract, but instead the two agreed that he would buy 100 shows. 'If I manage him, I can make 10 per cent, but if I produce I can make 10,000 per cent. I asked him how much he wanted for a show, and he said \$200. I agreed of course, and started work. Did Peled believe in his new protégé's psychic powers? 'I didn't in the beginning,' he admits today. He never once saw a Geller spoon in the act of bending on its own, the rare, but far from unique phenomenon so many people have been certain over the years that they witnessed. He did not even bring a spoon of his own from home for Uri to bend. It was very much as if Peled was unwilling to tempt fate by examining too closely the goose which he was convinced was about to go into full time golden egg production. 'When we were kids, we used to go and see magicians, but everybody could tell how the trick was done. And none of them could do anything like Uri Geller.'

'No, no,' Miki Peled corrects himself as he speaks in a smart Tel Aviv restaurant. 'Many, many people were *like* Uri Geller and did the same the same kind of tricks. but I never saw the same. For 20 years since Uri left Israel, people have come to me saying they know Uri's trick, and show me, and every time, it was never the same. It was always *like* Uri Geller. How many people have there been who are *like* Elvis? Even in Israel, we have about ten. And another ten *like* Tom Jones. These *like* Uri Gellers always had to touch the things they bent, but Uri could do it from 20 metres away. I always check how they do it and it's easy to see, every time.

'I sometimes thought it was a freak and would stop. I preferred not to investigate,' Peled reflects. 'I preferred to believe he did it with his power, and if you ask me now, I'm think he did. It's hard to say "I believe", because I'm ashamed to believe. People

are afraid to say they believe in Uri Geller, when you have the newspapers saying he's a liar. Sometimes you feel like you're against the world. Let's say I am against the possibility, but I believe he has something which nobody has. It has taken me many years to decide, but I am now sure he is real.'

Some time after it was reported in the Israeli press in 1970 that Miki Peled was now working with Uri Geller, Peled received a remarkable phone call for a theatrical impresario. It was from a Professor Kelson, a physicist at Tel Aviv University. 'He told me he could prove to me that Uri was a liar,' says Peled. 'Maybe at this time I was kind of looking for somebody to show me that it was a trick, because I couldn't swear it was the truth, yet I had no evidence it was a trick. He invited me to come and see him in his house, and he was really angry with me. He said because of me, people might believe in Uri Geller, this liar, this trickster. He was a very strong personality and I was convinced that Professor Kelson was right and Uri was a liar.'

'I came home and was devastated. I said to my wife, "Listen, Uri Geller is a liar. He's cheated us. I think I should finish my relationship with him." That evening, Uri Geller was performing in Gdera. I phoned the theatre and said, "Uri after the show, please come to my house." When he came, he realised I was upset, and I told him the professor had said exactly what he was doing. I said, "I'm your friend, I'm your agent. I expect you to tell me, at least, the truth. I don't want to get the information from other people. I don't care if it's a supernatural power or a trick. For me it's good business. But I feel insulted that you don't behave to me as a friend, as a brother, as a father. And he said, "Miki, this Professor Kelson is talking nonsense. I'll meet him and convince him he's mistaken." So now I was confused. Ten minutes before, I felt

you were a liar. Now I don't know. *Please* tell me how do you do it. He said, "I don't know how I do it. Sometimes I don't do it. I can never explain to anybody how I do it. My mother doesn't know how I do it."

'Two weeks later,' Peled says, 'We had a show in Jerusalem, and this Professor came with all his colleagues from the university. They told Uri that they would be in the first row and would take pictures and tape the show, and make a big story in the newspapers about how you cheat. Uri said, "Please do."'. And some of them went on the balcony with a telescope. After the show I said to Kelson, "Do you still think the same as two weeks ago?" He said, "No, I think maybe it's a different trick. But our theories of physics don't accept his apparent abilities." We never heard another word from him.'

Professor Kelson was, like many of the scientists who pitted themselves against Geller, a lover of magic shows, and had even learned to perform some tricks himself. But as keen as he was to spread the word against Geller in 1970, three decades later he is anxious to distance himself from the whole affair. 'At one time, I believed it was important to persuade people that this was nonsense,' he said warily at his office at the university. 'Now, I try to disengage myself in a totally neutral manner. I'd rather not even be mentioned in connection with your book. My energies are not channelled in that direction any more. It's obviously fraudulent, and that's it.'

Just as Elvis Presley had to do his army service despite his world fame, Uri, as a minor celebrity in 1969 and 70, was required every year to serve in the Israeli army reserves. As he was still unable to extend his damaged arm, he would have been put on fairly dull duties, had not the army got to hear of his unusual entertainment value

and swiftly placed him in a unit which entertained troops all over the country. This was a godsend for two reasons; it helped Uri become better known to people in captive audiences, who ordinarily might not have been interested in seeing him; it also gave him a chance to bypass the conventionalities of rank and hobnob with high-flying officers and generals, thereby extending his assiduous networking still further.

Uri's military gigs also brought him more of the kind of fans he might not have expected. Among them were two Israeli air force pilots, Gideon Peleg and Dov Yarom, both of whom now fly 747s for El Al, and remain strong supporters of Geller. Peleg was a Lieutenant Colonel in the air force when he first met Uri in 1969. 'I met him at a party and later flew him to a show at an air force base at Sharm el Sheikh in the Sinai,' he says. 'There were 200 or so of us at the show, a mix of soldiers and pilots. I don't know what they thought they were going to see, but I remember they were very impressed by him. At first I was very sceptical, but then I admired him after I saw what he was doing and I went with him to many shows and we became friends. As a pilot, you are very used to watching. I have to watch maybe two hundred instruments for the slightest deviation or change, so I think I see pretty well. And in all the hundreds of things I have very carefully watched Uri do, I have never seen anything underhand. Nothing.'

'Privately, he did many things like he driving a car blindfolded. He told me that he could see the road through my eyes and asked me to concentrate on the road. Things would move on the shelves in our apartment when he was there. Sometimes we'd visit him and on the way home, say something about him, and he'd call us later and ask why did you say so and so like that after you left? When we were staying at a

friend's apartment, there was a big old clock that hadn't worked for a few years and he made it move - he didn't touch it, but just put his hands close to it. One day, I remember, somebody showed him a picture of a group of people, and he pointed to some of them and said that this one has an injury on his left foot, that this one was very ill a few years ago, that this one broke his left hand. They were all correct. This guy that showed him the picture was amazed. Uri didn't know anybody there. Of course, I have seen the spoon bending on its own many times - these are the simple things that he does. But once, when we were talking about Uri in the kitchen when he was hundreds of miles away, a fork started bending, right there in front of us. I still have it, it was amazing. It was on the counter and suddenly we saw one of the tines just bend forward, several centimetres, completely on its own. But it wasn't scary, because we were used to these things after a while.'

'Of course, I read all the newspapers at the time, and sometimes people told the press that Uri Geller takes some of his own people to every show, that he had a code routine with someone in the audience. Because I was sceptical, I started looking out for these people. I would drive him or fly him to shows, and there would be no-one. Shipi wasn't there - I didn't know Shipi then. It was just him and me. He was doing a show in a different place every evening, and if he was cheating, he would have needed a big group of people working for him. The idea of him having confederates in the audience is wrong. It's a fantasy. If I had seen anyone assisting him, I would have left him and never gone to a show again. I wouldn't have associated with him anymore.'

'He told me that when he was young he started to feel that he had some sort of powers. He once said that he could make people stumble and fall when they are

walking, but he wouldn't do it because he is not that kind of person. I think,' Gideon Peleg concludes after knowing Geller thirty years, 'that he can read your mind from your sub conscious. Sometimes when you talk to him, he suddenly asks you something very strange that happened to you a few months or years ago, something that you almost don't remember. Sometimes he knows in detail about things that you have never talked to him or anyone about. It's God's gift, I think.'

Peleg's first wife, Leah, a medical secretary, was around for many of these strange occurrences. (The fork bending incident Gideon relates was with his second wife, Ofrah.) Leah Peleg's first experience of Geller was being with him on a kibbutz in the Negev, and seeing a needle break in half without Uri touching it. She was a witness to him blindfold driving on unlit Negev roads, when even a peek from under the blindfold would have been of little use to him, and saw Uri start the antique clock her ex-husband refers to.

Leah Peleg also became friendly with Tibor Geller. 'He was very dignified, clever, very tall, very, very handsome. You don't often see people like this, so straight and honest. Once a month I went to visit him in Hayarkon Street. Every time I came, he would escort me to my car, a Ford Capri. One time, I held my keys in my hand, and we were talking about Uri. Normally, Eva, his second wife was there when we met, and she was a little bit jealous of Uri, so we wouldn't talk that much about Uri. But this time we were outside, so Tibor said that he loved him very much but regretted a few things. He had never talked with me so seriously about things which happened in the past. And my car key broke in two, a big, heavy key. Uri's father was very calm. He just said, "Oh, it's Uri. I hope you have a spare key." I did. He wasn't surprised. he just said, "Yes, it happens." He believed in him. He had no theory about Uri's

powers. All he said a few times was that there was some gypsy blood in the family, from back in Hungary.’

Dov Yarom, now also an El Al captain, was a Major in the air force when he heard about Geller at the same time in 1969, and got to know Uri in parallel with Peleg. ‘We used to do Friday night parties at the base, and I was in charge of organising one particular evening. Uri Geller was just starting out, so I went to visit him at his mother’s home to see if he would be a good entertainment to hire. I found a very nice, polite chap, who held the doors open for you. I told him I was a young pilot in the airforce, and we wanted to invite him to our base, but there might be a security problem. But he explained that he was already security cleared. So I said, OK, can you show me something? We were sitting head to head, and I didn’t know about the guy. He told me a lot about himself, and was very confident, very persuasive, but I had to see. So he took a piece of paper and he tore it with his hands into a few pieces, put them on the table in front of us, and started concentrating. He put his hands 20-25 cm above the pieces, and they started to float above the table, not very high, but moving. That was good enough for me. There was no fake involved, they really moved. I am very sceptical, I am very fond of magicians, but I always keep in mind that they create illusions. It didn’t matter to me at the time if it was an illusion or a fake or the real thing. But as far as I was concerned, it was a real power. The same things have happened to me with a magician, but it’s definitely not the same experience that I had personally with Uri.’

‘He took me took me over to the window of this four-storey building and he told me that he is fascinated by the powers he has,’ Yarom continues. ‘He told me wonderful

things, astonishing things. He looked out of the window and said he can decide whether someone will fall in the street, although he didn't do it for me. Anyway, we invited him to the base and did all the usual stuff he does in front of the audience, but more amazing things happened later. We went to the house of one of our navigators. There were five or six couples there - that evening was the first time Gideon and Leah met Uri. So he started with bending a little spoon in his hand. It was very intimate, just us sitting having coffee and cake. He bent it in front of us. Really, it was unbelievable. He was holding it between his thumb and little finger and he had no power to bend it physically. And we actually saw the spoon bending. Another thing which amazed me was how astonished and happy he was when he succeeded. He didn't react as if he took it for granted that it would work. But more striking still was what happened to the wife of the navigator who had invited us. She had very nice glasses on her head and he told her to take them off, to put them between her hands and cover them. Then he floated his hands over her hands, and said, "I have to concentrate, help me with this," and then he said, "Open your hands," and she opened them and her glasses were bent. We were all astonished. She was not annoyed - there was no problem re-bending them. I know he wouldn't do anything harmful. Many years later, when I was flying for El Al and Uri was a passenger one time, he came onto the flight deck and showed everybody there the things he could do. I knew there was no way he would be a danger in the cockpit; I don't know, perhaps that shows that I was still a little sceptical after all.'

One particularly intriguing assertion Capt. Yarom makes about Uri at this stage is that the Israeli military became nervous of him as he darted from base to base, apparently overturning the laws of nature at every stop. 'He definitely had

connections with some very high ranking officers in the Israeli army, and as far as I know the air force regarded this phenomenon called Uri Geller as a security problem. What they found a little frightening was that people believed in him so much. They were afraid of a Pied Piper effect, that people would follow him blindly. Because this guy was very persuasive, very trustworthy and very dominant and strong in character, if you are in charge of an air force that is dealing with a very technical, very real world, you don't want people to believe too much in a paranormal phenomenon. It's very nice if you go and see a magician, but it's totally another thing if someone convinces you he has real paranormal powers. In fact, it was the air force that first took the initiative of trying to debunk him. They brought a few guys together who did something like Uri Geller did, bending spoons and driving blindfold - these three guys, I remember, were called the Ayalon Trio - and they were taken round the air force bases of Israel to say what Uri Geller does is a trick.' (Eytan Ayalon was indeed a magician of the time, who launched a high profile campaign of duplicating Geller's effects. he trained up two young men to act as fake psychics, grew a beard and announced in the press that 'Uri Geller will disappear'. If he did not announce himself as a fake within a fortnight, they said, they would 'reveal all'. Ayalon spoke of his regret at this, but said it was a matter of 'saving the Israeli people'. A left wing magazine renowned for exposes, Haolam Hazeh, also spoke of Geller, the 'telepathic impostor', as 'a national menace.'

In barely two years from being an obscure wounded war veteran, promising a fellow soldier, without giving specifics, that he was going off to become rich and famous one day, Geller had very nearly achieved both. To have upset stage magicians along the way was hardly surprising. But to have been seen by the military and academic

establishment as a living threat to national morale must have been beyond even Uri's fruitful imagination. Uri Geller had made powerful friends in high places; but powerful forces were also starting to work against him.

They did not always, however, have quite the desired effect when they did so. Capt. Dov Yarom's suggestion that the Israeli Air Force used magicians to forestall any possibility of its elite flyers starting to believe in the paranormal is echoed with an interesting and amusing twist, by Roni Schachnaey, the Grand President of The Israeli Society for Promoting the Art of Magic. Schachnaey, from whom we will hear much intriguing Uri Geller background later, recalls being contacted by the Air Force in 1983, and asked to go down quickly to do a show at an F16 fighter base in the south of Israel. Schachnaey is a mentalist, a magician specialising in the production of psychic effects such as ESP and psychokinesis. Mentalists often leave it to the public to judge whether they are using trickery or genuine psychic powers, or sometimes, as Schachnaey did on this occasion, will claim their performance is psychic and then explain later, to make a point, that it was really done by non-supernatural means. Uri Geller, of course, is regarded as a mentalist - at least by mentalists.

The base Air Force base, Schachnaey recounts, had recently received an entertainment visit from an Israeli of South African origin, who had an updated Uri Geller style act in Israel. The F16 pilots were knocked out by the act, to the extent that the senior officers, the high command or someone - Schachnaey does not pretend to know who - telephoned him and asked him to do an Ayalon-style magician counterstrike. Schachnaey tried out on the assembled pilots and their wives a new and impressive trick he had devised. He got one of the men to sign his name on two blank

cards and place them at one end and the other of a stack of similar blanks. He then asked the airman to bundle the stack of cards up and place them at some distance from the audience, but in full view. This done, he asked the same man to pick any woman from the audience. Schachnaey then took her through a lengthy rigmarole, asking her first to name her favourite childhood book, and finally, to remember her favourite phrase from it. On this occasion, the woman chose the phrase 'daisy chain'. Schachnaey then asked her to go over to the stack of cards and flick through them. There she found a card in the middle of the pack with the phrase 'daisy chain' written on it.

'From that point onwards', Roni Schachnaey says, 'I had these fighter pilots open-mouthed. But the funny thing was, that instead of taking the point that some of these psychic effects can be done by trickery, they started saying the South African guy was a fake - and it was me that was the real thing.'

Chapter 7 / Fame and Friction

'I don't predict. Why don't you ask Uri Geller?' Prime Minister Golda Meir, asked at a 1970 press conference about Israel's future.

Renown and notoriety for Uri Geller were running almost neck and neck in the middle period of his celebrity in Israel, from the end of 1970 to 1972. He managed a spectacular feat of headline grabbing at the end of September 1970, when Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian leader, died unexpectedly in Cairo of a heart attack. Nasser's death was one of the biggest news stories imaginable for Israel; his brand of Soviet-backed nationalistic socialism had been a thorn in Israel's side since 1954, when he became president.

The big news from Cairo occurred shortly after Miki Peled became Uri's manager, and upgraded the polish and theatricality of his act. The new partnership was going pretty well, and theatres across the country which had previously enjoyed typical 30 per cent occupancy rates were in some cases reporting full houses for Geller. But however much more dramatic Uri had become in his presentation, nothing quite

prepared Peled for the display of sheer hamming Geller displayed on the night of September 28th in a small Tel Aviv auditorium. From his seat in the stalls, Peled truly believed the boat which had so recently come in for him was on its way back out - under full steam.

Some way into the show, Geller suddenly stopped in mid-act, looked ill, sat down and asked if there was a doctor in the house. As a doctor came up from the audience, Geller announced that he felt unwell and was unable to carry on because some enormous, historic event was about to happen. He elaborated, saying he believed Nasser had just died or was about to die, promptly stopped the show, and asked the 300 in the audience if they wouldn't mind leaving. As they were filing out, looking puzzled and murmuring, Miki Peled was not a happy impresario. 'I just thought, that's it. That's his last show. Saying Nasser is about to die, is not like saying it's going to rain tomorrow. There happened to be a journalist in the audience called Ruth Hefer, and I believe she went to the phone in the lobby and phoned the newsdesk at her newspaper, and the Israel Radio to ask what was going on. I think she came back and said there was nothing at all on the news wires about anything happening to Nasser.'

'I was really concentrating more on Uri. He was really not well. The doctor had taken his pulse and it was 160 or 170. If it was all an act, it was crazy. This wasn't something where he could say, "Oh sorry, I made a mistake." He was putting all his money on one number. If nothing had happened, people would have laughed for years. It would have been a grand finale.'

It is practically impossible to establish nearly thirty years after the event the exact timings involved, but the Israeli papers over the next few days were full of the story of Uri Geller predicting the death of Nasser twenty minutes, as they seem to have agreed, before it was announced in Cairo. There were, naturally, stories saying that someone backstage had happened to be listening to the radio and whispered to Geller while he was on stage that Nasser had died. The theatre director gave a well-reported statement in response to say there had been nobody backstage to tell Geller anything, and the story passed, as these things do, into a sort of uneasy mythology, with some people believing it, others deeply doubtful, and nothing really settled. A strike against the story's veracity is that Ruth Hefer, who would be most likely to recall the precise details, admits to being hazy about them. Since 1970, she has dropped out of journalism, split up with her husband, Chaim, a well-known Tel Aviv columnist, become a fashion designer, and now runs a stall in the flea market in Old Jaffa. 'I was certainly in the audience, and I certainly remember Uri Geller saying Nasser was dead and hearing the news later that he had died,' she says. 'But what I remember most was the shock. So I can't be absolutely sure that I went all the way and made the phone calls. It's very possible, as I was writing for papers then, and the feeling I have at this distance is that, yes, he was well ahead of the news breaking.'

Geller, as might be expected, maintains that it was just an inexplicable feeling he got, and a cool analysis of the whisperer-behind-the-curtain theory does not exactly make it seem more plausible. Geller did not pretend to be a clairvoyant, so why would some backstage person, in the unlikely event that he was listening to the radio, tell a man in the middle of a spoon bending, watch-starting, telepathic demonstration about the news from Egypt? Doing so might just as likely bring about a balling-out from

the star after the show for putting him off his stride. Occam's Razor (the theory that the simplest explanation for any phenomenon is the most likely) aside, the whisperer theory becomes less plausible still if we accept for a moment the dubious idea that Geller always had someone on standby listening to the news in case some world-shattering event occurred during the act, which he could then capitalise on. The risk of making such a drastic intervention as pretending to faint and throwing the audience out because he had heard a faint message about Nasser would seem too great even for a rash performer to take. What if someone in the front row heard the whisperer? What if the news, or indications of its imminence, had already been on the radio before the show, and somehow Geller had missed it? Short of being able to quiz his informant through the curtain like a journalist would - Was the news confirmed? How could he be sure this was the very first inkling and hadn't been mentioned on any radio or TV station earlier? - it is hard to imagine how Geller could possibly have been confident enough to gamble his entire reputation and career on this one long shot. For it to be a fraud and succeed, Geller needed more than just for the audience to leave the theatre and hear on their car radios that Nasser was dead. There had to be a reasonable interval before anyone heard the news; there had to be no possibility of a credible witness coming forward to say they had heard someone tell Uri the news. Apart from anything else, Geller had no need to take such a chance. His star was in the ascendant anyway.

But whether it was a genuine psychic premonition, a mad guess, or an outrageously reckless piece of opportunism (and perhaps you would need to be psychic anyway to know if such a risk would pay off) the Nasser incident finally turned Uri Geller into a

nationwide celebrity. For anyone who had somehow not heard the showbusiness buzz and also missed the Nasser story, the Prime Minister, Golda Meir finally ensured Uri's elevation to stardom. Asked by a radio journalist at a Jewish New Year's press conference a few weeks later to speculate on how the next year would work out for Israel, Meir, probably delighted at the chance both to avoid giving an answer and to manage to sound clued-up, said, 'I don't predict. Why don't you ask Uri Geller?' Geller responded later by saying that, in fact, he wasn't in the habit of predicting either. Perhaps Meir's comment was even crafted by the old vixen to be an ironic put-down to Geller for public consumption, and she meant that only a fraud pretends to be able to predict the future. But it didn't matter; it was taken as a *de facto* acknowledgement that Israel had its own psychic superstar, and Geller was able to bask in the glow of it for years afterwards. 'There was absolutely no question about it,' says Miki Peled. 'From the moment of the Nasser incident, he was the most famous guy in this country, and even now in a way, he still is. It was from this point that he became a phenomenon.'

Being increasingly busy and famous, Uri's social life and love life were rather neglected. Iris, still almost a child, was virtually his shadow, following him and showing a neediness and dependence which was getting him down. She wanted to know everything he was doing and where he was at all times, and, partly because his true love was still Yaffa, and partly just because he was a man of 24, he found this constant pressure increasingly wearing. Whenever he saw Yaffa, which was rarely, he re-affirmed that he loved her, and told her all about Iris, without ever telling Iris about Yaffa. The imbalance between the story each girlfriend was receiving (forgetting Hanna Shtrang's background girlfriend role for the moment) was the kind of moral

conflict many a young man can cope with for a while, but the relationship with Iris was nevertheless petering out. Uri eventually finished with her, a blow from which she never quite recovered, ending her days lonely and drug addicted and dying on his birthday many years later.

Uri was unhappy about leaving Iris, and deeply saddened when he discovered she had fallen on hard times and died; he still felt tenderly for her. Yet, her clinginess aside, it is easy to understand how for someone in Uri's extraordinary - and so rapidly attained - position, a love affair with a teenager he had met in a cafe, and which seemed a good idea at the time, must have come to feel increasingly unsuitable. It would, perhaps, have been asking too much of him not to feel that he had moved on. The elite of Israeli society, right up to the prime minister, were flocking to him for private audiences after meeting him socially. 'I was now getting invited to really important parties, with lawyers and judges and generals. That's where I met Golda Meir. She did a hidden drawing, and I read her mind. But the only problem was that she did a Star of David - so I didn't really have to be very psychic to know what she'd drawn. I always laugh at that.'

There was a story in the newspapers that Shimon Peres, later to be prime minister, had experienced his pen breaking in Geller's presence without Uri having touched it, and that Moshe Dayan, coming to the end of his time as Defence Minister, had been meeting Geller secretly. 'I did meet Golda Meir after she mentioned me, but on a very confidential basis,' Uri says. 'She and Moshe Dayan wanted me very much to work for the Israeli secret service, and to see how they could utilise my powers. Then, putting aside the secret stuff, Moshe Dayan utilised my powers to find him

archaeological finds - illegally. I was really young and naive and I didn't know - here you are talking to *the* Moshe Dayan, the national hero, and he asked me to locate things for him. I used to spend hours over maps, and I know his garden and his house were just riddled with antiquities.' Dayan had initiated the contact by inviting Geller for lunch at a steakhouse called the White Elephant at Zahala, where he lived. Geller did telepathy with him, both the routine way, and the 'reverse' method which had so bowled over Amnon Rubinstein. Geller remembers both Dayan's single eye 'flickering and gleaming' - and that the Defence Minister let him pay the bill.

A couple of weeks later, Dayan asked Geller to come to his house for a more private meeting. This time, as a test, Dayan said he had hidden a photograph somewhere in the room, and asked Uri firstly to indicate where it was, and secondly to describe the photo before he had looked at it. Geller relates that he 'dowsed' for the photo, using his hands, and pointed to one book in a row on a shelf. Dayan confirmed that he had the right spot and asked Geller what the photo showed. He asked Dayan to 'project' the image to him, and Uri duly described an Israeli flag. Dayan laughed, which caused Uri to wonder if he had blundered. Dayan then turned to page 201 of the book, in which was placed a small snapshot of a flag flying over the control tower at Lod Airport. As Geller tells it, Dayan said, 'You've proved yourself, Uri. I don't want to see any more. There's no need for you to bend anything. Now what can you do for Israel?'

'Golda believed in these things,' Geller continues, 'and she wanted to know the overall pictures of Israel's future, and how many more wars were in store. She was very much for peace, and I told her I could see Israel singing peace treaties with all

our Arab neighbours. I actually I predicted - but I don't know if it was a logical conclusion - that we were going to sign a peace treaty with Egypt first. I met Golda three times. Once in the Beit Sokhalov, which is the press centre, once at the house of a friend, a General, and once on an army base, in a conference room in the barracks. I never visited her home. And the only time I bent a spoon for her was after the telepathy, at that little party. (Conspiracy theorists may well conclude from this anxiety of politicians to talk to Uri that they know more than they let on about his powers; non conspiracy theorists may conclude simply that politicians are deeply superstitious people. Interestingly, his political connections in Israel seem to have been maintained - and to transcend left/right differences. While all the above, and Amnon Rubinstein too, were of the Israeli left, Geller says he has friendly contact and occasional meetings today with the current Defence Minister, Yitzhak Mordechai, and with Ariel Sharon, the old war hero and now Infrastructure Minister. Interviews about Uri Geller were requested with both, and declined - but in neither case did the minister deny knowing Geller.)

In October 1970, following closely on the Nasser 'prediction' and Meir's comment about Uri on national radio, Haolam Hazeh, the popular magazine which had already been warning about Uri Geller being a national menace, carried an unsigned attack on Geller, quoting mostly from the ubiquitous magician, Eytan Ayalon. Ayalon was openly promising a witch-hunt against Geller - his phrase. Geller's transgressions were, a) claiming to be a psychic, b) poking his nose into Israeli politics and, c) 'He started to hurt our earnings. That is why we decided to hit back..' It was nearly four years before Haolam Hazeh launched its big and widely-quoted investigation into

Geller, which we will look at later - along with evidence that this investigation was itself a fraud.

Another unconventional circuit besides the military which Uri started working early in his career and was still playing after Miki Peled came on the scene was the universities. Here he often found himself causing great rifts between students who believed in him and others who refused to. Ygal Goren, who had last seen him on that final day in the army and been baffled by Geller's confident announcement that he was going to become rich and famous, caught up with him at the Hebrew University, *en route* to his own career as a political journalist. 'We were shocked,' Goren says. 'It was very impressive. I remember people saying he was a sophisticated magician, but it didn't matter to me, because he was going to become the biggest magician in the world, and I was very happy for him. I saw him a lot after that. He's a nice guy, a good guy. I like his energy and happiness, and he helps people. Jealousy is a big thing in Israel, and people were always going to try to damage him'

A student event which went less well, in retrospect, for Uri, and gives a further impression of the depth of feeling which was developing against him, occurred at an engineering outpost of Haifa's Technion, Israel's M.I.T., in Beersheba, down in the south of the country. A student called Sam Volner booked Geller as a pre-disco entertainer. He did his usual act in front of 300 engineering students, and, as Volner (now a diamond dealer in Los Angeles) recalls, it went very well. 'The paranormal was a new phenomenon in those days,' says Volner. 'This was something out of the blue. It wasn't a regular magician with pigeons and rabbits. It was somebody from

another world, right down to the casual clothes he wore for a performance. It was weird, and amazing to watch. There were big arguments for weeks afterwards among us, but I'd say the majority of the students thought he was real. However, one guy, a mechanical engineering student called Uri Goldstein, wasn't happy. He didn't believe, so he found a lawyer who was interested in some publicity and sued the promoters for his money back.'

The following year, in July 1971, the case came before the civil court in Beersheba. Goldstein alleged breach of contract, the Jerusalem Post reported in a single paragraph item, 'In that he promised to perform feats of telepathy, parapsychology, hypnotism and telekinesis, while in fact he merely employed sleight of hand and stage tricks.' With Geller absent from the court to defend himself, the summons having been sent to Miki Peled's office and either lost or ignored as trivial, Goldstein was awarded by default 27.5 lira for breach of contract. The money - around £3 - was apparently paid into the court anonymously and the case settled. 'I think Uri Goldstein's case began seriously, but it was really a student joke,' Volner says. 'I remember Uri Geller, when he heard about the judgement, wrote a very funny letter to a newspaper. He used a phrase I still remember. He said, "Why should I argue with a horse?'. Trivial as the case seems - the ruling can hardly be said to have been the product of a sustained argument by one side or the other - it is seized on even now as the definitive debunking of Geller, and the reason he left Israel a few years later for Europe and America. Various publications over the years have stated that Geller was 'convicted in a court of law for pretending to have paranormal powers', and have accorded great significance to the Beersheba ruling. This seems a fairly substantial exaggeration, even if based on indisputable fact.

A curious insight into the case now, particularly in the light of the airline captain Dov Yarom's belief that the Israeli air force had decided at a high level to use magicians to debunk Geller, comes from Uri Goldstein, who today works as an air-conditioning engineer in Petah Tikva, a town to the east of Tel Aviv. Goldstein rejects the idea that his legal case was a student joke. He says that he had decided to bring it as soon as he saw the posters announcing Geller's forthcoming appearance, and admits having bought his ticket with every intention of saying afterwards that he had been swindled. 'I didn't believe in all this nonsense about telekinesis, so I talked with my lawyer and said we would go and see the show and ask for the price of the tickets back. It wasn't a question of the few lira. It was the principle.' A week or two after the Geller show, Goldstein recalls, another show was announced in a hall in Beersheba by Eytan Ayalon, the magician Yarom believes was used by the military as the spearhead of its surreptitious campaign to discredit Geller in case he started turning airmen into paranormal believers. Goldstein took a group of fellow science students to the hall, and went up to see Ayalon at the end of the show. 'Ayalon said, "OK, why don't I come to your house. Bring some of your friends, and I'll show you all Uri Geller's tricks." And he did. He came back with about 20 students and showed them everything. It was very interesting. It proved that Geller was just a magician.'

All this could be tossed off lightly as good, publicity-attracting hurly burly, but subsequent events were to be much more damaging for Geller. Rather quietly, before Uri teamed up with Peled, he had been doing some performances in Italy. They had not been a success, and were to lead to a near catastrophe. All the indications from the start were that Italy was going to be bad news. The interpreter had not been able to

translate him understandably into Italian, and the audience gave every impression of being unmoved by the effects.

He had, naturally, been depressed by this first foreign venture, and decided that, confrontational and argumentative though Israelis were, he should never try to work outside Israel. One man in the Rome audience was, however impressed, and asked to meet Uri for lunch the next day. He picked him up in a Rolls-Royce, gave him a tour of the city, and explained that he was very keen to get Uri to America - especially to Las Vegas. Not unnaturally, and again not really needing psychic powers, Uri had enough imagination to smell Mafia. He was scared, and politely explained that he had a lot of engagements coming up in Israel, and that if he ever got back to Italy, he would, of course, look the man up. Uri was already having problems trying to disengage himself from his current manager, and start working exclusively for Peled. He was sure the manager, who had arranged the Italian trip, was cheating him, and Geller was terrified at getting sucked into some Mafia operation based around using his powers to fleece Las Vegas casinos.

The following morning, when Geller was checking out of his hotel, the desk clerk handed him an envelope someone had left for him. It contained the keys to a car, and papers registering it in his name. Outside the hotel was a brand new Alfa Romeo Spyder. Even more paranoid now about the Mafia, he gave the envelope back to the receptionist, and asked him if he wouldn't mind later that morning - preferably well after the flight to Tel Aviv had left - phoning the number on the papers and asking for them to take the car back with his most gracious thanks, but no thanks. He heard

nothing more from Rolls-Royce man. (On a subsequent visit with Miki Peled to Venice, Uri couldn't resist a session in the casino, which led to yet more Mafia fears. Gambling was an anomalous area for Geller. He had always, or so he says, had an instinctive belief, perhaps merely superstitious in nature, that he was not 'supposed' to use his abilities to make money; yet he was now making a good living using little else, with no deleterious effect on the powers, so he kept being drawn to casinos in spite of himself. 'A casino is a most dangerous place to try tricks,' says Peled who was with Geller. 'He made a lot of money on roulette. I remember it was \$36,000. Whatever number he said would come up came up. But I advised him not to go back. It could have been very dangerous to win any more. The Mafia would find out about him again, and come to ask if Uri could help them. I was with my wife, and she said she would leave Italy if he went back. But it was difficult to tell Uri, because he liked money *very* much.'

Geller's undoing in Italy, however, came not from Mafia threats genuine or imagined, but from a very real piece of amateurish stupidity on behalf of a young Israeli, Rany Hirsch, who was with Uri as representative of his pre-Peled manager. It was well into Geller's Peled heyday back home, but Uri was in the country again fulfilling some previously agreed dates. 'Rany had all kinds of bizarre publicity stunt ideas,' Geller explains. 'He said it would be great if Uri Geller could meet Sophia Loren, which he actually pulled off. I went to her villa and met her and it was all fine. But stupid Rany, because she wouldn't allow us to take a photograph with her, stayed in Rome when I went back to Israel, went to some photographer had a photomontage forged of me and her. It was so obvious, a fool could tell it was a montage. I woke up

one morning in Tel Aviv and as usual, went down to buy the morning papers and there was I with Sophia Loren on the front page and a headline shouting, FORGED!'

The newspapers, naturally, fed off the scandal for days. Hirsch, years later, wrote a cringing acknowledgement and apology that the whole mess had been his doing, but it was a gift to the sceptics in Israel, and a bad blow to Uri's credibility. 'He was not psychologically prepared for such a blow,' says Amnon Rubinstein. 'I said again that the only way he could repair all the damage that had been done was by going overseas, to an American or English university and have scientists examine him.'

Geller, characteristically, put on a brave face over the Loren fiasco. 'I was shocked because it wasn't my doing, but funnily, it just shows you again that all publicity is good publicity, as long as you are not some kind of murderer or have done something really bad. Because being on the cover of the paper actually led to more interest, more bookings. there wasn't really any damage - but what Amnon was saying again about trying to get some kind of scientific study was making me start to think very hard about the nature of these powers, about what I really was.'

Uri's experience to date of scientists had not encouraged him to see them as his salvation. Professor Kelson, the physicists who had been quoted rubbishing him in the Israeli newspapers, even Uri Goldstein, the mechanical engineering student and his £3 lawsuit. So on the one, hand he wondered if maybe Amnon was right, and on the other, whether he should simply phase out his showbusiness career and go back to regular employment and a normal life.

Although university scientists had been universally dismissive of him so far, Uri was not totally sucked in by the spiritual world of ghosts, seances and unexplained powers, and consequently removed from the world of practicality. Oddly perhaps (although not to those who suspect him of being a regular magician, with the considerable mechanical aptitude that requires) Uri Geller was a bit of a backyard mechanic. Going right back to childhood, he had done such things as remove an electric motor from a ventilating unit to help power up his mother's old, pedalled Singer sewing machine, and fit an ungainly outboard motor to his bike in an (unsuccessful) attempt to make cycling up the hill to Terra Santa College in Nicosia a bit less arduous. Even when his performing career was developing, he retained an affection for mechanical tinkering, and therefore had a natural affinity with a slightly older chap called Meir Gitlis, whom he met at a party right back in his teenage years. Meir was an electronics wizard, who had his own little workshop at his parents house, close to Margaret and Uri's flat, and a neighbourhood-wide reputation for repairing almost anything electrical. Meir saw something of Uri's paranormal abilities, and was immediately fascinated by them.

It was Meir, indeed, who became the first scientist ever to examine Uri's strange aptitudes. Their informal experiments had two lasting results; the first was that Uri was not a complete laboratory virgin when the first started being tested seriously by professional scientists; the second was that Uri Geller and Meir Gitlis continue to be partners in an electronics business, Nachshol, which Meir and his sons run from his combined home, laboratory and factory in a pretty rural village a few miles east of Tel Aviv. Meir Gitlis, who is now 54, is a gadget fanatic, his shelves heaving with his 30

inventions, most of which are in production. There's a thermal diamond tester, an electronic dollar bill tester, a gold tester and a cellular phone radiation shield, all manufactured under the Uri Geller Enterprises label. The company is currently selling a Gitlis-designed earthquake early warning gadget in California, a sensitive metronome-like device which detects micro tremors and could give up to 20 minutes warning of a coming quake.

‘At the beginning, I refused to believe in what he was doing,’ Gitlis says. ‘When he was young, Uri was always very naive and excited when something he tried to do worked out, but I was still very suspicious. So, just after he went into the army, I asked him if I could do some tests on him. The result of this was that I measured a voltage from Uri's body of about ten times more than average. What was more surprising was that he could make the needle of a compass move, even if it was your compass, and you put it where you wanted it. The compass could be on the table and Uri half a metre away from it and he could still make the needle move. It was unbelievable. I checked him carefully for metal and for magnetic fields, in case he had some magnet hidden, but there was nothing. And anyway, he was too far from the compass for a magnet to affect it. I often photographed the spoon bending. I was looking for the trick; but there wasn't one. I saw the spoon bend on it own many, many times.’

‘I told Uri always, “Look, I am a technical man. I believe only in what can be tested and seen. I often asked him when we were young, OK, how do you do it? It took me a long time until I believed that he was really doing it. I've seen magicians on TV saying they can do the same as Uri, but I can always see the trick. It's easy. But not

when Uri does it. If you tested Uri and the magicians side by side, there would be no competition. My older son was very suspicious of Uri just like I was, and he did a telepathy test with him where he controlled all the conditions. He went into another room, and although the door was closed, surrounded himself with books so Uri wouldn't even be able to see if he was in the same room. Then he drew a car with a certain number of windows and lights and antennas. Then he went back to where Uri was and gave him paper and a pen. And Uri drew the identical car, with all the same antennas, the exact same length, only higher. Uri was on his own, without Shipi. These people who say he can't do it without Shipi are liars. They're just jealous.'

'A lot of other things have happened to me with Uri,' Meir continues. 'We went to see our accountant only a little while ago to talk about something Uri wanted to do, which was to give all the royalties from our cellular phone shield, a lead protection from mobile phone radiation, to a children's charity. We were sitting in the accountant's office and Uri was under a light fitting high up on the ceiling, which was held up by a chain. And as he was sitting there, one of the links of the chain snapped. The accountant said the light had been there for 20 years without a problem. Uri also always phones when we're talking about him. we're very used to that now.'

'I once asked a neurologist I know what he thought the mechanism might be, how Uri works,' Meir Gitlis says. 'He told me that he believed the two halves of our brain transmit to one another on a certain frequency of some kind, and than Uri may have the ability to tune in to frequencies that are not his own, that his brain is like a scanner for these brain transmissions. He believes a very small number of people have this ability.'

It was, then, with Meir's small-scale, informal scientific experiments in mind as an example of how such work might not be too terrible, that Uri spent much of his time in 1970 considering whether and how he might give a part of himself to science. He mulled in particular over how this might affect his performing career and his bank balance. Even with Miki doing very well financially out of him, Uri had by now bought a penthouse apartment for himself and his mother on Yesha'yahu Street, in the swanky north of Tel Aviv, and was driving his dream car of the time. (This transport of delight, oddly enough was a Peugeot 404, more a Third World idea of a luxury limo than an ostentatiously smart vehicle of the sort one might expect a young star like Geller to opt for. 'I don't know what made me buy a 404,' he laughs. 'I think it was the nice ads in the newspaper. When you opened the door you were supposed to get hit with a burst of the fragrance of leather, but it was the worst car in the world. It hardly had the power to climb up the long, slow road to Jerusalem. I used to stop for hitchhikers, and the car would struggle up the hills.)

The Peugeot was not the most psychically inspired choice of car Uri could have made, but then these were dog days for him in many more important ways too. There is something quite melodramatic in the decline of Uri Geller at this time. 'I started ebbing away in Israel,' he acknowledges. 'My performances had a limit - I could do telepathy, I could bend a spoon, I could warp rings, I could hypnotise, and that's where it ended. A magician could write new acts, get new magic, do new tricks. I couldn't because I wasn't a magician. I was amazed when I started seeing the auditoriums emptying on me. 1971 was as incredible for me as 1970 had been, but already I was being attacked and questioned. 1972 was when I was over and out. People had seen me over and over, they were shouting, "Hey, Uri, we've seen that."

Managers could no longer put me up in big theatres, so I started being booked into discotheques and night-clubs, underground, smoky places, with dancing and striptease and clowns, jugglers and acrobats. I was suddenly just another act. No-one would pay attention to me, and I really felt the pits.’

Chapter 8 / Getting Weirder

'It was us who found Uri in the garden when he was three.' (Message, supposedly from the planet Hoova, received by Dr. Andrija Puharich in the early hours of December 1st 1971)

It was perhaps because he was in a steep decline by the summer of 1971 - playing too many tacky clubs, wondering whether the only way for him to prove what he felt so deeply about his abilities being psychic was to become a laboratory guinea pig, less than happy with his lover, still in love with a married woman, worried even whether he could keep supporting his mother long-term - that on Tuesday, August 17th of that year, Uri Geller fell into the Svengali-like clutches of one Dr. Andrija Puharich of Ossining, New York.

Puharich proved to be a both a blessing and a curse for Geller, and no less for me. Damaging or embarrassing revelations are supposed to be the flesh on the bone of biography, but in researching Uri Geller's life story, his close connection with this strange Serbian medical doctor, wonderfully idiosyncratic biographical material though it provided, was curiously depressing. This was not simply because I had

developed a respect and fondness for Uri, and I was sad to see him smeared by association, nor because Puharich has even necessarily done him any great harm. It is because I am as sure as one can be that Andrija Puharich was at times a deluded paranoid, whereas Uri is not so sure, and goes along with, or at least acquiesces to, much of the peculiar input Puharich had into his life. More importantly, the Puharich connection is a gift to the more dogmatic of Geller's opponents; not a bad thing, perhaps, except that I believe it also detracts from the process of assessing Uri fairly.

There are subtleties beyond the simplistic 'Geller teams up with eccentric, therefore he is a charlatan' line of argument. I would suggest for example, that while he may have been ill-advised to associate so closely with Puharich, his loyalty to such an unlikely mentor is anything but evidence for the prosecution. Geller, after all, stands accused by his detractors of being a cunning deceiver, not of being gullible or impressionable himself. But there is no avoiding it; Puharich remains an embarrassment those who have tried to give Geller a fair hearing. Charles Panati, a long-time science editor of Newsweek magazine, knew Geller in the mid-seventies and edited (at some cost for a while, he says, to his credibility as a science journalist) *The Geller Papers*, a book collating all the existing scientific research on him at that time. Panati met Puharich and recalls him as being, 'Very, very strange indeed. I don't think I'd ever met anyone quite like that.'

Yet Andrija Puharich, it must be pointed out from the start, was not a rogue or a charlatan, even if he did indulge himself from early on with one classic charlatan characteristic - the use of several different first names at the same time. Born Karel Puharich in Chicago in 1918, he liked to be called Andrija at home, but changed his

name to Henry at high school to sound more American. As a doctor and presenter of medical papers, he was always Henry K. Puharich, only reverting occasionally to Andrija for his less conventional work, such as that on Uri Geller. A polymath, Puharich was a school academic and sporting star, and went on to do a first degree in philosophy at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. He worked his way through college as a tree surgeon and entered the University's Medical School in 1943.

Whilst a medical student, he was a prominent wrestler and also continued with graduate studies in philosophy. His first medical assignment was as a second lieutenant in the US Army Medical Corps, from which he was released (on medical grounds, with a chronic inner ear infection) in December 1947. He became deeply interested in parapsychology and ESP from the start of his medical career, although continued to lecture and publish papers in conventional medicine too. He was also a formidable electronics genius, who hero-worshipped and seems to have modelled himself on another Serbian American, the brilliant inventor, Nikola Tesla.

Just like Tesla, Puharich was megalomaniacal, neurotic, obsessive and self-destructive. Just as Tesla did, Puharich patented dozens of inventions, many based on the newly discovered transistor technology. Among Puharich's patents were micro in-ear hearing aids, hearing aids which worked by electrically stimulating nerve endings in the bones of the skull, a device for splitting water molecules, and a shield for protecting people from the effects of ELF magnetic radiation. Similarly, like Tesla, Puharich was adept at living royally on other people's money, although both men died in abject poverty. And while Tesla hob-nobbed with the likes of Mark Twain and

Rudyard Kipling, Puharich, fifty years later, became friendly with the enigmatic novelist, Aldous Huxley.

In 1954, while the Godalming, Surrey-born Huxley was living in California, he published his second best-known work after *Brave New World* - *The Doors Of Perception*, an account of his tripping on the drug Mescaline. The book became a bible of the sixties counterculture; Huxley had borrowed the title from yet another strange man, the 19th Century poet William Blake, who wrote: *'If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.'* Yet another peculiar man, Jim Morrison, borrowed from Huxley for the name of his cult rock band The Doors. It was Andrija Puharich, meanwhile, who, (or so believes his fourth wife Rebecca) introduced Aldous Huxley to drugs. Whether or not Puharich procured Huxley the four tenths of a gram of Mescaline he took on a bright May morning in 1953 and which inspired him to write *The Doors of Perception* is not recorded. However, the drug blew the writer's mind, and nearly two decades later, Uri Geller, or so it seems, blew Puharich's mind - more or less permanently - and without using drugs at all. Paradoxically, since Andrija Puharich is so linked in the hippy consciousness with exotic substances, his new Israeli discovery, Uri Geller, nice, neurotic Jewish boy that he was, was scared of both alcohol and narcotics and has always stringently avoided them.

Between Huxley and Geller, Puharich had done enough to merit a full biography of his own. By the seventies, when he sought out Uri, Puharich had adopted a rumped, Einstein look, frizzy-haired with a crooked bow tie. But in the sixties, when he first became peripherally well-known in America, he was a dark, intense, dapper little

doctor, renowned as an author of books on the paranormal and as an occasional face on TV. He served in the Army again in the early 1950s, and in 1952, presented a paper entitled 'An Evaluation of the Possible Uses of Extrasensory Perception in Psychological Warfare' at a secret Pentagon meeting. In 1953, he lectured senior US Air Force officers on telepathy, and the staff of the Army Chemical Center on 'The Biological Foundations of Extrasensory Perception.' Back in civilian life, he starred in a Perry Mason episode as a scientist on the track of some paranormal phenomenon. A TV documentary, which appeared in an ABC TV series called One Step Beyond in 1961, followed his expedition to a remote village in Mexico to investigate a local mushroom which was rumoured by the Chatino Indians to induce extrasensory perception in those who consumed it. The fungus had been the subject of Puharich's first book, *The Sacred Mushroom*.

It was as a distant result of a lecture Uri did for science students in the spring of 1970 at the Technion in Haifa that Puharich and Geller became a team. Many months after the lecture, according to Uri, a retired Israeli Army colonel called Yacov came to see Uri, saying that his student son had been at the Technion event, and been especially impressed. The colonel had told an Israeli researcher friend in Boston, Yitzhak Bentov, about Geller and Bentov wanted to know more. Uri liked the colonel's laid-back approach, he recalls, and broke an ordinary little pin the colonel had while it was in the man's fist. The colonel left, and posted the broken pieces to Bentov in the States. What Bentov made of the snapped pin is not clear, but he seems to have found something of interest in the structure of the break in the mild steel. Puharich recounted in a videotaped interview-for-posterity which he made in 1985, ten years before his own death, that Bentov stood up and talked about Uri at a November 1970 conference in New York for 'alternative'-type scientists, called

Exploring The Energy Fields of Man. Delegates at the conference had been bemoaning the lack of a scientifically validated exponent of psychokinesis - the moving of material objects by mind power. As a result of what Bentov had to say, Puharich says he was mandated by the conference to go to Israel to seek out and assess Uri Geller.

The mission was just what Puharich needed. Ever keen on 'owning' his research subjects - a control characteristic which would one day bring him into catastrophic collision with the equally strong-willed Uri - Puharich was in search of a new protégé. He was just getting over the death in a car crash that January of a Brazilian 'psychic surgeon', Arigo, whom he had been studying and writing on for several years. Arigo had the facility, or so the Chicago doctor was convinced, successfully to perform major surgery in seconds while in a trance and with the use of no instruments other than a rusty, dirty knife. A later Brazilian psychic surgeon Puharich also studied, Pachita, could, without anaesthetic or sterile procedure perform even more complex operations. Puharich claimed to have witnessed him do instant kidney transplants, and Pachita operated successfully on Puharich's own continuing inner ear problems. Reputedly (although Puharich did not pretend to have witnessed this) Pachita was also performing brain transplants.

By way of getting Uri interested in the possibility of doing some scientific research, Puharich had enlisted the help of someone he believed the Israeli might be impressed by - Dr Edgar Mitchell, the lunar module pilot for the Apollo 14 Moon landing, who had become the sixth man to walk on the Moon just a few months earlier. Mitchell was a highly unusual recruit to the ranks of paranormalists. A science graduate twice over with an additional PhD from M.I.T (where he taught inertial guidance and

interplanetary navigation) he had been a Navy pilot and an aerospace test pilot, and was technical director for Navy collaboration in the US Air Force manned Orbiting Laboratory Program when he joined the astronaut corps in 1966. Despite being as practical an empirical scientist as one would expect a man of his training to be, Edgar Mitchell was also fascinated by what he believed both before and after his astronaut career, to be the bigger picture - the view of the universe which accepted the existence of ESP and psychic phenomena. While on the Moon, he quietly carried out an extracurricular and informal ESP card guessing experiment with four friends back on Earth, which he felt was mildly successful, but nowhere near as spiritually uplifting as seeing the world from a quarter of a million miles' distance.

After serving as a back-up crew member for Apollo 16, Ed Mitchell retired and went full time into psychic and parapsychological research, writing a massive scientific book, 'Psychic Exploration: A Challenge For Science', and thereby earning himself the epithet 'half-assed-tronaut' from his non-admirers among some convinced scientist and magician sceptics. Puharich had met Mitchell twice in 1971 while he was raising funds for his Uri Geller expedition, as a result of which Mitchell wrote to Uri recommending Puharich and enclosing a signed photograph of himself on the Moon.

It was, therefore, with some hope that Andrija Puharich found himself at 11 pm on a hot Tuesday night in a seedy Old Jaffa night-club called Zorba, watching Uri Geller perform as the climax to a succession of second rate singers, jugglers and other cabaret turns - and being distinctly underwhelmed by what he saw. Geller knew from Mitchell's letter that Puharich was coming, but had not expected him to turn up at Zorba, and was embarrassed when the American did. Puharich admitted to Uri months later that he was pretty sure at the end of his evening at Zorba that he was no more

than a routine magician, and that he may well have wasted his trip from the States. Keen though he appears to have been to believe anything going, Puharich was not totally indiscriminating. The year before he discovered Uri Geller, Puharich had been up to the north of Canada to meet an 80 year-old man called Arthur Matthews, who had just published a book called 'Nikola Tesla and the Venusian Space Ship'. It was Matthews' contention that Tesla, Puharich's exemplar, had not died as history recorded, in 1943, but was living aboard a UFO - which occasionally landed in Matthews' back yard. And it was Puharich's conclusion after meeting him that Matthews was indeed quite mad.

Initially dubious though he was of Uri Geller too, Puharich installed himself in a friend's apartment, and over the next few days did some preliminary tests with Geller. Puharich, it seems, was determined to 'get a result' if there was one to get. Nevertheless, he did so with the reputation and methods of the good, pedantic, plodding scientific researcher that he was capable of being. He kept the most meticulous notes in a tiny handwriting on his Geller experiments. No tape recorder or film camera could be mentioned without its make and model number; all times were accurately recorded to the second. The culture of precision note-taking was second nature to Puharich. In another part of his complicated life worthy of mention, he kept detailed written records of every sexual encounter he enjoyed with his succession of four wives and countless beautiful, young, impressionable (and, oddly enough, usually rich) girlfriends, who were attracted by his renown as a sort of hippy scientific icon.

Puharich's notes on Geller's science-busting feats in the borrowed apartment, he mailed back to Ed Mitchell in the States; Uri jokes now that Mitchell must have

thought Puharich was running clinical trials on some new form of pot over in Israel. The stuff Puharich reported did, it is undeniable, look like the result of him doing a spot of updated Aldous Huxley-style research drug tripping - and this was *before* Puharich's work in Israel with Geller turned seriously unorthodox, as it did later that year.

It started routinely enough. Puharich explained to Uri that the tests would be lengthy and occasionally boring, but that this was necessary, thanks to the scientific convention that extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof. With Yacov, the retired army colonel, and an Israeli friend of his as assistants, Puharich asked Uri what he would like to do first. Uri suggested some simple telepathy. He wrote something on a pad, placed it face down on the table and asked Puharich to think of a number, then another, then another. Uri then asked him to pick the pad up. On it were already written the numbers, 4, 3, 2 which Puharich had in his mind. Uri laughed, apparently delighted that it had worked. Like Amnon Rubinstein had been, Puharich was immediately more impressed than by the spoon bending, which he had seen at the night club and regarded as inconclusive. 'That's pretty clever,' Puharich reports he said. 'You told me this would be telepathy, and I, of course, thought you were going to be the receiver. But you pulled a switch on me.'

Uri explained why he had done it this way round, by saying that if he had told Puharich to try to receive the numbers, he might have fought him. 'In this way, you participated in the experiment without prejudice,' he said. Puharich asked if he could turn on the tape and film camera. Geller assented, but added, 'You probably think that since I sent those numbers to you so easily, I might also hypnotise you to see and do things that are not really there.' Puharich reported that he felt from that point the two

of them would get along fine, although for several days more, their relationship would remain formal, Uri calling him Dr. Puharich. after an hour of swapping numbers, colours and single words telepathically, Puharich and his assistants got into a huddle and agreed that, even if this obviously was not a proper controlled experiment, they were satisfied that this was genuine telepathy. They asked if he could receive or transmit more complex data; he replied that he stuck to simple information, because then he could be judged wholly right or wholly wrong, with no grey area, as would be bound to occur if he tried to transfer whole concepts or stories.

Uri then asked if anyone had brought a broken watch. The female friend of Yacov said she had one which was not broken, but which she had allowed to run down and stop. Puharich intervened and asked to inspect the watch. With the camera running, he shook it, and it ticked for a few seconds, then stopped completely. Uri refused to touch it, and told Puharich to give it straight to the woman. He placed it in her palm, which she closed. Uri then put his left palm over her hand, without, Puharich said, touching it. After 30 seconds, the watch was running, and continued to work for another 30 minutes before running out again. Meanwhile, Uri asked Puharich to take off his watch, a chronometer, and hold it in his hand. Puharich noted the time on it as 2.32 pm, and then Uri held his hand over Puharich's for ten seconds and told Puharich to check it. The time on the watch was now 3.04; but what surprised Puharich more was that the stopwatch dial on the watch face had similarly advanced 32 minutes. For both dials to have advanced by the same time, the whole apparatus would simply have to have run for 32 minutes. 'This complex feat of psychokinesis was unparalleled in my experience, or in the literature, for that matter,' Puharich concluded.

The next day, Puharich repeated the telepathy tests with the same success, then asked Uri to concentrate on a pair of bi-metal strip thermometers. Even from across the room, Geller was capable of raising the reading on whichever of the instruments he selected by six to eight degrees. Thoroughly convinced now that Uri Geller really did possess startling telepathic and psychokinetic powers, Puharich started to interview him about his past, and about his views on what his powers were. Puharich was impressed and surprised by the depth of introspection Geller, considering his basic education, had achieved. The burden of Uri's home-made idea was that telepathic waves travel faster than light, which meant that, once the light barrier was overcome, we could see into the past and the future, as well as teleport materials instantaneously. He also believed that the particles that existed beyond the speed of light were too small to have yet been discovered. On the question of teleportation, he did not discuss his extraordinary incident in the army with the heavy machine gun parts which had apparently teleported to him, but did tell Puharich that when he broke a ring, it often lost weight, and how when he snapped a jewellery chain, a link was frequently found to have vanished.

Uri also speculated, Puharich reported, on what the source of his powers might be. One idea was that he had inherited the powers by some genetic fluke from a previous human civilisation, for whom they were commonplace. A second theory of his was similar, but proposed that his ancestors had interbred with extraterrestrials. A third was that there was a simple warp in the make-up of his brain. The fourth, he said mysteriously, he didn't want to talk about, except insofar as it was related to idea number two, and that, 'They are somewhere out there. They have their reasons.'

With which he returned to the experiments. He promised to crack but not break the ring of Yacov's wife, Sara, and did so, creating a fracture which Puharich relates that he sent to a metallurgist at the Materials Science Department of Stanford University in California. Several months later, Puharich said, he was informed that electron microscopy had shown the fracture in the ring to be of an unknown kind.

For a few more days, Puharich repeated the same tests again and again, determined, at least from his account, not to be fooled. He needed to go back to the States with sufficient evidence of Geller's abilities to guarantee that he, with Edgar Mitchell's help, could drum up more financial support for him to do further Geller research in Israel, and thereafter open up the possibility for Uri to be tested scientifically in America. Thus it was that Puharich doggedly prepared the ground for Uri Geller to be tested, as he was in 1972, by Stanford Research International, a vast laboratory and think tank in Menlo Park, outside San Francisco, with extraordinary and globally-reported success.

But before that enormous breakthrough for Geller, Puharich came back to Israel in November 1971, as he wanted to try to find some answers to the fascinating scientific phenomenon he seemed to have uncovered in the Zorba night-club the previous August.

Perhaps here I am being disingenuous in saying 'try to find some answers'. I hope this does not do a disservice to the doctor, who died in 1995, but there seems a distinct possibility that already had a clear idea of what he believed he was on to, and was determined to prove it at all costs. That mysterious reference Geller had made to Puharich back in August - *'They are somewhere out there. They have their reasons.'* - had revived in Puharich's mind something extraordinary which he had encountered

back in 1952, before he was into drugs, strange mushrooms or Brazilian healers performing brain transplants with rusty penknives, when he was just an army medic with an interest in the interesting new field of parapsychology.

At a party in New York in 1952, Puharich met Dr. D.G.Vinod, a professor of philosophy and psychology at the University of Poona, in India. Dr. Vinod was on a lecture tour organised by the Rotary Club. Vinod, like Puharich, was interested in matters like ESP. Two months after meeting Dr. Vinod, Puharich accidentally bumped into him again on a train. As they were travelling, the Hindu scholar did a past and future life reading for Puharich by holding his right ring finger at the middle joint with his right thumb and index finger. Puharich found Vinod's past reading uncannily accurate. On New Year's Eve of 1952, Puharich invited him to his home in Maine, where at 9 pm, the Indian went almost immediately into a deep, hypnotic-like trance. Although Puharich, with his big, sleepy eyes and slow speech, was a superb hypnotist - a point which we shall dwell on a little later - on this occasion, Vinod went under quite spontaneously.

While he was in trance - we must assume with Puharich recording him on some early form of tape or wire recorder - Vinod apparently took on a deep, sonorous voice. His trance voice was in perfect, unaccented English, which was quite different, Puharich reported, from his normal high pitched, soft, and Indian-accented speech - even if, from what Puharich wrote down of it, distinct tones of Peter Sellers parodying Indian English will be discernible to some. *'M calling,'* Dr. Vinod apparently said. *'We are Nine principles and forces, personalities if you will, working in complete mutual implication. We are forces, and the nature of our work is to accentuate the positive, the evolutionary, and the teleological aspects of existence.'*

Vinod went on in this vein for 90 minutes, interspersing his monologue with references to Einstein, Jesus, Puharich himself, and a mathematical equation, which, amusingly, when examined by mathematicians was later found to be ever so slightly wrong. After a month of these trances, Puharich and a group of helpers were completely satisfied that they were dealing with something more than messages from the spirit world. They were persuaded that they were being spoken to through Dr. Vinod by an extraterrestrial intelligence, which Puharich named The Nine, supreme alien beings from far beyond our part of the Universe, who had turned their attentions to saving Earthlings from the disastrous consequences of their wars, pollution and so on. Puharich was convinced that the beings, rather than come in person, were using automated, computerised spacecraft as a tool to effect material consequences on our planet, including the contact and training of selected humans - starting, naturally, with himself.

At the end of January 1953, Vinod went home, and Puharich heard nothing more from him. Remarkable though the experience of being contacted by extraterrestrials must have been, Puharich seems to have managed to shelve it for 19 years, until, in November 1971, The Nine spoke to him again in Tel Aviv, through the medium of a hypnotised Uri Geller.

For his second trip, Puharich had rented a sixth floor apartment in the up-market area of Herzliya, north of Tel Aviv, about a mile back from the Mediterranean - Puharich was always rigorous about not stinting himself materially. He set up camp from crates loaded with the latest in magnetometers, cameras, tape recorders and countless electronic gadgets Geller could not identify, and started work again. It was agreed between the two men that Geller would give Puharich three to four hours a

day, but that this might have to happen at odd times, since Uri was continuing his career of shows and public demonstrations, albeit at nothing like the pitch of as little as a year previously.

Again, the experiments started with what now passed for 'routine' stuff, Uri accurately picking up three digit numbers from Puharich's mind while in another room, and Uri moving a compass needle through 90 degrees; this latter, Puharich was intrigued to note, worked better when Uri put rubber bands tightly round his left hand as a tourniquet to block the return of blood from his hand. But the compass-moving seemed nevertheless to exhaust Geller. He complained to Puharich that he found it much less strenuous if he had a crowd of people around him, on whose energy he felt he could draw. A result which fascinated Puharich was Uri's ability to bend a thin stream of water from a tap with his hand held a few inches away. This, he commented in his notes, was easily done by anyone with an electrically charged piece of plastic, such as a comb, but with a finger, such an effect was unheard of. The electrical charge on Uri's skin seemed to disappear when it was wet. Another simple test Puharich devised was to see whether Uri could direct a beam of energy narrowly, or whether he produced a random, scatter-gun effect. He laid out five matchsticks in a long row, on a glass plate monitored by a film camera. Uri was able to move whichever matchstick he chose up to 32 millimetres.

At one stage, Isaac Bentov came to join in the tests with two old friends who had been students at the Technion together in the 1940s. With four researchers poring over Uri together, Puharich noticed that Uri was starting to get bored, and the two had a 'where do we go now' discussion with Bentov and his friends as an audience. Uri laid out his problem with scientific work plainly. Despite the advice of Amnon Rubinstein,

he still could not see the point of it. He elaborated eloquently how nothing mattered to him so much as he was making money, and the freedom which went with that. His life as he saw it had been a constant struggle to assert his freedom, with money being the ultimate way to achieve it. When the chance came to show off his powers, with his increasing love of performance, and to make money at the same time, he grabbed it. 'I want to be known. I want to be successful. If you want to work with me, you will have to deal with my need for fame and fortune. That's it,' he concluded to Puharich.

Puharich and Bentov were saddened by what they saw as the small-mindedness of this 'unabashed egomaniac', as Puharich described Geller. They all went out for dinner. On the way home, late at night, Uri insisted on giving a display of blindfold driving. This did not impress Puharich much - he knew it was an old magician's trick and how it was done, but was surprised by how accurately Uri managed to drive, at up to 50 mph for 3 km. One odd thing was when Uri said he could see a red Peugeot coming, and such a car then appeared from round a bend. Back at the apartment, Bentov started a late night conversation about the soul, and how he believed Uri's was so much more evolved than other people's, but had become coarsened by poverty and struggle. He did not have to be so selfish and financially obsessed, Bentov said.

Uri seemed mildly interested and asked how he could find out about his soul; Puharich leapt at this and offered to hypnotise Geller. Uri was reluctant at first, but Puharich was already compiling ever-more detailed notes with a view to writing a book on his Uri Geller experiences. He convinced Uri that hypnotism would be the best way to go back to his childhood and recall vital material he had forgotten; Uri said he knew about hypnotism, being in show business, and knew that he was un-hypnotisable, but would happily give it a try.

As the guests all left Puharich's apartment, one of Bentov's friends took Puharich to one side and said: 'You know, we have a word in Hebrew for a kid like Uri - *puscht*, a punk. He really is insufferable. I don't know how you can be so patient with him.' Puharich says that he replied, 'I feel he is so extraordinary that he is worth almost any effort.'

On November 30th, Uri was doing a show at a discotheque in Herzliya. Puharich and Bentov were planning the first hypnotic session with Geller that night, and went to see him at the noisy show. Puharich later reported being so depressed by the tawdriness of the show, just as he had been by the cabaret Uri was in at Zorba back in August, that he almost wondered if he wanted to continue with the Geller experiment any longer. Uri turned up at Puharich's apartment with Iris, nevertheless, and lay down on the living room sofa at the apartment at just after midnight. Puharich asked him to count backwards from 25, and was pleased to note that by the time he got to 18, Geller was in a deep trance. He would remain in it for an hour and a half.

Once he was fully under, Puharich asked Uri where he was. Geller talked initially about being in the caves back in Cyprus, with Joker. 'I come here for learning,' Uri said. 'I just sit here in the dark with Joker. I learn and learn, but I don't know who is doing the teaching.' Puharich asked what he was learning. Geller replied that it was a secret, about people who come from space, and that he would tell Puharich all about them, but not yet. Uri then lapsed into Hebrew, with Bentov doing a running translation. After telling of many trivial childhood incidents, he finally talked about the light in the garden opposite his parents' flat in Tel Aviv. He named the day it happened as December 25th 1949, a date which obviously has enormous resonance, although not, it must be noted, in Israel, of course, where Christmas Day is just

another working day. Uri described the light he saw in the garden as a large, shining bowl, from which he saw come a figure with no face but a general radiance about it. Then the figure raised its arms and held them above its head, so it appeared to be holding the sun, at which point he passed out from the brightness.

At this point, according to Puharich, a mechanical, robotic voice appeared in the apartment either from Uri or directly above him. The voice spoke for a couple of minutes, after which Puharich ended the session and woke Uri. Puharich told him about the strange voice, which Uri clearly did not believe. Puharich played him the section of the tape leading up to the voice's intervention, where his own voice could be heard describing the garden incident. This made Uri frightened and agitated, as he did not remember any of the long hypnosis. As soon as the tape reached the mechanical voice part, Puharich reported, Uri swiftly ejected the tape, took it in his left hand, and closed his fist over the cassette, whereupon it vanished. He then rushed out of the apartment and ran away. Puharich, Bentov and Iris searched everywhere, worried that he might still be partially in a trance and could hurt himself. After half an hour, they found Uri, as Puharich put it, 'like a standing mummy'. They took him back into the apartment, and decided that he needed to go home and sleep. Iris agreed to drive him, while Puharich and Bentov decided to reconstruct all they could recall of the strange voice's words while the memory was still fresh.

Their reconstruction ran thus: *'It was us who found Uri in the garden when he was three. We programmed him in the garden for many years to come, but he was also programmed not to remember. On this day, our work begins. Andrija, you are to take care of him. we reveal ourselves because we believe that man may be on the threshold of a world war. Plans for war have been made by Egypt, and if Israel loses, the entire*

world will explode into war. There will be one last round of negotiations that may not avert war. America is the problem. The negotiations will not succeed. The Egyptians have as of now no fixed date to start the war. The critical dates as seen by us are: December 12, 15, 20, 25, 26 1971 - or nothing at all.'

Puharich and Bentov stayed up all night, as one might imagine, discussing what they were dealing with. The following day, Puharich was alone in the apartment, catching up on his sleep, when Uri arrived in Herzliya, seeming, Puharich reported, unusually relaxed, as if things had taken a distinct turn for the better for him. Puharich had earlier placed a specially machined steel ring, made by Bentov in his workshop, into a wooden microscope box. Why he had put it in the box, Puharich was not sure; he had planned to get Uri to bend it. But Uri suddenly asked, 'Why did you put the ring in the box?' He said he didn't know. Uri then demanded that Puharich get out the movie camera, take a film of himself putting the ring in the box, and he would then make the ring disappear. Puharich did so; Uri placed his hands over the box for around two minutes and told him to check the box. The ring had vanished. 'This was,' Puharich wrote later, 'the first time I had experienced an object vanishing where I was certain there was no deception involved.'

Andrija's work may well have only just started, according to The Nine, but for most people, the first hypnotic session is where the usefulness of Puharich's account of his Geller experiments seems abruptly to end. While his reporting on events up to this moment has an oddly truthful feel to it, it then spirals downwards into a bad-movie imbroglio of UFOs appearing all over Israel, of objects moving about buildings and the entire world of their own volition, of Mossad spies, of top level meetings with anonymous Israeli security chiefs and averted world wars - although needless to say,

the war the mysterious voice referred to did not happen. (Puharich would doubtless have argued that of course it didn't because it was averted, wasn't it?).

One day, Puharich takes a brass ink refill cartridge with the number #347299 on it, puts it inside a ballpoint pen, then puts the pen in a wooden box, all in an attempt to produce a variation on the disappearing ring phenomenon Uri had managed previously. When Uri holds his hands over the box, the pen stays put, but the cartridge vanishes. A few days later, on December 9th, Uri feels an inexplicable urge to go to a certain point in a suburb east of Tel Aviv at night. He drives out with Puharich and Iris, and there, above a building site, the three see a blue-ish pulsating light. He feels drawn to the light and tells the others to stay by the car. As he approaches, he sees a massive object and, in a near-trance, senses he is being drawn into its interior. He believes he can make out control panels inside the object. Then a dark shape approaches him and puts something in his hand ... seconds later he is outside again, and running up to Puharich and Iris. Puharich checks what Uri is holding in his hand. It is a brass ballpoint ink refill cartridge with the number #347299 engraved on it.

The tape recorder continues to issue its communiques, summoning Uri to a UFO fly-past here, a teleportation there. Yet every tape made of the voice conveniently disappears, just as the first one did. Uri seems, by both Puharich's and his own description, to have tagged along as a bewildered passenger on a magical mystery tour produced and directed by the good doctor. Yet questions of whether Uri was Puharich's acolyte or Puharich Uri's, of precisely where the power lay in the relationship, of whether Uri Geller was out-conjured by Puharich or the two were co-conspirators - or perhaps, even, whether the whole thing was perfectly genuine after all - are still up for debate today.

Puharich claims that Uri started relaying messages from The Nine on a regular basis. Sometimes, the voice would come out of Puharich's Sony tape recorder in the same curious, monotonous, automated tone. The mysterious aliens, from a world called Hoova, and sometimes calling themselves Rhombus 4D, had designated him and Geller to carry out a variety of tasks, which would test their faith and abilities. The Nine had assigned the pair a central role in preventing war, as well as making them foot soldiers in a grand design for Earth, which they admitted were principally for their own needs and benefit, but would at the same time be the greatest thing ever for mankind. They reassured Puharich, still through Geller, that they had been directing his life and career for decades, as well as Uri's; their city-sized spacecraft, called Spectra, they explained, was responsible for Uri's odd powers, and the way mankind received Uri Geller would determine whether their Earth development programme would continue, and how, as well as our general fate. For some subtle, cosmic reason, he was deliberately being sent into the world undercover of a clownish, comic act.

Maybe it was just a weird symbiosis between Uri's and Puharich's fertile imagination, each sparking the other off in an atmosphere of increasing hysteria. Puharich became utterly entranced by his watch, whose wild, erratic hand movements in Uri's presence were for him the everyday calling card of The Nine. The two men also experienced extraordinary teleportations almost daily. On one such occasion, they have both reported, an electrical massage machine Puharich had left in New York appeared in its box in working order in the Herzliya apartment. There were hundreds more such incidents. Puharich continued to log every minuscule detail for his extraordinary 1974 book, *Uri*, a work which page by curiously unreadable page became less credible and more damaging and embarrassing to its subject.

To take Andrija Puharich intellectually apart is almost too easy, like kicking someone in a wheelchair; yet to dismiss him as a madman is far too simplistic; he *was* a real scientist; he did, with great success, deliver Geller to a world-wide scientific audience. The majority of his note taking has that ring of pedantic accuracy about it, whether it reflects objective truth or not. Indigestible though his book 'Uri' is, he was not at all a relentlessly earnest man, or one without humour. He was not lacking in worldly wiles either; he orchestrated getting Uri on to every TV talk show in the US.

'Was it a mistake for Geller to link up with Puharich?' ponders John Hasted, an atomic physicist, and retired Professor of Experimental Physics, at Birkbeck College, University of London. 'No, it wasn't. No-one else could have got other people interested. Puharich was a medical electronics man, a reputable electro-engineer, and that was the whole criticism of him. They thought he was so good at putting transmitters inside gold teeth that Geller did his telepathy that way, which is rather absurd although it is perfectly possible. He was also very personable but not absurdly so, and a very *nice* man.'

What the Puharich/Geller story most likely illustrated was the progressive diminution of Puharich's rationality as he led the all-too-willing young Israeli entertainer into an ever deepening, hypnotically induced follie-a-deux. A Berkeley, California-educated science writer and teacher, Michael Rossman, wrote an eloquent 1979 article on Puharich and Geller, which while not uncritical, may well have got to the nub of the matter.

‘Puharich records for us the precise times of his watch stopping and starting,’ Rossman wrote, ‘an obsessive litany, clinging to this incongruous reed of objective data like a man drowning, the scientist stripped back to his most primitive reflex: measure something, something outside the self. The chaos he faces is real before his eyes; but it is also within him ... The story I read in his book is not, perhaps, the one Puharich meant to write. True, he warns us at the start that Uri is less about Geller than about The Nine, a group of approximately omnipotent entities from another dimension or plane, whose guidance he and Geller have come to accept and serve. But I read the book instead as a drama, candid and historical, about the states of mind of men confronting the unknown.’

‘If one does not simply dismiss Puharich as a crackpot for this account of the Nine,’ he concluded, ‘but instead reads Uri seriously as the drama of the muddling of its writer's mind and will, one must ask why his pot cracked in this particular way. The question is not minor, for in nosing around circles of psychic research I have met a number of others whose minds have been muddled (if muddle this be) in a strikingly similar fashion. Perhaps their patterns of reaction give better clues to what they are reacting to, than do their researches themselves. And surely Puharich is a prime case to study, given the precise way in which he blew his scientific cover on the eve of a long-pursued triumph.’

Whereas, when he was in his early thirties, Puharich had been able to cope with and more-or-less shelve the spooky Dr. Vinod experience, when he encountered Uri Geller in his fifties, he pretty much fell apart. If even a quarter of what he relates happening to him regarding UFOs, voices from The Nine and the increasing interest the Israeli secret service was taking in him, is true, I for one will owe him a

posthumous apology, but it is hard not to see him as just another deluded soul, riven with obsessions and conspiracy theories. Conditioned in the fifties to be politically wary - he was branded a Communist by some for his friendship with Yugoslavian friends in America of Marshall Tito - Puharich started reporting in 'Uri' on the Mossad persecuting him in Israel. When he got Geller to the States in 1973, his persecutors became, in classic paranoid fashion, the CIA and FBI. (He, or The Nine, may have had the FBI in mind when they said their planet was called Hoova - as in J. Edgar Hoover.)

To get a final firm fix on Puharich at this stage in the Uri Geller story, we need to spin forward a couple of years in the narrative. Puharich had bought - using whose funds, it is not known - a magnificent 15-room house with six acres, a brook and a pond at 87 Hawkes Avenue, Ossining, New York. This became his base for what was, at his Uri Geller apogee, a virtual Puharich cult. The Puharich place was known in Ossining as a hangout for oddballs, otherwise 'The Turkey Farm' or 'Lab Nine'. In early 1979, Puharich discovered in his role as a UFO contactee that Moscow was beaming powerful signals at the deeply Satanic-sounding frequency of 6.66 Hertz into the brains of Americans. These signals were designed by the Soviets to make Americans feel constantly depressed. Puharich sent this vital information to President Carter, to Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada and (for some unclear reason) to the British Opposition leader, Margaret Thatcher. He received no reply from any of them, but his house did burn to the ground a few weeks later. He claimed to have evidence that the CIA had arranged for the fire, but had subcontracted the job of setting it to the Palestine Liberation Organisation, which in turn had assigned a notorious IRA terrorist to do the dirty deed.

In fear, Puharich, his fourth wife Rebecca, and their daughter (who is now a stand up comedian in London) fled to Mexico, where they lived in rustic poverty and fearing assassination - until Rebecca began to suspect the whole thing was a fantasy on Andrija's part, phoned her father in Baltimore and asked her to drive down as soon as he could to pick her and the child up. 'Andrija was always starring in his own drama, but it was a drama of his own making,' Rebecca reflects today. In the divorce hearing, Puharich claimed Rebecca was a CIA agent; she replied tartly that it was a funny sort of CIA agent who bore the subject of her investigation a baby. He said later that she was also the best wife he had ever had, and he wanted her back.

The clinching evidence for me against Puharich is actually linguistic; I think the full extent of his self delusion has to be read between, as well as in, the lines he attributes to The Nine. How curious it is that when Dr. Vinod is the mouthpiece of the superior beings, they speak in a sort of comedy Anglo Indian, yet when they speak through Uri Geller in the seventies, it is in the style of the Daleks in Dr. Who. The vocabulary too, at this time, is distinctly 1971. At one point, speaking through Puharich's tape recorder, the mechanical, synthesised voice of The Nine slows down to automaton speed to say: 'We are com-put-or-ised com-plete-ly com-put-or-ised. We are com-put-or-ised, we are com-put-or-ised.' That may have been the way we imagined computers behaving in 1971, but it is hard to believe that the computers of a super-civilisation from the planet Hoova would still be droning on in this distinctly dated way.

The most devastating linguistic clue, however, that Puharich was himself simulating the voices of The Nine (although how he made Sony tape recorders seemingly speak their voices, and how he made the cassettes he recorded their voices on all disappear

into thin air is unknown) comes from Rebecca, who is now back in Baltimore, married to a wealthy attorney, LeRoy E. Hoffberger, and has founded a superb gallery of modern, visionary art by that city's harbourside. Rebecca Hoffberger recalls that she got home from Mexico after fleeing from Puharich, to find a message on her father's answering machine from Andrija, speaking in a strange monotone, robot voice. 'It was saying, "This - is - Doctor - Andrija - Puharich. You - have - stolen - the - following - items - of -video -equipment. If - you - do -not - return - these ..."' and so on. Of course, I hadn't taken anything. We just wanted to get out of Mexico before he found out we'd gone. but it was very, very odd. He was very paranoid. if you were against him, you were from the CIA. But he loved Uri. He knew he was the real thing, and in that respect, I still agree with Andrija.'

Uri Geller's attitude to Puharich over this bizarre period in Israel is best characterised as that of a favoured nephew defending an eccentric, erratic but brilliant uncle, to whom he owes a great deal, and with whom he had a special intellectual connection. He declines to dissociate himself entirely from Puharich's wilder theories. He appreciated the American's approach from the outset. 'Here he was, this good looking Einstein, full of joy and fascination and interest. There was something about him that to me said, this is an important man that I have to listen to. He was almost like a guide to me.' Liking Puharich was one thing, but most important for Uri was that he was prepared to accept as reality his childhood Joan-of-Arc vision - and to run with it.

The centrality to Uri Geller's life of the light he saw nearly 50 years ago in the Arabic garden on Betzael Yaffe can never be underestimated. One evening during the writing of this book, he phoned me to reply to a couple of earlier questions, then

hesitated before saying out of the blue: 'I've been meaning to ask. What do *you* think I saw in that garden when I was three?' Slightly taken aback, I replied that it could have been a dream, or some kind of childhood fit, or a UFO, or possibly God. It was really very hard for me to tell. He understood my uncertainty, he said.

With Andrija Puharich there had been no such hesitancy. While the rest of the world was still struggling with trying to believe or not believe in Geller's powers, Puharich was managing to get Uri Geller to believe in an Uri Geller of his, Puharich's, most idealised imaginings: exit Svengali, enter Dr. Frankenstein. The vision in the garden and the ensuing feeling of differentness which this had engendered in Uri as a boy served as the ideal starting point for Puharich to gain Geller's compliance in the construction of a new version of himself as a higher being. The extent of Geller's affirmation of this idea of himself has varied over the years.

If we accept, even for a moment, that Uri really was telling the truth, and the phenomena were merely something that happened to him rather than something he contrived, it is hardly surprising that he would trust the belief of a highly qualified foreigner that he was under the control of aliens. Neither would it be amazing if from time to time, Geller had his doubts about the theory. Frankly, even if his powers were a trick Geller had invented, the degree to which the trick had already worked over the 20 years he had already been doing it, and the volume of affirmation he received from the public that he really did have paranormal powers, might well be enough to make a lot of people wonder on occasion if they really were 'special', even if their 'miracles' were faked. One would suspect that a lot of witchdoctors, shamans and

miracle-working gurus who learn their trade quite systematically come eventually to believe they really do have special powers.

‘Such bizarre things started happening when Andrija came into my life,’ Uri attests one day, as we are walking his dogs along the River Thames in a rain storm. ‘Like the incident with the massage machine. I wanted one so badly, and he was wishing he had brought his over with him, so one morning, his materialised from New York to Israel. I wake up and there is a massage machine in front of my bed. When this kind of thing happens, you either think you are totally out of it, or you have to accept them, because it is a fact. I questioned his credibility, I don't question my own sanity. I had gone through a war and gone through Cyprus, crazy things had happened since childhood, I read minds.’

‘Look, sometimes I think there are no in between here. It's either, I really saw what I saw and it was there in physical form or not. But then many a time the idea sneaked up on me that maybe he managed to hypnotise me to such an extent that he actually implanted these ideas and images into my mind, so when, for instance, we saw this huge disc in the Sinai desert, it was really my imagination and it wasn't there. Then there were other times when I thought he had sprinkled my food and drink with magic mushrooms. Then again, my relationship with Puharich was a very long one, and you can't poison food every time you plan for Uri Geller to see something. And, yes, there is supposed to be a phenomenon where your mind or your subconscious can put itself on magnetic tape. Maybe Andrija found a way either by hypnotism or by triggering some ability in me to create those tapes. But then the voices I heard *were* very real. So

it was seeing, hearing and smelling, and as far as I feel, it was a fact I saw these things.’

‘You must understand,’ Geller continues, ‘Because we were in this situation it looked quite normal to me in a way. Yes it was bizarre, but it was normal. But to the outside person, who was not involved, it looked total madness and hysteria. From the day I met Andrija he was very accurate. He kept diaries. He was 100% sure that an extra-terrestrial intelligence was working through me, using me as a vehicle for them to achieve certain things here. There was some sort of code system through his watch. OK, in a very strange way, I disconnected myself from that scene while it was going on. I let things happen. The UFO in the Sinai, another one that I have saw with Iris in the suburbs of Tel Aviv, they were all happening to me, and I took it very naturally, just said to myself, let it happen.’

‘When he hypnotised me, some of the voices came through me, but I was awake when I heard the words come out of the tape recorder. Did I hallucinate? No way. But because of the way the tapes *in* the machine dematerialised every time they should have been recording the voice from Spectra, I suspected Andrija, because he had come with his own tape recorder a Sony. Once, when he wasn't in the room, I opened it with a screwdriver, just to satisfy myself that this wasn't a trick tape recorder that could gulp down a tape and make it disappear. Yes, then I thought Andrija was tricking me. He was totally immersed in me, Uri Geller, for no monetary reason. I had to tell him that if he wanted me out of Israel, I wanted to buy my mother an apartment before I left. He actually loaned me money with which I bought my mother an apartment. It was new for me to see such a non-financial motivation.’

‘Now when Andrija’s book came out and I was being interviewed, I was very supportive to him. I had to go along with his idea, because I was a believer, because he painted the canvas and I interpreted it from the canvas. But when I parted ways with Andrija years later, I had to stay in the balance, meaning if I would have disputed what he had written, it would mean that I was just some kind of conspirator along with him, and I lied and all that. But because I still very deeply believe that what was occurring between me and Andrija was real, I couldn't brush it aside. If you look at an interview in its entirety, I would go on about 90% about my powers and abilities and that would give a little opening of about 10% to the possibility that these voices were some kind of an extraterrestrial intelligence. I never said that this was a hoax from Andrija or that it wasn't real, or that this was his imagination. I said it exactly as it happened. What can I do when Andrija opens a Sony tape, a new one, in front of my very own eyes, tears off the cellophane, puts it into the tape recorder, presses the button to record and a mechanical voice comes on?’

‘This is the big difference between me and many other paranormalists. They think that paranormal powers come from within you, whereas I say that’s possible, but I believe that in my case, it is coming from outside, from a thinking entity, and that it is it which decides what to do. The fact is that here I am after nearly 30 years, and I am still in contact with something. If that’s controversial to some closed-minded people, fuck them. The fact is that these things are still continuing to happen to me - and not only to me.

Chapter 9 / An Agreement to Fantasise?

'The rational, orderly, common-sense world of experience is a sham: behind it lies a murky and paradoxical world of shadowy experience and shifting perspectives'.

Physicist, Professor Paul Davies.

Readers may have noticed that an unexpected word, hypnotism, has begun to creep into the Uri Geller story like an uninvited guest at a party. I had idly wondered early on in my research into Uri Geller whether the explanation for what I saw him apparently do - make a spoon bend of its own accord in the flat of my son's hand - might just lie in the field of hypnosis. The idea seemed too ludicrous, however. I have often read that hypnosis is credited in corny fiction and bad films with far more than it can actually achieve. But then, I have seen and admired the British stage hypnotist, Paul McKenna, apparently induce the same ridiculous private fantasy - be it riding a horse or swimming underwater - in each individual on a stage-full of people. Perhaps Uri Geller was more of a mind bender than a spoon bender?

Strongest among the competing theories I had thus far considered as an explanation for what we saw, and for the whole Geller phenomenon, was the idea that Uri's

abilities to bend metal by the power of the mind exist in the majority of us, and that he somehow subliminally triggers our subconscious to cause us to produce such effects. This had to be the answer for the huge number of anomalous events I was told about which had happened at some distance from Uri.

If we accept for a moment that the power of the mind might be able to bend metal, some kind of subconscious triggering mechanism in third parties had, surely, to be the only way to explain how, for example, the El Al captain Gideon Peleg had seen a fork tine spontaneously bend when he was talking about Uri several hundred miles from him. Then there are the hundreds of thousands of reports from dozens of countries of people's broken watches and clocks coming to life, and their cutlery bending and leaping about when Geller appears on television. The same happens every time he appears on radio or TV. Towards the end of the writing of this book, a couple from Leeds, in Yorkshire, both highly educated crossword compilers for several quality newspapers, heard Geller on a local radio station asking people to get their broken watches working via his powers. The wife of the couple had an old battery-operated Sekonda, which had stopped, she estimates, over two years earlier. For amusement, she tried to give the watch the Geller treatment by clenching her hand over it and shouting, 'Work!'. Not only did it come to life, she says, but it started to tell the same time as the kitchen, microwave and oven clocks - all of which had been accidentally set two minutes fast a couple of days previously. Furthermore, a month later, the watch was still working perfectly.

'I am completely astounded by it, because I am a total sceptic. I still can't believe that it happened,' the woman told me. Her husband added: 'We always thought he

was a charlatan, and in a way, we still do. We are both quite rational and deeply sceptical, but then we are also both religious people, who believe in the possibility of miracles. I have to dismiss as unbelievable the “obvious” explanation, that my wife got the watch going and set it by the kitchen clock and then played a trick on me. It is logical and plausible, but incorrect.’

Not all such people can, surely be imagining things? James Randi, a charismatic Canadian magician-turned-crusader against all forms of what he believes to be charlatanism, laughs and says they most certainly can. He claims he went on a New York radio station once pretending to be a Geller-esque spoon bending psychic, and similarly received scores of calls from people reporting healed watches and destroyed cutlery. Randi, who has spent 25 years and become world famous doggedly campaigning against Uri Geller, is a colourful engaging character, a former escapologist, who has been adopted as the unlikely figurehead of a coalition of anti-Geller magicians and scientists.

The possibilities of Randi’s radio experiment are intriguing, so long as he is telling the truth. Unfortunately, Randi is a self-proclaimed conman; although he now describes himself as such ironically, to demonstrate that all magic is a confidence trick, he also has a self-defeating tendency to stretch the truth, albeit in the pursuit of what he believes to be a greater truth. Randi naturally subscribes to the view that the callers to the New York radio station imagined the phenomena, or were simply lying. But what if, believing that he was a ‘real’ psychic, they accepted a hypnotic suggestion that their spoons would bend and their watches re-start, and they thereupon triggered themselves whatever the Geller effect on metal is? Or if, under the power of

Randi's suggestion, they all believed they had seen such phenomena, even though they had not occurred?

Of course, being *told* even by the steadiest and most reliable of witnesses such as Capt. Peleg, about such wonders as objects bending and changing at a distance, is fascinating, but not nearly so much so as seeing the phenomena for yourself; and many similar events happened to me after meeting Geller. An hour before I left my office on the morning of our very first interview in 1996, he phoned to ask if I minded conducting it as he went on one of his marathon Thames-side walks - the pattern we then settled into for two years. This meant I would have to use a remote microphone for my tape recorder, to clip onto Geller's lapel as we walked. In 1981, I had bought an excellent and expensive little Sony electronic mike with a tiny windsock which would have been ideal for an outdoor interview, but unfortunately it had not worked for at least ten years. For some reason, I had never thrown it away, occasionally buying a new battery for it to try to goad it back into life, but to no avail. It was completely dead. So when Geller said we would be doing the interview on the hoof, I went to my local electronics shops to quickly buy a new microphone, only to find that such things are unknown in suburban high streets. Back in my office, I found in a drawer one very cheap old mike I could use for the meanwhile. Next to it was the 15 year-old Sony; out of curiosity, I tried it out, and was alarmed to find it working perfectly. It has continued do so ever since, right through all the Geller interviews, indoors and out, all over the world, in all weathers.

I seem to have a thing about elderly gadgets; perhaps I had been awaiting Uri Geller all these years as a psychic repairman. Another, an old camera from the sixties, also underwent a mysterious rebirth during the course of writing the book. I use the second-hand Pentax Spotmatic with a close-up lens for copying pictures for my books. The meter has, again, not worked for several years, but this hardly matters, as I have had to become adept at judging exposure. One morning, I was on Kibbutz Hatzor, where Uri spent an unhappy year aged 11, when Nurit Melamed, the elder sister of his best friend from that time, Eytan Shomron, produced a tiny but excellent black and white snapshot of Uri and the Shomron family in about 1957. Nurit did not want to part with the photo, but was happy for me to copy it. The light level in her house was very low, however, so we took it outside, where the midday sun was dazzlingly bright. I realised I had never copied a photo in such light, and was unsure what exposure to use. For once, I could have done with a working meter. Peering through the viewfinder at Uri's intense eyes from 40 years ago, I suppose I should have expected something odd to happen, but I didn't, and proceeded to guess a variety of exposures. It was while doing so that I noticed the dead meter needle was suddenly working; I had no memory of ever seeing it move from its resting point. It gave me a perfect (and slightly unexpected reading) and continued to work for the rest of the day. The following morning, I awoke in my hotel to find a sandstorm had blown up, and I jumped up to take a photo through the window of the extraordinary swirling yellow dust outside. As I picked the camera up, the strap caught round something, and the camera hurtled to the hard floor with a horrible crack. The Pentax was undamaged, and still worked - all apart from the meter which stopped working again, and has not done so since.

A key element of these phenomena, if such they are, and not just coincidence upon coincidence, always seems to be an element of the unconscious. It is no use hoping or assuming your camera or microphone will suddenly work because what you are using it for connects in some way with Uri Geller. But if you aren't expecting it, something odd does seem to happen, even though, again and again, you curiously don't connect it with Geller when it does so. When I was copying the photo on the kibbutz, and told Nurit my camera meter had just come to life when I needed it, it was she who pointed out the Geller connection; I was concentrating so hard on the problem of taking the tricky photo, that for a moment, I genuinely did not know what she was referring to. Another day, Uri came to see me in my office, as he was passing by in the late afternoon. The next morning, a previously reliable wall clock he was sitting under was 20 minutes slow. Assuming the battery had run down, I checked it on a tester, but it was fresh. I threw the clock out that day. Perhaps I was a little slow too, but it was only several hours later that the connection even struck me between the world's most renowned psychic interferer with watches sitting in my office and the five year-old clock packing up.

While they would obviously dismiss the idea that Geller can hypnotise us to make Geller-type effects happen through our own subconscious efforts, one or two of the professional magicians I interviewed hinted that when we saw our spoon bend so dramatically, it was an illusion as the result of a suggestion by Geller. Mass hypnotism does occasionally crop up as an explanation for such anomalies. In 1863, D.D. Home, a Scottish psychic who was never discovered to be a fraud, performed a series of table and cloth levitations in France, as well as extending his own body by six inches, and placing his head in a pile of live coals and emerging unmarked. The

experiments and others by home were observed and written up by Sir William Crookes, a distinguished physicist, and Lord Adare, a Daily Telegraph foreign correspondent. A commentator in the scientific journal Nature at the time posited the theory that Home was a hypnotist. (His second possibility was that he was a werewolf.) In London over a hundred years later, the science fiction novelist Arthur C. Clarke, years after seeing his door key apparently bend under Uri Geller's gaze, changed his mind and said that he had been mistaken, and might have been in a hypnotic state when he made the observation.

But even having suspected that hypnotism might provide some kind of answer to the Geller enigma, learning later from Uri that Andrija Puharich was a master hypnotist came as something of a shock; and when I came by chance upon the first evidence that Uri himself had also quietly been honing his hypnotic skills back at least as far as the early seventies, I experienced what felt at the time like a falling of scales from the eyes. Uri subsequently mentioned hypnotism passingly in interview, but certainly does not dwell on the subject. This could merely be because it is not very important to him, but I did find myself wondering if this was an issue he preferred not to be too well-known.

Although it later turned out to be quite widely remembered in Israel, I found out about Uri's dalliance with hypnotism through an Israeli investment management MSc, Yael Azulay, whom I met at an afternoon workshop Geller held at Battersea Town Hall in London. Yael got up to tell Uri at the workshop that she met him in 1972, when she was a schoolgirl. He was very friendly towards her, but I do not think it was

in his plans for me to take her number and go to see her months later. Yael is a great admirer of Uri Geller, but her story was quite different from what I expected.

Although by the time Yael Azulay met him, Uri was already famous, and well into his bizarre Puharich period, he was still attending showing his face all over Israel, even attending the more up-market type of student party in his continuing effort to convince the next generation of influential Israelis of his powers. Yael was at an elite private high school, where she was worried about some coming maths exams. She was at a friend of a friend's party late one night at a villa in a smart Tel Aviv area, when, she recalls, 'Uri just arrived. I remember someone saying he is likely to come and you must see this guy.'

'People were hyping him up and talking about how he does all these magic kinds of things. He just arrived and the music stopped and he was trying to grab attention because obviously he had an audience. He wanted to talk to us, to get something going. It's not unusual at Israeli parties if somebody wants to say something or they have had enough of the music just to come in and do as they want. Uri had short hair, and was wearing a loose baggy, checked shirt with buttons down the front and denims. He looked like a kibbutznik. He didn't come across as a very powerful man. He had presence, yes, but he was just like someone who was playing around. He said, "Does everyone want to do some hypnotism?"', in a very inquisitive, almost childlike, way. Obviously I volunteered. I wasn't working at all at school, and I was worried about it. He had a pendulum, and said, "I bet you that with this pendulum, I can have you asleep within seconds." It seemed to me throughout the whole time he was hypnotising me, I was not asleep. I am quite aware of what was going on. Everybody was watching. He asked me if I wanted anything in particular and I said, yes I wanted

him to make me pass my exams the next month, to make it so I could get really good mark in maths. I was very sceptical of the whole thing. I didn't believe that he had managed to hypnotise me, but I did immediately start working damned hard. And I don't know how, but the exact questions I had revised came up in the exam, and I got a really good mark of 95 per cent. Of course I made the connection when I got the mark. What I liked was that he didn't make me do anything under hypnosis. He inserted messages in my mind; he said, "Just believe that you are going to do well", but he wasn't looking for a product there and then. He didn't even ask me to let him know what results I got.'

If his hypnotic exploits are really a skeleton in Uri Geller's cupboard, and not merely just another ability he has, it may seem curious that Geller's sceptical critics have not made more of it in all the decades of ceaseless attacks on their *bete noire*. Insisting, as they do, that Geller simply bends spoons behind his back while you are not looking, is less than satisfactory for those who, even when they are aware of such moves and are on the look out for them, fail to see anything of the sort. Hypnotism would seem to be an acceptable, rational explanation for what so many people see, or believe they see, in his presence, or with him consciously or subconsciously in mind.

The problem for sceptics here is that, by and large, they believe hypnotism too is a fraud, and therefore obviously cannot cite it as a rational explanation for Uri Geller's repertoire. They argue that research with thousands of subjects has shown reliably that only 15 to 20 per cent of the entire population is capable of going into a deep hypnotic trance, and that only another 30 per cent can be hypnotised at a lighter level. Additionally, they say, we don't even really know what a trance is. No instrument has

ever been invented to measure whether somebody is under hypnosis or not, and there is a good reason for this; there is no indication that there would be anything for such a machine to measure. Some modern brain scanning experiments have indicated that the brain activity of a hypnotised person is significantly different from that of a person told to pretend to be hypnotised. But the evidence is tentative. Other psychologists can show that the 'altered state' supposed to be characteristic of hypnosis can be faked. So much for the kind of controlled, laboratory tests which sceptical, empirical science demands before any new effect can be accepted as proven. Hypnosis happens when all parties to it willingly consent, and this does not make it a very scientific phenomenon.

'I am convinced,' James Randi told me in his Fort Lauderdale office, 'That hypnotism is an agreement between the hypnotist and the subject to fantasise. I have never seen anything done during a so-called hypnotic trance that could not be done out of a hypnotic trance.' At his office desk in Loughton, Essex, Mike Hutchinson, a close friend of Randi and a leading light in the British sceptic movement (as well as an implacable opponent of Uri Geller, like Randi) was still more forthright. 'Hypnosis is nonsense,' says Hutchinson, who left his job as a wood veneer merchant a decade ago to become the UK distributor for rationalist books from America. 'Let's get one thing straight as far as hypnosis is concerned - there is no such thing. There is no hypnotic trance. Perhaps if you use the word suggestion, I can go along with it. I know somebody who is a stage hypnotist, who used to use this so-called trance, but now he does his act without using the hypnotic trance - and gets the same sort of results.'

Randi went as far in 1995 as to include hypnosis in a book called *The Supernatural A-Z*. The practice did not emerge at all well under his scrutiny. Such apparent successes of hypnotism as weight-loss and cessation of smoking, he wrote, might just as easily be attained by religious inspiration, ‘or the intervention of another mystic-sounding but ineffective therapy ... This is an idea professional hypnotists do not care to hear.’

Randi’s is not the only supernatural bestiary to include hypnotism. Morris Goran’s 1978 book, *Fact, Fraud, and Fantasy, The Occult and Pseudosciences* is a recommended text for convinced sceptics. In it, Goran lists hypnotism along with the likes of Pyramidology, Palmistry, Numerology, I Ching, Tarot Cards, Scientology, Witchcraft and Astrology. A 1990 book James Randi especially recommends, *They Call It Hypnosis*, by a psychologist, Robert Allen Baker, propounds the theory that there is no such thing as a state of altered consciousness produced by hypnosis, and that what we term hypnosis is in fact a mixture of social compliance, relaxation, and suggestibility. This, it is argued, can account for many occult phenomena, such as past-life regression, UFO ‘abduction’, channelling, and speaking in tongues. Another book, *Bizarre Beliefs*, by Simon Hoggart (a fine political journalist) and Mike Hutchinson, examines hypnotism alongside crop circles, Nostradamus, ‘evidence’ of a living Elvis Presley and the Curse of Tutankhamun. (An oddity to note here, perhaps, while mentioning *Bizarre Beliefs*, is that Mike Hutchinson’s ex-wife was a white witch. I suggested light heartedly when he brought this slightly surprising point up in our interview that, with him a highly knowledgeable rationalist and campaigner against Geller, while his wife getting involved in witchcraft, the reason for her becoming his ex-wife was clearer than in most divorce cases. He shot a meaningful

glance; 'It was better than if she'd got into Catholicism,' he said. It turned out that Hutchinson supported her, was delighted when she got into a good coven in nearby Leyton, and has written in qualified support of witchcraft [the white variety, at least] in a sceptics' magazine.)

To appreciate hypnotism's status for sceptics, it is important to realise that when this strange new mental process was discovered only 200 years ago, it was the spoon bending of its day, and its inventor, a Swiss-German mystic and physician, Franz Anton Mesmer, was in many ways the Uri Geller of the age. The striking parallels between Mesmer and Geller were, in fact, one of the most interesting unexpected discoveries I made during researching this book.

Mesmer was the talented son of a game warden, and was flamboyant, rather opinionated, forceful and given to the dramatic. At 23, as a medical student, he came up with his early ideas on hypnotism. He first called his practice 'animal gravitation', then changed its name to 'animal magnetism', magnetism being a particularly fashionable concept at the time as an explanation for, as we would say today, life, the universe and everything. For centuries, magnetism had been regarded as an 'occult virtue' and accredited with all manner of crazy qualities; once it was better understood, from the early 17th century, people liked to use magnetic attraction as a metaphor for all kinds of effects which had nothing to do with magnets. For Mesmer to tack 'magnetism' onto his theory was, then, much like attaching the prefix 'cyber' to some new concept today.

When Mesmer hypnotised patients, to produce ‘crises’ - what we would call trance - to cure various ailments, he used a combination of dozens of magnets and his own charisma. It hardly mattered that nor that the magnets were a completely extraneous gimmick. Not even Mesmer himself seemed to be aware that it was actually him - ‘the magnetiser’ - who was the significant ingredient in animal magnetism. Nor was it realised that the practice of curing ailments, both physical and mental, by unleashing the power of the subconscious had been used by shamans, medicine men and witchdoctors for thousands of years.

Mesmer was the man of the moment from shortly after setting up in medical practice in Vienna. In that city and in Munich, he demonstrated the art of ‘magnetism’, and was a sensation, with hundreds of happy clients to swear by his cures. Not surprisingly, Mesmer, a tempestuous maestro much given to tantrums, eventually attracted professional scepticism and outright opposition, just as Geller did centuries later. At the age of 43, in the wake of a slightly over-ambitious -and unsuccessful - attempt to cure a Viennese worthy of blindness, he decamped for Paris, and became a controversial sensation all over again, only this time in a much bigger way.

He opened a clinic on the Place Vendome, which he equipped with a baquet - a tub of water filled iron filings and pieces of glass and with iron rods protruding. Patients were required to grasp these rods while sitting in a circle connected by a cord. The room was darkened and full of mirrors; Mesmer would appear dressed as a wizard, touching or simply staring at his clients as soft music played. Some would fall asleep, others go into convulsions. And hundreds of these wealthy patients would claim to be cured. Such a furore ensued that Mesmer soon had to move into bigger premises, with

four baquets, no waiting. He even introduced an economy class for those unable to afford the personal attention of the master. He ‘magnetized’ a tree, to which thousands of the poor and sick attached themselves with cords - shades of Uri Geller's power crystals. A large proportion of those who used the magnetized tree claimed to be cured, probably by self-hypnosis.

Le magnetisme animal was the talk of France, ridiculed by doctors, respectable scientists and satirists, discussed in hundreds of books and pamphlets, but patronised by the wealthy and powerful (Marie Antoinette for one) as well as the poor. Mesmer, as a man of science as well as a doctor, craved scientific validation, but the professors refused to discuss him, let alone investigate his claims. He and his preposterous theory were a gigantic hoax, they held. The Royal Society of Medicine discussed looking into Mesmer’s methods, but he soon blew up over the suggested experimental protocols, and the Society would have nothing more to do with him.

The accusations of fraud did nothing whatever to dim Mesmer’s star. The richer and more famous he became, the more miraculous cures were reported. Eventually, in 1784, the King, Louis XVI, intervened. He appointed a royal commission to establish whether Mesmer was a charlatan or a healer. On the panel were Lavoisier, the celebrated chemist, Benjamin Franklin, physicist and statesman, Bailly, the astronomer, Guillotin, inventor of the guillotine (seen at the time as a great advance in humane execution) and de Jussieu, a botanist.

The commission utterly debunked Mesmer. It ripped apart the concept of animal magnetism, found the fluid in the baquets was not magnetic at all, and showed that a susceptible subject, when offered four trees, only one of which was ‘magnetized’ was sent into a trance by all of them. It refused to consider the evidence that a huge

number of people believed themselves cured by Mesmer, and effectively sent him packing into obscurity and exile. Of the nine commission members, only the botanist, du Jussieu, published a dissenting opinion. He was convinced from what he had seen that Mesmer might be on to something big and genuine.

A combination of Mesmer's rampant commercialism, his showbizzy pzazz, his fanaticism and the poor standard of his scientific explanation for his own work ensured that he was designated a hoax and a fraud. Yet a large body of his more open-minded supporters believed - rightly as it turned out - that Mesmer was on the track of something, and they continued to use and develop animal magnetism, still without knowing what it really was.

Sceptics aside, today, hypnosis is pretty much an established treatment, 'Officially endorsed,' as the Encyclopaedia Britannica confirms, 'as a therapeutic method by medical, psychiatric, dental, and psychological associations throughout the world.' Some hypnotists in Europe still describe the 'community of sensation' between hypnotist and subject, likening it to a magnetic force. Experiments by Soviet researchers have suggested that hypnotism can work over very long distances, of a thousand miles, in one case, and that hypnotic suggestion may even be able to be transmitted by some electromagnetic means. In more conventional arenas, hypnotism is used in preparing people for anaesthesia and childbirth, in enhancing drug response, and reducing dosages. Hypnosis is routinely used in the management of extreme pain, especially in cases of terminal cancer. It is excellent for nervous dental patients, and works well on high blood pressure and headaches. Although Freud used hypnosis for a while, he turned against it. Partly as a consequence of this, in modern psychotherapy, it is not fully approved of, because of the argument that it relieves

only symptoms and not the causes of neurosis. Although controversy continues to burn on over the question of stage hypnotists, and whether their performances or dangerous or even fraudulent, few medical doctors, and still fewer practitioners in the psychological sciences, have any doubt at all that hypnotism is 'real'.

Real, yes, but could it have caused a sceptical journalist and his two teenaged children to believe simultaneously that they had seen the same spoon bend when it hadn't? That depended, I found, who you asked. For Mike Hutchinson, the idea was not conceivable - not that he was in any way suggesting the spoon bending we saw was real. 'A mass hypnosis, of three people?' Hutchinson reflected. 'Suggestion, perhaps, but if you are thinking about being put into trance, then no.'

What did Paul McKenna think? On the phone from New York, where he is establishing himself as a star of stage hypnosis as he has been in the UK for many years, McKenna took an on-the-fence position, but not an uninteresting one. 'Three people to see the same thing? Definitely, I think it's possible, if the operator is skilful and slick enough,' he said. 'There are all kinds of examples of mass hallucinations. It's less common than one person seeing something.'

Could Geller have learned to hypnotise the unsuspecting in an instant, as McKenna seem to. 'It seems in my stage show to some people that I have more power than I really do,' McKenna admitted. 'It looks as if I can just walk up and snap my fingers, but that's not actually what takes place at all. Because of the environment, the context in which the show is taking place, the cards are so stacked in my favour that I appear to be able to do these things. Some research in Australia has shown that if you give

people a big title, like professor, doctor or his lordship, they appear to be taller to people than if they don't. We distort reality in our mind with our preconceptions. But at the same time, on anecdotal evidence of spoon bending, I'd say I'd have to keep an open mind. I've seen magicians bend spoons, and fool me, but not the way Uri does it, where people see it bend apparently by itself. So what you saw could have been real.'

Dr. Graham Wagstaff, Reader in Psychology at Liverpool University and a leading authority on hypnosis had a third view. It was Wagstaff who gave evidence in Paul McKenna's favour at the court case in London in July 1998 of a man who believed Paul McKenna had turned him into a schizophrenic and tried to sue the hypnotist.

'It wouldn't be unusual for three people to think that's what they've all seen if that's what they expected to see,' Wagstaff postulated. 'Or maybe you *did* see it, but it was an illusion, or maybe it's a problem of memory, that you all remembered it wrongly. But as for hypnosis by Uri Geller, you'd have to have a pretty way out, eccentric view of hypnosis to believe people can be hypnotised without being aware of it. It won't wash with the vast majority of the scientific hypnosis community, even those who really believe there is a hypnotic state. To them, a hypnotic state is something like focusing your attention, not some weird thing, some strange suggestible state that you fall into and then you're in it. You have to *believe* you're being hypnotised.'

In talking to Graham Wagstaff, a fascinating difference between him, a professional sceptic, and myself, who I would have to class as an amateur, became clear to me. He believes that we all have stories the likes of which Geller, Puharich (and latterly, me) would regard as 'strange' and spooky, but that a *proper* sceptic retains his scepticism at pretty much all costs.

‘We all have these experiences,’ Wagstaff told me. ‘One of my favourites was when the wing mirror on my car got mended by itself. It was in about 1975, when I lived in Newcastle, and, no, I wasn’t on drugs. I had a Ford Anglia, and the mirror was dangling off. Then one morning, I came along and it wasn’t dangling off. It was mended. That’s how I remember it. I do a bit on cars, and I’d looked at it, and I couldn’t see how anyone could fix it. I’m not suggesting that anything weird and wonderful happened, but that I suppose, I must have seen it wrong, or I’d made some sort of mistake, or my memory was playing tricks on me or something like that. I went through everything, None of the neighbours knew what had happened. I was quite worried about it. It’s quite possible that some good Samaritan mended it, but I would have thought it was beyond repair. It was hanging down.. But I’m a real sceptic, so there must be some explanation.

Chapter 10 / Germany

'The powers of this man are a phenomenon that in theoretical physics cannot be explained.' (Dr. Friedbert Karger, physicist, the Max Planck Institute for Plasma Physics, Munich)

The end of Uri's harrowing, futile relationship with Yaffa came in the middle of his extraordinary adventures with Andrija Puharich, but was not as result of the bizarre turn Geller's life had now taken. It was a simple case of an illicit, extramarital affair having finally become intolerable for the married party, Yaffa, and it was she who decided they should not see one another again. Uri had no doubt that he loved Yaffa more than Iris, and was heartbroken by her decision. Even though he was often seeing, he says, two or three girls for one night stands besides Iris, and Hanna Shtrang was still quietly in the background as Uri's on-hold marriage partner, the Yaffa question tortured him day and night, and played a considerable part in his decision to leave Israel in the summer of 1972, when he was 25.

Amnon Rubinstein had long ago counselled Geller to be tested scientifically overseas, and now Puharich too was increasing the pressure on him to ease up on the

showbusiness razzmatazz and start becoming a serious fish in some bigger pools. It almost seems that Puharich tacitly acknowledged that his own eccentric reputation precluded Uri from being taken seriously until he had been tested by independent researchers. Uri's experience abroad was minimal, however. He had not been very successful as a performer in Italy, and was distinctly nervous about going straight to the States and submitting himself to the scrutiny of scientists who might be a good deal less friendly than Puharich. He was even worried that his powers might somehow desert him outside of Israel. He decided he would like to go to Europe first that summer, as a kind of step-by-step approach to America. He wanted to meet some scientists there, who had expressed interest in him, and perhaps try some performances.

Germany may seem an odd place for an Israeli to decide to go to further himself, but several factors led him to be at Ben Gurion Airport boarding an El Al flight one June morning. An Israeli friend of Uri, a singer called Zmira Henn, had a boyfriend already working in West Germany as an impresario. She suspected Uri would get on with her friend, Yasha Katz, and could come to a good business arrangement with him. Another factor was that, in common with many native-born Israelis, Uri did not have quite the post-Holocaust horror of Germany which so many European Jews understandably are haunted by. Germans tended, as they still do, to respond to the friendliness of Israelis by being especially welcoming in return. A further small point which made Geller comfortable with going to Germany was that his mother had been born in Berlin, so he felt some affinity with the country.

Uri was seen off by an odd party of well-wishers, consisting of his divorced parents, Shipi's parents, Hanna - and Iris. With Uri on the flight was Shipi, who had left school, but still had some time to go before he was required for his army service. It looked very much as if Shipi was going to be Uri's personal and road manager. Now a smart 17 year-old, Shipi was to all intents Uri's kid brother, and the partnership would last to the present day, when he is both Uri's brother-in-law and all-purpose manager. Iris would have gone to Germany with Uri, but her parents, who still disapproved of the relationship, would not permit it; the good bye at the airport was effectively the end of their affair.

It was, for many obvious reasons, a particularly poignant parting from Israel for Uri. He had a lot to think about. 'I like to have these in-built safety devices in my mind. So I made two vows as I walked up the steps of the plane. I swore that every day, whatever happens to me, I will look at my life as one big holiday. The second thing, I would thank God for what he had given me, and when the moment comes when it ends, I will always be grateful. You see, in the back of my mind I always kept a little room of fear that it might end and I might have to go back and work. To me it was such a splendour and a privilege to wake up in the morning whenever I wanted to, I didn't have to go to work. The days of me running around in Tel Aviv being a messenger boy on my Vespa really were over. I could do whatever I want, because everything around me was paid for.'

Uri and Shipi did not fly initially to Germany, but to Rome, which Uri was familiar with, and where a friend had lent them an apartment. Uri rented a car in Rome, and he

and Shipi took a leisurely drive north, stopping off in St. Moritz, where they met two Australian girls they spent some time with. Greedily devouring the mountain scenery, the luxury and wealth all around them compared what they were used to in Israel, they continued to Munich, where Katz was waiting for them, a friendly-looking man of nearly 40, Uri observed, with a crinkly face. Uri liked him immediately. Katz had an entire show tour already planned, but more importantly, he introduced Uri to something he took an immediate liking to - indeed, became quite addicted to: friendly tabloid newspaper coverage.

In Israel, the popular newspapers were always a little prickly about him, although not necessarily in the good sense of being cautiously sceptical. There is, as so many Israelis point out, a jealous streak in their national culture which manifests as a desire to be spiteful about anyone successful. Geller fell foul of this, and as part of the same syndrome, of the perils of what might be called the instant-expert, black-and-white school of journalism, which dictates that if an academic - almost any academic - with halfway decent looking qualifications is phoned up and is prepared off-the-cuff to be derogatory about someone, what he says instantly counts as the totality of expert opinion.

In Germany, almost from his first day, thanks to Yasha Katz's introduction, Uri Geller hit on the other side of the same coin - newspapers who saw him as good news, and would not naively assume that because one scientist dismissed him as a fraud, all would do the same. In Uri Geller, the Munich newspaper *Bild Zeitung*, the first in Germany to go big on him, found a fascinating story of the paranormal personified in a character of a tabloid editor's dreams - young, handsome, heterosexual, earnest,

articulate and even from a favoured country - Israel being all the more favoured after the terrorist massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics, which co-incidentally occurred while Geller was living in the city. Had Uri Geller been Polish or Nigerian, or ugly, or just a bit shy, his career would have been stillborn. Indeed, the only extra thing he really could have done further to oblige the international press in 1972 would have been to be female and gorgeous on top of his other assets; but even a psychic has his limits.

Bild Zeitung went ahead with a six-part Uri Geller series, and even managed to get some informal scientific back-up for him from a serious physicist. During the work on *Bild Zeitung's* series, one of the paper's journalists asked if he could do some really big stunt, such as stopping a cable car in mid-air. 'My powers were in tip-top shape,' he says, 'And I wanted to prove myself. I wanted to show the Germans the power of the mind and I did things for them that I doubt I can do today, but they just happened, one after the other. After several unsuccessful tries, Uri managed to do just what the journalist had suggested, with a cable car-load of journalists in tow. The car controller told the reporters the main power switch had simply flicked off. It was a most unusual incident, he said. The story made headlines all over Germany; Uri repeated the same electrical interference, or whatever it was, with the escalator in a department store, and stopped it dead. More headlines. He bent the wedding ring of the mayor in the middle of Munich, and a set of handcuffs at a police station - after he had been, with his agreement, strip searched for any illicit conjuring aids. Then *Bild Zeitung* took Geller along for an informal meeting in a hotel with a 32 year-old physicist who worked at the Max Planck Institute for Plasma Physics at Garching, just outside Munich.

Although he was infinitely more mainstream than Andrija Puharich, Dr. Friedbert Karger, it is fair to say, was still not quite an everyday physicist. A specialist in thermonuclear fusion research - the study of hot temperatures - he has also studied psychology and philosophy, and has spent most of his professional life examining parapsychics, and especially poltergeist and other psychokinetic phenomena, alongside his conventional work at the Institute. Five years before Geller arrived in Munich, Karger was one of two physicists from the Max Planck Institute allowed to use the Institute's apparatus to assist in the investigation of what remains the most validated poltergeist case in parapsychological history. (Anxious not to lose government research grants, the director of the Institute at the time, a believer in some aspects of the paranormal, permitted the equipment to be used so long as it was clear that the two young scientists were doing the poltergeist research on their own behalf rather than the prestigious laboratory.) A 19 year old secretary in a law firm in Rosenheim, a small town in southern Germany, was causing unparalleled havoc without seeming to do anything deliberately, disrupting electrical supply and telephone lines, sending hanging lights swinging as she walked down a corridor and so on. Fraud was never proven despite intensive sleuthing by scientists, journalists and the police, the effects moved with the young woman when she changed jobs until they finally faded out, and Friedbert Karger's whole perspective on physics changed.

'These experiments were really a challenge to physics,' Karger says today. 'What we saw in the Rosenheim case could be 100 per cent shown not to be explainable by known physics.' Because he had been brave enough to say so, it was natural that *Bild Zeitung* looked to Karger to do a preliminary an assessment of Uri Geller. He came

prepared with a ring, which he handled cautiously, never taking his eyes off it or letting it leave his hand. Uri touched it gently in Karger's palm and concentrated on it. The ring rapidly bent out of shape and cracked in two places. His colleague from the Institute, Manfred Lipa, also examined the ring for tool marks and found none. Karger also brought a diving watch, which Geller altered without any detectable trickery. The journalists asked Karger if the damage to the ring could have been caused by strong pressure. He said it could not. By a laser? No, Karger replied. The only possibility was that Geller had tried some form of hypnosis, but he considered that unlikely. Karger summed up: 'The powers of this man are a phenomenon that in theoretical physics cannot be explained. It is like atomic science. At the turn of the century, it was already known as a reality. It was just that at that time, one could not yet explain it in terms of physics.'

A quarter of a century on, had Friedbert Karger altered his view at all? He had, after all, become quite sceptical about some of the indiscriminate enthusiasm surrounding supposedly paranormal phenomena. 'I came over to England to go on a David Frost show on firewalking,' he laughs. 'I demonstrated that it has nothing to do with paranormal abilities, and that anybody can do it. One can explain it with physics. But of course, after I had done firewalking myself on the show, people said, "Oh, you must also have paranormal abilities."' It was very funny. But Uri Geller? No, the pre-experiments I did showed me that there were really some abilities in his case. Now, I didn't do anything in laboratory. And I think what he does on TV may be something else - it's a pity he uses his abilities in shows and that kind of thing - but what I saw him do, especially in one case with a diving watch which is extremely difficult to change the time on, was very impressive. He moved the hands by one hour, and we

could observe both him and the watch at all times, so it was not possible for him to do any tricks. Naturally, many of my colleagues said the usual thing, that he was doing good tricks and nothing else, but they had not done experiments with him, and I had.'

'I think he has both psychokinetic and telepathic abilities,' Dr Karger maintains. Asked what the physical mechanism might be which explains how Uri's effects work, he cautiously prefers not to speculate - but hints at the way his thinking has been going - which is that the Uri Geller effect, poltergeist effects, and even stranger paranormal anomalies might all be one and the same. 'It seems that we have really to change our way of looking at these phenomena,' Karger says, 'Because I have found that they are connected with such strange things as life after death. It's unavoidable that you come into contact with these things when you investigate such cases. Things like psychokinesis don't exist in isolation - and you are totally helpless when you use only known physics. Many very well known physicists have done this work, you know. Einstein investigated spiritistic mediums, and Pauli and other Nobel prize winners did similar experiments. If you are ignorant of these phenomena, it's easy to dismiss them, but if you have seen the phenomena you have to ask the questions I have.'

Uri Geller as a poltergeist phenomenon? It is certainly a new and interesting idea which could explain many of the bizarre things which seem to have happened to when Uri and Puharich were together in Israel. Poltergeists (German for 'noisy spirit') have been known and spoken of in dozens of cultures, and are regarded as a major area for parapsychological research -the problem being that the majority of cases parapsychologists examine are easily discovered to be fraudulent. Most poltergeists

are centred, as was the one in the Rosenheim case, on adolescents or young adults - the very people who, spurred on by horror films and TV documentaries, are the most likely to fake poltergeist phenomena as an attention-seeking strategy. The kind of children and adolescents in the better documented poltergeist cases, however, tend to be genuinely unhappy as well as attention seeking. Uri, of course, was unhappy and lonely at times as a child. He was also an admitted attention-seeker. What is most curious when pursuing this line of thought is the number of friends of Uri who characterise his boundless enthusiasm and energy, his impatience, his incaution and often crazy, ill-advised ideas (along with his affectionate nature, generosity and many other good qualities) as being distinctly adolescent in nature. Now if Uri, as an unhappy child, did by any chance attract the attentions of a particularly strong poltergeist (rather than those of the crew of the spaceship Spectra), is it possible, then, that he still is haunted by such a presence? He often speculates, when pursuing, as he still doggedly does, his 'controlled-by-extraterrestrials' theory, that he might be under the power of some maverick UFO crew, who are, basically, having a laugh at his, and humankind's expense. This, he feels, explains the trivial - or 'clownish' as he calls it - nature of so many of the effects that 'happen around him'. But how much better, perhaps, would be a poltergeist explanation; that it is a poltergeist around him, not an alien, which has the sense of humour, and continues to exercise it through Uri Geller, the world's oldest teenager?

Oddly enough, as a showbusiness tour in the summer of 1972, rather than as a publicity bonanza, Geller's German interlude was not really very successful. In Munich, he appeared at the Hilton Hotel and was the hottest ticket in town, but elsewhere, the tour's success was mixed. In Hamburg, Geller found himself booked

for ten days into a magicians' spectacular, which he was most unhappy about, although, he was gratified, he says, to find his fellow performers were fascinated by how he did his 'tricks' without any special equipment or sleight of hand. That was the first sign to date he had received that some magicians might one day come to accept him as *not* being one of their own.

The real difficulty in Germany for Uri was that Yasha Katz had rather overextended himself with promises. 'He was a good man, but he did want to earn a *lot* of money through my talents. He and another guy who worked for El Al who he worked with both had these tremendous dreams and visions of becoming multi millionaires from Uri Geller, and they planned the big shows and auditoriums and record deals. Yasha promised me a lovely little sports car, an Opel GT when I arrived, but it never happened, so from the financial point of view, it was all a little disappointing.

His few months in Germany were successful for Geller, however, for social reasons. Those parties back home at which the elite of Israel gathered and clamoured around him represented an extraordinary social boost for a young man, but Israel *is* a small, villagey place with only a very fuzzy and indistinct class system. In Germany, Uri began his assault on the Matterhorn of social climbing - the world of jet-setting European socialites. In Munich in particular, he found himself being invited to every reception and cocktail party worth being seen at. And thus it was that he came to be enjoying a passionate affair with Brigitte Bardot's sister-in-law, Eleanor 'Lo' Sachs. Lo Sachs was married to Ernst, whose brother Gunther was married to Bardot. Gunther and Ernst were the only shareholders in a huge motor accessories business, and were both among the richest men in Europe. While Gunther amused himself as an

international playboy, Ernst was a quieter, duller workaholic, who was 39 at the time, and usually away on business. It is not hard, then, to see how a flamboyant young Israeli psychic superstar of 25 exploding onto the Munich social scene would have provided an interesting summer distraction for the older Frau Sachs. The Sachs lived in a huge, antique-laden mansion in Grunwald, close to Franz Beckenbauer, the German football star. Uri and Shipi were invited to the Sachs place frequently before his affair with his gracious social hostess began.'

'I guess in Yaffa, I had seen the mature woman. She was older and wiser she really wanted me as me and not for anything else,' Uri says now. Maybe this is why I was attracted to Lo too, except she was German and very beautiful and very, very rich. I was looking for security and a mature love affair. Lo must have been close to 40. It was an astounding thing for me, because In Israel, although I was making good money and I managed to buy my mother a penthouse, but a tiny one, suddenly I was brought into this palatial house in the outskirts of Munich with its indoor swimming pool, outdoor swimming pool, suites, silver and gold everywhere. She introduced me to all the Guccis and Schmuccis and Fendis. I had no idea about such things. I was totally drunk in these surroundings and I liked it. It was almost power; she was mingling with Royalty and politicians and singers and actors and there were football players going through the house, and parties with caviar and champagne.'

'You must understand that Iris and Hanna and Yaffa were all beautiful young girls but we were all very simple. We didn't know more than what was around us in Israel. At those times, the late 60s and the early 70s, it was even a big deal to have a black and white television, never mind dishwashers and washing machines. Those were

unheard of , and then suddenly you are catapulted into surroundings where those things are totally normal and standard. It was ridiculous. I also loved the openness and the cleanness and the meticulous Germanic ways, everything working, the streets clean, the Post Office working. I liked the clinical cleanness. All that appealed to me.’

‘Lo was still married to Ernst, but he had an Italian girlfriend and didn't seem to be living in the house. He even gave me his cufflinks as a gift, 22 carat gold studded with diamonds. And, yes, the gigolo in me woke up. When I was still struggling, I sometimes had this notion that I would marry someone rich, and if that didn't work out, I would just become a gigolo. Lo and I used to go to restaurants, and she would order caviar and she would buy me shoes and clothes. One day, we walked into a shoe store and she bought me these beautiful long boots. Then as we were sitting in the restaurant she tucked five or six hundred Marks into my boots under the table so that I could pay the bill, so it didn't look like she was paying it. I was living a fantasy. There was a total detachment from my past. I disconnected myself from Iris who loved me madly, and from Hanna and from everyone in Israel. For a while, I didn't want to hear about Israel any more.’

The summer idyll could not last long. Andrija Puharich was urging Uri to get on a flight to the States and start seeing a line-up of interested scientists he had contacted. And then, while Uri was hanging out at the Sachs home one afternoon, something happened to jolt him, to remind him sharply of his roots, and to make him realise that he needed to be getting on with the more serious side of his life. ‘Lo had a ping pong table,’ he relates, ‘and I was in the attic either looking for the balls or the rackets to play ping pong and there I stumbled on these pictures of Gunther, Ernst as boys with

their father - and Hitler. It was unbelievable. There were all kinds of Nazi swastika signs and documents and books that blew me away. You can imagine a 25 year-old Israeli standing in an attic with all this Nazi paraphernalia around me, and I am sleeping with this woman and I am taking her money. I think it shook me back into reality and out of the fantasy I was living. I didn't raise it with Lo, though. She was good to me and I couldn't blame her for her husband sitting on the lap of Hitler. But it was enough for me.

Chapter 11 / I Wanna Be In America

'We have observed certain phenomena for which we have no scientific explanation.' (Preliminary statement from the Stanford Research Institute regarding its work with Uri Geller)

The very composition of the strange Team Geller which headed for the USA from Germany in October 1972 to begin the 11-year middle phase of Uri's career explains why the Geller phenomenon was seen and sneered at by many from the start as a circus. It consisted of Uri, the 18 year-old Shipi, who had been exempted from army service on medical grounds, Andrija Puharich, who had flown over from the States to accompany the party, Yasha Katz, whom Uri still wanted around even though he had not quite delivered what he promised in the way of bookings or sports cars in Germany, plus Werner Schmidt, an impresario who had produced the German versions of *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Hair*, and after meeting Uri in Hamburg, wanted to make him the singing star of a psychic musical which included the demonstration of Uri's powers. Schmidt was coming to the States to try to make his musical

happening idea happen, while Katz was to organise a lecture tour to make enough money to keep the team together while Uri submitted to the exhaustive round of scientific investigations Puharich had arranged.

The team got still bigger in the States, with such glitzy additions as a beautiful Japanese American girl, Melanie Toyofuku, who was working in film production in Rome, but had previously been an assistant to Puharich, and came back to join the Geller roadshow. Uri and Melanie soon became lovers. Another attractive female team member was Solveig Clark, a Norwegian American executive with a large corporation, who had a consuming interest in the paranormal. Also attached to the group, if not actually on the road with it, were Dr. Edgar Mitchell, who met Uri and was fully convinced by him, and a New York society couple, Byron and Maria Janis, he an international piano virtuoso who had been trained by the great Vladimir Horowitz, she, the daughter of the film star, Gary Cooper. While Dr. Mitchell had had some of his formative thoughts on the paranormal while in space and walking on the Moon, Byron and Maria's interest in such matters stemmed partly from an extraordinary connection, co-incidence, call it what you will. In his twenties, Byron became one of the world's leading exponents of Chopin. But it was only in a chateau in France, when Byron's career was already well established, that he accidentally came upon, in an old trunk, two unknown Chopin waltzes, written in the composer's own hand. The discovery was a sensation in the music world, topped only by the occasion, six years later, when he discovered, again by pure accident, different hand-written versions of the same waltzes in a library at Yale University. What makes the Janis/Chopin connection truly strange, however, and explains how the Janises and Uri Geller come to have so much of common interest - they are now his closest friends -

is that Byron Janis is the double of Frederick Chopin. As you look at Byron in profile in his plush Park Avenue apartment next to a rare engraving of the composer, the similarity is more than just a passing one - they could almost be the same person.

So it can be seen how Uri began to collect around him, just as he had done in Israel, an entourage of high-gloss, interesting friends, all with an interest in the paranormal, some with a tendency (although not one he has ever encouraged) to regard Uri Geller as extremely special, perhaps a guru. All became fascinated by Uri after seeing him carry out the same procedures - the spoon, the thought reading, the ring bending - as he had been doing since childhood. All these people believed what they saw, and all placed a sort of faith in Uri. This was not largely a religious faith, but a faith primarily that he was not fooling them, and secondly that his genuineness was evidence for there being 'greater things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy'.

With America opening up before him, great scientists lining up to meet him, and New York on red alert for a new social phenomenon, it is interesting to speculate for a moment about what it would have been like for Uri Geller by now if he *was* a fake, and the whole Geller effect was a hoax. It is easy enough to say that he was so dug into his position that he could not extricate himself even if he wanted to; yet could any 25 year-old really have maintained a fraud at the level he would need to in the USA, several times a day, on live TV, and in front of audiences of possibly hostile scientists, without running away, or admitting under pressure that it had all been a huge joke? Franz Mesmer, in so many ways Geller's predecessor, never had to recant his animal magnetism; it worked because it was real, apart from the fact that Mesmer thought it was done with magnets, whereas he was actually hypnotising his patients by his own personality.

Time and again, even from friends of thirty and forty years' standing, I heard the same sentiment from Uri Geller's friends and associates - that if they ever discovered from him that he had been fooling them all along, they would never speak to him again. A lot of his patronage and friendship is based on his powers; sure enough, people like him, and often love him as a person, but it is an oddly conditional kind of affection. I found it interesting that some magicians who are good friends of Uri have never seen or asked to see his abilities at close quarters, and he has never attempted to demonstrate to them. For my part, as a writer, I would have been delighted to have had it confirmed by Uri that he was a fraud because in many ways it would have made a better story. But that's journalists for you.

America for Geller would be the best of times and the worst of times. He would receive scientific approbation at an awesome level - *surely* enough to drive anyone other than a superman quite insane if he knew that everything he did was faked? - but also face the most heavyweight opposition of his life. This opposition, however, did not start to crystallise out for many months. In his honeymoon period in the States, before and including, his crucial tests at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) the scientists, albeit hand-picked to an extent by Puharich, rolled over for Geller.

Edgar Mitchell, going firmly on the record at a time when astronauts were still public figures (the last Apollo Moon landing took place just as Geller was touring the US in December 1972) announced: 'Uri is not a magician. He is using capabilities that we all have and can develop with exercise and practise.' Dr. Wilbur Franklin of the Physics Department at Kent State University, said after a brief spell of testing, during which Geller moved a watch ahead, broke a ring and concentrated on a sewing needle until it broke with an audible crack: 'As a result of Geller's success in this

experimental period, we consider that he has demonstrated his paranormal, perceptual ability in a convincing and unambiguous manner. The evidence based on metallurgical analysis of fractured surfaces [produced by Geller] indicates that a paranormal influence must have been operative in the formation of the fractures’.

The Geller entourage went to see, at Mitchell’s suggestion, Dr. Wernher von Braun, the renowned NASA rocket scientist, at his office at Fairchild Industries, where he was vice president. He asked von Braun to take off his gold wedding band and hold it flat in his own hand, while Geller held his hand over the ring and concentrated. To Geller's delight, as he was particularly keen to impress von Braun, the ring obediently warped into an oval shape. Geller also managed to get von Braun’s faulty electronic calculator working. Von Braun admitted to being baffled by Uri: ‘Geller has bent my ring in the palm of my hand without ever touching it,’ he said. ‘Personally, I have no scientific explanation for the phenomenon.’

Elsewhere, scientists of all descriptions were enthusiastic as a result of their first meetings. William E. Cox, of the Institute of Parapsychology, at Durham, North Carolina, reported: ‘Metal objects were bent or divided [by Geller] in circumstances such as to prove conclusively ... that the phenomena were genuine and paranormal.’ Dr A. R. G. Owen, of the New Horizons Research Foundation in Toronto, concluded: ‘There is no logical explanation for what Geller did here. But I don't think logic is what necessarily makes new inroads in science.’ Dr Thomas Coohill, a physicist at Western Kentucky University, said: ‘The Geller Effect is one of those “para” phenomena which changed the world of physics. What the most outstanding physicists of the last decades of this century could grasp only as theoretical

implication, Uri brought as fact into everyday life.’ Dr. Elizabeth Rauscher, a theoretical physicist at the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, part of the University of California, Berkeley, pronounced Geller, ‘One of the most powerful men alive today.’ (A note of caution here, maybe, is that Rauscher lived for many years with Andrija Puharich; she is, however, a highly respectable scientist). Jule Eisenbud, M.D, Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, described a Geller key-bending episode. ‘The Yale key at no time left our sight from the moment it was removed from the key ring and placed on the typewriter frame to the time when the splined end had bent upwards,’ she said. ‘Our attention was not distracted and the key was not altered in position, accidentally or otherwise. We were all looking carefully for magician's tricks and there were none. Everything occurred exactly as I have described. As a result of this personally witnessed experiment in clear unequivocal conditions I am able to state with confidence my view that Mr. Geller has genuine psychic capability.’

Geller's progress through the US was not restricted to academic departments of science. He was also making himself known to the ‘alternative’ community. At one such stop, at a New Age centre in Silver Spring, Maryland, however, he was presented with a request quite definitely not scented with patchouli oil. A scientist called Elder Byrd lived nearby, had read in the local newspaper that Uri Geller was coming to town, and wondered if Geller could spare him 15 minutes.

Byrd was a lieutenant commander in the US Naval reserve., who had left the full-time military to work as a civilian strategic weapons systems expert at the nearby Naval Surface Weapons Center. He had top secret security clearance, and contacts

high in the CIA and its Defense Department equivalent, the DIA. Byrd, who died in 2002, was increasingly becoming interested in non-lethal weaponry, especially biological warfare; he saw it as more humane to infect an enemy with *reversible* illness than ‘to punch holes in their body and have their blood leak out.’ To further his knowledge, he went back to school and in 1970, got a graduate degree in the highly unusual subject of medical engineering, at George Washington University, in Washington DC. He would later get involved in still more rarefied areas of defence, such as using electro magnetics as a weapon to confuse people, again as a reversible process, and in experiments on thought transference.

Byrd got his degree and his interest in what might be called alternative warfare at a good time. In the early 1970s, various parts of the American military were looking in a diversity of directions at such areas - including, as we will see shortly, using psychics. ‘The army even started spending money to see if you could instrument plants on the jungle trail as intrusion detection devices, and they determined that 80% of the time, plants could detect the presence of a human being who was bent on harm versus one that was friendly,’ Byrd says. ‘That started me on the realm of the weird. Uri Geller was an anomalous phenomenon, and I particularly wanted to see if he could interact with a new metal which has been discovered here at the laboratory.’

The new metal, called nitinol by the lab, was intended by Byrd as a sneaky trick to test Uri Geller with. An alloy of nickel and titanium, it had a unique property of possessing a mechanical memory. It sprang back to the shape at which it was forged, whatever twisting and distortion it was subjected to. The metal is now used for such things as orthodontic braces and very expensive unbreakable spectacle frames, but

was then known only to metallurgists. ‘I thought this was neat,’ Byrd recalls, ‘because, here was something which was not generally available, so the probability of Geller ever having even heard of it was very slim. If he could do something to it, it would be some evidence or an indication that he had the ability to do something very strange.’

With Shipi, Puharich and several other members of the entourage in attendance, Byrd handed Uri the five inch-long wire of nitinol he had taken from the lab. But Uri asked if he could first play some other games. ‘He wrote something on a piece of paper, handed it to me and said, “Put this in your hand and don't look at it now. I'm going to think of a letter, and I want to see if you can pick it up.” He closed his eyes, but nothing was happening in my head. So I thought, maybe I have to close my eyes for this to work. I closed them, and bam, there's a big green R lit up in my head. So I said, “I guess it's an R,” and he said, “Yes, open the paper,” and it was an R.

Byrd asked if Geller could do it the other way round. ‘I had been an amateur magician, so I knew a few tricks. He said, “Make it something in this room,” but I knew that trick, so I thought, no I'm not going to make it anything at all. I kept my paper and my pencil down below the lip of the desk, so he couldn't see the tip of the pencil running around, because if you are really good you can tell by the way the pencil moves what the picture is going to be. I just randomly started drawing something, an ellipse with a circle in it and then a dot in the circle. He quickly sketched something on the back of an envelope and said, ‘What is this? A button? He had drawn exactly what I had, but put four dots in the centre, because he was thinking of a button. Then when we compared them, and they were exactly the same size.’

Uri then stroked the nitinol wire, Byrd says, until an odd little lump formed in it, which failed to disappear as it should have done. Byrd went home, promising to let Uri know what his colleagues at the lab made of the wire. That night, he and his then wife, Kathleen, were up until late transmitting increasingly complex pictures to one another flawlessly. 'I thought, man, somehow Uri tuned me up and I can even transfer the ability to my wife. But the next day, we tried again, and it wouldn't work.

Back at work, Byrd's colleagues examined with an electron microscope the nitinol wire Uri had handled, and said it seemed to have been stretched at that one point, but that it could easily have been a flaw in the metal. He went to see Uri again, this time with wires which he had scored with a razor blade in binary coded decimal. 'One of the criticisms that magicians had was the switch. They'd say, how do you know he doesn't already have a supply of nitinol wire, and he has already bent these things and so on. I now had a mechanism for knowing that these were my wires.'

Uri successfully bent them so that they did not spring back into shape. 'I took them back and asked the lab to do a total analysis. They came back and said the only way these wires could have changed their configuration is to have heated them to 400 degrees, left them at the same temperature and then re-annealed them in some kind of oil. Uri had had some very profound affect at the molecular level in the memory of this shape memory alloy.' Further crystallographic examination of the wires showed that the crystals which contain the metal's 'memory' had increased in size - a change which would have required Geller to have raised the temperature of the metal to 900 degrees.

Byrd wrote a paper on the trial, which was reviewed by his bosses and cleared for publication - the first time parapsychological research at a government facility had ever been so accepted. 'Boy did that story get the sceptics going,' Byrd laughs. 'They tried everything they could think of because that was the most threatening piece of evidence to them.' (So frustrated, it seems, were sceptics by what they believed to be flawed research that the magician James Randi, several years later, when he was a respected leader of sceptical opinion, said in an unguarded comment that Byrd was now in jail for child molesting. The anti-Geller issue had become ever more emotional for his enemies, to the point where Randi, at least, was repeating gossip he had heard on the highly unreliable sceptics' grapevine. Byrd, who was neither a child molester nor in jail, successfully sued Randi for libel in a highly entertaining court case in Baltimore, which almost destroyed Randi financially and damaged the sceptics' movement considerably. The case serves as a an illustration of the depth of feeling Geller engendered when he came to the States; 25 years on, the question of Uri Geller still, amazingly, provokes virtual fights between sceptics and believers.)

As Byrd got to know Geller better, his conviction that his powers were genuine grew. 'The magicians say that if they can replicate what Uri does with the spoons, then that proves that it's a trick. But a couple of years later, I saw another thing that blew my mind and proved beyond all doubt to me that he could bend spoons with some unknown kind of energy. It was in a restaurant in London, in front of a group of us. One of the waiters recognised him and asked if he would bend something. Uri said, "Go to the kitchens and bring back a knife." The waiter held it with one hand and Uri put one finger on top of the blade. Everybody was crowding round waiting,

and he stroked it a few times. And over a three second period, we all watched the knife blade curl up all by itself. No magician can do that. I have also seen Uri touch a seed and in a second or two, it sprouted an inch. The first time he did this, and it sprouted just a little bit, was on Japanese television. They had the camera on his hand, and they started to sprout right in front of your very eyeballs. More recently, he touched a seed and it sprouted over an inch with leaves on it in a second or two. It was incredible.’

Uri’s ability to (apparently) make a seed sprout, which started when Edgar Mitchell suggested on a hunch that he try, is something I have also seen myself; he takes a scattering of radish seeds from what I assume - wrongly perhaps - to be a standard, sealed pack. He then holds them in the palm of one hand, while stroking them gently with one finger. After 30 seconds or so, I saw one of the seeds ‘pop’ with a visible shudder as its epidermis appeared to burst. I then saw a shoot emerge and grow within about half a second to approximately three millimetres long, complete with two tiny folded-up leaves.

Although the phenomenon was superficially as remarkable as spoon bending, I was immediately suspicious that, perhaps, radish seeds have a natural tendency to sprout suddenly in a warm spot. I called Simon Vyle, assistant head of the Chelsea Physic Garden in London, who said that radishes do indeed germinate quickly - sometimes in as little as 24 hours. ‘No seed will sprout as quickly as a few seconds, whatever it is. The radish is just a member of the cabbage family, and not very special. There was something recently in one of the horticulture magazines about Uri Geller doing this, and it seemed to be all above board. It amazed everyone who watched it, and there

were professional horticulturists there.’ To be on the safe side, I also e-mailed James Randi a few weeks after meeting him in Florida, to ask how he believed it was done. ‘An already sprouted seed will hide easily between the fingers, and Geller always uses radish seeds, which sprout within a few hours,’ Randi replied. ‘Easy to prepare by simply dampening a tissue in a plastic bag, adding seeds, and carrying the packet about with you until needed.’ It seemed to me again, as with the magicians’ explanation of spoon bending, like a fine description for how it *could* be done - but not how Geller does it. Geller is currently considering trying to make eggs hatch on demand, but is still pondering the ethical considerations; he is extremely unhappy about affecting any ‘life and death’ issue.

Uri Geller finally got to the SRI at the end of 1972. The rumour that he was going to be tested in the Electronics and Bio-engineering laboratory of such a prestigious establishment had spread throughout a bemused scientific world, as well as a conjuring fraternity, parts of which were becoming more furious by the day at the seriousness with which Geller was being taken. The view among magicians, as reflected in letters to their magazines, was that there was still time for the Israeli to confess his fraudulence, and that if he did, even now he could come to be regarded as a good old boy who had taken America for a brief ride; the status of conjuring could only increase if Geller came clean, whereas if he persisted with his paranormal claims, magicians would be obliged to campaign ceaselessly against him, if only because he represented a grievous threat to their trade. Uri knew that how he performed at the SRI would be crucial to his future in the States, and that a failure here would almost certainly wipe him out world-wide, as well as bury for ever the fledgling academic study of *psi* - the blanket term for all form of parapsychology and

the paranormal The pressure on Geller even if he were genuine was immense; if was a charlatan, and would have to contrive yet cleverer ways to cover his tracks in a fully fledged laboratory setting, once again, one can only guess how worried he must have been.

There was little encouragement for Uri going to SRI from the mysterious voices on Andrija's tape recorder, which were continuing, according to both men, to come at regular intervals; perhaps they were instructions from Uri's controllers on the good ship Spectra, but it still seems somehow more likely that they were some kind of reflection of either Puharich's or Geller's inner turmoil. Like some kind of mechanical schizophrenic, the machine was warning Uri, he says, only to meet scientists socially. Already as scared of the laboratory as a surgery candidate is of the operating theatre, Uri decided up at Puharich's house at Ossining, where the whole team was living, not to go ahead with the SRI tests. A row ensued, in which Uri hurled a sugar bowl at his mentor. As he did so, a grandfather clock shifted across the hall and smashed, with Melanie and Shipi as witnesses. In the middle of the following night, Uri and Shipi, asleep in their rooms, heard the tape recorder voice, only louder, boom, 'Andrija must write a book.' The Ossining commune interpreted this as meaning what it stated, plus that the Spectra crew had finally given the OK for the SRI programme.

It was with this thoroughly peculiar approbation in mind that Uri, Shipi and Andrija flew two days later to San Francisco, were they met at the airport by Edgar Mitchell, Wilbur Franklin from Kent State, and the men who would be examining Uri over the next couple of weeks - as well as ultimately putting their reputations on the line to

support him - Dr. Hal Puthoff and Russell Targ. Who, then, were Puthoff and Targ?
And what was SRI?

Hal Puhoff was a senior research engineer at SRI and a specialist in laser physics. He held patents in the field of lasers and optical instruments, and had co-written *Fundamentals of Quantum Electronics*, a textbook on the interrelation between quantum mechanics, engineering and applied physics. He has been a lieutenant in Naval intelligence, handling the highest category of classified material, a civilian operative of the National Security Agency, and was involved in the early 1960s in the development of ultra fast computers for military use.

Russell Targ was a senior research physicist and an expert in plasma physics, like Friedbert Karger in Munich. Like Puthoff, Targ was an inventor, who had been a pioneer in the development of lasers, and had a series of abstruse laser devices to his name, such as the tuneable plasma oscillator and the high-power gas-transport laser. He had sought out Puthoff for two reasons when he heard that he was doing high-level research into psychics. The first was that he already had an interest in psychic research; the second, which would serve him well, was that he was a keen amateur magician. He grew up in New York, where he was a regular in the magic shops on 42nd Street, and prided himself on knowing the field of professional magic well.

SRI had been part of the nearby Stanford University since 1946, but had become an independent think tank, laboratory and problem solving organisation in 1970. Its 2,800 staff members worked in a hundred different disciplines on the 70-acre site in Menlo Park and other offices around the US and overseas. The institute worked on

contract for both private industry and government, including secret defence work - although precisely who the client was for the investigation into Uri Geller (as well as other psychics who were examined as part of the same programme) has remained a closely-held secret until very recently. Back in the early 1970s, the official line was that the work was sponsored by a foundation Edgar Mitchell had founded, along with a paranormal investigation group in New York.

Geller's testing at SRI took place in two parts, the first now in late 1972, and the remainder in March 1974. Puthoff and Targ had clearly taken advice on the kind of conditions which helped psychics to perform. 'They tried to make the environment very at home,' Uri says. 'They had a living room setting with paintings on the wall and all those homely kind of features so that I would feel good. But outside, they had all the equipment in another room. Everything was wired. It was really very professionally set up, to have it under totally controlled conditions.'

The main thrust of the work took place over five weeks up to Christmas 1972. The release of the investigation's findings unfolded in a multi-layered fashion. Before the work was even finished, it was made clear to a constantly inquiring media that something was up at Menlo Park. A holding statement early in 1973 that, 'We have observed certain phenomena for which we have no scientific explanation,' alerted the press, although this publicity taster from SRI turned out to be a two-edged sword as far as Geller was concerned, as it started Time Magazine out on what would be a highly sceptical - devastating, in fact - cover story on him, debunking both Geller and the SRI work.

Late in 1974, the cream of the SRI work, the strongest part, was published to massive publicity in the British science journal, *Nature*. A more wide-ranging analysis of the things Geller did at SRI was contained in a film made by the institute, *Experiments With Uri Geller*, which Puthoff and Targ explained on its release was made to 'share with the viewer observations of phenomena that in our estimation clearly deserve further study'. Further observations, meanwhile which Puthoff and Targ deemed too anecdotal for the film - or were noted informally without the cameras running - are still emerging 25 years on, as the two physicists reveal them.

The findings sent to *Nature* were relatively modest, and concerned telepathy only, not metal bending. All the same, such material was so revolutionary for conservative science that it was always known that if the magazine decided to publish them, the ripples would be gigantic. The *Nature* editors warned in their pre-amble to the article that it was 'bound to create a stir in the scientific community', and added, with remarkable candidness, perhaps, that the paper would be 'greeted with a preconditioned reaction amongst many scientists. To some, it simply confirms what they have always known or believed. To others, it is beyond the laws of science, and therefore necessarily unacceptable'.

The first conclusion of Puthoff and Targ was that Geller had succeeded partially in reproducing randomly chosen drawings made by people unknown to him, while he was in a double-walled steel room which was acoustically, visually and electrically shielded. The chance of him doing as well as he did by chance was calculated at one million to one. He had done only as well as chance in trying to establish the contents of sealed envelopes, but in another test, where he was asked to 'guess' the face of a

die shaken in a closed steel box - so the investigator could not possibly know the position of the die either - Geller managed the correct answer eight times out of ten. What was especially interesting was that the twice he did not get the answer, he had not attempted one, saying his perception was not clear. The die test, again, represented a million to one chance.

The rest of the *Nature* report concerned another psychic called Pat Price, a former California police commissioner. Price was a 'remote viewer', and in perceiving and describing in detail randomly chosen outdoor scenes from many miles away, he managed to beat odds of a billion to one. A third test on six unnamed psychics to see if their brainwaves could be measured responding to a flashing light in a distant room yielded one of the six with a measurable reaction in his brain.

Targ and Puthoff's conclusions were buttressed by several caveats; they explained the security precautions they had taken, and made it clear that their aim was no more ambitious than to establish whether paranormal phenomena could be scientifically tested; they had no mission to 'prove' the paranormal. They also speculated that 'remote perceptual ability' might be available to many of us, but that the perception is so far below what most of us are aware of, it is not noticed or repressed. They made the point that, although they had seen Uri bend metal in the laboratory, they had been unable to do a full, controlled experiment to support a paranormal hypothesis of metal bending.

The SRI Geller film went much further than the drier official report. Geller was first shown sending numbers to Puthoff, Targ and Franklin, along with Don Scheuch,

vice president for research at SRI. Then we see him playing what the experimenters call 'ten can Russian roulette', in which he successfully finds a steel ball in one of ten cans without touching them. He graduates from first doing this by holding his hands over the cans, to later detecting which one contains the ball as he walks into a room and sees them lined up on a blackboard sill. He also succeeds at the same test when one of the cans contains room-temperature water. When faced with a line-up of cans where one contains a sugar cube, or a paper-wrapped ball bearing, he passes and says he cannot be sure. We are told in the film that, whereas 'officially' SRI could only report Geller as having achieved one in a million chance, in reality, and taking all the tests into account, he had defeated odds of a trillion (10 to the twelfth power) to one against correctly guessing the cans' contents.

In psychokinesis, the area which the experimenters did not touch in the *Nature* article, the film showed Geller decreasing and increasing the weight of a one gram piece of metal on an electronic scale which has been covered by a bell jar; all Puthoff and Targ's precautions to preclude fraud by such methods as tapping the bell jar or even jumping on the floor are shown. In another psychokinesis (PK) test, Geller successfully deflects a magnetometer to full scale, having first been checked out with the same instrument for concealed magnets. In another test, he is seen deflecting a compass needle, although the experimenters make the point that they are not satisfied by this test, not because they have any evidence of Uri cheating, but because they discover that a small, concealed piece of metal can in some circumstances produce the same effect.

On the question of spoon bending, the film steered on the side of caution; although, as Puthoff and Targ show, Uri succeeded in bending several spoons in the laboratory, he never managed to do so on film or without touching the spoon, and the question of whether it bent because he has exceptionally strong fingers and good control of micro-manipulatory movements, or whether the spoon ‘turns to plastic’ as Geller claims, was not resolved. The same problem applied to the filming of Geller bending rings. For the experiments, SRI had manufactured rings which required 150 pounds force to distort them; they certainly ended up bent, but the laboratory had no film or experimental findings to confirm how they became so, and they were firmly in Geller's hand when whatever happened to them, happened. Of course, the mystery (no mystery whatsoever to magicians and other sceptics) of why the spontaneous version of Uri Geller's metal bending, in which he does not handle the spoon, never quite manages to be captured on film or video is *the* consummate weakness in the entire Geller phenomenon, and will be examined at some length in my final chapter, since it is far more subtle an issue than the obvious - i.e. that it can't be seen because it doesn't exist.

It was not, however, merely because the SRI team failed to capture spoons in the act of bending that the reaction to their work was so violent. As *Nature* had hinted it would, the sceptical onslaught was fierce. Indeed, even the coolest reading of events in late 1974 would have to be that the response to the *Nature* article was beyond what might have been prompted by an ordinary piece of disputed scientific research. To be fair, the magazine itself, in the preamble, accepted that the Puthoff/Targ paper had its shortcomings. A sceptical professor of psychology, Ray Hyman of the University of Oregon had, unlike other critics, had visited SRI and pronounced that from his

observations that Geller was doing what any magician could do, and was clever enough to fool the scientists. (Hyman was a watchful, aware amateur magician like Targ, but he did also observe that Geller's eyes were blue, when they are in fact brown.) At its extremes, the criticism of SRI had a shrillness reminiscent of religious fundamentalists with their core beliefs under attack. Sceptics found fault with the experimental protocols, the conclusions, anything they had data on, plus plenty they did not.

A massive wrangle, still being fought 26 years later on the Internet, for instance, concerned a tiny hole in the wall of the sealed 'cage' which had been built to shield Geller from electronic or any other signals from outside which might help his psychic senses. The hole, a couple of inches from the floor, was there for wiring to pass through, but Geller was said by his critics to have got all his information through it in code, or by whispering (nobody actually explained how it could be done), courtesy of Shipi - who at 18 and in a foreign country where he barely spoke the language, was attributed with virtually superhuman power in his ability to outfox a lab full of PhDs, conjuring buffs and experienced assistants.

Another theory came up, and is still held by many to rival any X-Files-obsessed paranormal conspiracy enthusiast. It suggested that, as Puharich was a miniature electronics expert, he must have fitted one of Uri's hollowed-out teeth with a radio. It so happens that Puharich had three patents filed in the 1960s for tooth radios as part of his interest in deaf aids. The tooth radio theory, however, presupposed a lot of other chicanery on the Geller team's behalf. Hidden radio or not, they still *somehow* had to find out what the secretly made drawing was, or which die face was upwards in a

sealed box, then *somehow* transmit this information to Uri even if he was in a radio-dead Faraday cage. Even James Randi conclusively squished the tooth radio idea in an open letter to the British Magic Circle magazine *Abracadabra*. But neither Randi's letter, nor Geller having his teeth formally examined for radio equipment by a New York dentist has managed to destroy the tooth radio myth.

If one thing became clear as a result of the SRI experience, it was that some anti-Geller sceptics spoil their case for others, and even make Geller look better than he necessarily deserves, by being outstandingly gullible; when it comes to Geller, they seem to believe anything another sceptic tells them. The similarity in this respect between dogmatic paranormalists and dogmatic sceptics is a precise mirror of the personality similarities in politics between those of the far left and the far right. The 'switchover' characteristic often noted in politics also occurs in scepticism; just as former left wingers make the most fervent fascists, 'devout' sceptics have been known to become equally committed believers on the strength of a single experience of Uri Geller or someone like him. During the writing of this book, Geller was invited to dinner at the home of a mutual friend. Another guest at the dinner was a famous British engineering industrialist, who, when he heard Geller would be coming, scoffed and said he was 'a total fraud'. Yet having seen Geller bend a spoon at the dinner table, he asked him if he could repeat the exercise in private, in the kitchen. A couple of minutes later, the industrialist, according to my friend, emerged from the kitchen and said; 'I've seen all I need. It's real,' and has been a fervent (albeit anonymous, at his request) 'believer' ever since. An interesting case of the reverse process (albeit not quite as instantaneous) is provided by Dr. Susan Blackmore, senior lecturer in psychology at the University of the West of England, Bristol. When she started out as

a parapsychologist in 1973, she was a New Age hippy, convinced of psychic powers and personally into tarot card reading, witchcraft, crystal balls and out-of-body experiences. A career in parapsychology has persuaded her, however, that there is rather less to the power of the human mind than she thought. She is now a dogged - some might say dogmatic - sceptic, who has less belief in such areas as spiritual healing than thousands of doctors, and opposes many forms of alternative medicine available on the National Health Service.

Another postulate still of the sceptics concerning the SRI tests in the 1970s is possibly more bizarre than even the tooth radio theory; it argued that the SRI film cameraman, an ex Life Magazine war photographer, Zev Pressman, had not really taken any of the 40 hours of footage which was edited down into the Geller film, and that he had been forced to say he had shot it, while in fact a group of conspirators in league with Uri Geller had contrived it. If the story is true, then someone must have had a great deal of leverage over Mr. Pressman, for even in his mid eighties and frail, he still insisted when I visited him at his home at Palo Alto, a few miles from SRI, that it was his film and his alone, and has a clear recall of several other of Geller's feats. Pressman was so keen to talk about his Uri Geller experiences that he even rounded up his neighbour, the then head of information at SRI, Ron Deutsch, now also well into retirement, for our morning coffee meeting.

Pressman and Geller spent a lot of time together during the trials, talking for hours in Pressman's workshop. Pressman had started to be impressed the day he met Geller. He had wanted to bring something really obscure to work to test Uri's telepathic powers, of which he was deeply sceptical. Hunting around in his garage, he came

upon a strangely shaped roller blade key, of a type which, he reckoned, had disappeared in about the 1930s. He had it in his pocket for their first meeting, and asked Uri to describe it. Uri immediately did a near perfect drawing of the odd little item. After that, Pressman says he saw spoons bends ‘dozens of times’, and both witnessed and videotaped an SRI stopwatch apparently materialising in mid air from Hal Puthoff’s briefcase, before dematerialising, then materialising again, and dropping down gently onto a table. Unlike the 40 hours of raw film, which Pressman to this day has no idea of the whereabouts of (it is thought by Targ and Puthoff to be under lock and key somewhere in a US government vault) copies of the videotape still exist. But they are, of course, said to be fakes which Pressman was made to say were genuine, and even SRI was clearly too unsure about the segment being a Geller-inspired hoax to include it in their film.

Reflecting in old age on his time with Geller, Zev Pressman veers interestingly towards the ‘mixed mediumship’ hypothesis introduced in Chapter 2 - the theory that a lot of genuine psychics muddy the waters for themselves by also being skilled in the magical arts, an ability they feel obliged to own because of the concern that psychic powers are so notoriously fickle and unreliable, while the public requires them to be available at all times on demand. Pressman believes, he says, that, Geller’s repertoire is a mixture of conjuring tricks and real, paranormal stuff. ‘He’ very slick, he’s fast, and he knows when and how to move,’ Pressman says. ‘But it wasn’t a question of belief in him. It was talent. The guy was good. No, he wasn’t good; he was perfect, and I don’t mean as a magician. I couldn’t explain what he did. He couldn’t explain it. He just said, “I don’t know how this happens.”’ Another peripheral player in the Geller story at this time, Bob Williamson, the hotel manager where Uri was staying,

took a similar view. As sceptical as anyone when he met him, and aware of the accusations of fraud which were in the media, he saw Uri bend a spoon and a key, and slowly became convinced. 'I felt I hadn't been hearing the truth,' Williamson says. 'To me it was simple. If one man could bend one key one time without using physical force, then that was a major event on Earth.'

Press reaction to the SRI tests and the *Nature* article was largely favourable. The New York Times, not known for jumping to rash judgements, opened an editorial in November 1974: '*The scientific community has been put on notice "that there is something worthy of their attention and scrutiny" in the possibilities of extra-sensory perception*' The Times leader writer pointed out that Geller's reputation '*is deeply clouded by suspicion of fakery*', but picked up Puthoff and Targ's point about most of us possibly having ESP but not being aware of it. '*Scientific orthodoxy has grown increasingly remote from the interests and beliefs of a generation of Americans,*' the editorial went on to warn. Leaving aside '*junky pop-occult literature*', college bookstores were full of texts by serious mystical thinkers such as Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, so, the Times believed, '*The epithet "non-scientific" is no longer a sure ticket to oblivion.*'. The newspaper's conclusions were that '*The essence of science should be receptivity to new ideas,*' and that the editors of *Nature* had taken an important step to stimulate scientific discourse.

Earlier, over a year before the *Nature* article Newsweek Magazine also cautiously welcomed the SRI work, but that other rock of fine, sober American journalism, *Time*, was less impressed. Ron Deutsch at SRI had been fairly warned by the magazine's science editor, Leon Jaroff, that, although *Time* was reporting the SRI/Geller work

closely, it was not likely to be doing so favourably. ‘The people at Time were adamant that Uri was a shyster,’ Deutsch recalls. ‘Leon in particular felt he was a phoney.’ Nevertheless, as *Time* had established contact over a long period with Deutsch and SRI, Geller accepted an invitation to the magazine’s Sixth Avenue, New York, offices to give Jaroff and the other editors a demonstration. Geller arrived with Puharich - not, perhaps, a brilliant idea, since he already suspected that the meeting would be something of a lynch party. Jaroff had lined up James Randi to pose as a *Time* reporter, and thus get his first close-up inspection of Geller, the man who would become his *bete noir* (not to mention his livelihood) until the present day. Geller did not seem to recognise Randi, and, as might be expected, Randi saw precisely what he believed he would, that Geller's bending of a fork and a key were due to sleight of hand. Randi’s confirmation of what he expected to see spurred Jaroff on to write a damning cover story based on what he too expected to see. The story, which labelled Geller ‘a questionable night-club magician’ had its debatable factual points, although in the context of an attempt to unmask an alleged trickster, its central ethic, the ambush by James Randi, was well within the Queensbury rules of journalism. Some of the article’s other assertions might not have survived the rigorous fact-checking *Time* now insists on. It was said, for example, that Geller had ‘left Israel in disgrace’, for which there is no evidence; it was also stated that scientists in Israel had duplicated Geller's feats, which is difficult to back up.

As ever, there was a complicated and intriguing backstage to the *Time* affair. Jaroff, according to one of the reporters who worked with him, had a deep-seated private distaste for parapsychology, because he and others on the magazine associated it with the occult, and in turn, associated the occult with fascism. Another of the *Time* writers

involved in turning Geller over also said privately, it has been reported, that SRI's parapsychological research should 'be destroyed'. Geller's case was not helped in Jaroff and Co.'s eyes by Hal Puthoff having at one stage been a member of the controversial Church of Scientology - albeit at a time when thousands of west coast professionals were doing so. Puthoff had also long since resigned and joined an anti-Scientology pressure group.

More amusingly, as the *Time* publisher wrote in his letter to readers, the publication of the edition containing the March 1973 story rubbishing him - '*The Magician and the Think Tank*' - had been fraught with Geller-esque incident. Leon Jaroff's clock radio failed to go off three mornings running, causing him to be late for work each time. 'Even more bizarre,' the publisher continued, 'was the mysterious force which glitched *Time*'s complex, computerised copy-processing system on copy night - at almost the precise moment that our psychic phenomena story was fed into it. Against astronomical odds, both of the machines that print out *Time*'s copy stopped working simultaneously. No sooner were the spirits exorcised and the machines back in operation than the IBM computer in effect swallowed the entire cover story.' It took 13 hours and two overhauls to get the story back. Geller claims that some days before the magazine was due to appear, he stood on his Manhattan balcony looking towards the Time Life Building and willed the machinery there to go wrong, visualising the magazine rolling off the presses with column after column simply repeating his name. A fanciful theory, yes, but is it *just* possible that Geller liberated some force in Leon Jaroff's mind and that of others in the *Time* office - a force which went forth and became a mischievous ghost in the machine?

As for the retired, but still writing, Leon Jaroff's view of the Geller affair now, I e-mailed him to ask if he still felt the same about Geller as he did in the early 1970s - as well as how he viewed the Time Life (now Time Warner) group's subsequent reporting of matters paranormal. In 1996, another - highly positive, on this occasion - *Time* cover story examined research by scientists into the effect of prayer and spirituality on illness. The piece, by Claudia Wallis, centred on work on the beneficial effect of prayer on AIDS patients by, ironically enough, Russell Targ's psychiatrist daughter Elisabeth, who is clinical director of psychosocial oncology research at California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco. 'Twenty years ago,' Wallis wrote, 'No self-respecting American doctor would have dared to propose a double-blind, controlled study of something as intangible as prayer.' Among several medical academics, she quoted Jeffrey Levin, a gerontologist and epidemiologist at Eastern Virginia Medical School: 'People, a growing number of them, want to examine the connection between healing and spirituality,' Levin said. 'To do such research is no longer professional death.' Wallis's piece was far from the only example of the Time empire seeming more receptive today to the paranormal than in Jaroff's day. In April 1998, *Time* carried a nine-page cover story on the Shroud of Turin, the overall impetus of which, beneath the balanced reporting, was clearly in favour of its authenticity. CNN, Time Warner's TV news network, regularly brings Geller into the studio as a paranormal commentator. And in June 1998, *Life* magazine carried a mammoth 5,000 word assessment of paranormal research, which included a respectful passing mention of Uri Geller and this assertive quote from a leading parapsychology researcher in the US: 'I don't *believe* in *psi*,' said Richard Broughton of the Rhine Centre at Duke University. 'It's not a matter of belief. It's a matter of data.'

Jaroff's reply to my e-mail was this: 'In brief, I am still pro-rational and, until someone comes up with solid evidence of any paranormal phenomena, I still consider *psi* to be a combination of nonsense and wishful thinking - sort of a religion substitute. As for Geller, he had demonstrated time and again that he is an excellent magician and a total fraud. Actually, however, he is a phenomenon, of sorts.' (Jaroff has admitted ruefully at a sceptics' convention that it was his assiduous debunking efforts which, by putting Geller on the cover of *Time*, effectively made Geller a superstar.)

What Jaroff would have made of the stuff which was happening backstage at SRI during Uri Geller's time there hardly bears thinking about.

Chapter 12 / I Spy

'These are the names of the men which Moses sent to spy out the land.' (Numbers, xiii, 16)

One day, Geller was having lunch in the SRI canteen with Russell Targ and Edgar Mitchell. They had been talking about Mitchell's epic walk across the Fra Mauro region of the Moon the previous year, when Mitchell mentioned the expensive Hasselblad camera he had left up there. Geller, as ever with an eye on the main publicity chance, hatched the idea of trying to bring the Hasselblad back to Earth by some method of teleportation. Whereas the camera has not yet returned, the idea, incidentally, has - to haunt Geller for having dreamed it up. Saying he was going to beam a large and unique camera down from the Fra Mauro region of the Moon is one of the claims which sceptics have joyously seized on. However, within minutes right there in the canteen, some very strange teleportation effects did appear to manifest in the presence of Targ and Mitchell.

Geller, who at the time was still a big, omnivorous eater (today he is a whippet-thin vegan) had ordered two desserts, the second of which was vanilla ice cream. In the first spoonful, he bit hard on something metallic. He spat it out to find a tiny arrowhead, which Mitchell looked at and said, 'My God, that looks familiar.'

Annoyed, Geller had meanwhile called over the waitress and suggested the canteen warn its supplier about foreign bodies in their product. She asked him if she could take the offending item away; he refused, thinking he would need it for claiming compensation if his tooth turned out to be broken. Back in the laboratory, the three were talking when they saw another small piece of metal fall to the carpet. They picked it up, to see that together, the two pieces which had appeared made up a tie pin. Mitchell, according to Geller and Targ, looked shocked; he now realised why the first part had been familiar. It was a tie pin he had lost several years before.

Russell Targ still lives close to the SRI, and has recently retired as a senior staff scientist at Lockheed Martin, the aerospace corporation, where he was a leading light for 12 years in developing a new laser-based air safety system, only announced in 1998 and called Lidar. Lidar is a form of radar which detects clear air turbulence up to 10 km ahead of an aircraft. The system may well be fitted to commercial aircraft in the near future. Targ, a rather magisterial, imposingly intellectual fellow who today resembles an older Art Garfunkel, but with a deep, bass voice, is so proud of his anti-turbulence device that he has the license plate LIDAR 1 on his motorcycle.

Although the more mystically-inclined of the SRI Two, Targ is the more reluctant to attribute too much to Uri Geller. We met in Beverly Hills, where he was on a tour promoting a fine new book he has co-authored called *Miracles of Mind*, which explores 'nonlocal consciousness and spiritual healing'. Available chiefly in alternative, spiritual-type bookshops, *Miracles of Mind* contains just two brief references to Geller - and none at all to Puharich.

‘I don't regret having given him a platform, I think he is a fine fellow, an admirable character and a nice man, and I have no problem with the work I did with Uri,’ Targ said. ‘In the laboratory, he demonstrated various kinds of perceptual ESP comparable to what we saw from a number of other people. I would say that Uri was certainly better than average, but by no means the best we have seen. The fact that some of our remote viewers were able to provide precise, descriptions of what was going on in the Soviet Union and China and other places which were later verified by satellite photography, makes it quite ordinary that Uri Geller can look in a closet in another room and describe what's on the wall. Geller's miracles are of very small note compared with the architectural accuracy provided by a number of other people from thousands of miles away.’

‘Spoon bending, however,’ Targ continued, ‘Is something which did not occur at SRI. We worked for five weeks intensively in an effort to elicit spoon bending from him, but that did not happen for us, for whatever reason. It happened numerous times during informal sessions, but for a scientist, what doesn't happen in the laboratory doesn't happen.’

‘I don't rule out the possibility of Uri being able to bend a spoon paranormally. I have seen evidence, under somewhat better controlled conditions of spoons being bent in the hands of other people who were caught by surprise by the bowl of the spoon suddenly getting soft and rolling up. So it is not that I am categorically saying there is no paranormal spoon bending - I think there probably is - but I couldn't say that I have seen Uri do it. Most people have paranormal psychic abilities, so it would be silly to say that the world is filled with psychics except for Uri Geller.’

Hal Puthoff, meanwhile, runs a private science research institute in Austin, Texas, working in a field so audacious and advanced - it is known as Zero Point Energy and concerns, ultimately, harnessing hidden energy in the vacuum of space to power spaceships - that he is expected by many to win a Nobel Prize before he retires. I was told that, while Targ had already retired, but was still involved in parapsychological research, and would hence be happy to discuss Uri Geller with me, Hal Puthoff was a different matter. Puthoff works in a rarefied area of science, yet one which is conventional, he writes for respectable scientific journals and magazines such as *New Scientist*, and would most likely want to avoid discussing anything to do with Geller.

Hal was indeed hesitant for a moment, but I got the sense he had plenty of new insights to shed on the events of a quarter of a century earlier. We were soon having lunch together at a restaurant close to his laboratory. We talked first about his work in the exciting area of extracting energy from 'nothing' Ironically, perhaps, a major part of Hal Puthoff's job today is debunking crazy inventors who think they have discovered free energy - although he makes it clear from the start that he sees no difference between that function and what he was doing at SRI with Geller and other psychics in 1972. 'This is the hardest thing to get across to people,' Puthoff explained. 'My position is that I am a total sceptic, and that's a sword that cuts both ways. I am sceptical about *psi* phenomena existing, and similarly, I am totally sceptical of the sceptics who, without evidence and without investigation, dismiss it out of hand as being an impossibility. I have had some fairly acrimonious interaction with sceptics on the basis that they should have *supported* the SRI effort. In the laboratory we found these phenomena sketchy, unreliable, high noise but nonetheless, there was

something there. I imagine there are some honest sceptics but for a lot of them it's an emotional issue.

Puthoff took on the job of investigating psychic claims 'on a lark', and would have been just as happy if the result had been the debunking of Geller and the others as he was validating their powers. Fun as he saw it, there was, however, a deadly serious side to what SRI was doing. It is only very recently, since part of his work at SRI became declassified (a declassification he had campaigned for) that Puthoff has been able to reveal that the whole Geller programme was requested and paid for by the CIA, and later passed on to the military version of the CIA, the DIA. It turns out that the intelligence community was beginning to get seriously rattled by the Soviets' use of psychics for military purposes. It was believed that the information leaking out of the Communist bloc was largely disinformation, and that the psychic spying they were rumoured to be engaged in was probably mere propaganda. However, it was seen as a good idea to launch a low profile, academic study of psychics, but in an out-of-the-way, non-obvious centre, where it would be under the control of CIA operatives and secrets-oriented scientists (like Puthoff), rather than glory seeking university professors. The operation to discover whether there was potential in 'remote viewing' of distant targets would carry on in fits and starts until as late as 1990, under a variety of names, Operation Stargate and Grillflame among them.

Where Uri Geller, who was by this time one of the best known (as well as egomaniacal) celebrities in America, fitted into this hush-hush approach takes some explaining. For one thing, the Mossad, with whom US intelligence had friendly, although mutually wary, links had informed the Americans that Geller was very

interesting indeed. Leaving aside some of Puharich's dubious-sounding stories about he and Geller meeting Israeli military chiefs to warn them about their information from Hoova on forthcoming Egyptian war plans, there is no doubt that Geller and Puharich were a matter of intense interest to the Mossad while they were together back in Israel. There is evidence, for example, that some unfortunate Israeli spook was assigned the job of sifting Geller's toilet waste for shreds of anything it might reveal about his nefarious purposes. (They once confronted he and Puharich about a photocopier brochure which Puharich had had mailed from the States; Geller had feared the security people would discover it and assume Puharich was an American spy. He tore it up and flushed it, only to find it painstakingly reconstructed back at Mossad HQ when he was summoned there to explain it.) The Mossad's conclusion, however, seems to have been that Puharich might be nutty but was bright and no danger, whereas Geller was a potentially powerful military weapon who had proved himself useful in secret military tests, but at the same time, was a flamboyant showbusiness personality, who, in terms of keeping a secret, was likely to be about as much use as a giant megaphone. Their recommendation to the Americans, therefore, was to test him and use him, with their complements, as it were, but to be careful.

Of course, as Hal Puthoff knew, once you were into the intelligence world, absolutely nothing was straightforward, and a veritable circus ensued. Geller was not to be told that he was just one of many psychics to be tested; for publicity purposes, however, it was to look as if Geller was the *only* psychic being examined. That way if, as suspected, he was found to be a conjurer, the Russians might believe the Americans had given up no sooner than they started. It would also give an opportunity for an easy answer to be given when the rumour got around, as it would, that 'something',

was going on at SRI; they could simply say they were checking out Geller. Additionally, the Israelis had to be watched in case they were planting Geller as a known fake; there was said to be an understanding that Israel was letting the US look at Geller in exchange for use of American spy satellites as they passed over the Arab countries. Another complication Puthoff and Targ needed to be aware of was that rival parts of the American intelligence world might want to sabotage the CIA/DIA's work at SRI. Another still was that Uri Geller might after all be a magician who had fooled the Mossad and was now out to fool them too.

‘Before Geller came, someone showed up from Israeli intelligence,’ recounted Puthoff, a pixie-like Californian with a dry sense of humour. ‘They were interested in what we were going to do. They had used Geller in field operations and were impressed by what he had done, but they had never done anything scientific with him, so if we were going to generate scientific results, they were very interested in them.’

Once it was clear that the Israelis were monitoring the SRI tests, the security around Geller increased. ‘We were doing our own security as SRI, but we were reporting to the CIA, and they wanted to be sure that we were taking every possible precaution. We were stationing people on the top of SRI buildings looking for people on the top of other SRI buildings. We did all kinds of things,’ Puthoff continued. ‘Another concern was that he was working for Israeli intelligence, and that they were just out to prove that he was a superman in order to scare the Arabs, and that therefore he might be something like the Six Million Dollar Man. He might have implanted receivers, he might have a whole shadow team with eavesdropping equipment. So we tore apart the ceiling tiles every evening looking for bugs. Our concern that this was an intelligence

plot resulted in our paranoia being much deeper than the typical sceptic would say.

We were sure there was a scam.’

Inside the lab, the ‘enemy’ in a sense, was Geller. ‘What was not appreciated at the time, when everybody thought we had been fooled by a magician,’ continued Puthoff, ‘was that we were looking for magicians’ tricks beyond anything Randi ever thought of. Of course, we looked at everything Randi had said, like Shipi probably had a signalling system to signal into the sealed room. Well the thing wrong with that Shipi was in the sealed room with him on our insistence, because we were more worried about it than Randi was. We covered everything Randi later said was wrong with the experiments, but in ways he doesn’t know. We were salting magicians in as physicists and lab people while he was doing the experiments. We had an expert in psychic magicianship come in and carefully view video tapes of experiments, and he couldn’t work out how they were done.’

Of course, trying to fool Uri Geller is not easy, as Puthoff noticed. ‘He is one of the brightest people I have met. He is very quick on the uptake, he doesn’t miss a thing, and for those who would say that he is a magician pure and simple, he certainly sees things that the ordinary person doesn’t. We might walk by a laboratory where I had a couple of agents hidden in the back with 30 other people, and Uri would walk by and point to them and say, “Who are those two guys?” As far as I could tell, they looked just like everybody else.’

Then there were the suspected destabilisation attempts by other parts of the US government machine to deal with. On one occasion, Puthoff tells of a visit from George Lawrence, the director of ARPA, the Pentagon’s Advance Research Projects Agency. Lawrence brought with him Professor Robert Van de Castle of the

University of Virginia School of Medicine. Van de Castle was a psychologist with a particular interest in sleep and dream research, parapsychology and psychic research. The three-man ARPA team, which also included Ray Hyman, the sceptical psychologist from Oregon, wanted to see the Geller experiments, but Puthoff and Targ objected. 'We were still paranoid that there was a big operation against us, and maybe ARPA and Geller were in cahoots, so we wouldn't let them be in our experiments,' Puthoff said. 'What we offered instead was they did their own. So they did some experiments with Uri, but not under control. Uri did very well reproducing pictures from sealed envelopes, but someone from New Scientist ended up interviewing George Lawrence, and he said, "Oh, yes we went there and all we saw was tricks." The implication was that they had seen our experiments, but they only saw their own.'

According to Prof. Van de Castle, even those experiments had satisfied him that Geller 'was an interesting subject for further research'. What he says happened was that Geller had sensed that Lawrence and Hyman were hostile to him from the start, and that Geller asked if he could do something alone with Van de Castle, 'because he liked me and I was different from the other two.' Lawrence, Van de Castle says, was convinced before he even went to SRI that the trip was a waste of time. In addition, late the night before, Lawrence had eaten a large Chinese meal, and in the morning was complaining of diarrhoea and fatigue, and was highly irritable. Lawrence continued running to the bathroom during his discussion with Geller, and later wrote a scathing report on the visit for ARPA, which formed a large part of Leon Jaroff's *Time* article. Van de Castle complains that he told *Time* of his conclusions from the visit, but that they were given a scant few lines compared to Lawrence's heavily critical comments.

Hal Puthoff explains that several experiments he and Targ did at SRI were never published. ‘Once we said, “Uri we have a physics colleague on the East Coast who we’d like you to show what you can do.” Now in fact, this was the CIA contract monitor. We called him at the agency and said, “Just put something on your desk and we’ll see if Uri can get it.” Uri is sitting there in our lab struggling to try and get whatever it is, and he keeps drawing something, crumpling it up and throwing it away. We were there for an hour, and then finally he said, “I give up. This is all I am getting, but it doesn’t make any sense,” and he had written the word “architecture” across the back of this paper and made a drawing that looked like a plateful of scrambled eggs. So we asked the guy what he had on his desk. He said it was a medical textbook which he’d opened at random to a section called Architecture of the Brain, next to a picture of a brain. There was no possibility that there was collusion between them.’

As for psychokinesis (PK) effects, Puthoff confirms that the formal SRI tests were a disappointment. ‘Under camera conditions, the spoons just didn’t bend. Informally, my father’s keepsake ring distorted into a heart shape but Uri stopped it because didn’t want it to break it. One of the things I found the most striking in an informal setting was early on, before we had started the experimentation. Russ is used to seeing how magicians handle cards, and decided to bring along a fresh pack he had bought on the airplane, a pack he knew hadn’t been tampered with. Russ said by handing them to Uri and watching, he would be able to tell if he was a practised magician. So we were sitting round the table chatting, and Russ takes the cards and rips open the cellophane and says, “Uri, do you ever do anything with cards?” and hands him the deck. Uri says, “No, I’m not into cards,” and he reaches out to take the deck and clumsily drops part of it. Now our observation was that the cards appeared to fall and land and go

partially *into* the table and fall over, so what we ended up with was several cards whose corners were cut off where they appeared to go into the table. A whole piece of the card was missing. In the deck, of course, the cards were in order, and we had a certain place where they began to be slightly chopped, and the next one was a little more chopped and so on, from 10 per cent of a card up to 30 or 40 per cent. There were about six or seven cards with part missing, and they were the ones that gave the impression of having dug ‘into’ the table. We all saw it was very startling.’

‘Russ scooped up the cards immediately. The question was, how did that happen? Without a doubt, there was no chance for Geller to substitute cards or to distract us while he cut pieces off. This was a one second event. The only thing we could figure, since we weren’t yet ready to believe that something so magical had happened, was that when the cards went through the machine in the factory, a certain set went through at an angle and got cut. So Russ checked with the card company, and asked if they ever had runs in which some of the cards get chopped. They said never, they had all sorts of procedures to prevent it, and it would be detected if it had occurred. Even on that basis, you have to say that the synchronicity that one of the few decks that ever got chopped should ever end up in Uri Geller’s hand is unbelievable. But that’s the kind of thing that happened around him.’

‘Another thing that happened was when everybody was over at our house for dinner, and my wife had made some mayonnaise, and set the spoon in the sink. We ate, and later when she went back, that spoon was all curled up but the mayonnaise on it had not been touched. It’s hard to believe, not that it couldn’t have been done. Uri would have had to go in there, bend the spoon, then go the refrigerator, find more mayonnaise, swill it around, make sure it had untouched mayonnaise on it, and put it

back in the sink. And we always watched him like a hawk. We always traded off that if one of us went to the bathroom, the other would watch him. Even in informal situations, myself, Russell, my wife, other friends we had over, I gave them all tasks; you concentrate on spoons, don't let them out of your sight, you concentrate on when he does drawings.'

'Back at SRI, we were going to have Uri attempt to deflect a laser beam. This was a complex experiment, and he said, "How will I know if I am successful?" We said, "You see this chart recorder over here. That line is a recording of the position of the laser beam that is picked up and if you deflect the laser beam it will show as a signal on the chart." He said, "So what you want to see is a signal on this chart recorder. OK, one, two, three, go!" And the chart recorder went off scale, came back and was burned out. We took it to the repair shop and some of the electronics had been blown out. OK, so it could have been a coincidence, or our paranoid theory could have been correct, that he had some EMP pulse generator buried in his body somewhere and he stepped on a heel switch and made it blow. Or maybe he had just demonstrated a genuine PK event. But it is not a real event from our standpoint as scientists. It is one of those unrecorded events, so I don't know what to say about the PK claims. But I have no doubt that he has genuine powers in the psi area.'

To place Hal Puhoff's position on Uri Geller into perspective, it is important to note, as he pointed out at our lunch, that Geller was only a part, arguably a publicity front, of a larger, more secret, remote viewing programme, and that both he and Targ are generally happier discussing remote viewing as a whole than Geller alone. Both men tend to take an 'oh, yes, and then there was Uri Geller' attitude to their work in the early 1970s. 'Remote viewing involved millions of dollars and training dozens of

intelligence agents even as late as 1985,' Puthoff explained. 'And it worked. One of the Russian hypotheses was that it was transmission from brain waves, so we even did some remote viewing from a shielded area on a submerged submarine several hundred metres down, suspended mid way between the surface and the bottom of the ocean off Catalina Island, southern California, 500 miles from where we were.' The results, which Puthoff presented at a symposium of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1981, were almost as good as remote viewing results on land.

Did Puthoff, then, ever regret becoming involved with Geller? 'I don't have any regret,' he shot back, 'because it was fascinating, and I know there is enough genuine stuff to say something about physics. It opened my mind. We are going to look back and see that 20th century science was pretty primitive, just as we look back and think that 18th and 19th century science was primitive I feel it has been a privilege to have been exposed to 21st century physics ahead of time.'

Targ came away with a rather different perspective. He was fascinated above all not by details, not even by any explanatory mathematical equations that the Geller experiments might have yielded up, but by the bigger picture still. 'Modern physics talks about nonlocality, which pertains to the idea that there is an element of conductivity in the world beyond what is obvious,' Targ explained. 'There are experiments that show, for example, that photons which set off in opposite directions

at the speed of light still appear to have an interaction or an effect upon one another. It is said that there is a nonlocal connection between them. Photons at the speed of light should not still be interacting according to classical theory. Quantum theory, however, predicts that that there will continue to be an interaction, and indeed that interaction is seen.’

‘This is in perfect agreement with what the Buddhists said 2,500 years ago. The central idea of the Buddhist tenet was that if you only knew one thing, it is that that separation is an illusion, that we misapprehend the world we live in, and there is significantly more connection between the consciousness and the physical universe than it seems. The Indian guru Patanjali, who was a Hindu, wrote a book which he called The Secrets of Patanjali, and is available today as How To Know God, translated by Christopher Isherwood, in which Patanjali writes that a person seeking transcendence will encounter the abilities to see into the distance, see into the future and see into bodies - and this is available to the quiet mind. This was all 500 years before the time of Christ that Patanjali provided the tool kit for psychic functioning. So you could say we spent \$20m of the CIA's money and 20 years of our time demonstrating that Patanjali got it right. That's our accomplishment - that we replicated his teachings. He totally understood our psychic abilities.’

Although Puthoff and Targ are still happy to support Geller, there is a sense in which they continue, just a little, to damn him with faint praise. Specifically, both are agreed that, looking at the remote viewing programme as a whole, the star of that programme was a former Burbank, California police commissioner, Pat Price. Price was one of the elite psychics actually put on some unofficial payroll of the CIA and

employed through a distant outpost of the agency at Fort Meade, Maryland, as a remote viewer. He had a string of successes, but died under what are claimed to be suspicious circumstances in Las Vegas. (The suspicion is that he was so good that his heart attack death was faked to fool the Russians, and he continued to work for many more years. Price is said to have been buried in a closed casket; Hal Puthoff was at the funeral and says it was open, with a very good likeness of Pat Price inside.)

Although Puthoff and Targ are unanimous that Price was the best remote viewer in the US psychic programme, that conclusion is disputed. The man doing most of the disputing is Dr. David Morehouse, a 43 year-old career army man, who believes he developed psychic powers as a result of being hit on the helmet by a bullet during a training exercise in Jordan. That Morehouse was recruited into the remote viewing programme at Fort Meade is beyond question, but he is controversial, as he has written a book - *Psychic Warrior* - on the programme, and had dealings with Hollywood over it, which has rendered him to some extent a pariah for breaking ranks so publicly. Nevertheless, what Morehouse has to say about Uri Geller is interesting to note. He works part of the time as a writer, and part teaching American police departments on the use of psychics, and is highly regarded in his field.

‘I came to know of Uri when I was in the remote viewing unit because one of the first things you were required to do was go through the historical files and in these files were constant references to Uri and Uri's early involvement at Stanford Research Institute,’ Morehouse says. ‘It was very clear in all of the historical documentation, the briefs that were passed on to the intelligence community, that Uri Geller was without equal. None of the others came even close to Uri's abilities in all of the tests.’

What interested me was that this was not a phenomenon that was born in some back room behind a beaded curtain by a starry eyed guy; this was something that was born in a bed of science at Stanford Research Institute, being paid for heavily by the CIA. And also, these were two laser physicists, not psychologists, but hard scientists- brought in to establish the validity and credibility, to see if it works as an intelligence collection asset, and if it works, to develop training templates that allow us to select certain individuals that meet a certain psychological profile, and establish units that can gather and collect data using certain phenomenon. And their answer to all those things was, Yes. If Targ and Puhoff had said, “Well, yes, there is a little something to it, but we can’t explain it, it’s not consistent and isn’t of any value,”, well fine, but obviously it met all the criteria and twenty odd years later, they were still using it.’

Like Morehouse, Geller too feels, a little peevisly, perhaps, that there is an attempt in retrospect to play down his achievements at SRI, and suggests that, grateful as he is to Puthoff and Targ for their continuing support, they might still be under obligation to the CIA to keep some material on him secret.

‘There was a lot of stuff at SRI that was very strange, like the stopwatch materialising out from Hal’s briefcase and appearing over the experiment table and then falling on the table,’ Geller says. ‘I have seen the videotape of that because they played it back over and over. Then I bent metal under running water for them; I have never seen that film either, and you can actually see coins and spoons bending. Then there was the bending of the rings. Those were heavy, thick rings. There was no way that anyone with force could bend those; you’d have to really hammer it, but if you hammer a copper ring, you will see the indentations. I know for certain they never

found impact on those rings. They will probably deny all this, and some of these things happened off camera and not under controlled conditions, but I always wonder, where is the stuff that was under laboratory controlled conditions, that was filmed? Why did they take it away? It probably exists somewhere in the dungeons of the Pentagon . Maybe they were afraid of the public knowing for a fact that Uri Geller is genuine. Maybe there was a plan to debunk me purposely, so I would come to depend on them.’

One of Geller's most disturbing stories from this time was of being spirited off to a government installation and given an unusual request. ‘I can't tell you where it happened,’ he says. ‘All I can tell you is that I was asked to stop the heart of a pig, and I knew that the final target was really Uri Andropov the head of the KGB. They were ultimately asking me to see if the power of the human mind could stop the human heart. I went into the room and talked to one of the scientists and said I wasn't interested in this at all, because it isn't in my nature to do such a thing. That was the time when I becoming a vegetarian, and I was very quiet and very shocked. I asked to leave and they drove us - because this was base outside a certain city - back to the hotel, and then I just flew back to New York. That was when I decided not to do any more scientific work, because I feel that the whole thing at SRI was really leading to that. perhaps it was only one man's obsession. I don't know. They wanted to see what the power of the mind could do which was impossible physically or electronically. If they could find someone who could concentrate on a picture like some voodoo thing and stop someone's heart bingo they'd have a tool in their hands.’

Further backing for Geller being known to the CIA, and being a matter of interest and concern to the Agency, if not for doing work on its behalf, as Geller claims he did, comes from Edgar Mitchell and from Eldon Byrd. 'After the Geller work,' says Mitchell, 'I was asked to brief the director of the CIA, Ambassador George Bush, on our activities and the results. In later years during the Brezhnev period, I met with several Russian scientists who not only had documented results similar to ours, but were actively using psychic techniques against the US and its allies' Byrd says, 'I eventually ended up briefing a director of the CIA, I briefed people on the National Security Council and I briefed Congressional committees because of some of the results we got.'

Eldon Byrd also recounts two occasions that he knows about of Geller apparently working with Israeli intelligence - both of which Geller today refuses point blank to discuss. 'One time, Uri called me when he was in New York and said he had a very strange encounter that evening with someone who said they were from Israel and would he like to do something beneficial for his country. They wanted him at a certain time the next day to concentrate on some latitudes and longitudes, and to think, "Break, break, break"'. He asked what was there, and this person said if whatever there broke, it would be good for Israel. He asked me if I thought he should do it, and I said I don't know why not, it would be interesting to try and see what happens. He called me all excited later on and asked if I'd heard what happened. The successful Israeli rescue raid on Entebbe had taken place, and he was sure the co-ordinates he had been given connected with it in some way.' [In 1976 an Air France Airbus hijacked by Palestinian terrorists was given shelter in Idi Amin's Uganda and 100 Israeli

passengers held hostage. A daring Israeli rescue mission swooped in by air to save them.]

‘Uri kept saying, “The radar in Entebbe, there must have been radars there. Can you find out if there were radars at these points?” I said I'd try. I had contacts with people at the CIA. I called them and asked them could they find out if there were radars at these latitudes and longitudes, as they were roughly on the way from Israel to Uganda, and if they could find out if the radar was really knocked out or not. They called me back and said they didn't have any information about that, they said the raid as far as we know was conducted underneath the radars anyway and we have no indication that there were radars at those points and whether they were working. But Uri had called me beforehand to tell me about this, and then the raid happened, so I thought that was pretty good.’ Byrd is not suggesting, obviously, that this proved Uri's psychic ability, but it did suggest strongly that the Mossad really were in contact with him.

‘Another time,’ Byrd says, ‘Uri had been secreted out of the country by the Mossad and they'd dressed him up as an airplane mechanic for an ElAl flight. In the 747, there is a way from the cargo hold up into the cabin. That way, they got him in and out without going through customs. He told me they took him back to Israel and flew him over some place in Syria two days in a row and said they wanted to know where the nuclear power plant was from his psychic impressions, and he told them. By gosh, just a day or so after he told me that, they bombed it.’

As far as Geller working for the CIA is concerned, rather than him being observed by it, Byrd is less sure, and yet his account continues to be highly illuminating. (Uri tells of being recruited for certain tasks later by the CIA's station in Mexico City later in his career, as we shall see later in Chapter 15, but as in accounts of all espionage exploits, second hand reports are bound to have more validity than first hand.) 'I got a call a couple of years after I met Uri, from someone in the CIA,' Byrd says. 'They wanted me to come over. I went down to Virginia, and they said we understand you had an interaction with Uri a couple of years ago, and what did you do with him? So I told him about the telepathy. And they said, "So you say it was a green R that came in your head?" I said yes, and they looked at each other. I asked if there was something significant about the colour and they said yes.'

'Another time,' Byrd continues. 'Uri asked me to check with my CIA guy, because he was living in the States and had the benefit of being here, and wanted to do something like work for the CIA on a project or something. So I passed that along to them and they said, no, we won't do that. I said he's offering for free, why not? They said we have had bad experiences working with double agents, so we don't do it. They said they knew he was working with the Mossad. They verified what Uri had been telling me. I said he'd never told me he was working with the Mossad. There were a couple of instances of requests, but that doesn't mean working with or working for. They said, "No, we know he works with the Mossad.'"

'Later on, my contact person, who was head at the time of a division called Life Sciences, was regularly asking me if I knew where Uri was and what he was doing. Finally, I said why are you so curious? They said they were assigned to keep track of

him. I said this implies that you know he's for real. They said of course we know he's for real. I asked how they could determine that. They said they'd tested him without his knowing who they were. He had been told to call a certain telephone number when he was on the west coast doing experiments, and there was a scientist in Washington DC who wanted to do a very quick experiment with him. My guy said he was the scientist. Now this guy had a medical doctorate, and he also had a PhD in neurophysiology, and his expertise was forensic medicine. He was the Scully of the X-files. He said he had seen a tape of Uri cheating, but it didn't make much difference, because they'd seen him make spoons and forks bend on their own, so they were convinced that he was for real, but this time, they were taping it under a certain set of protocols, and they said the proof to them that Uri was not a magician was that when they caught him cheating, the way he did it was so naive that a magician wouldn't have thought he could get away with it.'

When he describes the surreptitious test on Uri by 'Rick' of the CIA, Byrd is referring, of course, to the same incident as Hal Puthoff; the book Rick had on his desk was Gray's Anatomy, and that telephone test was the one which convinced the CIA that Geller was for real. The CIA contract manager tried another test across the States with Geller on another day. The man, whom Geller knew as Rick, was at home with some sealed numbers in envelopes. Out in California, Geller suddenly told him something had happened in his house in the Virginia suburbs involving shards of glass over some smooth green surface and a dog with a square face. 'Rick' went into his den to find his white bulldog had knocked over a lamp with a glass dome, and the splinters of glass were lying across a bright green carpet.

Rick, whose similarity (in function if not form) to the fictional Agent Dana Scully of the X-Files has already been noted by Eldon Byrd, was soon to be dragged into something infinitely stranger involving Geller, as documented by the science writer Jim Schnabel in his excellent, though sadly under-publicised, 1997 book *Remote Viewers: The Secret History of America's Psychic Spies* (Dell Publishing). One of the most secret nuclear weapons facilities in the USA, the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, happened to be an hour or so from SRI. By 1974, according to Schnabel, who writes for such journals as *Science*, *New Scientist*, *the Washington Post*, and *The Economist*, a few staff at Livermore had become concerned that if Uri Geller was genuine, he was a danger to national security. It didn't take more than the movement of a few grams of nuclear material a few centimetres, after all, to set off (or sabotage) a nuclear weapon.

Although the whole world now knew by 1974 that Geller was being tested at SRI, and a select few knew the work was government-funded, it would still have been considered unseemly for the Livermore Laboratory to do any official work on Geller. In between scientific engagements, Geller was still a showbiz animal, hopping from talk show to celebrity party to talk show. Consequently, a small, volunteer group of physicists and engineers at Livermore, with Rick's knowledge, embarked on a series of experiments with Geller at evenings and weekends, in an old, wooden barracks on a low security part of the former naval air base.

The tests were designed to succeed in the PK area where SRI had failed, Schnabel relates. As experiments, they largely failed. Geller could do everything in the way of metal bending and computer disc wiping that he was asked - so long as he was

allowed to touch the items he was working on. But a psychological backdrop developed among the researchers which would unquestionably have had Scully and Mulder arguing and speculating through an entire episode. What was to become a mounting hysteria, practically a mass-possession, began when one of the group, a security officer, was speaking on the phone to Geller, and Geller proceeded in mid-conversation to give him a detailed description of three minor family dramas he predicted. All three happened to the officer the following Saturday. Then, in the makeshift lab, an infrared camera started recording unexplained patches of radiation for a few seconds at a time, high up on a wall. Shortly afterwards, an audiotape picked up a peculiar, unintelligible metallic voice which no one had heard when the tape recorder was on.

In the following days, some members of the team and their families began to see a fuzzy, grey 3-D hallucination or vision, or something, of a miniature flying saucer hovering in the centre of various rooms. Other visions the scientists reported, in mounting terror, took the form of giant birds, which would walk across their gardens, or, in the case of one physicist, Mike Russo, and his wife, at the foot of their bed. After a few weeks, according to Schnabel, another physicist, Peter Crane, called Rick at the CIA, almost in desperation. Rick came down and met Crane in a coffee shop in the town closest to the lab. He later met the other team members, and was astonished to find them sweating and weeping openly as they described what had been happening. Knowing from his medical training that group hallucinations were extremely rare, and additionally, that all the affected Livermore personnel, as a part of their high security clearance, were known to be unusually stable psychologically, Rick reportedly doubted the hallucination theory even more. When he examined the

metallic voice tape, he became even more puzzled. One of the few recognisable words on it was the codename for an unconnected top secret project, which he happened to know about, but nobody at Livermore could have any inkling of.

Shortly afterwards, Russo received a phone call from the metallic voice, which was insisting that the Livermore group cease its work on Geller; something the scientists, who were only volunteers after all, did with some alacrity, whereupon the phenomena gradually stopped. One of the last, according to Schnabel, appeared to a physicist called Don Curtis and his wife in the centre of their living room, and consisted of a holographic false arm in grey suiting material, with a hook for a hand. This vision prompted Rick to ask Puthoff and Targ for a meeting when they were next in Washington. He seemed to think privately that the SRI men, both laser physicists of course, were playing some kind of holography prank on their scientific colleagues at a rival lab, and he wanted them to know the joke had gone too far. Late at night, as Hal Puthoff confirms today, Rick was telling him and Targ the whole bizarre story of what had been happening down at Livermore, ending on the *piece de resistance*, the arm, and looking, presumably, for a confession. As he was talking about the arm, apparently, a sharp, very aggressive knocking was heard on the hotel room door. By now, Puthoff and Targ suspected Rick might be playing a practical joke on them. Rick answered the door to a middle-aged man in a grey suit, who wandered stiffly into the room, stood between the beds and said in an odd, slow voice, 'I guess I must be in the wrong room,' before walking slowly out again. All three men noticed as he left that one sleeve of his suit was empty.

The strange Livermore events are unique in the Uri Geller story, in that they are the only instance to be found of anything which might be described as evil happening around Uri Geller. As Jim Schnabel points out, accounts of apparitions of giant, raven-like birds glowering from the end of the bed at terrified young couples have a definite aura of shamanism about them. They are the stuff of witchdoctors, black magic and nightmares, yet nowhere else is there a report, however fanciful, of such things happening, let alone to a group of nuclear scientists. Could it just be possible that something - from Uri's subconscious, from the Livermore people's subconscious, from Andrija Puharich's bag of electronics tricks, from somewhere - objected to Uri working with men whose job was producing nuclear warheads? He has been a soldier and killed a man, he has helped Israel defend itself, but he is essentially a peaceable man. My question is not of the kind to which there is really any answer, but it seems odd that something so frightening to others would happen just this once, when he happened to be working within a few hundred metres of weapons capable of wiping out most of the world. 'I have no explanation for what happened at Livermore,' Uri says today. 'I wasn't even aware of it at the time. I can only think it happened because I misused my powers in this place where weapons of mass destruction were being made. For me what was so weird was the birds. The senior physicist was called Ron Hawke, I'd been dealing with Eldon Byrd over at the Naval Surface weapons Centre in Maryland. But I'm just guessing. I don't know what was going on.'

It is illuminating to think again what it must have been like to be Uri Geller at this time. In a couple of years, he had gone from being a night-club turn in Israel to being on the periphery of the American nuclear machine, to being a matter of fascination to the CIA, to having senior military figures briefing senior politicians about him. He

was still living in Puharich's cultish compound up in Ossining, and believed, rightly or wrongly, that he was under the control of extraterrestrials. And on top of all this, he was a major showbusiness personality, who rarely passed a week - especially after he had been on the cover of *Time* - without appearing on a TV talk show. I have already discussed the question that if everything he did was a fake, the strain of keeping up appearances would surely have killed him or driven him into a mental institution; but what about the opposite, if he knew in his deepest self that what he did *was* real, that all those people trying to prove he was a fake were doomed to failure? Could being genuine be as great a personal cross for Uri to bear as being a fraud? Could it be that he found some comfort in people believing he was just a conjuror? After all, there's a lot of conjurors about, there's safety in numbers, and so long as he was keeping himself and his mother back in Israel in some style, and he was satisfying his lust for fame and recognition, why should he *care* if people thought he was a fake?

An unlikely position for Uri Geller to take? Perhaps; but Eldon Byrd has an interesting reflection on how badly Geller really wanted to be regarded as genuine. 'I always remember that Uri had this box,' Byrd told me. 'He may have got rid of it now. When he showed it to me, he said, "You know, if the world really *knew* I was for real my life wouldn't be worth a nickel. There would be people trying to kill me if they thought I could really do what I can say I do.'" He opened the box, and in it, he had a fork, and in the handle of the fork there was this fingerprint. I said, "How did you do that?" and he said, "I was thinking, '*Melt, melt, melt*', and it got soft." I said, "Just give me that, no magician can put their fingerprints in stainless steel. There's no way of doing this. It's mind boggling. Give it to me, and we can analyse it. But Uri

said, “No. That’s going to prove for good that I am for real, and I don’t want people knowing that.” He was very, very paranoid about that.’

Paranoia that the Russians, or even the Arabs, would kill him was one reason Geller may have shied away from any further laboratory testing after 1974, and his final experiments at SRI. Another was boredom. The amount of time he spent wired up in laboratories in the early 1970s is astonishing, as Charles Panati of *Newsweek* discovered in researching his 1976 book, *The Geller Papers*. On top of SRI’s and Eldon Byrd’s work, Panati published papers from academics including Wilbur Franklin at Kent State (*‘Fracture surface physics indicating teleneural interaction’*), from Dr. Thelma Moss of the Neuropsychiatric Institute at UCLA’s Center for the Health Sciences, from Dr. Coohill at Western Kentucky University, and from William E. Cox at The Institute of Parapsychology at Durham, North Carolina. In Europe, Geller underwent testing at Birkbeck College and King’s College, both part of London University, and at the INSERM Telemetry Laboratories of the Foch Hospital, Suresnes, France. In South Africa, he was examined by Dr. E. Alan Price, a medical doctor and Research Project Director for the South African Institute for Parapsychology, who painstakingly documented over 100 cases - which took up 60 pages of Panati’s book - of Geller’s effect on members of the public and university staffs as he travelled across the country on a lecture tour.

Uri Geller was a handsome, wealthy young man in his twenties on the loose in America, with little real interest, according to his best friend Byron Janis, in being anything other than an unusual kind of rock star. While he was on the rock star’s Holiday Inn trail around the States, he was able to attract as many women as he

wanted, although he denies being on the rampage. ‘I had very stable relationships with girls. And then once a while, yes, I would sleep with groupies because it was comfortable and offered passion and sex. I could have had anyone if I wanted to. The girls just appeared automatically, it was easy. There were even stories about girls having orgasms when they were watching me in shows.’

‘The government saw that they couldn’t really control me,’ Uri Geller continues, ‘Because I was really on an ego trip and into making money and showbusiness. I didn’t want to sit in a bloody laboratory without getting paid and doing this constant work, and I also noticed that wherever I went to do scientific work, they always wanted me to do the same thing over and over again. They didn’t know how to handle Andrija, and they didn’t know how to handle me.’

Chapter 13 / Gathering Clouds

'They are ill discoverers that think there is no land, when they can see nothing but sea' (Francis Bacon, 1561-1626)

When the New York Times welcomed the SRI's excursion into psychic research in its editorial of November 6th 1974, but referred to the 'high risk element' of Puthoff and Targ's *Nature* paper, it put this hazardousness down to one of the test subjects being, 'a performing magician named Uri Geller, whose reputation is deeply clouded by suspicion of fakery'. That such suspicion existed in the States was the triumph of a short, bearded magician born in Toronto as Randall James Hamilton Zwinge, the son of a telephone company executive. In his forties, as he was when Uri Geller became well-known, Zwinge was known in a small way in the US as James 'The Amazing' Randi.

Randi, a complex livewire who should rightly be the subject of a biography of his own, was a bright high school dropout who had run away to join a circus at 17. He claims in his youth to have been taken to a spiritualist church in Toronto by a friend and, with his sharp eyes and high intelligence, to have caught the preacher cheating at an attempt to psychically read the contents of sealed envelopes. He further claims that he disrupted the service in protest, and consequently was locked up by the police for

four hours, until his father came to pick him up. He says that this incident was the source of his trenchant antipathy to those claiming psychic powers, although it did not stop him from doing precisely that himself. He built a career in Canada touring rural towns in Quebec and Ontario as 'Prince Ibis,' a bearded, turbaned mind-reader, posing all the time, for the act and for newspaper publicity, as a real psychic. In the States, using his new name, he became an escapologist of, it is said by other magicians, fair to middling success. Many amusing and embarrassing stories are in circulation of James Randi failing to escape from his bonds. His magic, too, was said by those better able to judge these things than a journalist to be OK, but no more. He spent some time in the road crew for the rock star Alice Cooper, choreographing the stage effect in which Cooper's head was guillotined.

It is no exaggeration to say that the biggest break Randi ever had was when *Time* drafted him in to pose as a staff member to help Leon Jaroff on his 1973 Uri Geller story. Randi, with his antithesis to the paranormal going back to teenage, was, predictably, unimpressed by what he saw of Geller at the *Time* office, announcing, 'He'll never go anywhere with that act,' which he later called the worst prediction he ever made:. Geller went on, in Randi's words, to become the 'psychic superstar of the century,' something Randi blamed on his own underestimation of the American public's gullibility. Of course, now that he had shed his Canadian past as a psychic, Randi was under no pressure to be an accurate predictor of the future, so he was forgiven this miscalculation, and managed to turn it, as befitting a man with an IQ of 168, to his own massive advantage. Randi even instituted an annual 'Uri Award' - a bent metal spoon on a home-made, plastic base - which he has the *chutzpah* to say he presents 'for incompetence.'

As we know, Randi went on to become Geller's internationally famous nemesis, and built a totally unpredicted showbusiness career, and later, something not far from academic eminence, for himself as a debunker not only of Uri Geller, but of all paranormal and religious activity. The basis of Randi's new career was the principle that 'it takes a thief to catch a thief'. His intellectual starting point was that all psychics and all paranormal phenomena *must* be fraudulent. He had successfully fooled the public and the media up in Canada in 1950 that his mentalist act was genuinely psychic, and as a result was convinced that scientists, journalists and the public were hopelessly underequipped to detect such fraudulence. Such observers, he argued, were fatally inclined towards seeing what they believed. The only people with the eyes, the experience and the knowledge to see the truth behind Uri Geller, behind healers, behind practitioners of alternative medicine, behind hypnotists, astrologers, spiritualists, clairvoyants and behind religion itself were stage magicians - and never mind the irony that plenty among that profession have limited respect for James Randi.

Coat-tailing on Geller's career - how lucky for him that Geller had not flopped as he forecast - Randi became a star himself at last. His message had a brilliant simplicity, and with a little practice, like dozens of magicians in Israel had done, he learned to bend a spoon and do other tricks which looked remarkably like parts of Geller's repertoire. The premier TV talk show host, Johnny Carson, who had training as a magician, took to Randi, inviting him more than 30 times onto his NBC *Tonight* show. Like Geller, Randi gathered acolytes and admirers from academia, too. Of

course, when such people praised Geller, sceptics accused them of being naive; if they praised Randi, however, an illusionist who was proud to call himself (ironically, one assumes) ‘a charlatan, a liar, a thief and a fake all together’, academics were applauded for showing proper discrimination.

Randi’s supporters were every bit as prestigious as Geller’s; the little Canadian could match Nobel Prize winner for Nobel Prize winner, professor for professor. Dr. Maurice Wilkins, the Nobel Laureate and co-discoverer of DNA went on record as saying: ‘Mr. Randi, you’ve told us what you did was accomplished by trickery. But I don’t know whether to believe you or to believe *in* you.’ Ray Hyman, the sceptical psychologist from the University of Oregon affirmed that, ‘Randi can straighten out the bent minds, but only for those of us who have the courage to face the facts as they are, rather than as they would like them to be. Martin Gardner, a columnist for *The Scientific American*, cheered that Randi, ‘has done more to damage parapsychology than any one person in the last fifty years.’ Dr. Christopher Evans a psychologist at the National Physical Laboratory in England said: ‘Randi knows, in some ways, more about human nature than a psychologist’. Leon Jaroff saluted Randi for his ‘devastating blows to the pseudoscience of parapsychology’. Isaac Asimov attested to Randi’s combination of ‘sanity and a sharp sense of magicianship’.

An odd case was that of Carl Sagan, Professor of Astronomy and Space Sciences at Cornell University, who thanked Randi for performing ‘an important social service.’ If scientists and the public could be fooled by Geller’s conjuring tricks, Sagan asked, ‘what more dangerous political deceptions must we already have swallowed?’ Sagan later withdrew his support for Randi, citing his disgust at scurrilous rumours circulating about Randi’s lifelong bachelor status. Unfounded gossip is of no concern

here, but the more likely reason for the late Prof. Sagan expressing his doubts about Randi is that Sagan changed his mind as he got older about the relative value of faith, as opposed to empirical truth, which sceptical scientists are meant to be concerned with exclusively. Sagan's 1986 novel, *Contact*, and the wonderful film of the same name he co-produced, amount to a plea for faith in a discovery that the main character makes, even though the evidence she could produce for it was unsatisfactory. *Contact* is concerned closely and reverently with a cluster of matters sceptics are supposed to consider taboo - God, intuitive feelings, and the spectre of unconventional scientists being marginalised and persecuted by their peers for stepping out of line with conservative, established ideas. The film ends with a definition of what scepticism should be - the desire to keep on looking for answers.

In the wake of Geller, and with his new academic friends in awe of him, Randi was instrumental in 1976 in the setting up of a pressure group called CSICOP (The Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal), with its magazine, *The Skeptical Inquirer* and a loosely connected publishing company, Prometheus Books, which is pre-eminent in the publication of rationalist literature. In 1986, after a lean spell when his debunking business had fallen on hard times and he had been forced to sell his home in New Jersey, Randi was awarded \$272,000 over five years by the MacArthur Foundation, a Chicago-based philanthropic group which usually bestows its awards on the likes of composers and scientists. Randi was honoured as an educator, a doctor on the committee having said Randi saved more lives by opposing alternative medicine than most doctors. Randi set up a modern, headline-grabbing version of an old ruse which went back to his hero Houdini's day in the 1920s and before - the offering of a permanent \$10,000 (at other times \$1m.)

prize for anyone able to demonstrate anything paranormal. The catch was that such a demonstration had to be under his own conditions, which magicians and scientists alike point out are unattainable. (Randi *is* an illusionist - something which frequently has to be born in mind when his persuasive and witty personality tempts literal-minded people to take him at his word.)

The Randi-Geller feud has continued to the present day, yet the two, as a Los Angeles Times article has noted, 'have lived a strange symbiosis, two exceedingly colorful characters, each a foil to the other.' Randi later split from CSICOP after his scatter-gun verbal attacks drew a \$15m. libel writ from Geller - of which more (but strictly no more than necessary) in a later chapter. Randi has since set up his own think tank and propaganda unit - the James Randi Educational Foundation - which stands in suburban Fort Lauderdale, right opposite, un-fittingly enough, a chiropractor's clinic.

What seemed so fresh and novel about Randi's approach in 1973 - setting a magician on the track of a suspect paranormalist - was, in fact, an old idea, like the prize. When D.D. Home, the Scottish psychic, was doing a contemporary Uri Geller in the court of Napoleon III in 1863, Napoleon paid a succession conjurers to 'do a Randi' on Home; they failed. Another account, from the Pharaohs' Egypt, suggests sending for a magician is, quite literally, the oldest trick in The Book - in *Exodus*, to be precise. During the Jewish people's liberation struggle in Egypt, God tells Moses and Aaron to demonstrate a number of miracles to Pharaoh as a way of wearing down his morale - but warns that the Egyptian leader will not be impressed initially. 'So *Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the Lord commanded. Aaron threw his*

staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. Pharaoh then summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts. Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had said.' The same thing happens with the first plague - the turning of the Nile into blood. The magicians have no problem doing a Randi. Only when it gets to the plague of gnats, do they fail to replicate, and even warn Pharaoh, in a momentary lapse from scepticism: *'This is the finger of God'*. But Pharaoh, a true believer in scepticism by now, ascribes to his boys abilities even they don't claim to have. But the plague of boils reportedly afflicts the magicians as badly as anyone, whereupon they disappear from the account, leaving Moses to work his way through the rest of the plagues un Randi-ed. Jesus later had a similar problem with His own Disciples not quite believing in his miracles. *'Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts still hardened?'* he asked them. *'Do you have eyes, but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?'*

When, in the aftermath of the *Time* article, in mid 1973, Johnny Carson invited Uri Geller onto *Tonight*, Geller should probably have sensed an oncoming encounter with eyes that would fail to see. If he did realise that Carson meant trouble, he faced every bit as bravely as the hostile reception at *Time*; perhaps it was a measure of his self-belief that he could not imagine another disaster that bad, especially as he had been a huge success on a string of shows since *Time*, Mike Douglas, Merv Griffin, Barbara Walters, Jack Parr, Tom Snyder among them. But the chance of going on the highest rating talk show in the country was simply irresistible, even though Puharich, who

was surprisingly well connected in TV, warned Geller that Carson was a serious sceptic.

The *Tonight* appearance was to be a watershed for Geller in the States, the twin reason along with *Time* why the New York Times felt obliged to insert its caveat about him in its leader the following year. Although Randi was unable to be in Los Angeles for the show in the way he had been on hand in disguise for the *Time* encounter, he was closely and secretly involved in the *Tonight* edition's planning. He insisted that all the props be chosen by the *Tonight* production team, that Geller be allowed nowhere near any of them before the programme, and - Randi's top priority - that Shipi be kept at a distance from the backstage area at all times. Whether all this was hokum, or whether Randi and Carson simply got lucky on the night because Geller was off-form is a matter of speculation; the odds had equally been magician-loaded against Geller at SRI and he had still succeeded. Whatever happened to Geller, the show was hideously embarrassing for him. As mentioned at the beginning of this book, he failed in 22 minutes to make anything work. He had blown his biggest opportunity, and knew it.

One of the tests on *Tonight* was a repeat of the 35mm film canisters 'Russian Roulette' Geller had triumphed with at SRI. Randi had guessed that Geller's method at this was to 'accidentally' bump into the table the canisters were placed on and judge from their reaction which contained water. At NBC, where he was kept carefully away from the table, Geller shook his head sadly and said he just couldn't do it. In a station break, Carson and one of the crew later said was their impression that Geller was stamping his feet hard in time to the music, perhaps in hopes of jarring the cans. If so, it didn't work.. And whether it was so or not, the incident has become part

of sceptical folklore - as one of the (for them) lamentably few occasions when Geller has been found with his hands even near the till. It is only a shame for the sceptics that they have no video of the foot stamping sequence - but, as they would doubtless agree, such phenomena are famously hard to capture.

Uri is not unwilling to discuss the Carson disaster today, even though it is not his favourite subject. 'They thought I was a magician, so they thought they would set me up by locking away the stuff that they were preparing for me,' he says. 'But it wasn't my intention to touch anything. I don't bring my pads or pens or spoons onto shows. I always tell people to prepare them. So when I was on the Carson show, I immediately felt his negativity towards me. He wanted me to fail, he didn't want it to work. Later on they all tried to say that I was shaking the floor to see which can moved and which didn't. What's interesting is that the spoon in the actor Ricardo Montalban's hand - he was on with me - did bend. They didn't talk about that. It bent slightly, but it bent. But it's so stupid trying to explain that I failed because *they* set me up. That's not true, because actually, I failed on other shows too. But I felt that this was a huge failure because everyone told me that if you get on Johnny Carson, you have *really* made it.'

'So I was really depressed. But then I slowly understood that all publicity was good publicity, and people said if I failed on that show I must be real, because if I was a magician, it would work all the time. I went through a learning phase there and sceptics still use that clip to try and debunk me. Me, sitting next to Johnny Carson and trying to dowse for something in a can and Johnny rolling his eyes to heaven. No, I can't pretend it was a good evening. But I think the guy was obsessed with debunking

me. If I don't believe in something, I just say I don't believe in it. I have good friends who don't believe in me. But Carson was frenzied about it. A couple of years ago, I was shooting a commercial in Malibu, and I bent a spoon for the people who lived in the house where it was done. I didn't know, but their neighbour was Johnny Carson, and after I'd gone, they rushed round to show it to him. And they later told me he was furious with them and muttering about Randi. Shortly afterwards, I was at a garden party in London given by David Frost. Carson was in town for Wimbledon and knew David, I bumped right into him under a tree. I shook his hand warmly and introduced myself, and he didn't say a single word.'

For a different perspective on the Carson appearance, I turned to a paradoxical and interesting man, a Professor of Sociology who came from a circus family, is an expert on magicianship and mentalism, has many leading mentalists as friends, and was one of the founders of the anti-Geller group CSICOP in 1976. Marcello Truzzi, whose seat is at Eastern Michigan university at Ann Arbor, became disillusioned with what he regards as the group's intellectual dishonesty, and left it, although without abandoning his scepticism. He is today a friend of Geller, of the very type Uri speaks of.

'I don't think it was nearly as much of a fiasco as Randi asserts,' Truzzi told me of the Carson show. 'First of all, when the show aired originally, no mention was made on the air of Randi's "controls", and it simply looked like a failure to perform rather than a failure at a test. Carson was pleasant about it. Second, and this has been ignored by Randi, Ricardo Montalban apparently felt the metal *was* bending, though not in camera view. So, to some degree, Uri was salvaged by this. My point is that

Randi constructed this appearance into a "fiasco" by his repeated descriptions of the failure, and it was not really universally viewed that way at the time. Of course, I am sure Uri was upset by it all, and I am sure it was embarrassing to him, but it was not as if he had his hand caught in the till. Uri failed, but he was not "exposed" on the show. Randi has since used the failure in his own attempts to expose, which is not the same thing at all. The important thing at the time was that Carson did not then go on to draw any conclusions from Uri's failure. Of course, it was bad for Uri, but far from the devastating incident Randi claims. It was not so much the harm the show did to Uri as the fact that Uri was deprived of what might have been extremely good for him had he succeeded on the show. I think most people forgot about the show until Randi brought it up much later on his own shows. By the way, years later Carson presented Susie Cottrell as truly psychic, and she demonstrated, apparently successfully, on his show. This infuriated Randi I think this incident may have severed Randi's relationship with Carson, for I don't think he ever appeared on the Carson show again after that.'

What really happened to Geller on the first Carson show? (he did other *Tonight* dates later when Carson was not presenting the show, and was more successful) The obvious answer is that Randi's cunning proved conclusively that Geller's powers relied on prop-dependent tricks. Yet does it seem altogether too feeble to suggest the failure might be due to Geller being sensitive to other people's thoughts, and being put-off, or even made nervous and unsure of himself, by the hostility surrounding him - the very idea the idea that raises guffaws among sceptics?

My growing impression of Uri over these past two years has been of a kind of virtuoso mental athlete, whose ability to produce anomalous phenomena is fickle and unpredictable in much the same way as the abilities of many physical athletes and other performers varies according to mood and atmosphere. We are constantly told by sports commentators how this or that sportsman ‘raises his game’ in front of a home crowd. Would we expect a sportsman, musician - or even a magician - to perform to his full capability in front of a virtual lynch mob?

I imagine it depends on the performer, and Uri would not argue with the contention that he is quite neurotic. When I asked James Randi if he could excel at conjuring in a hostile environment, he answered that he indeed could, and I have no reason to disbelieve him. Magic is a high-stress occupation, and no job for the nervous. I have seen little evidence of Uri being a cool, calculating type of character - quick-witted and highly instinctive, yes, manually dextrous, absolutely, cunning, possibly; but a scheming strategist? I really don't think so. (On the other hand, is it possible that Shipi does indeed collude with Uri - but does so by paranormal, telepathic means? I pose the question only semi-jokingly.)

What kind of a ‘scientific effect’ can these *psi* phenomena be that they are so weak and wilful and unreliable, sceptics ask? Scientist I have asked that question reply that many accepted phenomena are far more fickle than *psi*. Quantum physics in particular deals with effects which are subtle and elusive to the point of whimsicality, so fleeting as to make Geller phenomena look positively robust in comparison. Many elements of quantum mechanics are merely theoretical, and have never been demonstrated. Many depend on the point of view of the observer. In chemistry, catalysts work every time,

but it is not clear why. In medicine, allergies are little understood and regarded as a near-hoax by many doctors. In radioactivity, it is impossible to predict when a Geiger counter will click if it is put next to a piece of radioactive material. Radioactivity is so random that Einstein reputedly refused to believe at first, 'that God plays at dice'. 'But He does,' one physicist told me, 'and He often loses.'

It is quicker to list what the Carson episode wasn't for Geller rather than what it was. What it wasn't is the end of Uri Geller. Uri says interest in him increased as a result of it, and this appears to be more than a vainglorious claim. There is certainly no question of him leaving or being run out of the States as a result of the embarrassment, as is confidently claimed by many opponents - he had been in America just over a year when he went on *Tonight*, and did not leave the country permanently for another 12 years. It is also undeniable that the peak of his celebrity, as well as the zenith of his scientific acclaim (both at SRI and in Europe) occurred in the two years or so after Carson. The downside of the experience, which we shall see in Chapter 15, was a series of personal lows in the mid to late 1970s, which certainly led to him adopting a lower profile and spending time out of the US

There was a slight echo to the trouble Uri was having in America, meanwhile, back in Israel, where the left wing magazine *Haolam Hazeah* had, by all appearances, been nibbling steadily while the Geller cat was away at a serious expose of him. It was an impressive looking piece of journalism too, with detailed statements from Hanna, about how she and her brother Shipi and others had assisted Uri's mindreading from the audience. The headline over the anonymously-written piece was *Uri Geller Twirls The Entire World on His Little Finger*. All the now familiar charges were made; the

faked photomontage of Sophia Loren, the allegation that Geller couldn't perform unless Shipi or Hanna was in the front row. An employee of Miki Peled, a driver called Saban, was quoted as saying that Geller had confessed to him in a heart-to-heart that his entire act was a sham.

All Geller's enemies were quoted, from the magician Eytan Ayalon, to Professor Kelson, the conjuring physics professor who had taken exception to Geller, to Baruch Cotni, the manager who had the (true) story of Geller conniving with him in a licence plate guessing scam. What was rare about the *Haolam Haze* article - and, in the end, a bit of a give-away - was when it purported to reveal 'the eleven basic tricks with which Geller fooled people in Israel and elsewhere.' His watch effects were said to be caused by a magnet he bought from an (unnamed) Tel Aviv jeweller, and concealed in his sleeve. (Despite the fact that he rarely wore long sleeves). Spoon bending, the magazine said, was done by Geller either physically, while no one was watching, or, 'He used a special chemical that he could smear on it after he put his fingers into his pocket.' After a show in a restaurant in the northern town of Nahariya, the writer stated, Geller had gone for a meal with some friends who, when he bent a spoon for the waiter, noticed 'the funny chemical smell from the fork'.

The story seemed an incredible scoop for the magazine - but for one problem. Much of it appears to have been made-up. For a start, Hanna, Uri's father, and Saban, among several others, swear not so much that they were misquoted; they had never even been contacted by a reporter. For another thing - the clinching detail - the spoon bending 'chemical' referred to simply does not exist - as even Randi himself has exhausted himself telling people. If such a noxious substance did, obviously enough,

it would burn a hole through Uri's fingers long before it damaged a spoon. But the best indication, if not evidence, that the story was a hoax comes from the newspaper's editor-in-chief, Eli Tavor, who in 1986 wrote to Uri from his retirement home in New York State. 'Concerning certain things that were written about you throughout the years,' Tavor wrote, 'Actually I have no explanation for them. But I can tell you a few things about the article which appeared in *Haolam Hazeh* number 1903, in which your wife is quoted. I cannot remember who worked at that time at *Haolam Hazeh* because there was always a high staff turnover rate. But what I can tell you is that whoever wrote that article probably never met her at all. During these years many people worked here who were liars and frauds, who fabricated stories from their hearts.' Tavor went on to add that he felt he had been an honest sceptic when he was running the magazine's campaign against Geller, but concluded: 'I have changed my mind about you. I am convinced today that you are endowed with abilities that allow you to perform feats which I cannot explain.'

What was most remarkable about the *Haolam Hazeh* article, however, was that it failed to have any impact; somehow, the foreign press failed to follow it up as they would normally have done with gusto, and, when I asked in Israel what damage it had done to Uri's reputation, almost nobody knew of its existence. This curious lack of repercussion was noted by Randi in a book he published in 1975, *The Magic of Uri Geller*, (reissued in 1982 as *The Truth About Uri Geller*) which promised to reveal 'the astonishing truth' about how Geller's feats were achieved. Randi devoted an entire chapter called *He Didn't Fool Them In Israel!* to a translation of the piece, with occasional annotations by him where he disagreed with its conclusions.

The book is interesting for the insight it gives into the author's raw emotions over the Geller issue. A pure polemic spoiled by the massive overuse of clumsy irony, whole passages in capital letters and forests of exclamation marks, the book gives the impression of a man so angry, a vexatious bull in a china shop, that he loses the very thing he is supposed to be selling - rationality. It seems to be a treasure chest of revelation, yet is so ridden with sophistry and gross contradiction that it loses credibility by the page. Randi is clearly obsessed, something he has admitted to. He also writes with a slightly anti-Semitic tinge (something he denies totally and angrily), which shows up for those with eyes to see it in repeated sneering references to 'the Israeli Wonder' and 'the Israeli miracle worker'. The lurid cover of the first paperback edition of the book includes a caricature of Geller in which a wart is added to the end of his nose; co-incidence, I am sure, but it happens that Nazi caricaturists usually added warts to the noses of Jews in their drawings for publications like *Der Sturmer*.

We read in *The Magic of Uri Geller* Randi's gleeful accounts of his own hoaxes on scientists and journalists that he is an accomplished fake and liar. This begs two questions: firstly, why should we accept the word of such a man on anything? And secondly, why does there have to be a quantum leap from knowing that Randi can 'take-off' Geller to supposing that Geller's motivation is similarly dishonest? In cricket, some bowlers enhance spin by illegal cheating; others can achieve the same by legal skills; are all spin bowlers cheats?

The great problem with James Randi - for sceptics - is his reckless behaviour in the handling of facts, which is easily as sloppy as that we associate with the flakier end of

the paranormal pier. Uri can be a irritatingly cavalier and has been known to embroider his accounts of incidents, but, as a psychologist supporter of his, Dr. Marc Seifer, who teaches at the Community College of Rhode Island, points out; ‘Try to find a single instance of Uri Geller *lying*. I doubt if you will succeed.’ (It was an intriguing point. The nature of some of Uri's accounts of intelligence work makes them uncheckable, and some of the witnesses to events he refers to are dead. Yet everything that could check out about him, I had found, did, again and again. As for some of the more exotic CIA and Mossad work he claims to have done, nothing should surprise us about the exploits and projects government employees get up to. The only arguably false element, I suspect, of Uri's accounts of his intelligence work is to have misunderstood its importance in the scheme of things - and which of us does not do that?)

Randi's *The Magic of Uri Geller* had to be reissued with a string of corrections, plus additional *erratum* points which had to be clumsily stuck in post-printing. Speaking about Geller, he is even more hot-headed, a carelessness which has landed him at the wrong end of libel actions, apologising for his goofs, and under accusation of lying. Charles Panati, *Newsweek*'s retired science editor alleges one such instance.

‘Randi's his whole life is based on deception,’ Panati says. ‘I caught him in one deliberate lie in a show we did called Panorama out of Washington DC. They had me on for my book, *The Geller Papers*, and brought Randi on to present an opposing view. We got along very well, except Randi made a claim that *Newsweek* had done a favourable article on psychic surgeons in the Philippines. He claimed that he had a copy of the article, and I said, ‘That's ridiculous, I've been there a number of years

and I know we didn't do it. After the show, the host, Maury Povich, asked to see the article, because Randi said he had it with him. But Randi couldn't produce it, and there was no such article. I thought that was a very low blow. I don't like dishonesty, and he was dishonest in this case and I have had nothing to do with him since. I have no particular belief in parapsychology, and I cannot say for certain whether Uri is genuine or not. But Randi and his people are zealots. There is no other word for it. I believe that the good they do, they themselves trample upon with their zealotry.'

Even the deceptions of a propagandist can be coped with, but Randi is also exceedingly inconsistent with both opinion and fact. One such inconsistency concerns whether he believes Geller is a brilliant fraud or an incompetent fraud. He is not alone in this; other ultra-rational magicians too find themselves swirling round in an intellectual loop on the issue. When they run out of plausible explanations for Geller's abilities, they charge him with incompetence. If he is incompetent, you ask, why is he a hundred times more successful than they, in terms of fame, money and popularity? *That*, they blame on Geller's powers of mental deception - the very thing they rely on for a living, and which, if Geller were incompetent, he would surely fail at.

A major factual inconsistency exists at the heart of Randi's Geller-busting book. Written nearly a quarter of a century ago, it promised to tell how Geller bends spoons. It proposes some theories, but nothing which has put Geller out of business. Ask Randi today, as I did, how Geller bends a spoon, and he falls back on the frustrating magicians' tendency towards the enigmatic answer: 'All I can say,' he replied, 'is that if Mr Geller is doing spoon bending by genuine means, he is doing it the hard way.'

Even so, the most reprehensible inconsistency in Randi's frenzied muddle exists in his reprinting of that *Haolam Hazeh* 'eleven basic Geller tricks' section. For, in neither the original edition, nor the heavily corrected later issue of *The Magic of Uri Geller* does Randi intervene to reassert his own point that no spoon bending chemical exists. The journalistic fiction is simply left for gullible sceptics to believe it has the endorsement of the master behind it.

Why would someone as talented, charismatic and, surprisingly, in old age, respected, as James Randi have made such a Quixotic hash of what could have been a very clever and witty, even good-natured, public opposition to someone he disagreed with intellectually? Prof. Truzzi has fundamental disagreements with Geller, yet the two are friends. David Berglas, the president of the British Magic Circle, is an old intellectual enemy of Geller, yet a close personal friend. Such crossbench harmony is one of the joys of civilisation. It is easy to understand how Geller has become distressed and frustrated and driven more than is wise into law courts by Randi's ceaseless professional and personal attacks - Randi, after all started the shooting; but how has Randi become so bitter as to have likened Geller, as he did in a Los Angeles Times interview, to Hitler - and himself to Churchill? You would think Geller had destroyed Randi's livelihood and murdered his brother - not challenged his belief system. Yet perhaps Randi *could* be so highly principled that he would let a clash of what is practically theology consume him from the prime of his life to old age; there are such (principled), not to mention dogmatic, people who simply will not back down on an issue of principle, and they, too, are an asset to civilisation.

The truth, I suspect, is a little less elevating. James Randi, I believe, wanted to be part of the Geller roadshow, not a disgruntled customer heckling from the back row.

My evidence for this is a series of extraordinary letters he wrote Uri between February 1975, when he was coming to the end of writing *The Magic of Uri Geller*, and February 1998. The first was almost a fan letter: *'I make no secret of the fact that I consider you to be one of the finest performers that I've ever seen. Your demeanour, your mechanical skill and your psychological handling of the most difficult situations has evoked great admiration on my part,'* Randi wrote. He went on to claim that he *'really'* understood how Geller did his effects and pleaded for a secret meeting of the two men - to save Geller from certain ruination.

Geller ignored the letter, and another followed in July 1975, this time more threatening. Geller again ignored it. Five years later, Randi wrote again, flattering once more - *'You are a charming, witty, presentable and clever performer, experienced and tempered in showbusiness, You have all the charisma and chutzpah needed to become the greatest illusionist of this age'* - and pleading still for a meeting. There followed 14 years of silence, after which arrived at Geller's house in England a 13-page, close-typed, rant, amounting to 7,000 words of venom and reading like a fully-fledged stalker's letter. It began, simply *'Geller:'* and went on to suggest strongly Randi had been gathering intelligence not just from press cuttings, but on the Geller children and Geller's financial affairs. Most of the letter, however, was sheer insult, along with the promise Randi had been making since 1975 that Geller would never amount to anything, and end up, *'miserable, alcoholic, friendless, drug-crazed and disgraced.'* Before signing off with *'I leave you to your kismet.'* Randi warned that if Geller used any part of the letter in any way, he would *'make the entire document available'*. Bemused to hear from Randi after so many years, Geller saved his 70 year-old foe the postage, and sent copies to anyone who requested one.

The letter had come as a complete surprise, because the timing seemed to be apropos of nothing at all. Repeated readings suggested that it was a kind of death bed statement, and that perhaps Randi was ill. There was certainly none of the slightly ambiguous love-hate-love undertow of Randi's earlier missives. What, of course, is to be made of a man who writes steadily longer and more intemperate letters over a period of 23 years to the same person, each with more bluster, underlinings and 'You will be found out' warnings is for the individual to decide. The same applies to what is to be made of a man who, on receiving each - the last a detailed resume of all his foibles and frauds in Randi's eyes - instead of locking the letters away with a guilty gulp, distributes photocopies to his friends.

It was all most bizarre, and is almost embarrassing to reveal, especially as I rather liked Randi when I met him, and found him good company and a fiercely bright man, albeit one with the most disconcertingly scary eyes when he takes his glasses off. I would contend, however, that he is not quite the hero of rationalist thought that his supporters make him out to be.

Chapter 14 / Britain

'If people say Uri Geller is a magician, they have simply failed to read the published scientific evidence' (J.B. Hasted, atomic physicist, Professor of Experimental Physics, Birkbeck College, University of London)

However damaging the Johnny Carson experience in LA and the scoffers' consequent merriment had been, it had a zero effect on dissuading a leading BBC television show, David Dimbleby's Talk-In, from giving Uri Geller an enormous fanfare for his first 'official' visit to Britain in November 1973. In a sense, it was the beginning of Geller's journey to what would become home, and what was in some respects his roots. He had been brought up on stories of his father's exploits in the British Army, and enjoyed a traditional British education to GCE level in Cyprus. A decade later, he would settle in Britain, where he has now lived for 15 years.

At times, the live Dimbleby show looked as if it would go the way Carson had a few months previously. It took an agonising period of silence, with nothing at all happening under Geller's concentration before things started to happen in the studio - and the Geller furore described in the opening of this book was unleashed in Britain. Probably the most ringing endorsement of Geller in the immediate aftermath of the Dimbleby show appearance was that of science writer Brian Silcock of the Sunday Times, who the following Sunday, described an encounter with Geller in a taxi 'leaving this initially highly sceptical science correspondent with his mind totally blown.' Geller had caused Silcock's thick office key to bend in the flat of photographer Bryan Wharton's hand, and made a paper knife bend too, so that Silcock and Wharton both saw it continue to bend

'It is utterly impossible to remain sceptical after seeing Uri Geller in action,' Silcock wrote, adding, 'I am convinced that Geller is a telepath too,' after Uri had reproduced pictures the journalist was only thinking, but had not drawn. (Over the years that followed, Silcock reversed his opinion. 'I became convinced in my own mind that it was just a conjuring trick,' he says today. 'I have no idea how the trick was done, but I think there was a process of my natural scepticism reasserting itself. I tend to be of a rather sceptical, downbeat frame of mind, and I somehow got shoved out of it. I don't really understand how that happened, either.')

Perhaps the difference between failure on NBC and success on the BBC was Dimbleby, who, although a sceptic (he is now one of Britain's senior political commentators) had been quite shaken up before the show to see a key he was holding

bend under Geller's gaze, and now, if only for the sake of the show going smoothly, was clearly in an encouraging, positive frame of mind.

Also present on the show as resident scientific sceptic was John Taylor, an expert in black holes, who was Professor of Mathematics at King's College, and previously professor of Physics at Rutgers University, New Jersey. The author on anomalous science, Lyall Watson, was also on hand to explain that he had wasted his first experience of Geller by looking all around him for the catch. There were, Watson pronounced, no tricks involved with Uri.

Uri was his usual engaging self, and said he was convinced his abilities were caused by some 'outside power', but that on the other hand, that what he did might equally be powered by the people around him. He went on to do a successful telepathy test, which drew gasps from the audience, wreak havoc with some BBC canteen cutlery, and seemed to cause the hands on Watson's watch to bend under the glass while he was still wearing it.

Today, Dimpleby still clearly recalls the show as a huge success, and explains his view on Geller today - as well as possibly the view of much of the British intelligentsia - with characteristic crispness. 'I saw him doing the metal bending several times with Yale keys, and I can only say what I saw,' Dimpleby says. 'He would take a key and rub it between his first finger and thumb, then put it down and hold his hand over it, and it sort of lifted up towards his hand. I saw it lift up. Once it snapped and once it was just completely bent in half. I am very pragmatic about these things I don't know what the rubbing consisted of and what happened during that

process. The conjurer who rubbished him on telly afterwards, Paul Daniels, said everyone had been conned and it was just sleight of hand. But it was clear to me that what wasn't sleight of hand was that the key was on a table or in the palm of his hand, or sometimes being held by the person who had proffered it. I certainly saw the key moving without his actually touching it two or three times. He did telepathy on the programme quite impressively, and I have never seen anyone simulate properly the key bending or forks drooping and seeming to melt in his hand. The odd thing about him is that the little things he does are quite impressive and mysterious, but then ten seconds later, he'll be telling you how he mislaid his camera in South America and had it flown through the air and reform in Tel Aviv or whatever. So today, I am quite cool about the whole thing, and wouldn't endorse him, because a lot of the things he has done are meretricious junk.'

Prof. Taylor was entranced by what he saw in the BBC studio; 'I believe this process. I believe that you actually broke the fork here and now,' he said on the show, in a mixture of delight and bafflement. He took Uri off for testing at King's College, and became an enthusiastic Geller supporter. One scientific colleague recalls Taylor having in his eyes the obvious gleam of someone who could see himself getting a Nobel Prize for discovering the new scientific principle behind Uri Geller. Taylor wrote a popular book, *Superminds: An Enquiry Into The Paranormal*, largely about Geller and dozens of children - known as mini-Gellers - who were discovered in Britain after the Dimbleby show to have similar metal bending abilities. For a few years in Britain, the names Taylor and Geller were almost uttered in one breath. But then Taylor underwent a change of mind on Geller and the entire paranormal field. Another book he published in 1980, *Science and the Supernatural*, a sort of antimatter

version of *Superminds*, in which he concluded that the evidence for paranormal spoon bending was ‘suggestive but certainly not watertight.’

‘This is the conclusion I have come to more recently on carefully reconsidering the cases which I had investigated personally and which led me earlier to conclude that the phenomena was truly authentic,’ Taylor wrote, adding that when he developed a spoon bending method Randi approved for him, ‘In spite of the very friendly atmosphere he [Geller] did not succeed at all. Nor has he returned to be tested again under these (or any other) conditions, in spite of several warm invitations to him to do so. One could suppose that his powers desert him in the presence of sceptics, but during the test at no time did I or any of my team express any form of scepticism; I do not think we even thought a harsh thought! As far as I am concerned, there endeth the saga of Uri Geller; if he is not prepared to be tested under such conditions his powers can not be authentic.’

‘Taylor's case is a strange one,’ comments Prof. Truzzi in Michigan. ‘He began by being quite convinced and pursued a new theoretical explanation. When he found his theory would not work, he started questioning everything that he affirmed earlier. Many of us think he got badly burned by his doubting colleagues and largely wrote this negative book to salvage his reputation. His initial description of Geller's spoon bending would seem to preclude any fraud of the sort Randi claims.’ Uri shrugs over the Taylor incident and points out, as ever, that he often fails to produce any phenomena at all, and such zeros do not only occur on tense live TV shows. The same had happened once when the quantum physicist Richard Feynman came to see him in

Los Angeles out of curiosity, albeit curiosity fuelled by a track record of never having seen an ESP experiment which worked. 'I don't know what happened with John Taylor,' Geller says, 'He just switched off one day and decided that psychokinesis is not paranormal. You never know what happens in the minds of these scientists.' As for what Prof. Taylor thinks a further 20 years later, we cannot know. When I contacted him, his wife said very sweetly he prefers not to talk about it any more. And there endeth, I suppose, the saga of Prof Taylor.

Far less noisily in the background, however, a rather more qualified British academic - qualified in that he is an experimental physicist - was working intensively with Geller in his laboratory in London as well as at his home in Sunningdale, Surrey. John Hasted, who held the chair in Experimental Physics at Birkbeck College, was a most unusual scientist. As well as being a world authority on his speciality, atomic collisions, he was a lifelong lover of folk song, was deeply involved in the London skiffle scene in the fifties and sixties, and was an early anti-activist, who went on the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament's first Aldermaston march. Hasted was also involved in the first pirate broadcasting in Britain, which was not, as is often thought, done by the offshore pop station, Radio Caroline, but a CND operation in 1958 to 59, in which transmitters were set up on the top of buildings to put out tapes of speeches by Bertrand Russell.

Hasted now lives in St Ives, Cornwall, in a bungalow overlooking the lighthouse Virginia Woolf wrote about in *To The Lighthouse*. Frail, but still mentally extremely agile, he is still very much into peace and vegetarianism, and reads voraciously everything from new scientific papers to Martin Amis to classics. In the 1970s,

Hasted stuck his neck out and, after exhaustive laboratory tests centring on his use of mechanical strain gauges to actually measure the bending in metal, proclaimed Uri Geller genuine. In 1981, his book *The Metal Benders*, almost 300 pages of close-typed scientific data, speculation and anecdote, set out his experiences with Uri and some of the child spoon benders, along with his theories on the phenomenon. Today, he still believes strongly in paranormal metal bending, although regards the work he did as a comparative failure, because he never managed to work out for certain how the phenomenon happened.

‘If people say Uri Geller is a magician, they have simply failed to read the published scientific evidence,’ Hasted told me as we sat down to tea on a leaden winter Cornish day looking out to where the Godrevy Island lighthouse would have been had it not been for the mist across the beautiful St Ives Bay. He explained how he had been introduced to Geller by Professor David Bohm, the renowned American-born theoretical physicist, who was interested, like Russell Targ, in the links between eastern mysticism and modern physics. Bohm, a member of the top secret Manhattan Project which developed the atomic bomb, and a friend of Einstein, was pretty well convinced that Geller was genuine, but Hasted, while fascinated by, as he puts it, ‘the nine tenths of science which is unknown’ had no experience of the paranormal or psychic phenomena. Hasted, too, was soon becoming convinced.

‘I never had to be concerned that I was imagining seeing spoons bend,’ he explained, ‘because right from the very start I insisted on instruments, quite correctly of course. Randi came to see me at Birkbeck. He was absolutely fanatical about this, but he was not very convincing. It took me about a minute before I saw how he did it,

by pre-stressing the spoon. He is back in the days of bending spoons by using force, you see, but he has never attacked my more important experiments, the ones with instruments, because he doesn't understand instruments. I don't think he could have duplicated even the first experiment in Uri's hotel when I first went with Bohm, because I brought my own key, and I had identified it by weighing it very carefully - and I didn't let Uri see it until I popped it on the table. He started to stroke it, and eventually it bent - not a lot, but it bent.'

'I found these *professional* sceptics to be every bit as much a menace to scientific truth and impartial observation as the worst psychic charlatans,' the professor continued. 'They write that researchers in the parapsychology field are emotionally committed to finding phenomena, yet forget conveniently that they themselves are emotionally committed to finding there are no phenomena. I was often reminded of a saying: "Them as believe nowt, will believe owt."'

'It was a slight shock seeing that key bend,' Hasted continued, 'but there are far worse shocks than that in science. I was just puzzled. I doubt if I would have taken it much further had not Bohm pointed out to me that if that was genuine, we were onto something very important. David Bohm's main contribution to science was the insistence on what are called non-local phenomena in quantum theory, and he was one of the great experts on quantum theory throughout the world, so I took him very seriously indeed.'

Hasted, like Bohm, came to believe that what was happening in the case of Geller and the genuine child metal benders (some were, as might be expected, found when

they were videoed secretly to be attention seeking hoaxers) was ‘a nonlocal quantum interaction’. In other words, atoms in the metal were being dislocated at a distance by some instantaneously-acting force. What neither man could suggest was what it was in the human brain that could cause such atomic dislocations, but the theory was starting point. ‘Of course,’ Prof Hasted said, ‘Any law that connects such things as quantum theory and brain function would no doubt have to be Sod’s Law, and it would be Sod who would get the Nobel Prize.’

The time when Sod most applied to John Hasted’s involvement with Uri Geller was when Hasted brought his experimental subject home to Sunningdale. It was there, during and after Geller’s visit, that an extraordinary series of poltergeist-type phenomena showed up. The first was within minutes of his arrival, when Hasted observed at the back door of his kitchen, where he was with his late wife, Lynn (who was deeply dismissive about the paranormal) and Geller, an ivory statuette normally in the sitting room, falling vertically from the ceiling to the floor. This was followed by a second object appearing in the air, the key of an unused antique clock which stood next to the statuette. Over the next few weeks, there were countless instances of objects appearing to have travelled through solid walls or from inside containers, often when an increasingly frightened Lynn was on her own. The clock key kept making its own way to the identical spot by the back door, the statuette would be found on its side. Then the clock, which had no pendulum and had not worked for 30 years, started chiming, which caused Lynn to phone Hasted at the laboratory and beg him to come home. That evening, the clock - which has now returned to its dead state and still has pride of place in Hasted’s sitting room in Cornwall - chimed continually.

The strange occurrences in the house increased in frequency, culminating in a particularly disturbing one two days before Christmas. The Hasteds happened to have a good local butcher in Sunningdale, and a friend asked them if they would get his Christmas turkey for him. He came round to collect the bird late in the evening, the day before Christmas Eve. When the Hasteds and their friend went into the kitchen to pick the turkey up, something a little alarming had happened, a phenomenon reminiscent in a small way in its grotesque, baffling imagery of those which had afflicted the nuclear physicists at the Livermore Laboratory in the States a few weeks previously. The turkey's liver had apparently extricated itself from inside the still-sealed plastic bag of giblets, and rematerialised outside the unbroken bag, in the middle of a plain white table. There was no trace of a blood smear near it as would have been expected if the liver had moved across the surface.

Dozens of other bizarre physical phenomena were happening to Hasted at work, to his work colleagues and to the Hasteds' friends, but the turkey incident, however, was one too many for Lynn, who threatened to leave Hasted over it, although both she and he suspected that Geller had in some way let loose the avalanche of psychic phenomena through her unwitting co-operation. 'It was a remarkable series of incidents,' Hasted says now. 'It was a hard time for my wife and myself; we nearly fell out. We really had quite serious emotional troubles about it. I wasn't frightened; I can't become frightened for little pieces of metal; they weren't ghosts or anything like that. But she was very scared.'

The phenomena dried up, as these things do, and the Hasteds stayed together. And it moved Hasted's thinking on from puzzling over spoon bending to considering the

wider question of teleportation. ‘My attitude on this is that when metal bends, atoms move about in the metal, and if enough atoms moved around, then the whole object *could* jump, and this would be teleportation - which I now believe to be merely another branch of metal bending. In fact teleportation is probably the more fundamental event, and both Uri and some of the children I studied at the time have done it for me under very good conditions indeed. Eventually, this could be a solution of the transport problem. Yes, beam me up Scottie! I think we might get there within 50 or 100 years - except that it will be very dangerous in that your head might come off or something like that. Teleporation from A to B is instantaneous, because it is another demonstration of quantum nonlocality. Nonlocality means the same thing being in two places at once, things not moving, but just appearing, going through walls. That’s been my experience.’

Before I left for the train back to London, Hasted took me into his cluttered study, where he keeps the mementoes of his pioneering metal bending work alongside half disembowelled bits of computers and other electronic gadgets. The bent and mangled forks and spoons are carefully marked with little hand-made sticky labels; most are the product of metal benders other than Geller, and the quite grotesque distortions are greater than anything Geller produced. ‘There’s no doubt,’ Hasted said as I photographed him with these mangled old pieces of cutlery, ‘That some of the children were real mini-Gellers, and some were more powerful than Uri. I had one, whose parents were Oxford academics, who on one occasion walked through his bedroom wall in front of them. Most of these children, we found, were rather unhappy, and usually had problems with their father, and were closer to their mother - which I believe describes Uri's position. You will find, however, that in adulthood,

they are almost all reluctant to talk about what they could do as children, or tell you whether they can still do it, some because they were cheating and are embarrassed, and others because it brings back this tortured time in their past. Uri was unusual in taking a different course, I think, because he wanted to impress, but also to be a good publicist for the cause. That was his whole end object.'

Two interesting postscripts to my interview with John Hasted came in the week after it. With much international phoning and e-mailing, I tracked down two of his child metal benders, one in Wiltshire - the number supplied by her brother in Hong Kong (who asked if I got any explanation from his sister about what happened 20 years ago, to let him know what it was - the other in Canada. Both agonised over being interviewed again, but decided against it. 'It was all perfectly genuine,' one said, 'and please give my best wishes to Professor Hasted. But I wouldn't want my friends and neighbours to know about what happened back then, and have all those accusations about attention seeking starting again.'

The other curious thing was that, when we were discussing teleporatation, Hasted had said that he believed in my lifetime, but not in his, teleporatation would become an established scientific effect. On the Friday of the same week, *Nature* published a five-page article from professor Anton Zeilinger and other researchers at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, describing the first ever successful verification of quantum teleportation - not quite of Scottie or of an ivory statuette or a turkey liver, but of the electrical charge on a single photon particle two metres across their laboratory. The Innsbruck team were not, as it happened, looking into the possibilities of mind over matter being a quantum effect, but suggested that theirs was the first

experimental proof that quantum mechanics might soon be used to transfer information in computers infinitely faster than we can now do by mere electronics.

The *Nature* article happened to be published within days of another experiment in the USA, this producing the first virtually incontrovertible evidence of mind-power influencing material objects. Physicist Professor Robert Jahn's team at Princeton University documented subjects beating odds of 1,000 billion to one when willing a random number generator to produce specific sequences. A few months later, there was good and bad news for the paranormal from Japan, where the Sony Corporation announced it had proved after seven years research that ESP exists - but closed down its ESP research facility because there did not seem to be any way to turn the knowledge into marketable products. Neither the Princeton team nor that at Sony suggested that a quantum effect was behind their respective discoveries. But at least for the first time, the possibility of an explanation for the Geller effect - that his brain and that of others can cause thoughts, atoms in metal, and entire objects to move around by a quantum teleportation method - began to look howsoever dimly realistic.

One of the key events John Hasted organised almost to show Geller off when he was in England was an informal gathering of high-powered, interested parties in his lab at Birkbeck on a June Saturday in 1974. Among those who came to meet Geller were the chief engineer of the Rolls-Royce Rocket Division, Val Cleaver, Arthur Koestler, the engineer-turned science writer, who later bequeathed £1m to found a chair of parapsychology at Edinburgh University, Arthur C. Clarke, the science fiction writer, and a third Arthur, Arthur Ellison, professor of Electrical Engineering at City University, London and a part time researcher into the paranormal. The meeting

became famous as the source of an ongoing argument between Arthur C. Clarke and several of the others. When Clarke saw his front door key bend before his eyes, according to Ellison and others present, he exclaimed, ‘My God, it’s Childhood’s End come true.’ (a reference to one of his own novels, in which the alien overlord Karellan explained to the human race some centuries hence that the ancient mystics had been right, and science wrong, and such phenomena as poltergeists, telepathy and precognition were real). Clarke then said to Byron Janis, Uri's classical pianist friend, who was also present, ‘My God, what is this world coming to?’

‘Five or six years later,’ Janis related at his apartment in Manhattan, ‘Clarke said it hadn’t happened at all, and that he had been in a hypnotic state. It pissed me off, because I remembered it so well.’ Clarke had indeed turned rather abruptly on Geller. Ten years later, in the forward to a fairly way-out paranormal book of his own, *Arthur C. Clarke’s World of Strange Powers*, - an accompaniment to a TV series - Clarke urged his readers, a little incongruously, to study Randi’s work, and was scathing about Geller. Leaving aside the fact that Randi would be bound to dismiss the whole of Clarke’s book on principle, Clarke admitted he had indeed made the comment as reported when his key bent, but said that everyone else’s memory of the actual bending process, bar his own, had been at fault, and that Geller had actually manipulated the key.

Professor Ellison remains particularly resolute on this matter. ‘Clarke got out Yale key and he put it on top of Hasted’s secretary’s typewriter,’ Ellison recalls. ‘We were standing around the desk in the outer office. Clarke put his finger on the key, which was all alone on that flat surface, and said to Geller, “See what you can do with that.” I was to one side within a foot of it, Arthur Koestler was a foot away elsewhere,

and Geller came up between us and stroked it on the flat back of the typewriter. All of us were watching that key like a hawk, and the end curled up in about a minute. You could rock it to and fro. Our attention was not distracted, we weren't born yesterday, we were all aware of magicians' tricks, and there was nothing else that happened that I haven't mentioned, so there's not the slightest doubt in my mind. If I have seen something I will say so. I will not be short of the courage of admitting if I see things that the general scientists think are impossible. Clarke was amazed at the time, so I was surprised when I saw him on a TV programme that he was very non-committal about Geller. I think he probably feels that if he admits to seeing a paranormal phenomenon, everyone will assume he's going round the bend and will cease taking him seriously.'

Ellison, who has retired like Hasted, lives in suburban splendour in a detached house on a tree-lined avenue in Beckenham, outside London. Somehow, it is not the kind of place you would expect to find either a world renowned scientist, nor a leading light in psychical research, yet Ellison is both. The son of a tailor from Birmingham, his background is in heavy electrical engineering, from which he went into academia in 1958. Ellison is also prominent in the Scientific and Medical Network, an international group of nearly 2,000 doctors and scientists with an interest in spiritual and paranormal matters.

'My rule has always been,' Ellison explained, 'that if ever I talk about anything paranormal in the university common room, then I make jolly sure that the evidence for its truth is about an order of magnitude stronger than anything else in normal science. The standard and the quality of the research in parapsychology is a great deal

higher than it is in most subjects. I have had several sharp rows on the radio about the paranormal with people like Richard Dawkins, who is the Oxford Professor for the Public Understanding of Science, and Lewis Wolpert at the Middlesex School of Medicine. I have discovered the way to deal with Lewis now is to talk about quantum mechanics, the fact that a great many distinguished physicists think that what's out there depends on our consciousness for its meaning in reality. Nobody would say that the fathers of quantum mechanics, like Niels Bohr and the other distinguished members of the Copenhagen group of physicists, were idiots. Even Lewis wouldn't say that. Life just isn't as simple as people like these, who I call naive materialists, love to believe.'

'As for Geller,' Prof Ellison continued, 'I think he is important in that he shows how certain things that some normal scientists consider impossible are not impossible, but as they have been conditioned by their education and training to "normal" reality, they just dismiss it all as conjuring, so that it is not as important to them as it ought to be. If they had the truly open mind of a real scientist they would be very interested in things that don't appear to be obeying what they consider to be the normal laws of nature.'

'Now Randi, of course,' Ellison added with obvious irony, 'Has the benefit of already *knowing* that all this is impossible, so when finds some way of imitating it by conjuring, he knows that's the way it must have been done. What is unfortunate is when scientists are half blind too, and don't see things, don't do the right experiments, don't do any experiments, because they already know it's impossible.'

Remarkably for a man who is listed in *Who's Who* as a visiting professor at M.I.T. (The Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and the author of a string of papers and books on highly pragmatic matters, such as the problems of noise and vibration in electric machines, Prof Ellison (DSc Eng., CEng, FIMechE, FIEE, Sen Mem IEEE) goes beyond even quantum theory to explain Uri Geller. It was all rather heady - and fascinating - stuff to hear on a winter's evening in a suburban avenue in Beckenham, from a 79 year-old retired professor emeritus with a Birmingham accent. 'I don't actually think it is Geller who bends the metal,' he said. 'You will no doubt be what I call a naive realist. You think there is no doubt that all these objects are around us, and you have in your mind a model of the physical world, which usually works all right, and so do I much of the time. But I actually think there are not real objects around us, and that is the result of my own experience of the paranormal. I have been to every kind of seance you can imagine, I have had every kind of experience that there is within the paranormal. My boggle threshold is at infinity I think. I have seen an apport arrive in the middle of a seance in a good light, an object that wasn't there before, a rose, a living rose, slowly materialising. I have seen objects floating in the air in a good light. I was once in a seance when the control personality, through the medium in trance, while the light was still on, said, "Hold my hand," so I linked fingers and there was a luminous trumpet kind of painted on the carpet in the middle of a big circle of spiritualists. And I held my hands out, and this trumpet floated up in the air, went round and round my linked hands half a dozen times, before it floated back down to the carpet again. I have seen and made notes on some 30 full-scale materialisations, so you'll understand that I didn't turn a hair at seeing a key bent.'

Psychism, Ellison added, giving some to Uri's insistence that since the age of three that he has no real idea of how he does what he does, occurs at an unconscious level, where people have no control over it, and also cannot be switched on like a tap. He also considers it sometimes occurs in people who do not expect it when they experience what some psychiatrists term a 'temporary suspension of disbelief'.

The intriguing thing about Arthur Ellison when he discusses Uri is that he is in many ways quite sharp about him, and is far from an acolyte, yet still supports him. Ellison had wanted to study Geller back in 1973, but was beaten to it by Hasted and Taylor. 'Geller did invite me out to his house, once, when, I think, he really wanted this legal document to help him, an affidavit about the Arthur C. Clarke business. He promised to invite the family to see a bit of metal bending, but he never did. He is most unreliable. I slightly suspect he sometimes tells stories that aren't quite accurate, and occasionally makes promises that he can't keep. I also can't swear that he doesn't at some times use stage magicianship. If anyone is paid as much as he is and it doesn't work one evening, I imagine it's a terrible temptation to fake it a bit, if not for the self respect, then at least for your money, to give them what they paid for. That showmanship thing has done quite a lot to damage the subject. But the great thing with Uri is that he can get members of the audience, with no extra grind, to bend their own keys. Now that's fantastic, and I applaud Uri for it, because it's not Uri doing it; they are doing it themselves. It's that temporary suspension of disbelief.'

So much about Uri's 1973 and 1974 trips to Britain was focused on a solemn striving for scientific acceptance that it is easy to forget that he was simultaneously a creature of showbusiness, concerned more than anything else with maintaining a rock

star existence. But far from abandoning his flashy showbusiness career to science, Geller was managing incongruously to combine the two. In the midst of the scientific controversy in Britain, he found time to make and promote his first record, called *Uri Geller*, for which he wrote and voiced the vaguely spacey words and theme of universal love, Byron Janis wrote the music, and an arranger who had done work with The Beatles set the finishing touches. The record was a success, and Geller was called upon to record it in Italian, French and Japanese. 'It was recently re-released in Japan,' Uri says with considerable pride, 'And has also been voted the worst cover award in Australia, and, very was discussed a little while ago on ABC TV's *Good Morning America*, where it was mentioned as the third or fourth worst record in the world.'

Uri was also concentrating as much effort as he could muster while in Britain on simply having fun - with bizarre consequences in one case, as he describes. 'While I was in London, I went to a casino, something I'd only done once since the time in Italy, when I did well. In the States, I went to Las Vegas with Yasha and Shipi, and it was a disaster. We lost every penny and ended up sleeping in the car. But in London, and I either predicted where the roulette ball would fall or made it fall onto the number that I had chosen - I can't remember which - and I won £17,000. That was a lot of money for me, and I was sitting feeling happy in the back of this Daimler with my black leather jacket stuffed with £17,000 in two pockets. And as we were driving, I heard a voice in my head, terribly loud, shouting at me and saying, "Why did you do it?" I got so scared that I grabbed the driver. I actually opened the glass partition between us and I started shaking him. He stopped the car, and the door opened as if an invisible hand had opened it, and I felt as if I was thrown out of the car, with a

massive weight on my chest and body, pressing me right into the ground. It lasted maybe 15 seconds, and I threw out the money on the on the hard shoulder of the M4, £17,000, all bundled up in rubber bands. It was such a relief. I never gambled again after that.’

‘Maybe it was me,’ Uri speculates of this strange incident, the impact of which is marred only by his failure subsequently to track down the Daimler driver as a witness. (The incident was never reported either by Geller or anyone finding the money, leaving the obvious possibility that the driver raced back to the same spot later to pick the precious bundle up.) ‘Maybe it was my inner conflict, telling me never to do it, and it translated it in such a way that it scared me, and it was me building an energy force around me being able to psychkinetically open the door of the car,’ he theorises. ‘I will never know those things. I never know what is going to happen to me tomorrow. The mystery to me is why am I allowed to fly in an airplane and open maps and tell big mining companies where to drill and be paid for it, but I cannot try to win the lottery or go into a casino. I don’t understand it.’

Chapter 15 / Independence Day

'Melanie wanted my child because she believed that a child from me would be a space child. And I believed it, too.' (Uri Geller on his lover in the mid 1970s, Melanie Toyofuku.)

Geller's 12 years in America fell into two uneven parts - his time with Andrija Puharich in Ossining, which lasted until the end of 1973, and his much longer period based in his own Upper East-side Manhattan apartment, with his mother invited over from Israel and installed in a house Uri bought for her up in Connecticut.

The break with Puharich had to come, releasing Uri as it did into his first real semblance of an independent adult life. But it was as emotional a separation as any between parent and child, and practically ended in legal fisticuffs between the two men. 'I had a row with Andrija,' says Uri. 'He signed me on a contract, he owned me for seven years and all my income. I don't think it was that Andrija locked me into this contract for monetary reasons. He wanted to own me because of what I

represented to this alien intelligence I was their tool, and he wanted to own the tool. Andrija was convinced that through me, he was dealing directly with God. I never accepted that, because I am a believer in God, so when Andrija concluded from the messages that this was God speaking directly to him, that, I guess was the first step of me realising that it went too far.'

'Nevertheless,' Uri continues, 'Everyone around me was telling me how foolish I was. We were very gullible and naive. I had no lawyers, but I threatened the publishers of the book Andrija had just finished on me, *Uri*, and the whole fight was in London in a hotel room. I wanted him to tear up the contract otherwise I would have refused to endorse *Uri*. It was a damaging business until we made up again, but after I left him, he started gathering other people around him and he was OK. We saw him a couple of times in America, and when he came to London about eight years later for me to film him - that was just something I wanted to do for posterity - we embraced and hugged each other.'

According to Hal Puthoff, Uri's concern about breaking up with Puharich, a process which was coming to a head during the SRI tests in California, was worrying Uri at a deeper level than the merely financial. Puthoff's memory of his private discussions with Uri at the time on the Puharich question suggest as powerfully as almost any other account just how sincerely Uri believed in his own abilities, even if opponents believed he was enjoying a huge joke at the expense of science. 'Puharich told Uri that if they broke up as a team, Uri would lose his powers,' Puthoff explains. 'Uri spent a lot of quiet time with us asking if we believed that, because he didn't want to lose his powers. He felt obligated to demonstrate his abilities, and he was concerned

that if at any time he did the wrong thing ethically, he might lose them. What did we think he should do, did we think Puharich was right, was it possible that somehow Puharich's involvement with him helped strengthen his powers, and so on. It wasn't a con thing. He was genuinely concerned and he kept coming back to it.'

A letter Uri wrote to Andrija while on a flight just before Christmas 1973, and came to light after it was sent from Holland to Uri in 1998 by Puharich's first wife, similarly reveals a great deal about what was in Uri's mind at this troubled time. Some of the meaning is a little obscure, but it would be difficult for the harshest critic reading it to deny its sincerity. On United Airlines stationery, the letter is addressed in capitals, 'TO ANDREA'. (In two years of knowing Puharich, Uri had not picked up the correct Serbian spelling of his name.) '*Words mean nothing if feelings don't cry,*' he wrote. '*A lot we struggled for GoD in heaven but on the road we stopped. Never, never have I in my mind body or soul thought but about you. For me inside, I am still proud to know you Andrea. Whatever your decision is, to stop or keep going, I will understand your human feelings. I truly care about the mission. I also care about my people, so I asked you to trust my feelings towards you and Spectra. and if you still don't want to hear me or feel my wanting you, then maybe this is how it has to come to an end, although I don't feel so. Still loyal to you. Uri.*'

Uri's obvious regret that the relationship was breaking up is understandable. As part of the separation, Puharich had clearly been threatening to abandon Uri as much as Uri had threatened to abandon him. They both feared they needed one another, and both knew it had not been at all a bad life for Uri, Shipi and Yasha Katz in Ossining. 'I didn't have to go down to the local store to buy food,' Uri says, 'Andrija did it. It a

more down-to-earth, rustic kind of plush living than I was used to for that few months in Germany when I was truly living on someone, but Andrija organised everything, and it was very comfortable. So when I left Andrija, it was quite a shock for me, knowing that I had to rent my own apartment, and that to have breakfast, I had to buy it. After splitting with Andrija, suddenly I had no money at all, I was broke. I couldn't sell the apartment that my mother was living in. And that's when Byron Janis loaned me \$40,000, which was a huge amount at that time - and he wasn't a rich man at all. But with the money, I could afford the apartment, the furniture, and Yasha's salary, and I never had to worry again, because almost immediately, I had TV shows all the time, I was lecturing in universities for as much as £5,000 a time, and was getting book advances. I did a commercial for Japan. I remember getting \$40,000 from on show in Tokyo. So I could quickly pay Byron back with interest, and before long, I actually had two apartments on the 12th and 17th floor of the same block.'

'I lived in one alone, and Shipi and the girls lived in the other downstairs. I had two girls working for me, Melanie and another young American girl called Trina who was, I can't say a groupie, but she was a fan and she used to write me letters, and one day I called her and asked her whether she would like to work for me, just answering letters and things of that nature and then she just joined us. Melanie was also deeply in love with me, and she wanted my child because she believed that a child from me would be a space child. She really went on that. I believed it too.'

Shipi's still slightly ill-defined role in the Geller entourage had become clearer by now. 'Shipi was my personal manager, but also my confidante' Uri says. 'There were

certain things that I couldn't tell Yasha, but I could tell Shipi. I told Shipi everything. We used to discuss how the group at Andrija's really wanted to turn me into a guru, a messiah. And Shipi always knew me better than even Hannah when it came to my powers, and to the business side. My problem with Shipi was that he obviously knew I was involved with his sister, but she was in Israel most of the time, and we weren't properly going out yet. She used to come and see me. I was too busy to go and see her in Israel, so I would just send her tickets all the time, and then there were times when she would stay for months with me, and then go back. So as regards women I was seeing, I had to tell Shipi, look, you'd better be on my side because this is me, this is what I am. There are certain times when I felt he wanted to protect Hannah, but of course, by the end of the 1970s, it happened automatically anyway, Hannah finally came over and we were together for good. What was great with Hannah was that she understood that I was out to make it myself and I had no time for other people really, and that it was all a totally egocentric fame and fortune type of thing at that time. It was important because I learned so much from it, and I had to go through that phase in order to develop further. But I was always aware that it was quite difficult at times for Shipi.'

Uri's new life in New York, on the corner of East 57th Street and First Avenue, was every inch the celebrity whirl. At a party given by Elton John, he met John Lennon, and the two immediately clicked. They arranged to meet again in the coffee shop of the Sherry Netherland Hotel on Fifth Avenue, and made this a regular date. They talked about paranormal, spiritual matters, Sai Baba, a popular Indian guru Lennon was interested in (and who performs a number of Geller-like effects for

pilgrims who come to see him from around the world) and UFOs. A few weeks before Lennon was killed, and the last time Uri and he met, he told Uri an amazing story.

He explained how he had been lying in bed in the Dakota Building where he lived, when he saw an exceptionally bright light seeping under the bedroom door. He told Uri he thought someone had aimed up at his apartment an outdoor floodlight of the kind used at film premieres. He got out of bed, he told Uri, opened the door and saw the source of the light was actually in the next room. Lennon then felt something touching the back of his knees and his elbows and urging him into the light. 'I asked him obviously whether he was drunk or on drugs,' Uri relates, 'but he insisted he was perfectly awake and aware and had not taken any drugs. In the middle of the light, he said, he saw a hand stretched out. He described it as, "a typical alien hand," like the ones you see on science fiction books, and it held something. He knew intuitively that the hand wanted to put something into his, and he held his hand out. Then everything turned off, the light went off, the room was clear. And he found himself standing there with this egg-shaped, brass-type lump of metal in his hand. And then John put his hand in his pocket and said, "Uri, I want you to have this." It was as if he felt he was going to be killed and wanted someone to have this thing who would know where it came from and would believe him and look after it.'

Uri keeps the smooth metal object today in the hands of a 16th Century Tibetan brass statue in his house. The little piece of metal is certainly quite unusual, rather heavier than its size suggests, but for those anxious to know what it is, Uri is unhelpful. 'I purposely don't want to have it analysed because I don't want to be disappointed. I don't want someone to come up with a story that it's made in Korea. I'd rather leave it mystical,' he says.

Another seventies icon who became friendly with Uri was Muhammed Ali. He was brought to see Ali at his training camp in New Jersey by a journalist. 'Ali was fascinated by what I did. I learned that he loved magic and does all kinds of sleight of hand tricks. He realised that what he was seeing was real. Then we became friendlier when he was interested in me teaching him how to concentrate and look in the eyes of opponents in the ring to help overcome them.'

Another still of Uri's exotic menagerie of friends at the time was the surrealist painter, Salvador Dali - an amusing choice of companion, some will feel, as Dali too has become regarded by many as a charlatan in the art world. 'I was introduced to Dali by this incredibly beautiful woman called Amanda, who it was rumoured used to be a man, and who was hanging out with Dali at the time. She wrote a book in which she mentioned me. I used to meet Dali at the hotel where he used to stay in New York. I showed him my doodles and paintings, and I think he was quite impressed. He wanted to know why I drew the doodles the way I did. He actually inspired me to try some surrealist painting myself, which I still sometimes do. Then I stayed with him in Barcelona for a couple of days. It was while I was there that I bent a fork in his hand and he was so shocked that he took himself off to a room in his house and locked himself in there for hours. He finally emerged holding this beautiful rock crystal sphere - I don't know whether he made it or found it somewhere. Dali gave me several sculptures, which I have all over the house now.' The sphere the painter gave him now takes pride of place as the hood mascot of Geller's old Cadillac, his car back in his Manhattan days. The car, which he now keeps in his garage outside Reading, is covered in welded-on bent cutlery (not paranormally bent, but made specially for the car). Uri once planned to drive the car to Baghdad on somewhat surrealist peace mission to Saddam Hussein, but was discouraged from doing so by wiser heads who

suggested that the dictator might know a little about his connections with the Mossad and fail to take the gesture in the spirit in which it was intended.

At the very beginning of all this social mountaineering, which being in Manhattan naturally dwarfed his previous assault on the Eurotrash of Munich, came the single most dramatic and, if we are to believe him, traumatic psychic event of Uri's life. Whether it really happened - and there are certainly good witnesses to something extremely peculiar having occurred - or whether Uri felt the need to contrive the whole thing, or even if he invented it groundlessly, the following is revealing, some will feel, of the tension between himself and Puharich.

On a freezing November early Friday evening in 1973, on a trip back from SRI, Uri went round to Byron and Maria Janis's apartment. There, he had made a couple of phone calls, one to Puharich in Ossining, which is 36 miles north of New York City. Then Byron Janis recalls that he said he had to go down to Bloomingdales to buy something, and had some things to do. 'He was very excited,' Byron says. 'I assumed it was to do with a woman. He liked women very much.' At 5.30, Maria Janis says, referring to notes she made later that night, Uri left. Bloomingdales was eight minutes' walk away, Uri's apartment, two minutes in the opposite direction. The round trip to the store, into the camera department (where he bought a pair of binoculars, as it happened) and home would have taken 20 minutes. Maria knows this because she has paced the journey out repeatedly in an effort to explain what then happened, because Uri never reached home. Twenty five minutes after he left, the phone went. Maria took it, and Byron happened to pick up the extension. It was

Andrija Puharich, calling from Ossining. 'There's someone here who wants to talk to you,' Puharich said gravely.

'Then,' Byron says, 'Uri came on the line. He said, "Maria, I'm here." He was obviously in shock. She said, "Uri, what are you doing there." I thought it was a joke. But it was obvious that somehow, Uri had got to Ossining, and it was clear that he was a complete wreck. He went through the story on the phone. he said as he got to the canopy in front of his building, "I felt this sudden pull backwards and up." Those were his exact words. "And the next thing I knew, I was falling through the screen door in Ossining." It seemed unlikely to the Janises that this could have been a stunt, even if they thought Uri capable of pulling one, or had the remotest need to impress them, of all people, who were devoted converts. Yet they considered everything; a train or car getaway to Ossining was impossible in 25 minutes, especially on a busy winter Friday rush hour. Even a split second-timed helicopter operation would have taken longer, because of the time it would have taken to get to a helipad in central Manhattan..

Puharich, in an unpublished account found by his children after his death, confirmed the Janises' chronology. With his meticulous detail-noting style, he recounted having been watching the six o'clock TV news while lying on his bed - the main story was of Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy between Israel and Egypt - and felt a shudder with a simultaneous crash from, as it turned out, a conservatory he used in the summer as a dining room. He also heard the faint voice of Uri calling his name. when he found Uri, he appeared to have crashed through the roof of the conservatory, rather than the screen door. He had landed on a round wooden coffee table, whose glass top

had shattered. He was unhurt, but clearly confused and dazed. And he was carrying a Bloomingdales' bag.

Uri's own account has necessarily to come last on the 'he would say that, wouldn't he' principle, yet is compelling in itself. The sidewalk wasn't crowded at the time,' he says. 'The first recollection I have is of me looking at the pavement and seeing myself a few inches above it. The next thing I can remember is like someone had cut out a split second piece of my life, like a piece of film taken out with scissors. I remember the lifting off, then I recollect there being a screen in front of me, and putting my arms up to protect my face, as my instinct told me that I was about to crush something. Then my palms were crashing through the screen, but ever so gently, then there was falling on the round table, and a glass on the table slipping from under my hands, and breaking on the floor, and me falling on the table, and onto the floor. I didn't know where I was. I didn't recognise it as Andrija's porch at first, until I got my bearings. I had had many breakfasts there on that porch in summer.'

Geller, like the Janises and Puharich, spent many months trying to puzzle out what happened that evening. 'It's beyond my understanding and comprehension to believe that my body was disintegrated molecule by molecule and reconstructed itself 36 miles out of New York. My explanation is that people, animals and objects can fall into a time-warp, like a whirlpool of time, space and matter. You are sucked into some kind of void, a vacuum, an emptiness that could move you in space and time and replant you elsewhere. I could have gone back into the past or the future, I have no doubt. Hundreds of people go missing each year without a trace, and no-one knows where they disappear to. Probably what is happening is that there are velocities and

speeds in the universe and in our bodies and in our minds, and most likely, everything is happening right now. The past is now, the present is now and the future is now, and somehow we are just stuck in it. It is like a mixture of speeds we don't understand, so what happened to me is that because my mind, my subconscious, or even deeper than that, was so concerned about my relationship with Andrija and how I wanted to tear away from him at that time, that it just pushed me into this thing and I teleported there. Perhaps it was him wanting me to be back there. There were times, you know, when I began to doubt whether Andrija was human.'

If Uri was a hoaxer and practical joker, much of what had been happening at SRI, at the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory and at the same time in New York suggested he was also a workaholic practical joker. Yasha Katz, another man who needed no convincing of Uri's powers by now, was also experiencing a string of strange incidents at this turbulent time. Katz is an interesting case, because he, like Arthur Ellison in England but on a far greater scale, became disaffected with Geller - over money in Katz's case - went back to Israel, and proceeded to give James Randi, who later come over to make an Italian TV film about Geller, a damning interview, in which he claimed he had colluded in his former employer's cheating.

He could have stayed with the story, but instead, Katz now says he was paid by the TV team to lie, and went along with Randi to make mischief - although after being convinced by Randi that Geller had duped him. 'I was a little bit disappointed with Uri because he asked me to leave him, and after so many years of devotion I felt that I deserved a little bit more,' he explains at his Johannesburg office, where, aged 65, he

now sells life assurance. ‘Randi came and he talked me into believing that all of it was a hoax, but I regretted it at the same time as doing it. I lowered myself to the minimum and made myself very, very small. Because when I’ve thought about it, and I still do think about it, it is very easy to show all the things that Uri does by sleight of hand at a show, but we all *lived* together, and we saw things that happen without him having control. When you put one and one together, it’s obvious that something was happening.’

‘One Sunday morning in our apartment in New York, a whole series of things happened in quick succession,’ Katz says. ‘I went to get a newspaper, and when I came back, I saw my plant holder, which was a very, very heavy glass thing, which one person could not lift. in front of the elevator door. I thought maybe Uri played a joke on me, and I went into the apartment and he wasn’t in. He was in the other apartment, so I phoned him, and he came down said he didn’t do anything. We both had to lift it and put it back in my bedroom, and as we came out from the bedroom, the lamp that was in the lounge started rattling and moving, I had a little - which I still have - marble frog in my bedroom, and all of a sudden, it fell through the wall from my bedroom into the main room. It actually went through the wall. I saw it do so. Then a chair that was in the lounge turned around and fell in front of us, and Uri started not so much panicking, but he was a little concerned. He said, “Yasha, I have to write this down, can you get me a Coke. And I went into the fridge, and as we opened it, a pencil came out of the can.’

‘Another time, we went to a gala opening on Broadway called Galactica - it flopped. We were sitting there, and Shipi, myself and another Israeli friend of ours were next to Uri. I noticed that there was no arm between our two chairs, and Uri didn’t feel

very comfortable, so I put my jacket down, and he put his arm on it. We went out and it was pouring with rain and our car was parked in a garage. While I got it, they went into a telephone booth to keep out of the rain. On the way to collect the car, I saw something floating in the air - floating, not falling. It slowly dropped down. I picked it up and I saw it was the arm of the theatre chair. I still have it. The funny thing was that, although it landed in a puddle, it was completely dry.'

In another complicated case Katz details, a large round film reel box - it had contained Zev Pressman's SRI movie on Uri - apparently teleported from Zurich, where Katz had left it, to New York, where Uri was getting furious about not having it to hand. 'We heard a boom,' Katz says, 'and looked behind us and saw the box appearing from the ceiling and falling into our lounge. We phoned the guy I left it with in Switzerland straight away and asked him where this box was, and he said it's in the cupboard. So we asked him to go and have a look, and he did, and came back and said it's not there.'

'When Randi came to Israel to convince me to repudiate Uri, he stayed for hours and he was quite persuasive,' Katz concludes. 'But I think it was only greed on my part. And then, I only got something like 500 dollars for this interview, and I was very, very sorry. Later we were reconciled, and we became friends again and I am strongly behind him. Whatever he thought of me, it took a big man to forgive something like that, and he did. Then, in 1994, I had cancer of the colon and had to go for an operation. Uri obviously didn't know about it, but one day my secretary phoned me just as I was going to the hospital, and said Uri Geller phoned you at half past eight. . He hadn't phoned me for at least a year. My wife spoke to him and he said

he just felt that something was wrong. I think he phoned about 10 times to wish me well

In secret, back in the late 1970s, Uri had been suffering his own health problems, but in his case, nobody other than he knew a thing about them. It all started, he says, with a call from the impresario Robert Stigwood. ‘Robert is a multi-millionaire. He was the manager of the Bee Gees, he did *Evita*, *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Saturday Night Fever*. He first read about me in *Time*, when they did their negative story on me. He had a burn on his finger, and he saw my picture, placed his finger on my face, and it went. He called me out of the blue over to his apartment overlooking Central Park. He said, “Uri, I want your story,” and offered a quarter of a million pounds to sign me on a deal. So he bought the rights to make a major motion picture based on my life. But then one day he said to me, “You know, Uri, I want you to lose weight if you are going to be in the film.” Now I was chubby, because I loved eating, and I thought about this and said I am not going to give up food. What I will do is when I eat, I’ll just vomit it.’

‘It was as if I had invented bulimia. I had no idea it already existed. And I didn’t know that it would mean me losing minerals. So it was a great way for me to continue indulging in the excess of wealth. I was getting rid of guilt, stress, anxiety - and getting myself looking good. I vomited everywhere. When a plane landed, I used to stay on in the first class compartment until everyone got off, and then I would take the sick bag out. I collected sick bags from all the airlines. The stewardesses didn’t see what I was doing, but at one point, I was asked by a male steward and I said that I collect airline symbols. To tell someone that I collect vomit bags would have been

crazy. These bags were solely for use in cars, so when I ate lot of food and we had to drive back home or wherever, I used to sit alone in the back of the limousine, pull out the bag and force myself to vomit in the back of the car. I always managed to do it somehow without anyone noticing. I was really killing myself.'

'I hid it from everyone, It was private.' Uri recounts. 'It is hard for me to tell you in words how I camouflaged it, how I hid it, the manoeuvres that I used to do, the showers that I turned on, the taps that I let water run in the bath from, the toilets I'd flush, bidets I'd sprinkle, tissues stuff under the doors. Of course, it was taboo. Compulsion is an understatement, it was an addiction, a total addiction. Hannah noticed I was getting thin, but she thought it was because I was running around the reservoir in Central Park five times. That was my excuse. I'd say I exercise a lot, and I did. I ran three hours a day. I was already obsessed by money and on an ego trip where I wanted everything. Now I could walk into a restaurant and order ten desserts and devour everything and still look nice and trim thanks to my excusing myself to go to the toilet, sticking my finger down my throat and vomiting.'

Uri saw a doctor because his bulimia was accompanied by panic attacks, during which he thought his heart was about to explode. The self-created secrecy about the problem also meant he felt 'the loneliest person in the world'. Uri did not explain the bulimia, so the doctor said there was nothing wrong with him apart from being too thin, and prescribed Valium for the panic attacks. For the year that the bulimia was at its peak, the tablets became his best friend.

It was in Israel more than in the States that people noticed his thinness. ‘They used to say, “How thin you are, you’re a skeleton, what happened to you?” I used to say, “Oh I’m exercising, I couldn’t be fitter.” I didn’t see the Auschwitz figure staring back at me from the mirror. I saw someone really good looking, thin. Scales were another obsession of mine. In the morning, I would get up and be on the scale; after breakfast, I would get on the scale, before I went to sleep, I would check. I used to measure the glasses of water I drank, just to check how many pounds they would add to my weight. And I wrote all these weights down - with shoes, without shoes, with clothes, without clothes. I was so satisfied when my weight was low.’

‘When I realised that I would kill myself at the end of this then I had to stop it. I was being driven back to my apartment from somewhere in the Cadillac, the one I have the spoons on now. I was in the back, and I opened the door, but was so weak I couldn’t get myself out of the car. I had to grab the roof and pull myself out. I was losing protein, I was losing fats, I was losing energy. And I remember that I was walking very slowly towards the apartment and I said, “Wait a minute,” and it all flashed in a few seconds in my mind. I said to myself, “OK, Uri, if you don’t stop this you’ll be dead. Now is the time to stop it.” And in the middle of the street, in the middle of the day, right under my canopy, where that weird teleportation had happened, I shouted “ONE, TWO, THREE, STOP!”. People looked at me. But who cares? I got into the house, said hello to the doorman, went into the elevator, pressed 12D, got out in the apartment and never vomited again I just stopped.’

‘After that, I gradually went back to my ordinary weight and even today I imagine I weigh what I was when I was 19 or 20. But I don’t even know what that is - I don’t

get on scales any more. The funny thing was that Robert Stigwood kept paying me lots of money and made me a very wealthy man, but he got busy with his other big movies and never made that film. The rights reverted back to me and I was quite happy. I still speak to him. There's nothing not to be friendly with him about; on the contrary I have to thank him for putting me on a firm financial footing. My bulimia wasn't his fault at all - it was my obsessive personality, I guess. It was vanity, and the obsession that no-one tells me what to do; it was not wanting to lose the power of being able to create phenomena around me. And the physical weakness didn't seem to affect my powers.

It was in the midst of his year of living skeletally that Geller set off on another odd episode in his life - a period of over a year between 1976 and early 1978 living in Mexico City as a sort of psychic court pet of Carmen Romano de Lopez Portillo, known as Muncy, and the glamorous wife of the country's president, Jose Lopez Portillo. Geller had been brought down to Mexico originally by Lopez Portillo's predecessor, Luis Echeverria and immediately felt an affinity with the place. Echeverria had a hunch that Uri Geller could help Mexico locate oil reserves it knew it had, and was anxious to exploit. It was Echeverria's immediate successor, Lopez Portillo, who put Echeverria's hunch to the test after he became president in January 1977.

Geller's dowsing abilities, which were to be his financial mainstay from his mid-thirties onwards, had been discovered in England by the chairman of the British mining company, Rio Tinto Zinc, Sir Val Duncan, who met him at a party in London and suggested that bending spoons might not always be the best way for him to make

use of his psychic abilities. Duncan, took him down to his villa in Majorca on the RTZ company jet, and taught him his surprising knowledge - surprising for a man who had been an ADC to Montgomery during the war, and was now a director of BP and the Bank of England - of dowsing, the ancient art of psychically seeking out hidden precious substances. Moshe Dayan had got Geller to do the same kind of thing for him, seeking out buried antiquities - illegally under Israeli law, but Dayan was Defence Minister at the time, so Geller got away with it.

He did well when Sir Val, who seemed to regard Geller as the son he never had, tested him in Majorca, and his new patron tried unsuccessfully to get the RTZ board to employ Geller as an official dowser. Anglo-Vaal, a South African mining company, as reported by *Newsweek*, had some success with Geller locating coal deposits in Zimbabwe, but generally, large companies, as Geller later discovered when his dowsing sideline overtook his entertainment business, tend not to want their board and stockholders to know they are using psychic help, He tends, therefore, to be employed today by smaller oil and mineral companies, who hire him under conditions of great secrecy, palming him the odd million dollars in petty cash. They certainly seem to be happy with what they get; as Uri told me while he was making coffee once at his Thames-side mansion, with its acres of grounds and electronic gates. I was pressing for details of who uses his dowsing services. 'I'd love to be able to tell you,' he said, 'Even though only one of the oil companies is a household name, and then only a very small one. But I don't want to blow my living away, because total non-disclosure is part of my contract in every case. But let me put it this way, this house alone costs £140,000 a year to run, which is quite a lot from taxed income. We travel by helicopter to most places, we live quite well, we give a lot to various charities, but

I've hardly done any paid entertaining for years. So you have to ask yourself where my wealth comes from. If I were a drug baron, that might be the answer, but you probably gather that drugs and crime aren't quite my thing. So you may draw the conclusion that someone, somewhere is paying me for legitimate work, on which I happily pay full British taxes. The price is usually \$1m, payable in advance, whether the search is successful or not. So I make a living.'

In Mexico in 1976, with a foreign debt nightmare growing daily, they were less fastidious than in the developed world about such things as employing a psychic to find oil, and when President Lopez Portillo invited Geller to Los Pinos, the Mexican White House, he brought along the director-general of *Pemex*, the state oil company, a man, later jailed for corruption, called Serrano. Geller was put through an informal test, in which he was to search Los Pinos for a hidden liqueur glass of olive oil. He located it in a flower pot, which Serrano had rather cleverly buried the glass in, so that the oil was by now part of a lump of greasy dirt. The gathered Mexican elite was delighted, and soon Geller was in a *Pemex* helicopter with two geologists, doing a similar test. He did not receive any feedback, other than to be told by Serrano that his dowsing had been 'very precise'. Geller believes the Mexicans located oil at his suggested site.

He did not get paid in money for this work, but instead received the munificent patronage of Muncy, who saw to it that Uri Geller became Mexico's number one citizen, whisked around Mexico City with armed outriders, given all the best seats in the best restaurants, and photographed by the press daily with the first lady. Uri insists, and he is not one to deny such things, that he was not sleeping with the wife of

the Mexican president, and the rather grey, ageing Lopez Portillo does seem to have been very trusting of a handsome 30 year-old who had once seriously considered being a gigolo as a career. The president presented him with a priceless gold and silver-plated Colt semi-automatic engraved with a Mexican emblem. He was given a card entitling him to free first class travel anywhere in the world on Aeromexico, and another identifying him as an Agent of the National Treasury, and thus able to carry the gun, should he so wish, on his free flights - a hint, perhaps, that even as a Mexican presidential favourite, you couldn't be too careful. He was also given full Mexican citizenship for life, with naturalisation certificate number 00001, signed by the president. (Shipi was made naturalised Mexican number 00002). Uri and Shipi were also presented with lifetime Mexican passports, on which they still travel, Uri under his official name in Mexico, Uri Geller-Freud.

Even from down Mexico way, Uri was able to continue making social inroads in the States, specifically into politics. At a dinner at the American Embassy for Henry Kissinger and the wife of the US President-elect, Rosalynn Carter, Geller wowed Mrs. Carter by bending a silver spoon in her hand. He then found himself, or more correctly, manoeuvred himself, next to Kissinger, and promised to read his mind. He recalls Kissinger recoiling, looking worried and pleading, 'No, no. I don't want you to read my mind. I know too many secrets.' Uri said he merely wanted to do his telepathy with drawings party piece, which unfortunately, according to Uri, went so well that Kissinger asked sharply, 'What else did you get from my mind?' Uri replied, 'I'd better not talk about that here,' as a joke, and Kissinger became quite agitated, causing an awkward silence for a few seconds, until Uri explained he'd been kidding. Kissinger nevertheless ended the encounter looking thoughtful, Uri says.

Kissinger may have appeared to be ambushed by Geller, but it appears now that the entire scenario had, in fact, been orchestrated by an agent of the CIA at its Mexico City Station. Whatever the agency officially thought of Uri Geller by 1977, this agent, known as Mike, obviously thought he was close enough to the Los Pinos regime - yet at the same time provenly loyal to the USA - to be of use again. Mexico represented a major security problem to the US. Far more than Cuba, it was a huge KGB spying station. Not only was Geller obviously an intimate of the Lopez Portillo circle, which meant he might be able to help influence the Mexicans to reduce to Soviet presence in their country; he was also a little concerned about his and Shipi's visa arrangements back in the States. Mike worked out that Uri would very likely be happy to help out Uncle Sam if Uncle Sam helped out Uri. And another thing; he may not have been representing CIA policy exactly, but Mike was seriously interested in the possibilities of psychic spying, and of Uri doing a little work from the outside looking in at the KGB's building in Mexico City. All in all, he seems to have concluded, Uri Geller was a useful asset to the CIA. Not only that, but Mike was fascinated by the fact that the Jimmy Carter, who was due to move into the White House in January, appeared to be a fan of the paranormal. Could Geller be used to eat away at those surrounding Carter and help bring about funding for an official paranormal programme at the CIA? Mike thought and hoped so, and it was he, Geller says, who asked him to get alongside Kissinger and Mrs Carter at that Mexico City reception - to which Uri's friendship with Muncy had, of course, been an easy *open sesame*.

Thus began Uri's brief career as a spy, technically, in fact, a double agent. Under Mike's direction, he snooped into the business of KGB case officers, their local

agents and arrangements. It was Mike who introduced the question of whether Uri could stop a man's heart, with special reference to Yuri Andropov, then head of the KGB.

'I was used,' Geller says, 'to erase floppy discs on Aeromexico flights when KGB agents were flying with diplomatic pouches to the west. I did that a few times, because the agents went back home via Aeromexico to Paris, and then from Paris, took Aeroflot to Russia. I would sit there and concentrate on these pouches. I must have been successful, I guess, because they CIA guys kept asking me for more and more. I told them about drop outs and drop ins in the Russian Embassy, and they also took me out to the desert to test if I could move a drone, a spy model aeroplane, with the power of my mind. I managed to do that too. I just loved it because there were by now two agents in charge of me, and it was so James Bond-y.'

Mike had now decided, Uri says, to try to get Uri right into the Oval Office, to establish a direct line of communication over his pet psychic spies project with President Carter. Rosalynn was highly receptive, Kissinger had apparently been quite impressed. Mike promised to get Uri into the White House for Carter's inauguration in January. He wanted Uri while there to beam a psychic message into the President's brain to give funds to a paranormal programme.

It may all sound like an indeterminate mixture of a maverick, anonymous CIA field agent's fantasy mixed with Uri Geller's famously over-the-top imaginative capacity, which had been both his making and breaking since he was Achad Ha'am school in

Tel Aviv aged six - but for one thing. When, on January 20th 1977, Jimmy Carter was inaugurated as the 39th President of the United States, Uri Geller was right there, at the White House. Rosalynn Carter apparently said, 'Jimmy, this is Uri Geller, you remember, the young Israeli I told you so much about.' Uri beamed his psychic message at the President, while shaking his hand, in his nervousness, harder than he had meant to. The President, Uri says, winced slightly, and asked, 'Are you going to solve the energy crisis for us?' Uri says he cannot remember what he answered to this unexpected question.

Seven years later, a report in the *New York Times*, claimed that Carter in 1977 ordered a high level review of Soviet psychic research, and called Uri Geller in for a meeting in the White House to discuss what the Americans could do in response. Uri, again never normally reticent, still refuses 'to confirm or deny' the *Times* report. I am confident, however, that a half hour meeting with the President happened exactly as described by the newspaper.

Uri and Shipi's sojourn with the presidential lifestyle down in Mexico, however, came to an abrupt halt. Uri's social progress around Mexico City with Muncy set tongues wagging, not just among the Mexican elite, but as far away as in Fleet Street, London, where in February 1978, the *Daily Express* gossip column ran a tiny piece headlined, 'Bending the rules for Uri.', suggesting that observers in Mexico City were speculating that Uri's 'warm friendship' with the president's wife was thought to be on the point of precipitating a Mexican Watergate, and talking of the pair 'behaving intimately' at a shared holiday in Cancun.

The text of the gossip snippet was Telexed to Lopez Portillo by some brave soul in the Mexican Embassy in London in time for him to read over breakfast. The president's son, Pepito was on the phone to Uri within minutes to say his father was in a rage about the *Express* piece, and advising Uri and Shipi to 'Get out of Mexico - quickly.' They were on a plane to New York - first class Aeromexico, of course - by mid morning.

Chapter 16 / The Magicians

'The fact that I can paint a picture like Picasso doesn't mean that I mean that I am Picasso, or that I could originate something which has the value of a Picasso.' (James Randi, in interview, April 1998)

Events which I shall call paranormal, although I would still be happy to accept a banal, rational explanation for any or all of them, continued to occur as the research proceeded on this book. These singularly un-dramatic, un-frightening, micro happenings, starting with the strange goings-on I outlined in Chapter 4, were quite new to me; although I had been aware at various times in my life of a clustering of odd minor co-incidences, and had even read up a little Jung and Arthur Koestler on the subject of co-incidence, I would not have classed myself in any way a co-incidence junkie, or someone who collected suspect paranormal events as if they were

stamps. Apart from one occasion in 1972, when my elder brother knocked over a wine glass, which then broke in a most unusual way, at what turned out to be the precise minute our father died quite unexpectedly in hospital, I would be hard pressed to think of anything I had ever witnessed which hinted at the supernatural.

But now, since meeting Uri Geller regularly, I was experiencing them on average on something like a monthly basis. They seemed to follow a couple of vague patterns; one of these was that the events never occurred when I was expecting them. It was no use even letting the thought cross my mind that I was working with the world's most famous paranormalist, hence everything should be going haywire. All our machinery functioned normally, our cutlery at home remained stubbornly straight at all times, precisely no odd co-incidences occurred. Then, just when it was furthest from my mind, some tiny thing would happen of a Geller-esque nature. Frequently, I noted with interest, this would be when my belief in Uri's powers had taken a dip, which often happened after I had met a magician or was reading the works of Randi, or when my son David (whose interest in Geller had sparked the whole project) underwent a lull in his, often as a result of seeing some skilled magician on TV. This tendency reinforced for me my growing central belief that the Geller effect involves a subtle interplay between him (or merely the thought of him), our own subconscious and the material world - and possibly, *just* possibly, some peripheral 'outside force' of the type Uri is convinced is behind it all.

Another pattern I came to expect, if the paradox of expecting the unexpected can be permitted, was that people's reactions to the peculiar little happenings when I described them varied wildly. Something I thought was astonishing would leave

others cold; a little oddity I regarded barely worthy of mention would cause friends and colleagues to gasp. My sceptical journalist office mate and research assistant on this book, Gabrielle Morris, would be a particular acid test, often laughing at me when I was amazed by something, but then taken aback herself by another happening I only mentioned as a joke. I guess that shows nothing more than it takes a variety of abnormality to satisfy everyone that there might be another dimension or two of some kind 'out there'.

One Sunday morning, on the road out to Uri's house, I passed an old Peugeot 404, and remarked to myself that it must have been years, decades, since I had seen one, how common they used to be in France, and how they must have all rusted away, because you never saw an old one, either here or there. Half an hour later, as we were walking along the Thames, Uri happened to mention the first luxury car he owned in Israel, and what a bizarre choice it had been - a Peugeot 404, of all things, as beloved once of middle-aged French farmers.

Another Sunday, I had met the whole Geller family in London, and they were giving me a lift home. I had invited them in for a coffee. As Shipi, who always drives the family, was searching for a parking space for their people carrier, Uri asked me, 'Do you have a Labrador dog?' We were all laughing about something, so I felt my pockets and said, 'Not on me, no,' (I always liked testing Uri's humour, which was sometimes razor sharp, and other times drowned out by his intensity) Then I explained that we lived in a fifth floor apartment, so we couldn't but that, anyway, we preferred cats, if we had an animal, a dog would be unlikely. When we arrived a couple of minutes later, my eight year-old daughter, Ellie, answered the door. She was

wearing a T-shirt I had never seen before, with a large photo of a Labrador dog on the front of it.

One morning in March 1998, I was in the Geller conservatory when I happened to mention that I was thinking of replacing my ageing Tandy microcassette recorder with a MiniDisc machine, having seen that they could record four hours of speech in perfect quality without changing disc. Uri jumped over to a pile of things behind me and extracted from it a new Sony MiniDisc he had just bought and was impressed by. The Tandy machine was on a table behind me as we were admiring the Sony. When I turned back to the table, I noticed that a part of the metal casing of the Tandy had warped most oddly, and looked as if it had tried to peel itself off. I had never seen anything quite like it. The next day, the motor on the machine failed. The impression almost that the machine had gone into a childish tantrum at the idea of being replaced by a MiniDisc, unaware, in that dumb way tape recorders have, that I had already decided to stick to microcassettes for a while yet. It started working again after another day. However, I never quite trusted its reliability again. A few days later, I happened to pass the same branch of Radio Shack on Market Street, San Francisco, where I had bought the recorder five years earlier, and on impulse (I admit there was some trivial superstition working here) I went in and bought a replacement machine. An hour later, when I opened the box, I found a similar, but smaller warp in the new recorder's casing.

One Saturday in our local high street, I went into an opticians to get replacement lenses for my son, David's sunglasses, the frames of which were made of nitinol, Eldon Byrd's 'memory metal' which was now commercially available in unbreakable spectacle frames. You can sit on nitinol frames, twist them, or even bend the arms over double, and they will spring back to their precise shape. The optician was

looking up the price of new lenses, as I was saying to David that I had to hurry as I was going over to Uri and was late. As I mentioned this, one of the arms of the glasses snapped in two between my fingers - a sheer break in metal which was previously so tough you could tie a knot in it. You still can - in the unbroken arm. The time of the break, incidentally, was 11.11 in the morning - a number Uri believes is so powerful (as do many New Agey people), that he has incorporated it in one of his phone numbers.

In June 1998, Uri came to see me in my office, which is round the corner from our flat, for the first time. He sat on Gabrielle's chair. After he left, the electric clock, which has hung above the chair for some five years, stopped working. After fiddling with it for a bit, and trying new batteries, we threw it away. When I got home, Sue, my wife, who did not know Uri had been over, showed me something odd which had happened during the afternoon - exactly when Uri had been at the office. She had been replacing a light bulb, but when she took the new one out of the packet, its entire metal base was warped over at a 30 degree angle. A co-incidence, I am sure. For 30 years, she or I have changed lightbulbs, and the first bent one crops up the day Uri Geller passes by ... Gabrielle bought a replacement office clock a couple of days later. It fell off the wall and broke as she hung it up, something she found more remarkable, to my surprise, than the original one stopping dead.

A few days later, I was trying to e-mail Leon Jaroff, the retired *Time* writer in Long Island who had done Uri so much damage in 1973, and given James Randi his big break. My CompuServe software went into spasm, and the e-mail simply would not go. I had to re-boot the computer twice before it was sent. As it went, my Psion Series 5 palmtop computer also had a minor fit for the first time in its life, and needed

resetting. As I was doing that, I was hit at my office desk by a waft of some sweet smell so strong that my head went back and I winced slightly. What *was* that? In seconds I recognised it as the characteristic incense the Gellers often use at their house,

I went over to the Gellers another Saturday morning to take a photo of the whole family. A couple of photographers had warned me to take an extra camera if I went there, as he had stopped theirs working. I was fairly dismissive of this. I checked out my Minolta as I arrived. It was fine, as ever. When Uri appeared, and I tried to use it, it was completely dead. When he held his hands over it, it worked long enough to take a few shots, then died for good. While I had been waiting for the family to get ready, I sat in the kitchen reading something that interested me in a supplement of *The Guardian*. I made a mental note to buy a copy of my own later in the day. After I had taken the photo and had coffee with the family, I drove home. On the back seat of the car when I reached home, was the *Guardian* supplement. I had not bought the paper.

When I went to interview Randi in Fort Lauderdale, I confess - with apologies to Randi - that I played a little stunt, except it did not quite come off as I planned. As I was driving up the freeway from Miami airport, to which I had flown in from Houston, I called Uri 3,500 miles away on my cellular phone. I told him I was about to go into Randi's office, and why didn't he try to make something really strange happen right in front of Randi's eyes? Uri sounded a little sheepish, as if I was asking a little too much of him; and perhaps I should have known by now that if you are expecting something odd to happen in this paranormal business - it can be relied upon not to. When I got to Randi's, I moved two of the pack of heavy spoons I had brought with me from England from my luggage into my shoulder bag. I obviously wanted to

see the great man's spoon bending skills. I checked the spoons, which were brand new, in tissue, with their price labels on them. They were in good order. During the interview, to my fully expected disappointment, absolutely nothing odd happened. When I got the spoons out, I frowned; one of them already had a little distortion in the middle of the handle, a ripple. Randi saw it and said, 'That's faulty from the manufacturing process, you get a lot like that,' and rushed on to do his (quite impressive) stuff with the other. I found myself almost hustled into agreeing with him; what was I *talking* about, I wondered later? I had looked at it with great care in the car just before to check that it was perfect.

After the interview, Randi had to go, but two of the pleasant young boys in his office - a college student and a local schoolboy - asked if I wanted to go for something to eat. I thanked them, but had a long drive ahead of me. It was already 7 pm, and I had to drive to Sarasota, on the other side of Florida, for a story I was doing for *Time*. I realised it was a little late now to phone home, as it was midnight there, and forgot that it had now been two or three days since I had spoken to the family. Still, they had my cellular number, so could always reach me in emergency. I took the wrong route, and the drive took much longer than expected, six or seven hours across endless country roads at night; what I did not realise was that for some reason, the cellular didn't work in the backwoods of central Florida, so while I was still driving, at home, early on a Sunday morning, they were trying to reach me and becoming increasingly frantic that I was lying in a ditch being eaten by alligators. I got to bed at 2 am, knowing I would almost certainly now sleep through until lunchtime the next day.

At 8 am, however, I awoke with a violent start. I was furious, knowing, with the Florida sun streaming into the hotel room, that I would not get back to sleep. I decided to phone the airline, to see if last night's driving marathon could be avoided tonight, when I had to get back to Miami for a flight to New York. After five minutes on the phone, I felt the urgent need to call home. I still wasn't quite sure how long it had been since we had spoken. I dialled the number, to be answered by my elder daughter sounding shocked. 'How the Hell did you know?' she shouted. I could hear there was uproar at home. It turned out that the family had been trying to track me down by phoning every Marriott Courtyard - the hotels I usually use - in Florida, to no effect, and were panicking. Then they had the idea of calling Uri; he confirmed that I had called him the previous evening, so was certainly alive then. He told them to wait; he would wake me up. Uri then concentrated hard for a few minutes. Over in Florida, I woke up with that annoying start. If I had not called the airline first, I would have been on the phone home within 30 seconds of Uri's psychic wake-up call.

Was I going mad? I don't think so. Was I reading more into things than they deserved? Very possibly; Dr. Graham Wagstaff, the psychologist at Liverpool University, had experienced the apparently inexplicable, spontaneous healing of his Ford Anglia without it changing his life or his belief system. It was a matter of urgency that I get to see some conjurers. Assuming for the moment that Uri was not in fact a sort of double agent conjuror - a rather large assumption some people will feel - a few regular stage magicians would surely talk some sense into me.

If, that is, I could get them to talk straight. Although I never had the magician gene myself, and had no desire even as a boy to amaze people by trickery - in fact,

magicians rather got on my nerves - I have come to recognise that they have a problem. Their ethic of never revealing their tricks is very necessary if they are to remain entertaining. The truth behind most tricks is not even intriguing - it is just very dull; it really is all done with mirrors, wires and misdirection - focusing your attention on one thing when you ought to be looking at another. They also need to create a mystique around them, while, as rationalists, denying the existence of such things as mystique. Magicians tend to fall, consequently, into a mode of permanent deception. To maintain their livelihood, they are obliged to talk in riddles; this is frustrating enough when trying to get a simple answer from them. But additionally, as with compulsive liars, we have no way of knowing when a magician is telling the truth. A fine example of the confusion they thrive on - and you can't really blame them - was in 1998 when Fox TV produced a show called *The Masked Magician*, purporting to be a disaffected conjuror's revelations of how big magic tricks were achieved. When Sky TV showed the first of the *Masked Magician* shows in Britain, a group of young Magic Circle activists apparently tried to jam the satellite signal electronically in part of north London as a protest. Yet the word among magicians in the States is that the shows were a double bluff, revelatory enough to satisfy the TV people, but harmless to magic because they gave false explanations for the tricks.

Yet since Randi, and Houdini before him, had staked out the debunking of psychic claims as a kind of holy mission for magicians, in which the need to save mankind from deception was deemed more important than the protection of professional turf, I assumed I would get full co-operation from magicians in an honest attempt to explain Uri Geller one way or another. But things did not work out that way. Some magicians simply maintained that spoon bending and thought reading were trivial tricks not

worthy of any explanation other than the pat ‘he does it when you’re not looking’ Others, who claimed to ‘know’, would not show me how Geller does it since they were making their own living imitating him. Others still would hint, as far as one could tell, that there *might* be something to Geller after all, because they too had paranormal powers. A few came - or seemed to come - right out and said that Uri Geller was something way beyond magic and was truly paranormal.

The first magician I contacted was Ian Rowland, a London illusionist closely involved with the sceptical world, and specialising in replicating Geller effects, which he often does for students and companies, as well as on TV, as a way of promoting the sceptical view. Ian refused after a lengthy e-mail correspondence to see me, ostensibly because I would not pay him for interviewing him. I suspect, however, that the underlying reason was more fundamental. After all, in the time he took e-mailing me, I could have interviewed him twice over. ‘Sorry,’ he wrote early on, ‘but as I’ve studied Geller closely and continuously for the past 25 years, we will have to agree to differ about the value you place on my potential contribution to your book.’ Ian seemed to be one of those people who weigh every word in a rather tiresome manner, less to clarify than to obfuscate. His Website carries a prime example, for me, of this exasperating trait. ‘How to walk on water,’ announces one section. When you click on it, intrigued that he might be giving away an illusion as a free sample, you are led to a request from him to e-mail his Website address to three other people you think might find it interesting. ‘It’s a big favour to ask, but if you do it, you’ll walk on water in my eyes,’ he writes. Very droll, I’m sure.

David Berglas was another matter, and far more effective than Ian Rowland at deflecting me from my growing belief in Uri. After I went to Berglas's home in Cockfosters, north London one wet Sunday afternoon, I have to confess I nearly threw in the towel as far as believing Geller was concerned, as he was the first informed person I came across to challenge my original premise - that a spoon bent in front of me without Uri Geller touching it. That I and my children had been deluded was an extremely unsettling suggestion from one of the greatest illusionists (although now retired) in the world.

David, president of the Magic Circle, has a complex connection with Geller. He was originally an enemy, who was present taking notes in the audience on the Dimbleby Talk-In, and later gave Randi the idea for his debunking book on Geller while the two were in a London taxi going to Fleet Street to explain to journalists how they were being fooled. He was a founder member of the British sceptics' organisation, but later left it because of its narrow-mindedness, which he found 'unintelligent', and became a dear friend of Geller. At the age of 72, he is not a convert to belief in the paranormal, yet is an advocate of the view among some magicians that a part of what they do actually *does* defy rational explanation.

It sometimes seemed as we spoke that the only difference between Berglas and Geller was semantic; what Uri calls psychic, David calls intuition. 'Some things in my professional career happened that I don't know how they happened,' he explained. 'Something would work because of extreme luck, or you'd make a lucky guess, but again and again and again. It's perfectly possible for a psychic to be a magician and a magician to be a bit psychic. I'm not a sceptic. I have an open mind, and like to

investigate things. Having been part of CSICOP, I now regard sceptics as scoffers, who are ignorant about magic'

'My definitive statement about Uri is this. If the man is a genuine psychic, has paranormal abilities, can bend metal by his mind, can duplicate drawing that you're only thinking of, can make seeds sprout, stop and start a watch, can do all the other things that he claims, then he's a world phenomenon, because he's the only person who can do it, and must be respected. In my lifetime, nobody else has ever achieved such international fame and incredible respect. If on the other hand, he's a charlatan, a cheat, a conman, a magician, a trickster, a crook, whatever you want to call him, and he's achieved that level of notoriety, you must respect him. Whichever way you look at him, he's a phenomenon. Even magicians haven't pinpointed what he does. The public are demanding, and he's done it consistently everywhere in the world. You can't get away with doing something badly and get such acclaim.

But David was not prepared to go so far as endorsing Uri. 'I'm afraid I don't accept your description of what you saw,' he said of my first Geller experience. 'But I know what *could* have happened or *might* have happened. As a magician, people who say, "I'm not going to miss this because I'm not going to take my eyes off it," are fine. That's what I want. That's how I can fool scientists, because I know how they think. Sleight of hand, the hand is quicker than the eye, this is all fallacy. It's not the answer. Yes, some tricks work that way, and most magicians are interested just in moves of the hand, but there's far more to it in the psychological area.'

‘But,’ I protested, ‘Our spoon *bent*. It flexed like a little monster arching its back. Three of us saw it, and Uri wasn’t touching it. Surely we are agreed that to bend a piece of metal, pressure has to be applied to it, aren’t we?’ David Berglas smiled patiently. ‘No,’ he said quietly. ‘There is no one answer to that.’

‘I can hear how confusing this is to you,’ David said as I was leaving. ‘If I had a video of what happened, I might be able to tell you more. But when we did tests with some of the mini-Gellers, the child metal benders, back in the early 1970s, we got Customs men, trained in close observation, to watch, not one of whom detected anything untoward. They would *swear* they had seen the spoon bend, but I saw as a magician that they had cheated. They were very, very adept, and what made it more complicated was that a lot of them genuinely thought they *weren’t* cheating. They were self deluded. Just bear one thing in mind. Uri, whom I love very dearly as a friend, never does anything in front of me.’

What was David Berglas getting at? What was he suggesting when he denied that you have to use physical pressure to bend metal? And children who believed they were metal benders but weren’t? Or was much of what he said just patter, a part of this tiring magician thing of never answering a question properly? David was billed in his heyday ‘The International Man of Mystery’ Throughout our interview, he refused even to tell me where he was born, insisting it was the kind of detail which destroyed mystique. Perhaps he really is a psychic; it’s an ‘accusation’ frequently made of both Berglas and Randi. Both, for the record, deny it strenuously. And perhaps even his powers of observation aren’t 100 per cent perfect, after all. I couldn’t help noticing that one of his recollections of the Dimbleby Talk-In show, albeit from 25 years ago,

and about something the writer, Lyall Watson said rather than a point of magic, was quite incorrect when checked out on a tape of the show. A minor point, but fair, I think, to make in the circumstances.

Even his parting shot, that Uri had never so much as bent a spoon for him, was slightly puzzling, because the only man in the world who knows David Berglas's secrets, his son Marvin, has seen Uri bend spoons several times. Marvin Berglas is an accomplished close-up magician, who designs tricks for his own company, Marvin's Magic, the largest of its kind in the world, with shops in Hamley's and Harrods in London, FAO Schwartz and Caesar's Palace in the States. 'I watch for any sleight of hand big time, I really do, ' Marvin said when I called him, 'I have also seen it and studied tapes and watched it on TV. But you tend to get so wrapped up in him, in his personality, that you are wanting it to happen, and you are willing it to happen. It's a nice little trick, yes. It looks absolutely perfect the way it bends. I also find it fascinating that as he gets older, he seems to get exhausted by doing it. Is he a magician? I am not sceptical, but I veer on the side that there is logic behind most of these things. Personally, I think he is a mixture of things. Let's say if he is a magician, he has got to be one of the best, if not the best, in the world.'

My meeting with Randi, in contrast to the one with David Berglas, was not very disturbing. Randi's position is so well known, of course, that seeing him was almost a formality. In person, he is not a bad old buzzard, but the bitterness and heavy irony have worn a hole in what I suspect is a keen sense of humour. He seemed to me very defensive, which is an unusual way for someone who is on the attack to be. 'Do I call

you Randi or James?', I asked as we sat down. 'You can call me God if you want,' he replied.' I established that he preferred just Randi.

My first question was whether he thought spoon bending was a good trick. 'God what a dumb thing,' Randi replied. 'I think it is a pretty stupid trick and I am talking about the tricky way, not the divine way that Mr. Geller does it. I have to be very careful about that. He says he does it with divine help from the planet Hoova and the great flying saucer in the air. I am very careful to say that if that's the way he does it, then OK, he can have his fantasy if he wants. I would simply say that when I first saw it, I thought it was parlour trick. It's the kind of thing you do at boy scout camp, but it didn't amount to much more than that. But you must admit that if the simplest sleight of hand trick were actually real, then we would have to rewrite the laws of science as we know them.'

When Randi bent the spoon for me - the one which had not bafflingly become kinked between my rented car and his office - he was all hands. His hands move at extraordinary speed, like a blur of light, even in ordinary conversation. He brought the spoon close to my face, then moved it back again, playing havoc with my focus and perception. The phrase used repeatedly by Uri's ex manager in Israel, Miki Peled, about seeing hundreds of people over the years who were 'like Uri Geller' but none who was as good as Geller came to me. Randi took me into a video viewing room to show me a clip of tape from a BBC Noel Edmonds show, in which he claims Geller cheats when filmed secretly. With Randi and his two assistants sneering at the screen and shouting excitedly, 'There's the move, look at it!' I could have been persuaded; but it would be a hair's breadth judgement. And even if he had cheated, I see no

logical reason, by my own Maradona test (Maradona cheated too, but could also play football legally) why that meant *ergo* Uri Geller could only cheat.

As regards my experience with Uri and the spoon, he said, 'I have no idea what you saw.' At this one of the boys, a striking lad of 15 in with pony tail and wearing a tuxedo over a black T-shirt, offered the wisdom of his experience. 'What happens is every time you repeat the story, it becomes fresher in your memory that the actual event. We are only capable of seeing so much and observing so many things.' This reminded Randi of a story of a national TV presenter, whom he begged me not to name, who believed - wrongly, he says - that Geller bent a key in her hand. 'She really, honestly believes that he never touched the key, because she has told the story again and again.'

Why, I wondered, are scientists wrong when they support Geller but right when they support Randi? 'They are not right or wrong, they are not sufficiently informed,' he said. 'When they become sufficiently informed, I have had a number of scientists turn right around in mid-stream. Look at John Taylor in England. He is a perfect example of a well-informed, educated man with a good mind, but who made the assumption that he is so intelligent and such a good observer that what he saw doesn't have any explanation. But it did have an explanation, one about which he didn't know.'

Would anything ever persuade Randi that there was something in even the most routine parapsychology? 'All I say is that the parapsychologists haven't come up with anything to this point. As soon as they do, I'll accept it, no question of it and gladly, as long there is good evidence.' The older of Randi's assistants, another

handsome, bright fellow, chipped in with a critique of quantum theory, a branch of science which Randi had already said sounded too much like metaphysics for his liking. The young man followed his own confident view by stating: ‘There is no room for the phenomenon of parapsychology.’

Why, I asked Randi, should we believe you at all if you are, as you say, a charlatan? ‘It is quite possible that I am fooling you,’ he admitted. ‘I don't really have two hats. I am an entertainer. Basically, I use trickery in order to produce the effect of a genuine wizard, someone who has magical powers, and that's what the David Copperfields and the Paul Daniels and all the people over the world who actually do this sort of thing accomplish. But I do highly resent people who are doing tricks and are claiming that they are the real thing. That is a prostitution of my art. If David Copperfield were to come on stage and say to his audience that he is really going to cut this girl in two with a saw, you would be reasonably offended that he would ask you to believe some stupid statement like that.’

So did James Randi feel he owed Uri Geller just a little bit, for giving him his vocation in life? ‘No, I am not thankful for it,’ Randi said. ‘I was fighting little spiritualists and people who were selling dowsing rods in New York. Then along came Geller, and suddenly we had a major figure here that was fooling scientists in a very big think tank. But we're not concerned with Geller now. He is a fait accompli. We have done with him long ago. And if anyone is still going to believe it in spite of the evidence we produced, then there is no hope for them.’ (It was odd that Randi was saying that he was not concerned with Geller any more, yet two months earlier, had

written him, after 14 years without contact, a 13-page letter detailing 30 reasons why he regards him as a fraud.)

Randi's assertion that there is 'no hope' for anyone who believes in Geller will amuse a young American magician called David Blaine. Blaine is a new cult in America, where he has astonished primetime TV audiences with his brand of what he calls street magic. In many ways, Blaine is a new Uri Geller. his trademark effect, an uncanny levitation, in which he stands anywhere - but he prefers to do it in a public spot like a city sidewalk - and appears to rise slowly a few inches above the ground before sinking back again. Already, just as happened with Uri, a storm of controversy has blown up among magicians over Blaine. Many of his tricks are routine magic shop products, but performed with terrific style. His levitation, however, has them foxed. Anguished debates are unfolding on the Internet over how he does it, and several rival videos claiming to be able to teach people to replicate the effect are available. Some say Blaine cannot do his levitation without specially adapted Converse sneakers. Others say ABC TV, when they launched him with a lengthy David Blaine special in 1998, enhanced their video to make the levitations look better. Some magicians are even suggesting that Blaine may be 'the real thing' and genuinely be able to levitate. Blaine has a highly mystical outlook, and does nothing to deny that he is truly paranormal. None of the furore, just as with Uri again, has done Blaine any harm. In his early twenties, a laid-back New Yorker, extremely handsome, and a must-have at private celebrity parties, he gets more famous by the day. His best friend is Leonardo di Caprio - and his ultimate hero is Uri Geller.

Uri had never heard of David Blaine until one day in the spring of 1998, when Blaine phoned out of the blue from New York to ask if he could meet him. Uri said of course, and Blaine flew over, checked himself into Brown's Hotel and took a train out to Reading within 24 hours. I went over to meet the young American too, and was greeted by a fascinating scene. In the Geller kitchen, Uri was trying to teach Blaine to move a compass by the power of his mind. So intently were the two men concentrating that I am not sure either realised I was there. Uri was indicating a point in the centre of his forehead and explaining passionately, with his fist clenched for emphasis, how the power come from HERE, HERE. Blaine had not yet managed to do it. (The centre of the forehead, site of the pineal gland, is thought by many serious students of the paranormal to be the 'third eye', where our sixth sense is located.) Was this all a contrivance for my benefit? Or was Uri Geller, illusionist, trying to pull the wool over the eyes of David Blaine, illusionist? I can't say for sure, but I had the strong feeling it was a powerful demonstration of Uri's deep belief in the genuineness of what he does.

All the Geller family, plus the crew of a Virgin helicopter, which Uri had hired to take Blaine for a spin around the locale, had seen Blaine's levitation and said it was extraordinary. Blaine took me outside into the garden for a chat away from Uri. 'I wanna tell you something,' he said, his voice slow and deep. 'I've seen some things here today. Uri bent a spoon for me. The first time he did it, you know, I thought there must be a trick. The second time, I was stunned, completely, completely stunned and amazed. It just bent in my hand. I've never seen anything like it. It takes a lot to impress me. Uri Geller is for real and anyone who doesn't recognise that is either deluding himself, or is a very sad person.' Was Blaine a paranormal or a regular

magician, I asked him? He parried the question skilfully, but made it fairly clear that he was a hybrid, like so many suspect Geller is. Blaine then asked me if I had ever seen levitation. I had not, and he said, 'OK, let's do it.' He then turned his back towards me, and shuffled his feet. I was interested to see him from the side, so moved round to get a different viewing angle. He turned round again so his back was to me, but he was clearly not happy. Perhaps I seemed negative. 'You know, I've done this so many times today, I don't think I can get it right now,' he said. 'Let's go in and eat.' So I never saw a levitation, other than on the ABC TV film, which he brought over with him, and we all watched over dinner. It was certainly amazing to watch - but I noticed he did always have his back to the people he levitated for. I left later, laughing to myself. I remembered David Berglas, saying how Uri had never done anything in front of him. Was I now becoming the sort of person psychics would never perform for because I knew too well what to look for?

Another magician I ran into in my investigation was a 28 year-old in Israel called Guy Bavli. The eager, pony-tailed Bavli, son of an ace Israeli fighter pilot who now flies for El Al, is Israel's current answer to Uri Geller. As I explained in Chapter 6, Bavli is unstinting in his praise of Geller, although he has never seen him other than on TV. Bavli thanks Uri for his inspiration in his books and videos on spoon bending, but resolutely rejects the paranormal. or the idea of the mind having any unknown power. 'Uri Geller is a genius, but that doesn't mean he's supernatural,' Bavli explained, and went on to set out brilliantly a view I found expressed a lot in Israel. 'I think he's the most gifted magician in the world. But I don't actually care what he really is,' he said. 'In fact, I don't understand why people like you are so obsessed with whether he's "real" or not. If he's managed to convince the world for 30 years.

that he's a psychic, for me, that's a major part of the illusion. In fact it's *better* than being psychic. If you were born psychic, then so what. But what Geller has done is a fabulous achievement.'

Bavli recommended that I see as soon as possible the man who taught him spoon bending, Roni Schachnaey, the Grand President of The Israeli Society for Promoting the Art of Magic. Schachnaey was an early thorn in Uri Geller's side, a prominent, and, as his title indicates, respected, magician in Israel, where he still performs regularly as The Great Ronaldo. Two years older than Geller, Schachnaey performs, as well as high class conjuring, a mentalist act in which he replicates the whole of Geller's repertoire, from spoon bending to ESP.

A little incongruously for a leading magician in Israel, The Great Ronaldo is based in Scarborough, in North Yorkshire, where he owns a fish and chip shop with two holiday flats above it, and lives in a cosy former council house with his English wife. In Britain, too, he performs a Geller-style act which is part entertainment, part a pointed, non-paranormal dig at Geller; in Britain, he is known as Ronaldo Wiseman, complete with mystical paraphernalia and pony tail. The obvious contrast between Schachnaey's level of material success and Uri Geller's could not be greater, and yet he was not at all bitter or resentful when I went to see him. He seems a happy man. Although he had clashed with Geller in the past in Israel, his main concern was to be reconciled with him - something I brought about by the simple process of giving Uri Roni's phone number. They were chatting away like old friends and arranging to meet up before my train had got back to London.

And yet Roni Schachnaey is still a fairly bitter opponent of Geller, claiming he is ‘more skilled at manipulating the truth’ than as a performer. Schachnaey has a complicated relationship with both psychicism and scepticism. He insists there is no such thing as being psychic, yet admits that mentalism is *almost* psychic, or at least ‘intuitive’; then again, his CompuServe address is ‘Psychicservices’, and while on stage in his Ronaldo Wiseman guise, he claims psychic powers, though leaves the audience in no doubt by the end that in reality, he is only pretending to be.

At the same time as claiming to be a non-psychic psychic (or is it a psychic non-psychic? There could be no better illustration of the magicians’ mission to confuse) Schachnaey is friendly with the professional sceptics, but then again regards James Randi as someone ‘who would be a nothing if it weren’t for Uri Geller’, and accuses the sceptics of being consumed with unnecessary venom. He regards Geller, meanwhile, as ‘a great man’, thanks him for giving him his livelihood, and regrets only Geller’s belief in the supernatural, which is where he diverges from him. ‘Uri should be the rabbi of the mentalists, the successor to the great Houdini, not wasting his time doing silly things with football teams like he does today,’ Schachnaey says.

Leaving Roni Schachnaey and speeding home across the Yorkshire countryside, the old post-Berglas whirl crept back into my feelings about Uri. Schachnaey’s spoon bending, I can attest, is the best I had seen of the ‘like Uri Geller’ clones, and far better than Randi’s. Could Schachnaey be right after all? Maybe Uri Geller *is* a magician who simply fell among ‘spiritual’ people and began to believe in himself. Yet while Schachnaey derides Geller’s stage work as naive, and says he can’t see why people regard his younger countryman even as charismatic, one can’t help being reminded of the central paradox here. Uri Geller is a world famous multi millionaire,

while Roni Schachnaey is not; if both are, as Roni insists, merely illusionists, it would appear that Geller is the better insofar, at the very least, as he has illusioned more people out of their cash.

It has to be said that the Randi premise that magicians universally hate Geller and consider him a fraud may be faulty from the start. Geller has certainly gathered some impressive (and apparently straight-talking) testimonials from some among the profession. In 1974, he agreed to be examined by Leo Leslie, a leading mentalist and magician in Denmark. ‘The judgement of all of us who were present for what occurred was one of total endorsement of Geller's paranormal claims,’ Leslie wrote. ‘While Geller was in Copenhagen, I did not catch him in any deceptions. Therefore I have to continue to rely on my own judgement and experience as a mentalist; they tell me that Uri Geller is genuine.’ Arthur Zorka, a member of the Society of American Magicians, is on record as saying: ‘There is no way, based on my knowledge as a magician, that any method of trickery could have been used to produce the effects under the conditions to which Geller was subjected.’ Ben Robinson, a coming name in magic in New York and on TV in the US has said: ‘His psychic gifts are genuine and he provides a model for humanity at large to aspire to.’ Geller has several similar endorsements. The Rev. Roger Crosthwaite an Anglo-Catholic priest in Worthing, Sussex, a former British Close-up Magician of the Year and an author of several books on magic said on BBC Radio 5 in 1993, after meeting Geller and seeing him perform in front of him: ‘I know a little bit about sleight of hand, I know a little bit about the methods of revealing what a person is thinking, through body language and through other means, and I would challenge any magician to duplicate [Geller’s] effect with me.’

There is another possible answer to the baffling connection between Uri Geller and the traditional conjuring world, too, a hypothesis hinted at by Berglas and David Blaine, regarded as heresy by more bread-and-butter sleight-of-hand men - and which, incidentally, makes a slight nonsense of this book's title, *Uri Geller: Magician or Mystic?*. The theory is that 'magicians' and 'mystics' are not different species altogether, but are, in fact, different genera of the same species. It is a startling idea, which explains a great deal - about the suspicion that Uri is in possession of more conjuring skills than he cares to admit, and about the uncanny feeling that some of the great mentalists, and even straightforward conjurers, *do* seem to have something of the supernatural about them.

The idea is often mooted by out-and-out paranormalist writers like the excellent Colin Wilson and Lyall Watson, who have speculated that even men like Randi have *psi* abilities, but was also floated by a sceptic, Professor Truzzi, the Michigan sociologist, in a dazzling 1996 paper, *Reflections on the Sociology and Social Psychology of Conjurers and Their Relations with Psychological Research*. (Published in *Advances in Parapsychological Research* 8, by Stanley Krippner, McFarland & Co., 1997) Truzzi discovered that in private, magicians *do* believe in *psi* and ESP, but cover their belief up in public because they feel it is more respectable in a scientific age not to make any paranormal claims. He found a 1981 survey in California, at which 82 per cent of magicians at an assembly expressed a belief in ESP, and another in which members of the German Magic Circle were polled in 1980, and 72 per cent thought *psi* was probably real. Truzzi did his own private polling in 1979 among members of the Psychic Entertainers' Association - an international group dedicated to

the simulation of *psi* - the kind of act Roni Schachnaey and Ian Rowland do. Truzzi was surprised to find that 87 per cent of the members believed *psi* 'truly exists'. In 1993, Truzzi noted, the belief seemed to have declined, with only 47 per cent of PEA members saying they believed in ESP, 20 per cent unsure, and 33 per cent saying they did not.

What had happened between 1979 and 1993? Perhaps Randi's message had sunk in among a new generation of conjurors. But what was more likely, Truzzi thought, was that the apparent reduction in ESP belief was the result of a change in the membership of the association. By 1993, far more amateurs belonged than professional performers. It seemed that professional magicians, with their superior skills and experience, were more inclined to believe in ESP than amateurs.

Different people will reach different conclusions from that deduction. What I think it does suggest rather heavily is that magicians are anything but the unanimous, anti-paranormal, anti-Geller front of The Amazing Randi's imagination - and that the better and more successful they are, the more likely they are to acknowledge that Uri Geller really is something extra-ordinary.

If James Randi pulled off the brilliant feat of making common cause between conjuring, philosophical rationalism and science, Marcello Truzzi may be likened to a complicated road intersection, where scepticism meets occultism, and merges with magicianship. Randi's great achievement was to make magicianship respectable in a scientific age, when it still had the whiff of the top-hatted huckster about it. He was one of the founding fathers of CSICOP (The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal), which was a direct Geller spin-off. It is unlikely that there ever would have been a CSICOP without Randi, nor a Randi as we

now know him without Geller. Truzzi was originally pitching in there with Randi against Geller. Today, he opposes CSICOP.

Marcello Truzzi is one of the most learned men I have ever met, his book collection, kept in the basement of his house deep in the countryside outside Ann Arbor, rivalling many local libraries, with some 9,000 volumes on his specialities, conjuring, mentalism, scientific anomalies, scepticism and occultism - and Uri Geller.

Son of the greatest juggler of his generation, Truzzi's first love is magic. 'There are a lot of things in the magical community which border on real magic or real psychic phenomena,' Truzzi explained 'There are some things which are well understood like muscle reading, contact reading, being able sense movements in someone, in cold reading techniques. That's far in advance of the basic stuff that the mentalists all know. Things such as, if you're asked to choose one of five objects, people always go for the second from the left, if you're asked to think of a number between 1 and 50, two digits, both odd, most people will come up with 37; think of a vegetable, most will say carrot; a wild animal, 80 per cent go for a lion.'

Wonderful revelations for the uninitiated, but the principal question to ask of Truzzi was how he came to drop out of CSICOP and into a friendship with Geller - without ever having believed Geller was a real psychic, or even seen him bend a spoon? 'I was led to believe that Uri's motives could be nefarious, that he might start a religious cult. There were lots of rumours Randi and others were spreading about that he was bilking wealthy people, and all kinds of alleged backstage stuff, which I was inclined to think might be true at that time. But as time went on, I realised that Uri fitted the mould of a lot of mentalists in the past. I began to wonder about some of

my sceptical colleagues, and whether they were mis-estimating him. I didn't see the horror of what he was doing. As I saw it, mentalists have always fooled scientists. Mentalists are like that. Houdini escaped from prisons supposedly, when really there was collusion with the wardens.'

'As soon as I met Uri, here in Ann Arbor at a radio station, the first thing he said to me was, "I know you don't believe in me and what I do, but I don't see why your scepticism should prohibit our friendship." What else could I ask for? He wasn't asking for me to commit to him. And I have no reason not to think he's a decent human being. He's a performer. That's what he does. And anyway, hell, he might be real. I'm still hoping something's going on here. So I see no reason to be hostile to him. Over time I have found him to be a decent man, a very charitable person, a very caring, sincere person. And at the same time, I found that a lot of my fellow sceptics turned out to be pretty unscrupulous, and were as bad as the people they were criticising. In my opinion, most of the people in the sceptics' movement are scoffers, and I make a big distinction. They are like the atheists as opposed to the agnostics. As far as smoking gun is concerned, the closest they're going to get is the odd videotape, which are inconclusive. You couldn't get a jury to convict him as being guilty beyond reasonable doubt.

Parapsychology, Truzzi contends as a sociologist, is more tough-minded than many other academic fields, yet paradoxically, it remains a fringe subject.

'Parapsychologists really want to play the game by the proper statistical rules,' he expounds. 'They're very staid. They thought they could convince these sceptics but the sceptics keep raising the goalposts. It's ironic, because real psychic researchers are

very committed to doing real science, more than a lot of people in science are. Yet they get rejected, while we can be slipshod in psychology and sociology and economics and get away with it. We're not painted as the witchdoctors, but they are.'

Randi would have been less than delighted to know that I was going to see Truzzi a few days after him. But one man he was very keen for me to meet at home in England was Mike Hutchinson. Britain's leading sceptic and anti-Geller campaigner, as well as the UK representative of the CSICOP publishing offshoot, Prometheus Books.

Randi was right. I spent a fascinating couple of hours in Loughton, Essex with Hutchinson. He is an intellectual version of Forrest Gump's box of chocolates; you never what you're going to get. For one thing, although Hutchinson's hero is Houdini (who believed in reincarnation, premonitions and once claimed to have seen an apparition of his mother, but I let this pass) and has been Randi's friend for over 20 years, he professes not to be keen on magicians. 'Because I am basically honest, I am not good at conjuring because I don't like fooling people and telling lies to people,' he said. 'Sometimes magicians have a superior-than-thou attitude, and all this stuff about exposure of magic and its secrets is just silly.'

Hutchinson also has a clever line in lateral thinking, which I greatly admire. 'Geller getting on TV programmes talking about football and claiming he can help teams win is very funny, because in my opinion if he helps a team and really has psychic powers, that would be cheating. So when Geller says he is cheating, I don't think he is, but when he says he isn't cheating, I think he is.' Challenged on the point that for a Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, CSICOP

conducts remarkably few investigations - none, in fact - he had a smart response : ‘It’s the committee *for* the scientific investigation, meaning they’re in favour of investigation,’ he said.

What did he think of my growing contention that professional sceptics are merely the modern version of Flat Earthers? ‘I don’t think its a good suggestion,’ he said calmly. ‘Sceptics are often called closed-minded, but sceptics are more likely to change their minds than believers. What would convince somebody who is into astrology that astrology doesn't work? Nothing. What would convince a sceptic? A really good trial. It’s the same with Geller. Hardly anything would make a believer disbelieve in him. Even if he admitted tomorrow that he was a fake, there’d still be people who wouldn’t believe it.’

Would he ever be prepared to believe in *psi*, considering the success people like Prof Jahn at Princeton is now having? ‘I am almost prepared to say that now, although I don’t think that the evidence is absolutely 100% reputable. But even if there was something which was only noticeable through statistics, it still wouldn’t mean the psychic or the metal bender is able to do what they claim. It would be a very, very weak effect, which would be extremely interesting, but it would mean nothing to the man in the street.’

‘Did you know I caught Uri Geller bending a spoon physically?’ Hutchinson asked after showing me a clip from an early Oprah Winfrey show in Baltimore, *People Are Talking*, in which it does, indeed, look possible with right training (although by no

means conclusive) that the spoon bending Uri did was not quite on the level. Hutchinson claims to have spotted his ‘cheating’ incident at Olympia in London, at a charity Telethon. ‘While Geller was doing his bit on stage, I was actually showing some of the people in the front of the audience how to break a spoon in two,’ he recalls. ‘I saw him bend the spoon physically, and I looked underneath his hand to see that it was already bent, and said, “I think you’ve already bent that. You are hiding the bend with your fingers.” And he said, “Shame on you. This is for charity.” After that, when he offered to auction the spoon, nobody volunteered to pay for it, and somebody at the back of the audience said “I’ll give you £10, so he signed it and off he and Shipi went. As they left I introduced myself. He said, “Do you believe in God?” I said, “No”. He said, “Well fuck you,” and walked away.” I shouted after him, “Well you’re not God, Uri,” and that was that. I wrote it up the same day for sceptics’ magazine.’

So, thanks to Uri Geller, magic begat scepticism, scepticism begat CSICOP, and CSICOP begat Prometheus Books, Prometheus being the mythological bringer of light. These days, however, Prometheus sheds a pretty diffuse kind of light from its New York State headquarters and Essex outpost in Mike Hutchinson’s flat. Although Prometheus still claims a strictly rationalist ethic, rationalism has come to include libertarianism, and from there on, pretty much anything goes. Prometheus Books, rationalism’s brave riposte to Uri Geller and the forces of medieval darkness, has had to diversify, a demonstration, perhaps, of the ultimate truth of Randi’s assertion, which I earlier challenged, that the sceptical world is all done with Geller. Even Randi calls some of what Prometheus publishes today ‘awful stuff’ - so ‘awful’ that Mike Hutchinson recently felt obliged to ask the local Obscene Publications Squad to

adjudicate over one. It said it couldn't recommend the book, an avowedly anti-paedophilia work, but with some passages Hutchinson thought 'were a little bit too descriptive', be distributed in Britain.

One book on Prometheus's list is a British academic text on child abuse. *Children's Sexual Encounters With Adults*, republished in the States - with a bright red jacket on which the title is printed in bold black letters three quarters of an inch high, for the benefit, presumably, of short-sighted researchers into child sex. The book consists of hundreds of pages of detailed case histories of adults having sex with children. Others Prometheus texts have little claim to being academic. *Cannibalism: From Sacrifice to Survival*, *The Horseman: Obsessions of a Zoophile* [person with a sexual attraction to animals], *Whips and Kisses: Parting the Leather Curtain* (by Mistress Jacqueline), *The Breathless Orgasm: A Lovemap Biography of Asphyxiophilia*, *Death Dealer: The Memoirs of the SS Kommandant at Auschwitz ...* It is all some way from magicians' arguments over spoon bending.

Chapter 17 / Party Time

'Uri does not aspire to be an exclusionary icon - his is an enabling talent.' Sir David Frost.

David Berglas, before he retired, had a routine in his shows where he handed out metal bars as thick as a finger to members of the audience, and asked the strongest men to try and bend them, which of course they could not do. Berglas would then ask for a female volunteer, give her one of the metal bars, look straight at her, tell her not to think about anything, but that she's getting very strong and the bar is getting weaker. In almost every case, the bar would start bending, sometimes ending up in a fish shape. When Berglas handed it back to the audience, however, the men could never straighten the bar.

Berglas, of course, will not say how he achieved this, but there is strong evidence that he was actually engendering Geller-style metal bending power in ordinary people. Sir David Frost has described Geller as someone who is as interested being 'an

enabling talent' as in gathering glory for himself. Although in a small sense it is 'bad for business,' Uri does indeed believe that many more of us than just he have the power of mind to bend metal. And some astonishing research over the past 20 years in south California by a 59 year-old aeronautical and astronautical engineer called Jack Houck seems to indicate that virtually all of us can do it - and furthermore, that bending cutlery is far more than, as Randi calls it, a parlour trick. It is, argues Houck, a metaphor for the power of the mind to do everything from maximise creativity, to self-cure disease, to extract rusty bolts from machinery. And Houck is not just talking about concentrating hard to maximise strength. He believes the mind can be trained truly to interact with molecules of material. Which is why, although this chapter is not really about Uri Geller - it is also probably the most important in the book.

Jack Houck is about as different a personality from Uri Geller as it would be possible to imagine. Introverted, quietly-spoken and slight, he would not allow me even to photograph him. A graduate of Michigan State University, he taught aircraft structure there, before moving to work in the space industry. He is now a systems engineer for a company near his home in Huntington Beach, while his PhD wife, Jean, is a Dean of Education at Cal State University in Long Beach.

Houck hit upon his discoveries on metal bending via a roundabout route. In 1976, he became interested in Puthoff and Targ's remote viewing programme, read all their papers, and began to do his own research into the subject. One aspect of it in particular fascinated him. This was a strange time shift which occasionally cropped up in remote viewing experiments. Remote viewers would accurately, down to the last detail, describe a spot thousands of miles away, whose bare co-ordinates they had

been given. but would include a detail which only existed in the past, or even in some rare cases in the future. Jack began doing his own work, in parallel and co-operation with Targ and Puhoff. In one experiment Houck ran, a psychic remote viewer adequately described a randomly selected set of co-ordinates in the Caribbean, but with the alarming detail of a harrowing shipwreck, in which he sensed dozens of people dying. Houck discovered that such a passenger boat accident had indeed happened at this spot, but nine years earlier. He developed a theory that certain 'peak emotional events' (PEEs) could transcend the boundaries of the known dimensions, that, as he puts in it his own engineering terms, 'If you add an emotional vector to the space/time vectors, you have the start of the way things work.' As an extension of that idea, he wondered whether you could actually create a paranormal event by inducing a highly emotional state - a PEE - in someone. John Hasted in England had, after all, long since noted the way in which child spoon benders tended to be highly strung, and Uri Geller himself is not exactly lowly strung.

Jack Houck discussed his idea at the various university parapsychology departments where his gathering new interest was taking him, but it was not considered to be likely that it would work. So, knowing of Uri Geller's twin abilities to view remotely and bend metal, and assuming they were part of the same phenomenon, Houck invented what would become known as the PK (psychokinesis) Party. Working with a metallurgist he was friendly with at work, he gathered 21 people for a Monday evening party at his house. About half were proven remote viewers, half simply friends from his tennis club, invited to take part in an unspecified experiment. The surprised guests were each given either a fork or a spoon and told they were going to learn to bend them like Uri Geller simply by relaxing and having fun. It seemed a

ridiculous idea, but its very silliness seemed to do the trick. and the guests, who mostly knew one another, were all soon chatting and laughing as Houck had hoped they would. The metallurgist then gave them some instructions: they were all to ‘get a point of concentration in their head’, make it very intense and focused, and then ‘grab it and bring it down through your neck, down through your shoulder, through your arm, through your hand, and put it into the silverware at the point you intend to bend it.’ Then they were to command it to bend, release the command ... and let it happen.’

For some while, nothing at all happened. Then a 14 year-old boy, in full view of the circle of guests, had the head of his fork flop down by itself. Having seen this, almost everyone experienced, as Houck puts it, ‘an immediate belief system change’, and within minutes, cutlery was softening and flopping over in 19 out of the 21 guests’ hands. within a couple of hours, the plasticity of the forks and spoons seemed to exceed anything in Geller's experience. People were tying knots in the prongs of the forks, and rolling up spoon bowls as if they were leaves. At subsequent parties, of which Houck has now done over 300 of various sizes, involving more than 12,000 people, spontaneous bendings became relatively common, while on average, 85 per cent of guests achieved some level of near-effortless bending if they were allowed to use their hands. These manually assisted cases were not quite Geller-ism in action, but still astonished the people who suddenly seemed to develop the power to bend often quite heavy spoons and even half inch metal rods with ease. Seven and eight year-old children have been among those bending such ironware. People at the parties bend so much cutlery that they often don't take it all home. Houck showed me suitcases full of grotesquely distorted spoons and forks he can barely bring himself to throw out.

As an engineer, Houck naturally tried to work out what was happening, and developed a theory that the mind somehow manages to ‘dump’ energy into dislocations and flaws naturally occurring in metal when it is forged, and that this energy softens the metal as surely as heating it to eight hundred degrees. He even documented cases where metal was missing from spoons after they had bent. He says he borrowed from quantum theory in his theoretical thinking on the phenomenon, but was more inclined to look for straightforward engineering solutions. ‘The only thing I don’t know is how the mind dumps this energy into the dislocations. After that, it’s just engineering.’

He, and other researchers who have picked up on the PK party idea, have videoed hours of these wild metal bending parties - at which no alcohol is allowed, incidentally, as it seems to interfere with whatever process is occurring. ‘We’ve shown the tapes to sceptics,’ he says, ‘but they just say they won’t believe it unless we have got more tape from different angles. That’s how these people operate; nothing is ever enough. If you taped it successfully from different angles, they’d query the type of camera being used and so on for ever. Only recently, I had a stage magician at a party who went around doing his own spoon bending trick and just saying, “See,” to everyone. He seemed to think that because he knew a trick that looked the same, it was the same. He got so angry, he left.’

As befits his profession, Jack Houck is very much a practical man, who finds the idea of metal bending as a stand-alone phenomenon unacceptable. What, he wondered, is it *for*? ‘It’s about allowing yourself to apply your mind to goals, whether that goal is healing, or writing better, or fixing a dent in your car,’ he told me. ‘You

laugh, but I had a letter from a PK party guest in Georgia who claimed he got out a rusted-in bolt from his truck, a bolt on which he'd already broken tools, by commanding it to unscrew.'

People repeatedly tell Houck and other PK party enthusiasts that they feel empowered by seeing what they are able to do, and this is an idea which is catching on at the fringes of alternative medicine. In Colorado, where, admittedly, virtually everything from garbage collection to heavy engineering is done by someone adhering to New Age precepts, such mind-over-matter metaphors as wooden board breaking and Akido (but not - yet - spoon bending) are being taught to cancer patients as a way of encouraging them, alongside medical treatment, to overcome their illness.

But it is not only the 'alternative' world which started reading about and duplicating Jack Houck's pioneering PK parties in the 1980s. Up at SRI, Russell Targ, not the easiest man to please as he is both a laser physicist and a magician, was impressed by them. 'It was at a PK party, under quite good conditions, that I saw a person, someone I trust, sitting quietly with a teaspoon in her hand with the handle protruding and her eyes closed. in a meditative state until she screamed because the spoon came alive in her hand,' Targ says. 'It reminded her of holding a cricket. She opened her hand and the spoon bowl had bent through 180 degrees. Seeing somebody have the bowl of a spoon gracefully roll up into a gentle curve, as though it were fluid, something that is impossible to do by manual force, is quite impressive.'

Over in Washington DC, a US Army colonel named John B. Alexander, was quite fascinated by PK parties as a phenomenon of military potential as soon as he read

about them. Col. Alexander, who retired from the services in 1988, was originally a special services man. He commanded undercover military teams in Vietnam and Thailand, and later moved into military science, working as Director of the Advanced Systems Concepts Office, US Army Laboratory Command, then Chief of Advanced Human Research with INSCOM, the intelligence and security command. On retirement, he joined Los Alamos National Laboratory with a brief to develop the concept of Non Lethal Defence, which is now his passion. With his rare PhD in Thanatology - the study of death - he has strongly believed for a long while that inducing recoverable disease in an enemy's troops is preferable to blowing their bodies apart. He has written in this respect in several defence publications, and been written about in a wide range of newspapers, from *The Wall Street Journal* to *Scientific American*.

John Alexander, who now runs a privately funded science think-tank in Nevada, which looks, broadly speaking, at spooky stuff, is a charming but slightly eerie-looking man with amazing pale eyes. If had not virtually been living the X-Files for the past decade or more, he would probably be in it. With Jack Houck's help, in the early 1980s, he began teaching metal bending by the PK party method to American forces officer 'including some senior level people.'

'As far as Uri Geller is concerned,' Alexander told me when we met, 'I originally thought it could be a trick, but I dismissed that later. We even had magicians involved in looking at Geller. The idea of him relying on sleight of hand is nonsense. He is, of course, extremely gregarious and an extreme extrovert, and that worked against him,

although had he not been an extrovert, the chances are that nobody would have heard of him.’

‘The reason for teaching spoon bending was to show people that things could happen that they did not expect, and to emphasise the importance of that, particularly from an intelligence standpoint. It was important that they ensure that when they looked at unusual data of any kind, that they did not dismiss it just because they thought it couldn’t be true. The overall problem with the professionally sceptical class of people is that they are very scared. If *psi* is true, their world view is incorrect. I worked with an Army engineer once on a *psi*-related project, and he actually came out and said, “Don’t tell me something that says I have to relearn physics, because I do not want to hear it.” But most of the sceptics are not that honest. They won’t say I don’t want to hear it. They will just say it’s not true, therefore it isn’t. When all else fails, ignore the facts. Data that doesn’t fit is categorically rejected.’

‘We stressed to folks,’ Alexander explained, ‘that bending silverware is of very limited practical value. You can make mobiles and things like that, but as far as something to do it doesn’t make a lot of sense. What we did suggest was that it certainly impacts belief systems, and also that they could take and use similar kinds of energy for things like healing and other practical applications.’

How high up in the military world did word of the PK party plan spread, I wondered? ‘Well, I had the Deputy Director of the CIA at my house in Springfield, Virginia, for a PK party. But compared to potential war with the Soviet Union, it was noise, so, no, we didn’t have the President there.’

The most dramatic PK party John Alexander ran was at a military camp for a senior group of US army commanders from Intelligence, who had come in from around the world for a regular quarterly meeting. ‘We were using the Xerox training centre outside Washington,’ he recounts. ‘We had a session and there was a commotion over in one area. This guy, who was a science advisor at a civilian equivalent of a two and half star general, turned his head, and his fork dropped a full 90 degrees.

I didn’t see it, but the guy next to him did, and screamed, “Did you see that?” I said I suspected a trick, because there were a lot of people there who would have liked to see me fail, and I was waiting for them to say, “Ha ha, we did it, you don’t know what you are looking at.” So I was cautious, but by now, people were watching. And while we were all watching, the fork went back up, back down again, and finally went about half way and stopped. This is with all the generals and colonels watching, and the guy just put it down and said, “I wish that hadn’t happened.” It scared the crap out of him. Fortunately, we were sequestered, which means it was an isolated, live-in conference, and we had a shrink with us. But it took us a couple of days to put him together. His belief system was not prepared. He was based in Europe, so he went back to his station OK. What he did tell someone later was that he tried it once again at home by himself and it happened again, but by now, he was able to deal with it.’

Jack Houck has been tireless in his effort to spread his PK party. He is a man with a mission, although not a glory seeker; he seems to have been happy just to help the cause of parapsychology. Five years ago, he taught it to delegates at a convention of the American Board of Hypnotherapy. Among the participants in a large PK party there was a therapist called Gary Sinclair, who was in his forties and originally from

Maine. Sinclair had a special interest in the power of mind over matter. When he was 36, and 80 per cent incapacitated by multiple sclerosis and a lifetime lung condition, his doctor broke it to him gently that he soon would have to start using a wheelchair. So shocked was Sinclair by this, that he decided to heal himself by sheer willpower, and believes he did so. Five years later, the former restaurant manager was no longer taking medication for the MS, and had so recovered that he was winning ice skating championships. Whether it was mind power or spontaneous remission or both that cured him, he is certainly a remarkably youthful and fit 53 year-old today, and has re-invented himself as the ultimate south Californian therapist.

. The walls of the consulting room in his beautiful Solana Beach apartment, which is right on the Pacific north of San Diego, are covered with qualifications in an exotic pick n'mix of therapies. He is certified, among many other things, in Neuro Linguistic Programming, Ericksonian Hypnotherapy, Advanced Neurodynamics, Time Line Therapy, Past Life Therapy, Transpersonal Hypnotherapy, And Bridging Mind, Body and Spirit. He has gone on to combine all these into a therapy of his own invention, which he calls Cyberphysiology. 'I created it,' he told me, 'Because it incorporates all of the transpersonal works together, whether it is spirit releasement or wounded child or soul retrieval or past life regression or hypnotherapy or Neuro Linguistic Programming. I designed the therapy of therapies.'

Sinclair now has a waiting list of clients, many of them apparently celebrities, happy to pay \$1,500 for an intensive 'life clear out'. To his vast repertoire of therapies, Gary Sinclair, has recently, thanks to PK parties, added spoon bending as a metaphor for healing. And, he promises, you don't have to go to all the trouble of a party to learn to bend a spoon. He can teach on a one to one basis - and tutored me to

the first, most basic level of manually-assisted spoon bending in half an hour or less. After getting me to mangle a series of progressively bigger spoons as if they were made of Plasticine, he had me coil up the handle of a huge, heavy-gauge cooking spoon into a tight corkscrew that looked as if it had taken an hour on an engineer's bench to create. People back in England still gasp at the thing, try and unbend it - which they can't - and ask me how I did it. All I can answer is that I don't know, but it seemed effortless at the time, as if the spoon were made of rubber. The following, however, is a transcript of my tape of Gary's instructions to the first part of his spoon bending course, which may just work for some people even without his highly charismatic presence. I suggest readers use the instructions at first with a light teaspoon, and progress onwards through the cutlery drawer.

'First of all you have to find the energy of you on the inside. Where is your energy on the inside? How do you find the energy of you? Close your eyes, and in the process of closing your eyes, I want you to think of me walking up to you with an envelope. In this envelope is a letter, this letter tells you everything that you need to know about the rest of your life. All the questions that you wanted answered are inside this letter, and in addition to that, there is a winning ticket for the lottery for \$70m. I have to decide whether I am going to give you this letter or not. It's your letter. Is that true? Whoever wrote it absolutely wanted you to have it, because it explains all the answers to the rest of life, and then they added in this little gift of \$70m. I want you to notice what it feels like when you have this letter coming. OK? ... And then I want you to notice what it feels like when I stand in front of you and tear the letter up. Feel the feeling as I tear it into all these pieces. Now open your eyes. Notice that you are actually feeling something, you are feeling an energy. Where do you feel the feeling? Well that feeling, that's you, that energy is you. You must feel the energy that is you..

*Find the energy inside you. Once you have the ability to feel who you are, you can simply bring that energy into your hands. It is a fireball. Take the fireball and slowly move it with your hands. That energy will go wherever you pay attention. When you pick up an object like this and you intend it to bend, and you know that where you pay attention is where the energy goes, then the energy is going to go there ... focus between the fingers ... you **expect** it to bend make an agreement with the metal that it is going to bend ... now go!*

After I had bent a couple of small spoons, Sinclair told me: ‘You are now at the point where you know that it is going to bend. What you have to do next is see it bent ahead of time, and know that what you are doing is you are now getting that metal to bend ahead of time, as you see it in your mind, so that you know you are now transferring your energy to that metal, so that it will in fact bend.’ It was now that I bent the big spoon.

‘You can’t believe you did it,’ he explained, ‘But the reason that you did it was that at the time, you didn’t doubt that you could. You see, everyone else is still trying to make some scientific phenomenon out of it, but it isn’t a scientific phenomenon, it’s a fact. Once you believe you are capable doing it, from that point on, it’s possible.’

Chapter 18 / Meanwhile, Back in Israel ...

‘Whether Uri is the amazing phenomenon we tend to believe he is, or the greatest crook of all time, he deserves our admiration. Those grudging Israelis who won’t stand for any Israeli making good abroad can get as green as a sour grape. They’ve lost the battle against Uri once and for all.’ (Novelist Ephraim Kishon, writing in Ma’ariv.)

Uri does not know the date his father died, other than that it was around 1980. ‘I don’t even know the exact year,’ he says. ‘I try to totally erase it out of my brain. It is only when I have to light a candle that Hanna looks in the diary. I don’t want to know. It is totally erased. Another thing which still upsets me is that when I flew for his burial, we were all in the cemetery, and my father was all bundled up in the tallis [prayer shawl] and his wife, my stepmother wanted me to cry and I couldn’t. I was

almost embarrassed and ashamed that there were strangers around me weeping, and Uri, his own son wasn't. What it was that I really don't believe in funerals. That's why I never go to them, I knew that his soul was out there looking at me and saying I'm here, so tears didn't come to my eyes. Eva, my stepmother, probably never forgave me for that, though. She loves me very dearly and she spent some weeks here now. My father was her great love. One of my few regrets was that my father died before seeing my children.'

'But my father's death was also a huge shock to me,' Uri continues. I knew he had angina, I knew he was smoking, I knew he drank. I was running in Rome with Hanna in Villa Borghese, when my secretary called the hotel she said there's some bad news. I knew that my father was dead. I don't know whether that happened psychically, or just as every son or daughter would know it.'

'But for years, since I was about 16, in Cyprus, I had a recurring nightmare of walking into an apartment. The windows are open, overlooking the Mediterranean, and I walk into the next room, and also the windows are open to the Med, and I look on the floor and I see myself lying there, dead, and then I would wake up. When my father remarried, he rented a tiny little one-bedroomed apartment overlooking the Med opposite the Sheraton Hotel in Tel Aviv. I never connected it until the day he died, because he died exactly on the same spot as I dreamed I was lying overlooking the Mediterranean, with the windows open, the same tiles, the same colour, the same window frames. And that's when the nightmare stopped. I never dreamed about it again. I said to myself, why didn't I recognise it. I'd been to the apartment dozens of

times. It was only when he died and I went up there that I realised, my God, this is the place. I get goosebumps.'

Such flying visits, most under less sad circumstances, of course, were the way Uri kept up his link with Israel from the 1970s to the present day. It has been a brilliant way for him to ensure that, despite any unpleasantness that has happened at home in the past, he is still regarded overwhelmingly in Israel - even by people who consider him a fake - as a local boy made good. Only recently, the national telephone and communications company, Bezek, featured him in a big TV and newspaper advertising campaign - it was for an advanced phone that you only had to speak the number to dial, hence the 'psychic' theme. It is thus by skilfully spreading himself thinly, that he has managed to maintain affection and credibility for himself in the one place, one suspects, that it really matters for him. Friends in the US believe the Gellers were happiest there, and will return to live one day, but I would be surprised to find him anywhere but in Israel in old age.

There is, however, something of the return to the nest in every trip Uri makes back to Israel. When adults go to their parents' home, they get their soup just the way they like it, but their emotions also revert to an earlier model. Uri is, by all accounts, just that bit more bumptious - but vulnerable at the same time - the moment he steps off an El Al jet at Lod Airport. It's a familiarity thing. 'I think part of my success in Israel was that people saw some kind of saviour, a man with powers to save Israel from further war,' he told me once. 'Maybe I chose the wrong path by becoming part entertainer, part psychic part teacher, part science experiment. part communicator. Perhaps I should have gone into politics.'

There are inevitably a million stories about Uri Geller - Israel is a village, and everybody there has one Geller encounter to relate - but the two which follow, I feel, reveal a lot about the man as he matured. Both are from the 1980s, when Uri was approaching 40, had young children, and was in the transition between living in the States and in England. The first was told me in England, by Roni Schachnaey, his imitator and admirer, but one-time enemy, talking with the gloves off at his home in Yorkshire.

In 1980, Roni Schachnaey says, Geller came after several years' absence to do a show at the Mann Auditorium in Tel Aviv. 'I think it was a mistake, because the magicians were after his blood. I brought along 40 magicians to sit at the show, right at the front. I insisted that we behave properly; I would allow no disrespect for a fellow artist, but I thought the show was very poor, seventies stuff. It was like chewing gum, stretching everything out. Then, when he was bending the spoon, something extraordinary happened. Uri threw a spoon in to the aisle right next to me and said, "Even HE can't bend a spoon like I can." Now what has always puzzled me was, how did he know I was there. He had never met me, he didn't even know me. That incident to me was proof that he plants people in the audience.'

'So after the show, I was leaving, and his manager came across and said, "Uri Geller wants a word with you." I was taken into his dressing room, face to face after all these years of opposing him. He seemed very nervous. The first thing he said to me was. "You have very kind eyes." That took me by surprise. He then said he knew I didn't want to hurt him. I said, "Look, I know enough about you. I don't need to hurt

you. You're hurt enough.' But then he took me by the shoulder and took me into the bathroom. He wanted somewhere quiet where we could speak.'

'Then he said this,' the magician continues, 'And I promise that this is the gospel truth, told completely without venom. Uri said, "I'm going to tell you something I've not told anybody before. I swear on my mother's life I was lucky. You know, the thing with the oil. I really did get lucky and I made a lot of money. So now you know the truth, why not let me carry on working without disturbances?" Now for me, that was enough. I said, "Well, if you want to be one of us," and I had a little lapel badge for our association, which I took off and pinned on his shirt and told him, "You are one of us." As long as you wear this badge whenever you're up on stage, we won't trouble you. But he didn't, and it always made me laugh that he wrote later that I gave him a *medallion*, like it was an award, and he couldn't be sure whether I thought he was the greatest illusionist or a true psychic.'

The second of these snapshots of Uri as he was growing older is by Zvi Bentwich, an eminent professor of medicine at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Dr. Bentwich, a clinical immunologist, is one of the world's leading authorities on AIDS, and is based at the AIDS Centre at the Kaplan Hospital in Rehovot, which is affiliated to the University's Medical School - hence Dr. Bentwich's chair there - and the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. He was introduced to Uri as early as 1969 by his secretary, who happens to be Uri's old friend Leah Peleg, and because of this connection Bentwich had the distinction nearly 20 years later of being the last scientist anywhere to have conducted tests on Uri Geller. Uri had not been inside a laboratory for over a decade, and he has not done so since.

‘What I saw Uri Geller do in the laboratory,’ he attests, ‘Was a truly mind-blowing experience which cannot be overlooked, and should be made common knowledge once we have established it. I have no doubt that he manifests an extreme case of some unusual power, capacity or energy, which I believe is genuine and not magician or performer based - and which probably represents what all human beings have in much lower intensity.’

‘To start with, when we were younger’ Bentwich told me, ‘I was impressed with the regular things he can do, the telepathy he showed me, the bending of spoons and the seed sprouting. What was most impressive in my mind was that the spoon continued to bend when it was clearly out of his touch. The seed sprouting, I found intriguing, rather than disturbing. I approached him at that time and asked him to give himself to further testing within our medical school, and I was amused by his almost paranoid reaction. He was extremely anxious at my suggestion. I felt there was something problematic in his coping with his powers not being under his control, in his attraction to showbusiness, which I thought did him a big disservice.’

‘However, to my delight, in 1987, Uri agreed to come and be tested in my laboratory, and at the Weizmann Institute, which is nearby. My colleagues and I designed three experiments to test if he has any special effects when he concentrates and puts his hands over a culture of cancer cells. The bottom line of these experiments was they were all negative, so there was another guy, an endocrinologist, who came in and said, “I have some ox sperm cells. Maybe this would affect the sperm.”’

The sperm, Bentwich explains, were in frozen vials. ‘They were put into a plate and were swimming around very energetically, and then we had two similar culture plates that contained sperm in more or less in the same amount as a control. Uri put his hand

over one and, without touching it, concentrated. It was hot, in summer, so he wasn't wearing long sleeves or anything, and we checked out his hands for anything hidden. And, lo and behold, the sperm cells stopped moving. Most of them became either very slow in movement or dead. We repeated this three times. It was very impressive, so we did it again and again. However, when he asked what it was we were doing and told him, he was extremely upset. He really thought he had a destructive power. This was a dramatic result, but he wasn't happy with it, and at that point, he said he didn't want to do anything more.'

'After seeing such results, I told him, look we should continue testing. It is so interesting and amazing. But he didn't like the idea at all. At a later stage, I suggested that if he was concerned about negative forces, maybe we could try out some healing effects. He said that he liked that much more, but I didn't insist beyond a certain point, and we did nothing more, which I think is very regretful.'

'I think Uri is a very fine person, I like him personally, but in a way, I always considered him as an immature personality with an exceptional power that somehow he doesn't know how to cope with. He is attracted too much to showbiz and to performance, and not to more important things. Eleven more years have now gone by, and nobody has been studying him on any similar things, which is ridiculous. . There was too little to go on, but what we had already seen was probably the most significant piece of evidence ever in terms of biological effect of what he is capable of, yet he refrained and said forget about me, try it with somebody else. He is far from being systematic. He is chaotic, so he didn't make the connection with AIDS and cancer, or even think about it. It was like missing the main point while looking round for nonsense.'

Chapter 19 / Home, Home on the Thames

'I seem only like a boy, playing on the seashore and diverting myself in finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great oceans of truth lay undiscovered before me.' (Sir Isaac Newton, father of modern science - and practising occultist)

There were as many reasons why Uri Geller effectively retired in his early thirties as there were methods by which conjurors had by then invented to bend spoons by sleight of hand. His principle mission was accomplished - the accumulation of enough cash to keep him happy, settle down at last with Hanna, perhaps have some kids. His mother was settled in Connecticut, in a house which sceptical investigators - an example of how obsessive they were becoming - claim to have discovered belonged technically to the wife of the president of Mexico.

Then there were the additional factors. Uri had achieved as much respectability as was ever likely to come his way - the *Nature* article, the recognition by dozens of serious scientists, by showbusiness stars, by maverick elements within the CIA and Mossad, the briefings he unquestionably gave President Carter in the Oval Office. All this had happened, and still he was doubted and called a fraud; this made him aware that he would never win with some people. There was also the question of his powers naturally fading with age. Most children grow out of their psychic abilities; they become embarrassed by them, stop practising, the poltergeists move on. Uri seemed, and still seems, to maintain the majority of his powers by remaining in many ways a teenager. But performing psychically, even at small scale charity events, began increasingly to make him physically tired - something which has impressed many people as the crowning proof that he is no fake. And while there is no evidence that the public had become bored with Uri Geller - despite his limited repertoire, seeing him is still a profound personal experience for millions of people - I am also certain that a further element contributed to his winding down. It is Geller's secret, but it was as impossible for someone in his position not to know a few magicians' tricks for emergency use as it is for a professional athlete, a cook, a comedian, a lawyer or an actor not to know a few ways to keep the public happy on an off day, and to keep ahead of the game. But, I believe, Geller hated the idea of trickery, and barely, if ever, resorted to it.

‘There definitely was a phase of semi-retirement,’ he says. ‘It was my choice. I just got fed up with airports, with hotel rooms and the stress of appearing in front of thousands of people. I was fed up with driving to colleges and being interviewed by newspapers. And when you are famous in every country you can live in, say, England

and for six years not hear about Uri Geller, but meanwhile I'm in every newspaper and magazine in South Africa or in Norway. When I was not on American television I was probably on Danish or Swedish TV. Every country had its heyday. There comes a point where I didn't break down, but I had had enough. I identified myself so much with rock stars that go haywire in hotel rooms because the pressure is so immense on them. No wonder they turn to drugs and alcohol. I was in hotel rooms where suddenly there was no meaning to my life any more. I woke up there was an emptiness, a slight depression, but there were still people standing downstairs in the lobby waiting for my signature. I was ever so famous. I was a celebrity, I was a super psychic I was unique. You have got a Mick Jagger, an Elton John, a Peter Gabriel, but only one Uri Geller. I didn't see a way out of fame and fortune. It was like so what else, is that there? I've got the Cadillac, the two apartments, a magnificent house in Connecticut. I had to break that pattern. That's when a major change happened in my life and I became a vegetarian, I started exercising and I started reading books about health and well-being.'

What does an obsessive workaholic do when he retires? In Geller's case, in the States between the late 1970s and the mid to late 1980s, he made himself almost as busy banging his head like a wasp against the windows of government, power and influence - and pursuing legal cases. The teenage drive and energy, combined with a child-like desire for justice and a wealthy adult's bank account combined to make Geller a law junkie, even though to the present day, he has never been in a courtroom, most cases either being settled to his satisfaction, or fizzling out due to a variety of factors.

Geller's power games were far more important and interesting than his legal side-shows. He is anxious to play down his White House connection, which may indicate there was more - or less - to it than meets the eye, but regards two specific episodes as the summit of his years of what might be called political influence. One, in February 1987, was attending a reception given by the US Mission to the Geneva arms negotiations with the Soviets; the second, a fortnight later, was briefing a gathering of senior senators and congressmen, plus 40 Capitol staffers, Defense Department and Pentagon aides in a room in the Capitol Building sealed for the occasion from possible Soviet eavesdropping.

He was not at the Geneva reception as the cabaret, either, although the Soviet delegates may have thought he was. He was invited by Senator Claiborne Pell, then chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in the hope that he could telepathically influence the Soviet negotiating team, especially its head, Yuri Vorontsov, into making some serious concessions to the West, preferably, as a first step, reducing Russian missiles in Europe. Pell had been introduced to Geller, who now lived in Britain, by Princess Michael of Kent. So impressed was Pell, that he arranged a three way meeting at the Cavendish Hotel in London with Geller, himself and Max Kampelman, the chief US negotiator. The day after the reception, according to a full page report in *Newsweek*, Mikhail Gorbachev made an unexpected new offer - the removal within five years of all medium-range nuclear missiles based in Europe. Geller was quoted as saying he was convinced Vorontsov had called Gorbachev straight after the reception, having received his ESP message.

It all sounded, even with the *Newsweek* story, like the kind of tale which would fall apart when investigated a decade later. Apart from anything else, the *Newsweek* photo appeared to show Uri Geller in a suit and tie, a near impossibility for an Israeli. I took a train out to Rhode Island, therefore, to see Claiborne Pell, now a retired six-term senator. His simple, elegant home, on the ocean in Newport, is the fulfilment of every romantic vision of those brought up on images of John F. Kennedy's Camelot. A black and white picture of Pell with his friend, JFK, another with Lyndon B. Johnson, another with the Queen. In a corner, a chair from the investiture of the Prince of Wales. Pell had not been well lately, so on the coffee table was a letter from Bill Clinton, wishing his senior Democrat colleague well, and adding Hillary's best wishes too to Nuala, Pell's wife. Had JFK ever been here, in this house, I wondered, as we sipped tea from fine china? The elderly senator looked shocked; 'Oh, no ... I mean not often. He might stop his boat out there and drop by, but not formally, no. Only at our home in Washington. All very wonderful, but, getting down to business, I had to ask, was this Uri Geller story really true?

'Well, yes, actually. I was interested in parapsychology, telepathy and life after death. I had no ability or experience in this area, but I believed in it, and I would love to have had the experience. So I thought it would be fun for Uri to bring his dog and pony show to some of the American and Russian delegates at a cocktail party. I was interested in seeing what impression Uri might be able to make on the Russians, and I think they were mystified. I'll never forget the Russian ambassador, Vorontsov, now the ambassador to Washington. Uri bent his spoon. Then he put the spoon into the ambassador's hand, and the spoon continued to move in his hand. Everybody saw that. It was a key moment for me.' Whether Uri really influenced Vorontsov, Pell

reasonably says he can't know, and that it would be highly unlikely for Vorontsov to know, either.

Nuala Pell also remembers Vorontsov refusing to give Uri his watch. 'What I remember was Uri putting the grass seeds in the palm of his hand and they grew. He did it in front of us all. We just couldn't believe it. Everybody was floored. I truly believe in Uri, and I think everyone did. The Russians just looked stunned. They didn't know whether to believe or not to believe. I know Claiborne's colleagues in the Senate who were on that trip never got over that. They couldn't believe that Claiborne got him there, and then he performed, and they were so impressed. It was the talk of the Summit for some time. But Claiborne was very determined; he believed in Uri and was determined that other people should have the chance to see him too.

'I'd seen that kind of thing before,' the senator explained, 'and thought it might be a conjuror's trick. I talked with that guy Randi once, and he said it was a trick, and he could do too. There's a great depth of feeling there against Uri, you know. It's almost vicious. But Uri was far more impressive as a person. I think Uri is a very likeable, decent sort. I never felt he was at all dubious. I respect him. I think he has good ideas, and is genuine. I also remember how unless he was in full vigour, he couldn't make things happen, which I found most interesting.'

It was Pell who also arranged the meeting at the Capitol, for which the official agenda, for the benefit of any Soviet spies, was to talk about the plight of Soviet Jews. The meeting was held in the Capitol's only SCIF - a Superior Compartmentalised Intelligence Facility. Col John Alexander, was invited to by a general friend of his.

‘He talked about the stuff the Soviets were doing psychically,’ Alexander recalls, ‘But everyone wanted him to bend something. There wasn’t a spoon around, so someone went outside and found one in the guard’s coffee cup.

‘I was in the front row watching very closely. I had been trained by magicians by now, and I had watched Randi do it frame by frame and I could catch him at it. Uri took the spoon, stroked it lightly, and the thing bent up quite noticeably. He put it down on the top of this chair and he continued talking, and I watched this spoon continue to bend until it fell off the chair. There was never a time when Uri could have applied force. And even if the touch, were strong it would have bent down not bent *upwards*.’ Although Pell says he did not think the meeting was a huge success, at least one senator there did, according to *Newsweek*. Representative Dante Fascell, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, rushed directly to the library to read up on Geller.’

‘I saw Uri do that several more times after that,’ John Alexander added. I introduced him to Steven Seagal, and we did it there in Seagal’s house, the inner sanctum of his bedroom, with all these old ancient Tibetan tapestries on the wall. [Seagal, the macho actor, it is who has been described by the Dalai Lama as ‘a sacred vessel’] I don’t think Steven has any doubt. His belief system is that these things can happen, although it goes without saying that this is not totally unique to Uri Geller.’

Uri and Uri-related legal cases trundled on through the 1980s and beyond, their greatest benefit to him, I suspect, being to gather a team of very committed lawyers in the US and Britain, who understand him and have become wise counsel to him in both the legal and the personal sense. In the States, there’s a Baltimore attorney,

Richard Winelander, who unwillingly took over the Geller file by accident when an ex-colleague, Don Katz, was disbarred. ‘I’m a criminal attorney,’ says Winelander. ‘I don’t even believe witnesses. But I believe strongly in Uri. He’s a genius, and he’s my buddy. He managed to stop me smoking 50 a day, and the spoon bending is real. It is totally unbelievable.’ In New York, Geller has Ruth Liebesman, who was on the defence team for the Mafia godfather, John Gotti. Liebesman, was born in England, where her father was a US Air Force doctor, and is every inch the tough, big-time attorney - the Manhattan apartment, the vintage Porsche - except in one slightly unusual regard. Liebesman is convinced she has been seeing UFOs since she was 18, and has been abducted by them more than once. The most dramatic abduction, she told me when we met in a New York coffee shop, occurred when she was staying in the Gellers’ guest cottage outside Reading, on the night Andrija Puharich died. She awoke from what she thought was a nightmare with a row of painful blisters on her stomach. Two days later, back in New York, she took the scarring to her doctor. ‘He said to me , “All I can see is your laparoscopy tracks, which are at least three years old.” I said, “Jack, I’ve never had a laparoscopy. Never when I signed a consent form, anyway.”’ In London, Geller's barrister is the eminent QC, Jonathan Caplan, another classic high flyer with a difference; Caplan is a strong believer in the paranormal and UFOs, too.

The most - and only - important thing about the cases as far as ‘the big picture’ is concerned is that none of them have involved any proof or disproof of the paranormal, and all have involved James Randi’s excitable turn of phrase. In 1990, Geller sued Randi and a Japanese publisher for a claim by Randi in a Japanese magazine that Dr. Wilbur Franklin of Kent State University

committed suicide because he was so ashamed when Randi discredited Geller. Franklin had, in fact, died of natural causes. Randi was ordered by the court in Tokyo to pay half a million yen (£2,500) for the insult. Geller successfully sued Randi in Hungary, where Randi had accused him and Shipi of being swindlers; there was no significant money to be won in an action in Hungary, but Geller explained he was embarrassed that his Hungarian relatives might have read the comments. The newspaper had to publish a retraction and pay nominal damages and costs. Geller sued Randi and CSICOP for a comment in the International Herald Tribune that Geller's 'tricks' were 'the kind of thing that used to be on the back of cereal boxes when I was a kid.' In the US, he sued Timex for featuring a metal bending performer in an advertisement' claiming this effect was his trademark. In London, Florida and Hawaii, Geller sued Victor Stenger, a sceptical scientist living in Hawaii, and Prometheus Books and for repeating a false Randi claim that Geller had been arrested in Israel for misrepresenting himself as a psychic.

The Timex case failed. In the Prometheus case, over the alleged arrest in Israel, Geller gained a written apologies and acknowledgements of error from both the American and British branches. Mike Hutchinson of Prometheus still complains about the action as being over 'just one silly word'. In the States, the Herald Tribune case was ruled out of time, and had to be dropped, while the argument that Randi was an agent of CSICOP was rejected. This led Geller, ironically, since it was he who was complaining, into having to pay CSICOP a total of \$210,000 as part of a global settlement of all the cases, although in the long run, both CSICOP and Randi seem to have been more damaged than Geller by the six-year legal morass. Randi continues to maintain that he won all the cases Geller brought. A lot of Geller's out-of-time errors

in the cases were the fault of Katz, the original Baltimore attorney, who seems to have a good case for having been almost psychotically stressed-out when he made the error for which he was briefly disbarred. It is a very Uri Geller touch, Winelander laughs, that Geller remains friendly with Katz, even retaining him as a stockbroker, which is his profession today.

A case not directly involving Geller, but which would not have happened without him, came to court in 1993. Five years earlier, Randi referred in an interview to Eldon Byrd being 'in jail as a convicted child molester'. Byrd sued in Baltimore, with Winelander as his attorney. The 1993 trial was wonderfully discursive high comedy at times, the court transcript records. Geller was accused in passing by Randi of blackmailing him with a transcript of a tape which appeared to be of Randi having an intimate sexual conversation with a young man. Randi said in explanation that he had been working on behalf of the telephone company in its attempt to track down the reason his number appeared on a men's room under the name 'Donald'. (Mr. Winelander: 'Did there come a time when you actually took your number off the wall in the men's room?'). The question of Randi's height, which is about five foot four, was aired. Winelander asked him directly how tall he was. Randi answered five seven and a half; Winelander asked him to step down to show the folks. The judge told the attorney, he was stepping on the line, and to be careful not to go over it. At other times, Randi admitted not having made any attempt to check his facts. The jury found Randi guilty of libel with malice, although awarded no money to Byrd, the jury apparently not caring much for either Byrd or Randi, having discovered that Byrd did in fact have a past conviction for possession of pornography. Randi has since repeatedly claimed he won this case too.

If Uri Geller's 'semi-retirement' in the States looks on paper more like a whirl of activity, it has taken a somewhat hyperactive form in Britain too, where he lives in a state of permanent re-invention. He came to Britain at a time when crime and shootings in the States were beginning to make him and Hanna doubt if this was the right place to bring up Daniel and Natalie. He met Clement Freud, a distant relative through the Freud line, now a British MP, on a flight, and Freud suggested he settle in England; the Gellers needed little persuading.

Although Uri gives the impression over the past 15 years of having been pretty much quiescent, his own account of his activity - prompted, as ever, by Randi and his claims that 'Geller is finished' - does rather belie the retirement idea. 'In the past ten years,' he says, 'I've written seven books, which have been translated a dozen languages in as many as 33 countries. I am working on five more books. I write eight different columns for magazines and newspapers, including *The Times*. My Website had received as many as 400,000 hits in one day. A full-length motion picture about me by Ken Russell and distributed by Disney was sold to 60 countries in three days at the American Film Market. I have starred in countless TV specials and commercials, been written up in recent months in *Newsweek* and *Sports Illustrated*. And the latest Nieman Marcus catalogue in the States uses my name - without having asked me - to advertise a new range of silver cutlery. I don't mean to brag, but it's a damned funny kind of "finished".'

It's certainly the case that Geller is rarely out of the media. There have been two major TV documentaries on him since he came to Britain. The first, a BBC QED programme, was unfortunate for Uri, especially as the director, Tony Edwards, believed in him, had to fight hard to get the slot, and admits he would have loved the film to be more positive to Uri. Part of the film was made in Madison, Wisconsin, at a psychic event Uri was lecturing at. The great problem was that the scrupulously ethical Edwards, who also made a brilliant and positive series for the BBC on 'heretical' scientists, invited Randi to the Madison event in disguise, in a high risk attempt to provide some balance to the documentary. Randi was un-persuadable, and duly insisted that the spoon bending Uri did was fraudulent. A spoon broken by Uri at the Madison event was also taken to a metallurgist at Leeds University, who reported on the film that as far as he could see, it was a routine fracture. 'It was a shame,' Tony Edwards says today. 'Even though Randi was in an excellent disguise, and I don't think had even arrived yet, Uri was in an elevator with me at the hotel, and said, "I can *smell* Randi." I do think Uri has some special powers.'

A 1997 British documentary, in Channel 4's Equinox series, *Secrets of the Psychics* was a standard and unsurprising trot through the usual sceptical routine, with a clear anti-paranormal agenda, and soundbites from Richard Dawkins, John Taylor, Ray Hyman, Randi, Mike Hutchinson, Susan Blackmore, George Lawrence, Ian Rowland and Professor David Marks, a New Zealander who holds the chair in Psychology at the University of Middlesex, in Enfield. Marks, who has written books on conjuring, said on the Equinox film: 'As far as I am aware, from my observation, Geller has no psychic ability whatsoever. However, he's a very clever, well-practised magician'. (David Berglas, President of the Magic Circle, who agrees on the psychic question,

nevertheless disputes Marks' knowledge of magicianship). Also in the documentary were Marcello Truzzi and Russell Targ. His clips, Truzzi says, were clearly selected to maintain the editorial slant of the show. Uri complained to the Broadcasting Standards Commission about *Secrets of the Psychics*. His complaint was rejected.

Although he does no laboratory testing today, Uri still meets scientists and doctors in more gentle settings, and is keen to garner their support. He recently spent some time demonstrating his abilities to Brian Josephson, Professor of Physics at Cambridge and winner of the 1973 Nobel Prize for Physics. Geller and Josephson sat cross legged on the floor at a conference to talk. Josephson was enigmatic, albeit in a positive sort of way, when I asked him a few months later for his view on Geller. 'I think Uri is a magician, but I don't particularly believe that he is using trickery in his demonstrations,' he said. 'I believe there are psychic abilities. They don't accord with any science we have at the moment, but maybe some future science will back them up with theories.'

Uri also met a London consultant psychiatrist, Dr. Lawrence Ratna, by chance, who reported favourably on him. 'I am a Psychiatrist with 30 years clinical experience, a conjurer with a wide knowledge of magic and someone who has investigated paranormal phenomena and found them wanting in the past,' Ratna says. 'Uri Geller gave me demonstration of spoon bending. I could find no evidence of trickery nor the use of gimmicks. The fact that the spoon continued bending after he had handed it to me, for my mind, puts the event beyond rational explanation be it scientific or a feat of conjuring. He also demonstrated two examples of thought transference first accurately reproducing a geometric figure I had drawn and second and perhaps more

significantly transmitting to me a figure and a colour. As a life long sceptic I must record my total astonishment at these feats and testify my witness to a truly inexplicable and unique phenomenon.'

Sometimes, the media coverage the Fiftysomething Geller gets in Britain is over-the-top even by his standards. In 1996, *The Sunday Telegraph* carried the large and startling headline, *Uri Geller vindicated as historic sub is found*. The story told how a sceptical radio producer, William Scanlan-Murphy, had wasted £1m over eight years in his search off the Scottish coast for a sunken submarine, only to find that it was lying at a spot Geller had marked for him on a map. The submarine, it turned out, was not the only thing which was lying. Over a year later, Mr. Scanlan-Murphy wrote to Uri from his home in the Peak District saying he had made the entire story up, and that, owing to a 'financial reversal' he was now planning to sell the story of his 'hoax' to the press. 'I shall not do anything with the story before Wednesday,' he concluded. Whatever it was he hoped to sell, which was not at all clear, did not evidently find a market. Uri ignored the letter, and nothing subsequently appeared.

He does attract very odd people at times, not all malicious. Every post brings letters from people who regard him as a guru. A woman in San Francisco changed her name to Uria; another writes to him as 'Golden Uri'. 'Can you imagine, if I wanted to pursue the idea of being a guru, how much money I could have made then,' he says. 'I could have been like the Bhagwan. But I've never even been tempted. I'm an entertainer.'

Even as such, he still manages to keep a steady stream of celebrities and politicians through the house. The Israeli defence minister, Yitzhak Mordechai, who has visited, represents one extreme, perhaps, the Duchess of York the other. ‘She came over to my house with a policewoman one morning, and she really poured out her heart to me about her love affairs and about a certain tennis player, and, basically, how the Royalty let her down in a very brutal way, how there is almost a conspiracy against her and so on,’ Uri said. ‘She is very intuitive. I bent a spoon for her and her husband for their wedding at their request. But then I really can’t talk about other Royalty I have met because it would be a breach of confidence. Fergie wouldn’t mind me saying this because it is positive.’

‘She is very much into being positive. She writes down positive phrases. She spent a few hours with me, and she met Natalie and Hanna. We stay in touch via the telephone. I call her about twice a month, and try to give her confidence to continue and to shut out all the negative abuse that is thrown at her, and the way she is treated by the Royalty. I told her go for it as far as her business ventures were concerned. If you can do a commercial do a commercial, if you can get another book, get another book out there, just pay back your debts. She really listened to my advice, I think.’

As if to emphasise his commitment to being a strictly earthbound non-guru, Uri has developed a passion for football - which he is probably better known for in Britain currently than anything else. Even loving football, however, gets him into trouble. His support for his local team, Reading, ended in October 1997 in an argument with the club chairman, who decided to stop giving free tickets to the Geller family in return for their hands-on support. In the subsequent season, Reading, who had done quite

well in the English First Division during their year of Geller positing the team up on a weekly basis, dropped through the division like a brick, and were relegated in May 1998. Sports commentators continued to laugh at Reading's decline, citing it as a Geller failure, unaware that he had abandoned the club. Uri's reasonable point, though not overstated, case that it was, if anything, an extremely minor vindication of his powers was somehow never reported. Neither has the fact that the family now supports still more lowly Exeter City, on the basis that Daniel Geller believes he had a past life in Exeter.

The strange Glenn Hoddle affair was less of a joke. Hoddle, the England manager, is currently suing the *News of the World* newspaper over a claim by Geller that the manager visited him two years before the 1998 World Cup, and took part, along with his friend and faith healer, Eileen Drewery, in an exorcism of Uri's 'evil spirits'. Hoddle, even in the frantic midst of the Cup preparations, issued a writ against the newspaper, which is still outstanding. One of the mysteries of the case is that Hoddle said at a widely reported press conference that he had met Geller only once, four years earlier, and had not seen him or had any association with him since. The week after that, the *News of the World* published itemised phone bills which Shipi had found in the cellar which seemed to show several calls, including one of 13 minutes, from Uri's house to Hoddle's. When the libel writ arrived, it did not contest Hoddle having been to the Geller home, only that he had taken part in an exorcism. The case continues.

The Gellers have been lucky to steer clear of tragedy, apart from in one sad instance - the death of what would have been their third child. 'We were going to

name him Gaby,' Uri says, 'but he died like two months before he should have been born. We didn't have a funeral. And we let Daniel and Natalie hold him at the hospital. It is interesting; that is something that I totally want to shut away in my mind, not only place it in a box and close the lid, but I also took this box out of my head and to send it into space. I don't want to remember; it is just too painful. We do have a sonar picture of the baby, but we keep it behind a frame.'

The Gellers' is an extremely unusual household, as might be expected. Hanna, as Uri says, 'Doesn't really want to involve herself with me paranormally. She prays to God. She wants to keep it very Holy, very spiritual, very religious, whereas sometimes, paranormal or psychic phenomena don't go hand in hand with religion. So most of my everyday life and activities, Shipi knows more about than Hanna.

Although it is perfectly possible, of course, that the younger Natalie will be as powerful a psychic one day as Uri Geller, the young man a lot of eyes are inevitably on is Daniel. Will he or won't he inherit his father's powers? 'He has a very powerful telepathic link with me,' Uri says. When Daniel was six or seven, he developed the odd ability, which he no longer has, to be able to put a day of the week to any number. Daniel says: 'When I'm with my father, I feel I may have the power in very small amounts, but if I try to do something alone, it doesn't really work. It's a bit disappointing, but there is an extraordinary connection between us. I think the most amazing thing he ever did was to stop Big Ben. He went out to his gazebo one morning, where he prays, and concentrated very hard, willing it to stop. Later that day, mum ran screaming from the house. She's heard on the news that it had stopped,

but no one could work out why. Unfortunately, he couldn't prove he'd done it, but I knew because I saw it.'

'I never tell people my name straight away because they immediately form an opinion,' Daniel continues. 'I'd rather just be myself, but it's difficult because my name is Geller and either they're going to say, 'Can you bend something?' or they are going to start rebutting my dad. I was teased at school at first because a lot of the kids thought what my dad did on TV was a trick. It made it harder for me to make friends because there would be a chain reaction. One person would start saying, 'He's a fraud', and the rest would follow. I found it very hurtful because I couldn't understand why they didn't believe in him. I try to explain, but if they won't listen I just choose to ignore it.'

'My father has an incredible aura, a presence that I still find amazing. No matter what anyone says, I get to see the happenings and phenomena and it's fun. I'm never embarrassed by him. When I have exams, he goes out to his gazebo and concentrates very hard and I can usually tell he is helping me. I've always felt different, and sometimes I wouldn't mind being ordinary. I'd quite like to live in a medium-sized house, but my friends love coming over here because we have tennis courts and a swimming pool. They're always asking Abba to bend spoons. I don't mind, but he can't do too many because it drains his powers.'

Daniel and Natalie's only uncle, Shipi, lives in his own house on the estate, and, like his sister, Hanna, is as private as Uri is public. In his twenties, he was briefly married (as it happened, to Eldon Byrd's ex-wife, June), but it did not work out. He has

girlfriends now, but still has no plans to marry again. 'If he does, and decides to start his own business or whatever, I will certainly miss him because he has a great way of protecting me,' Uri says. 'Remember, it's a family thing. We've been together, and our families have been friends, for almost 30 years. It happens a lot in Israel to be united like that. It's the same as in Arabic cultures, where the family is one unit and you would rather have your family run your business affairs than a stranger. If you let someone else deal with your life, you are bound to fall out.'

What Uri would do without Shipi confounds most friends of the family. It had occurred to me that, as Puharich had believed, Shipi was a powerful part of the Geller effect. I asked Uri whether he could perform without Shipi. He was adamant he could, and subsequent inquiries in Israel confirmed that he had bent metal and read minds for years without Shipi, while he was still a schoolboy. But could he, I asked, bend metal when he was entirely on his own?

Uri blushed for the only time since I had met him. 'I am not often on my own,' he said after some thought. 'I have built this thing psychologically that I can't act alone. I'm sure I must have bent a spoon on my own once, but I can't think of a moment when I would have had the opportunity. Partly it is because I refuse to touch money, I don't have a wallet, I don't carry credit cards. I haven't written a cheque in the past 25 years. If I buy something, Hanna pays for it, or Shipi. I have driving licenses for everything, even a tank. But I don't drive. Come to think of it, you know, I am exactly like the Queen.'

Chapter 20 / Conclusive Proof?

'It still amazes me after all these years. I'm amazed and transfixed and excited by all these phenomena. I should have go used to it and become blasé, but it grabs me and astounds and puzzles me, although I've done it two or three thousand times.' (Uri Geller)

I promised at the start of this book that I had come to a conclusion about Uri Geller, and so I have; but I readily admit that in doing so, I have borrowed some ideas from the people I have interviewed or read along the way. Sometimes, I have appropriated an entire theme; other times, a mere nuance, a lightweight point which seemed to me to box above its weight.

As a big theme, I loved the analysis William A. Tiller, professor emeritus of Materials Science and Engineering at Stanford University arrived at after seeing an

especially on-form Uri at a conference in Seattle. Tiller believes Uri is a 'coherer' who 'absorbs energy unconsciously given by others, and transforms it into the form needed to produce such spectacular psychoenergetic displays'. Tiller became convinced that this explained why Uri was consistently less successful with negative audiences, because with such people Uri is 'unable to tap their collective energy fields.' Throughout history, Tiller adds, charismatic individuals have been coherers and had a great effect on crowds of people.

A small point made by the Los Angeles criminal attorney Bob Brooks, who was at school in Cyprus with Uri, but has only come to take his powers seriously in adulthood, also swayed my thinking. Brooks said he had been thinking of not telling me about it, in case I took it as a damning point, but trusted that I would understand its importance, as well as its lack of importance. 'Uri was very good with his hands,' Brooks said. 'He once took me round the school field and picked pockets. He would tap the boy on the shoulder and say, "You just dropped that." I think it was just a phase like so many little boys go through. It may have been for a week, or just a single afternoon. I most certainly don't think it's a big, dark indicting secret that explains everything, but on the other hand, he was darned good at it.' Brooks' point was a molecule rather than a whole chromosome, yet it persuaded me that Uri was not as innocent of the manual dexterity required to be capable of sleight of hand as he has sometimes suggested. Did he for a few silly moments, aged 11, harness some of that highly developed, feral psychic power that I believe criminals use for malevolent ends? I have always marvelled at the kind of sixth sense which must be needed for many non violent, 'intelligent' crimes.

The third interviewee who influenced my thinking was Roger Crosthwaite, the Anglo-Catholic priest and recent award-winning close-up magician in Worthing, on the south coast of England. 'I know Uri well and I think he is a very fine man,' Roger said. 'I don't go so far as to endorse his paranormal abilities, although I am very interested in quantum theory. I also do not dismiss the idea of miracles - and I think there are definitely some strange, unanswered questions about Uri. I was at his house once, and I looked him straight in the eye and asked him if he ever used trickery, even to enhance his effects. He said he had never, ever used trickery in the laboratory or in scientific testing, and I believe he is telling the truth.' I do too. Like a lot of Jews, Uri is rather fond of Catholics - the more so in his case thanks to the admiration he had for many of the priests at Terra Santa College in Cyprus; he is too superstitious, I believe, to lie to a priest. As for the implication in what Uri told Crosthwaite that he might have cheated *outside* the laboratory, I return to one of my own central themes - that all sorts of professionals have a few tricks of the trade for bad days - and that Diego Maradona really could play football, despite the odd handball into goal. Why would Uri never admit to this ability to manipulate things to look more psychic than they are? For the same reason that most of us have probably stolen something sometime on a rare occasion, but wouldn't admit to it. You can probe too deeply into someone's soul. The point is that Uri Geller is no swindler; everything points to the fundamental truth that he can do what he says he can, and that is what matters.

Another point which swayed me was made over lunch by Matthew Manning, the prominent British psychic healer. Manning, 43, was as a teenager one of the Geller-influenced young metal benders. At home in Cambridge, he saw Uri on TV, and discovered he could do the same - with ease. He was also the victim of a

powerful poltergeist, which nearly succeeded in getting him expelled from his boarding school. 'I believe whatever Uri and I have has nothing to do with little green men from outer space, but originates from way back, when we were in caves and needed psychic powers for survival,' Matthew said. Although a friend of Uri, he felt sad that Uri would be remembered principally for bending spoons, and that he should have developed his healing powers, as Manning has. On the other hand, Matthew Manning had a interesting answer to one of the most pervasive criticisms of Geller - his fixation on tabloid publicity.

Many has been the time these past two years that Uri has gravely presented me with a cutting from some American supermarket tabloid as if it were a shard of parchment from the Dead Sea Scrolls. He seems to have no idea that, call them snobs, but middle class people are more influenced, on the whole, by slightly more elevated journalism. Uri's flashiness is one of the bases of what I see as New Age criticism of him - the view that he can't be real because he's not spiritual enough, that if he has accidentally been given spiritual powers, he is abusing them by using them for self-enrichment. Manning has concentrated his publicity fire on the broadsheet press, and works as a healer. Yet it was he who made the point that in doing so, he is acting in accord with his own very middle class origins. He credits Uri with having, as a result of his working class background, made it his mission - perhaps subconsciously - to help regular, working people, tabloid readers if you like, to develop a spiritual awareness, to be aware that there is more out there than working, sleeping and eating. It may be that Uri uses only one implement out of the psychic kitchen; but in doing so, he has propagandised on behalf of the spiritual life much more effectively than the more exclusive kind of New Agers, whom tabloid readers would no doubt scoff at. It

should never be forgotten that a lot of the antipathy to Geller has been pure snobbery; it is an irony not lost on Matthew Manning, who has also made a fine living from psychic gifts, that because he is the public school educated son of an architect, because he instinctively knows the ways and the codes of the British middle class, that he is mostly immune from criticism. Oddly enough he dresses more flashily than Uri.

A final point which I thought brilliantly lateral was that I first heard from Guy Bavli in Israel, and was later repeated by other Israelis, including the novelist, Ephraim Kishon. The argument was that we were hung up in Europe and America about whether Uri Geller was genuinely paranormal, and wouldn't it be far more exciting and wonderful if Uri really was a magician? There is no doubt that a con on such a scale *would* be the 'crime' of the century. And a book of how he did his tricks, with step by step instructions for fooling the world would surely be one of the best sellers of all time?

As far as my view on magicians in general and their take on Geller is concerned, I have come to believe that conjuring makes people quite arrogant, from the moment they realise the power tricks have over people. I have seen for myself, by learning some tricks from books and trying a couple of the basic mentalist ruses Marcello Truzzi told me about, the awe-struck looks on people's faces when you do something 'impossible' by deceit. It is no wonder to me that women, who have less propensity to arrogance than men, are almost never interested in magic or magicianship. I suspect the magicianly arrogance makes conjurors a little like doctors, who are often particularly susceptible to disease and simultaneously un-self-aware. I have a feeling

magicians, by virtue of spending their lives creating illusions, become incapable of believing that they too can labour under one. They feel invulnerable in their knowledge of sleight of hand. Of late, Uri has been becoming increasingly friendly with magicians. I wonder if this is because he no longer cares what he is regarded as? Because of the doubt over what he is, he exists in a no man's land, half way between mystic and magician, and it suits him to be neither fish nor fowl, since he has then has no responsibility to be anything. The decision as to what he is made in our heads - another reason why he is not obliged to admit it if he has, on occasion, faked it. The only thing which would require him to 'confess' would be if *everything* was fake, and always had been. And what a confession that would be!

Scientists have surprised me throughout this project by being far more open-minded and, if you like, spiritual, than I had imagined. I gained the impression that as a profession, they have come on a little since Hermann von Helmholtz, the 19th Century physicist, announced: 'Neither the testimony of all the Fellows of the Royal Society, nor even the evidence of my own senses, would lead me to believe in the transmission of thought from one person to another independently of the recognised channels of sense.' I sense they are also a little more open to accepting the existence of invisible things. Medical doctors too are not all the scoffers who in years past laughed at people like Joseph Lister. In 1865, Lister, Professor of Surgery at Glasgow, pioneered the use of carbolic acid as an antiseptic against the microbes in the air which Louis Pasteur had identified. The concept was met with derision and hostility by doctors and nurses. Until then, it was assumed that inflammation produced microbes, not the other way round. One of the surgeons at St Bartholomew's Hospital could always raise a laugh, according to a contemporary account, by telling anyone

who came into the operating room to shut the door swiftly 'in case one of Mr. Lister's microbes should come in.' It was almost impossible to convince highly educated doctors that tiny objects 0.001mm in diameter could cause septicaemia. The idea of minute 'germs' floating around in the air was simply too absurd and removed from practical surgery.

The professional sceptics have seemed to me more dogmatic than either the bulk of scientists. I have a suspicion that a hundred years from now, the sceptics will seem in retrospect like superstitious primitives who missed the big picture, rather than Prometheus-like bringers of light in an age of gathering paranormal darkness. How will Geller seem a hundred year hence? I suspect, like a Mesmer, who accidentally discovered something and slightly misattributed the reasons for it. I do not think he will be seen as a guru. In his dark 1998 novel, *Ella*, Uri gave a hint of how, given the freedom of a novel, he sees himself. Although it concerned a female psychic in Bristol, from the heroine's name onwards, the novel bore close comparison to Uri's own life. Ella, a psychic girl, having spent her life being alternately celebrated, manipulated and damned because of her powers finally walks up Mount Sinai on her birthday and jumps off - apparently to fly like an angel. It is left to the reader's imagination to extrapolate that she has turned into some kind of celestial being. If it should turn out in the future that Uri was, indeed, a Jesus figure, I should be a little surprised, but delighted. It will have meant, for one thing, that I have accidentally written the Bible.

At the end of *Ella*, the angelic transformation which accompanies her death is captured for the first time on video. This gives a measure of Uri's preoccupation, as I

know it to be, with the single most striking weakness in his entire case for being a real psychic - the fact that the phenomenon of metal bending *on its own*, the extraordinary phenomenon which I witnessed with my children at the start of this adventure - and hundreds of other people of the highest standing also swear to - has never been filmed.

There are many possible reasons for this, from the obvious - that all of us are deluded - to the far out, as represented by one of Uri's own theories. He believes it is proof that his powers are controlled by some outside force or intelligence, and that this power does not yet wish the human race to know for sure that something as improbable as metal bending on its own is real. There is little doubt that if the effect were videoed, it would merely cause a new outbreak of controversy over whether the video was fake. It is hard to believe that if he had succeeded spectacularly on the Johnny Carson show in 1973, Uri Geller would have been accepted unanimously as real. So perhaps there is some grand design involved in keeping the phenomenon happening only when there is no camera rolling; I only wonder if the design is located in Uri's head, and that it is he who subconsciously controls who gets to see metal bending and who does not. There is another point: Uri has an uncanny effect on cameras. John Randall, a professional cameraman and sound recordist in London, was among many in the same job who attest to Uri sending cameras into spasm. (Randall had another incident in 1998 which quite scared him after filming Uri for a TV appearance. 'We were packing up the Transit, and the producer came down and said, "Hey, look at this. Uri has done this spoon.'" We saw there was a little kink in, but on the way back, heading down the A40, the spoon was on the front seat of the van and it literally went to about 40 degrees. That was well spooky. It was by itself, sitting on the front seat of the van. No one was touching it. We actually saw it moving.'))

You have to ask in the end if it is *really* plausible that Uri Geller has been faking it all these years. The audacity of somebody able to maintain something like this, if it were a trick, for nearly 50 years, repeating the same simple effect hundreds of thousands of times, in front of children, teachers, his own family, his wife's family, his best friend and business partner of 35 years' standing, magicians, secret agents, girlfriends, soldiers, scientists, conjurors, journalists, airline pilots, lawyers, agents, politicians, diplomats, in front of TV cameras on live shows, at parties, in restaurants, again and again and again would be truly unbelievable. And if he had faked the whole thing, there is another major factor to take into account. The great illusionists and illusionist-query-psychics of the past, the Houdinis, the D.D. Homes, were doing their thing in dimly-lit Victorian parlours and theatres, in front of tiny audiences. Uri does it in the jet age, in front of hundreds of thousands of times more people, all over the world and under the scrutiny of TV cameras, which must surely be dozens of times more revealing than gaslight.

I have considered for two years the possibilities for what I saw when my spoon bent in my son's hand, and am still sure that it happened. The evidence for Uri Geller, I submit, is utterly compelling, if not completely conclusive. To be pedantic for a moment, I would have to conclude that, in the absence of any proof of psychic powers from, say The Royal Society, Uri Geller has to go down as the greatest magician of all time. Plenty of highly qualified people certainly believe so. On the other hand, for me, Occam's Razor, the much hallowed belief that, all things being equal, the simplest explanation is always the most likely, suggests that rather than being the most brilliant illusionist ever, Uri Geller may merely be paranormal.

Chapter 21 / Into the 21st Century

It's 2009, more than ten years on from where we left the Uri Geller story. The world has changed fundamentally in a dozen ways, from the negative – 9/11 and the subsequent polarisation of the non-Islamic and the Islamic worlds - to the astonishing – the rise of China to become the world's second industrial power - to the progressive – the modernising changes in Russia and the former Soviet bloc. The Internet has grown from being 'merely' the most significant invention since the printing press to what it is today – the most important social and cultural development ever.

And with all these seismic changes in the world, one debate at least rages exactly as it did 10, 20 and, indeed, 40 years ago; the question of what Uri Geller is and what it is that he does. There has been no resolution, no new consensus, no great shifting of thought. The Uri issue and the whole area of the paranormal remains not a stalemate, but a continuing fevered argument – a bad-tempered slanging match much of the time – between 'believers' and sceptics. Indeed with the Internet now encompassing sites such as YouTube and RuTube, which would have been inconceivable a decade ago, the heat under the Uri Geller debate has been turned up considerably.

All this might have caused a man other than Uri Geller, who is now in his sixties (albeit looking like a man in his forties), to shrug, retreat (perhaps a little defeated) from the spotlight and retire home to Israel with his millions. Yet the continuing controversy surrounding his powers along with the quantum leaps in communication technology, which for the first time have created what can justifiably be called a

global village, have caused the opposite effect, both in Uri and in a new public which is as entranced by him as we were 40 years ago.

Extraordinarily, perhaps, Uri is bigger, bossier – and busier – than he has been at any previous moment in his life. The significant difference between Uri's public now and when he was in his twenties is that it is much, much bigger. He may not be quite the rock star type of celebrity he was when he was inconceivably famous in Israel, the UK, the US and western Europe. But today, his calmer, more measured celebrity extends into Russia, the far east and the entire world aside from the occasional backwater; and one imagines that even in a North Korea or an obscure African republic, there are probably still those for whom the name Uri Geller and the iconic image of the bent spoon have some meaning.

So nearly 60 years since his mother first scolded him for breaking his soup spoon in the flat at 13 Betzalel Yaffe in Tel Aviv, he still travels the world, conquering most of what he sees, armed with the same five abilities he had as a child – bending metal, altering watches and clocks, reading minds, remote viewing and confusing magnetic compasses. He still denies he is a conventional magician, even though he has subtly 'rebranded' himself a little, as we will discuss later in this chapter. And, most significantly, he is still measurably as or more famous as all the other great names amongst magicians, psychics and mentalists. The great god Google, by which we gauge fame and reputation today confirms that more significant than spoons, Uri Geller has succeeded in bending the global public's minds.

The Google statistics are staggering. At the time of writing, “Uri Geller” as a precise phrase, scored 1.75m hits. The most famous magician/illusionist in history, the late Harry Houdini (who came coincidentally from Hungarian roots just like Uri’s) scored 5.4m.

David Copperfield and David Blaine currently the America’s most famous illusionist and mentalist respectively, made 3.8m each; however, input “David Copperfield” and “magic”, and that figure shrinks to 668,000, so it can be assumed that a substantial proportion of the 3.8m hits referred to Charles Dickens’ David Copperfield. Criss Angel, the most exposed and fashionable mentalist in the US and Uri’s co-host in the 2007 NBC TV hit series, *Phenomenon*, scored 3.72m. So Uri at almost 62 years of age, was, realistically, somewhere in fame terms still up there between Houdini, David Copperfield, Criss Angel and David Blaine. By contrast, Derren Brown, the British mentalist currently becoming big in America had just over 1m hits; and James Randi, the magician who has sought fame for nearly 40 years as Uri’s ‘debunker’ scored 799,000.

Just as Uri’s fame and controversy, on which he clearly thrives, have stayed constant and even grown, his personal and family life have remained appealingly stable. He, Hanna and Shipi still live on the same grand estate by the River Thames west of London. He still walks his dog along the Thames banks every day, except his dog, a rescued former racing greyhound named Barney, is new –Joker, his oldest dog, Chico the Chihuahua and his old greyhound have all died; he keeps his dogs’ ashes in a jar in the house. And Uri’s mother, Margaret, died aged 91 on July 24th 2005. Having left Israel in the 1970s, she had never been back.

‘She knew she was dying,’ Uri says. ‘She wasn’t sick. She didn’t want to go to sleep because she was afraid of not waking up. I would go into her bedroom and speak to her every night. Then one night she folded her glasses nicely the way she always did, and I knew that was the last time she would do it. I found her dead in the morning. I knew as I placed my hand to her door that my mother had passed and that when I stepped into her room I would find, not her, but only her body. It was not the silence that told me — it was the emptiness. Hanna had been in to see her and thought she was still asleep, so she left her. My mum told me all her life she wanted to die in her sleep and she achieved that. I got permission to bury her in the local church from the rabbi, and he told me that it doesn’t matter where they bury her – the minute they dig her grave, it becomes, Jewish. So now she’s right next door to us. And we’ve left everything in her room exactly the way it is.’

Uri wrote a moving tribute to his mother on his Website. ‘My mother was in her 92nd year, and she packed three or four lifetimes into that century,’ part of it read. ‘Her capacity for work was inspirational: whenever I’ve felt tired, whenever I’ve wanted to skip a show or dodge a signing or miss a deadline, I have thought of my mother and how she would come home from her day job as a waitress, pick up a needle and slave into the night as a seamstress.’

‘I’ve been praying for my father’s memory too, these past days, and I believe that he has been reunited with my mother now, but I cannot gloss over the fact that it was her earnings, not his, that put food on my plate when I was growing up.’

‘My mother fought for me when we lived in Israel, a country that was as young as I was. She fought for me even before I was born, for my father wanted her to have me aborted. And I vowed, as soon as I was old enough to see what she was doing for me, that one day I would look after her, just as devotedly.

‘By 1969, I was able to start keeping that vow — though the roll of cash in my pocket was my pay as a male model, not a paranormalist. My mother thought it was fantastic to see her son’s picture in magazines, and she didn’t seem to mind that most of the shots featured me in nothing more than underwear.

‘In 1972, as I headed out to the States, I was able to purchase an apartment for her, but the toughest thing about my rocket trip to fame was knowing that Muti, my name for my mother, was back in Israel. By 1975 I could stand it no longer: I picked up the phone and told her, “You have to live with us in New York.”

‘From then on, whether we were in Connecticut, in a simple house at the foot of Mt Fuji in Japan, in a luxurious London flat or in the Thames-side home that we bought 20 years ago, Muti has always been with us. She’s seen every day of her grandchildren’s lives, from the moment they were born, and that’s a blessing that any doting grandparent must treasure above all others.

‘She was born in Berlin before the outbreak of World War 1, the middle girl of three sisters named Freud. Sigmund the infamous psychiatrist was a relative. When Margaret was one year old, her parents took her, Violet and Rose to Budapest, Hungary, where the family had a furniture and kitchenware business.

‘My parents met in Hungary and spent their courtship walking beside Lake Balaton, outside the city, or rowing on it. My mother liked to tell how her boat capsized one afternoon and she was trapped beneath the hull — my father dived to save her, pulling her leg free and dragging her to the surface. Whatever else she said about him, and she said a lot, Muti always knew that the man she married had the courage of a lion.

‘Decades later, when my father remarried, Muti befriended his new wife, a woman named Eva. They were kindred souls, and right up to her death Muti sent regular packages to Eva in Budapest: if I ever forgot to send Eva’s jam and aspirins, I’d earn myself a real ticking-off.

‘It’s so strange to think that she’ll never send another pot of strawberry preserve or blackcurrant jelly to Eva, or open the parcel that came by return post, a bundle of paperback romances. It’s these details that remind us when someone is gone: the big fact of death is too huge to understand, so we focus on the minutiae.

‘My mother did not fear death. I told her I knew beyond doubt that our spirits go on, and she was always content to trust what I told her. I felt sometimes that we were a pair of trapeze artists in a circus act, our movements synchronised so that we swung in perfect harmony even when we were furthest apart, always ready to leap and catch and hold each other safely. My mother is in God’s hands now. But I sense the lack of her hands on my wrists, and it’s a frightening feeling.’

There already seem to be indications that Margaret Geller is continuing as a presence in her son and grandchildren's life. Uri has noticed of late that solitary birds keep flying in to rooms where he is. He was starting to think that the birds might be kind of messengers from his mother, and this was confirmed for him recently when he went on a sentimental visit to the old family apartment on Betzalel Yaffe as part of an Israeli TV documentary, *Being Uri Geller* and, again, a bird – a white dove in this case - flew into the apartment from outside. He is now pretty well convinced that the birds are his mother's way of saying, 'Hi' and that she is still looking after the family.

Another, even stranger, incident happened shortly after Margaret died. 'I'd never seen a ghost,' says Uri. 'I'd heard ghosts, but always wondered what it would be like to actually see one. So we were looking for someone to make the tombstone for my mother's grave and our local rabbi gave me an address for a stonemason nearby in Maidenhead. He gets his marble from Italy, but before we took him on, he called me up and said he'd come round with some sample slabs of marble.'

'So he came on a Saturday and rang the bell. And for some reason, instead of opening the gate for him, I said to him on the intercom, "I'm coming out to see you."' I have no idea why I did that. While I was walking up I wondered to myself why I hadn't opened the gate for him.

And through the big gate in his little van, I could see the stonemason's dog sitting next to him. And the minute I saw the dog, I thought to myself, I'm so glad, I'm definitely going to get this man to do the tombstone because he's a dog lover. Anyone who carries a dog, especially a mongrel, a regular street dog with him, has to be OK.'

‘So I’m getting nearer and I thought I have to go and pat the dog first. So I went up to the van, and said “Hi” to him through the open window and then opened the door to pat the dog. But there was no dog. I said, “Where’s the dog?”. I thought maybe it had gone into the back of the van, although I could see, there was no way he could have just disappeared back there. And where the dog should have been on the front seat, all there was were these five slabs of marble.’

‘So he got out of the van and said, “Mr Geller, what do you mean, where’s the dog?” And I said, “Come on, where is your dog, I just saw it?” And he said, “Mr Geller, I lost my dog five months ago and I used to carry him with me all the time.” And he freaked out. Now I don’t see things, I don’t have LSD in the morning. But I saw the dog clearly. It was very strange and even though a lot of weird stuff has happened to me over the years, this was a new experience for me. And it made me more convinced than ever that we really do live on in some form after our death.’

Daniel Geller, meanwhile, who was a schoolboy when we last encountered him, has qualified and practised law in London, having studied the subject first at the London School of Economics and Political Science, the famous LSE, and later at specialist law school in London. Additionally, Daniel studied French law in Strasbourg. Daniel bought his own apartment on Westminster Bridge Road in London, in a building originally used by MI5, the British internal security service, and having practised for some years in a prestigious attorneys’ chambers, at the time of writing was in the process of moving to Los Angeles, and was planning to qualify as a US attorney and live in California.

The year after he qualified in England, I caught up with Daniel to interview him about his growing and active interest at the time in British politics, especially the Conservative Party, known colloquially as the Tories. The subsequent interview, published by the influential Independent newspaper, was headlined, ‘Daniel Geller: Abducted... by the Tories’ – a reference, of course, to Uri’s early, and ever controversial, UFO experiences back in Israel as a child.

We had met come to discuss politics – and his father, of course - in a London wine bar popular with his fellow lawyers. Daniel explained that he is economically to the right of centre, but socially to the left. In the then recent American election - he was born in the US and holds dual citizenship - he had supported John Kerry, the Democratic candidate against George W. Bush.

Displaying a bit of his father’s legendary courage and outspokenness, Daniel railed against Bush: ‘Bush’s natural law politics, where everything supposedly comes from God and morality, are utterly bizarre,’ he told me. ‘I don’t like his position on homosexuality and a lot of other issues. He is a very weird, didactic kind of leader. The whole thing stinks.’

‘I began to feel this calling to politics last summer, he explained. ‘I wanted to enter the arena; to do something; to contribute. So I joined my local Conservative party. ‘Politics is my passion. Politics is the relationship between the state, communities and individuals. I love the theoretical and the practical. And the characters fascinate me.’

But didn't Daniel find local politicians a bit dull in comparison to the kind of people he had been used to visiting his home since he could remember, people as diverse as Michael Jackson, David Blaine, Elton John, Geri Halliwell, Sarah Ferguson (The Queen's daughter-in-law, the Duchess of York, and the former Beatle, George Harrison)?

'Look, because of who my father is, I've met fascinating people I wouldn't otherwise have met,' Daniel said. 'But I get more excited about Sir Teddy Taylor [a minor Conservative politician] visiting for tea than Michael Jackson. Michael Jackson doesn't do anything for me. I've met Margaret Thatcher, for heavens sake.'

It had been a chance meeting the previous summer with Thatcher that impelled Daniel to come out politically. 'I introduced myself to her and said I'd welcome a brief chat. She was ever so accommodating. She gave me some choice words which have stuck in my mind: keep studying; imbibe information; keep learning. I found this inspirational. I was really moved by having the chance to talk to her.'

Was there a chance that having Uri Geller as a dad could adversely affect his political career? 'Why should it?' he demanded. 'John Major [the Conservative prime minister after Thatcher] had a father who was a trapeze artist and it didn't affect him especially.'

And had Daniel after all, inherited any of Uri's extraordinary abilities? 'When I was about seven,' he said, 'I developed an inexplicable ability to tell you the day of the week for any date in the future. I didn't have to think about it - the day just

came out. I lost that ability after a few months. But I've never delved into that. I'm a very grounded individual. I want the law and the local Conservative Party to be my life, not being abducted by aliens.'

Natalie Geller has taken a quite different, but equally interesting, path for the first part of her journey in life. 'Natalie went to drama school,' says Uri, 'then one day, she announced she was packing up and going to LA. She said, "If I don't do it, I'll never know. I know there are another million British girls waiting there for the dream to come true." And I said fine, so she rented a little apartment and worked at some friends' movie company, in charge of choosing independent films to distribute. And now she has moved into an apartment in Beverly Hills and is very happy there, especially now Daniel has also moved to LA.' Natalie Geller has performed in shows alongside her father in Israel and in Germany.

'They never look for help,' Uri says of his children. 'If I buy them a gift, I have to force them to accept it. They are amazing characters. I took Daniel to Brazil when he was 14 to show him how poor people live in the *favelas* and have no money for food. Daniel told his younger sister what he had seen on that trip there and I think that was the moment that they both realised how privileged they were. 'I taught them,' Uri says, 'to adopt an attitude of gratitude.'

In his public life, Uri's always exciting and frequently surreal life continued at the same fever pitch as it was decades earlier. His most famous association, of course, has been with Michael Jackson. It was through Uri that Michael met his guru for many years, the former Oxford University rabbi Shmuley Boteach; with Shmuley, now a

famous media personality back home in the States, Uri wrote a well-received book in 2001, *Confessions of a Rabbi and Psychic*. Uri and Shmuley remain firm friends, but both of their relationships with Michael ended sadly. In Shmuley's case, it fell foul of the court accusations made against Michael that he had abused children. Although Michael was found innocent, the relationship had by then fractured. The Uri – Michael friendship, went even more wrong – and this after Michael had served as best man at Uri's much publicised marriage vow renewal at his home. Shmuley was the officiating rabbi at the high-profile occasion.

Uri recalls: 'I met Michael Jackson through Mohamed Al Fayed [the owner of the Harrods store in London and father of Dodi Al Fayed, Princess Diana's boyfriend, with whom she died in 1997.] I was at Mohamed's home and Michael called him. So he said, "Hey, Michael, Uri Geller is sitting next to me." And I heard a shriek over the phone, "Uri Geller! Wow, I've always wanted to meet him." And so then on one of my trips to New York, I got to meet him. We got together, he came here, and everything went very well for a couple of years.'

Did Uri's psychic abilities ever give him any insight into what Michael really did or did not do with the children who ended up his accusers? 'I never believed that he was a paedophile,' says Uri firmly. 'One day, I was with Michael in a studio in New York and he was working on the album *Invincible*, the one I did a design for that appeared inside the CD cover. And he suddenly said to me, "Uri, I can't stop eating junk food. Can you hypnotise this out of me?" And I said, "Yes, I'm a good hypnotist." In Israel, in the late 60s and early 70s, I had to learn hypnotism to widen my repertoire, because it was very narrow.'

‘So I said to Michael, sure let me hypnotise you. And then in the darkened studio of The Hit Factory, I put him in a deep trance. And then I did something highly unethical. Instead of telling him not to eat junk food, this thought came into my mind - that I now had the chance to find out the truth. Now at that time, as everyone remembers, Michael had paid the parents of a boy called Jordy Chandler \$18m allegedly for their silence. Nobody understood why. Many people thought he was guilty and that’s why he’d ‘paid him off’.

‘Now Michael was a great subject to hypnotise. So I took my chance, and this was very unethical, I admit, I asked him, “Michael, tell me did you ever touch a child in an inappropriate manner?” And he, hearing this question immediately, without any hesitation at all, said, “No, I would never do that.” So then I asked him, “Well, why did you pay off Jordy Chandler?” And he just said, “I couldn’t take it any more. I’d had enough.” And then it hit me, and I’d always believed that he was innocent, that this guy may be naïve, but he really is innocent. It was like a private validation and its why when Michael went to court years later, they wanted me as a witness. So I took him out of the hypnosis and told him to forget everything. But then what happened was I then made the devastating mistake of introducing him to Martin Bashir [the British TV interviewer who drew from Michael the fatally embarrassing admissions and film footage which effectively ended Michael’s career.]

‘Michael was in London,’ says Uri, ‘and Bashir called me up and begged me to get him to Michael Jackson. And he sat here on my sofa pulling out from his wallet this crumpled-up letter from Princess Diana that she’d written him telling him how

wonderful the documentary he had done about her was. Then Bashir started talking about his children and how he needed to get one of them into hospital. So he seemed to be a regular family kind of man, so I trusted him, I gave him the introduction to Michael. And Michael then made the terrible mistake of signing an agreement without asking any of his advisors. He signed his life away, almost literally. Then he continued making mistakes. Holding that boy's hand in the documentary. Then saying he'd never had more than two plastic surgeries, It could have been a great documentary for him, but it was a catastrophe. And in the end, it obviously turned Michael off me. I don't blame him. Later, someone told me he had made some allegedly anti-Semitic comments on a radio show and from then on, I washed Michael Jackson right out of my mind.'

Uri and Shipi started to realise that the introduction had been a horrible misjudgement when one of Michael's assistants called from California asking for Bashir's home phone number. As Shipi explains: 'They realised the explosive stuff Bashir had taped and wanted to talk to him. But obviously, once Bashir had got what he wanted, he vanished, completely disappeared. Then they sent someone from the States, who came to the house here and then hung around in London for a couple of days on behalf of Michael to try to get a look at the documentary. But Granada [the British TV company] wouldn't let him see anything.'

Another famous Uri association in the past few years has been with David Blaine, who, as explained in Chapter 16, came over to England from the US specially to meet Uri when he was just starting to become a cult figure in the States. This friendship, too, foundered a few years on.

‘We were really good friends,’ says Uri. ‘When he did his famous stunt in London spending weeks in a glass box suspended high up from a construction crane was in the glass box, I came almost every day to see him and support him.’

‘But I started getting the feeling that he thought I was doing it for my own publicity. Maybe he was swayed by other people, but he said something quite rude about me later and I was quite shocked, so our relationship has cooled off. Here’s a guy who came to my wedding and whom I’ve supported a lot, I was really surprised. I’ve emailed him a couple of times since, but he’s not replied.’

Blaine did, nonetheless, before this cooling in the relationship, make some very supportive comments about Uri in *Being Uri Geller*. His remarks were especially surprising – and generous - as he is one of the magicians who is careful not to claim supernatural abilities and has never previously been drawn on the big question of whether Uri Geller is a magician or a genuine paranormalist. Indeed, knowing the vicious reaction of the majority of magicians when anyone within their ranks flirts with the supernatural, his comments were both brave and dangerous. For those of us outside the argument, however, the feeling can only be that if Uri managed to impress Blaine as much as he clearly did, then he must either be an unprecedentedly brilliant conjuror – or the real deal.

‘As a kid,’ Blaine says in the documentary, ‘I read every book on him. This was one of the people I really looked up to. It was him, Klaus Kinski and Orson Welles, a select group of people. So I got Uri Geller’s number and I called him and said, “I want to come and meet you.” Uri said excitedly, “Jump on a plane right now.’

‘So I flew out immediately. But he said, “One thing. When you’re on the plane, I want you to draw anything that you want and fold it up small and put it in your pocket, and don’t let anybody see it, not even on the airplane.” So we get to his house, and the first thing he does, before we even really sit down and eat anything, he says, “Come here.” He takes a piece of paper and a pen, and I have my hand on this thing to make sure nothing can happen to it. And he draws, and I start to notice it looks exactly like what I drew. I pull my paper out and open it up and not only are they identical, but he folds my paper in half across the middle of the drawing, puts it against his and every line matches perfectly. And that’s when I knew that this guy is onto some serious stuff.’

Undeterred by the occasional problems he has with his celebrity connections, Uri continues to expand his circle of mindblowingly famous friends. ‘I met Lewis Hamilton [the young British Formula 1 motor racing ace] in the street not long ago,’ says Uri. We were driving down a street in London and there he was, with Puff Daddy as it happens. So I got out of the car, said hello and bent a spoon for him. And Hamilton gave me his mobile number. So now, before every race I send him positive messages and energy and he always texts me back to thank me.’

Another inimitable Uri Geller characteristic that has continued unabated into his sixties is his ability – unique in the world so far as I know – to mix his spooky paranormal world with his crazy showbusiness world – and then to mix both with the serious world of politics and international relations. Extraordinary though it may seem, in 2005, Uri Geller played a key role – and one publicly acknowledged by the

other participants - in cementing in Geneva a working agreement between the Israeli and Palestinian versions of the International Red Cross, the *Magen David Adom* (Red Star of David) and the Palestine Red Crescent Society respectively. Under the agreement, both emergency services can now operate in one another's territory under the newly created, politically and culturally neutral symbol known as the Red Crystal – the crystal part being derived (perhaps supernaturally, Uri jokes) from one of his beloved quartz crystals, which he always carries in his pockets. Additionally, with the new arrangement in place, the *Magen David Adom* was fully accepted into the International Red Cross as a full member, rather than as a mere observer, as had been the case since the foundation of the State of Israel.

‘Dr Noam Yifrach, head of Magen David Adom had for years been trying to get Israel into the International Red Cross,’ Uri recalls of the extraordinary period leading up to the deal in November 2005. ‘Yifrach had one day watched the *Reputations* documentary about me on BBC television. And when he saw that during the 1987 arms talks between the US and the Soviet Union in Geneva, I had been brought in by Senator Claiborne Pell, then chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, to try to bombard the mind of Yuri Vorontsov, the head of the Soviet negotiating team, he said, “Wow, if Uri could do that, maybe we could use his talent to get us into the Red Cross?”’

‘So Yifrach called me up and said he wanted to talk to me. I assumed he was looking for a donation, but he said, “No we don’t want any money from you. We want something quite different and quite strange.” So I was intrigued and invited him here. He came with his deputy and said, “Look, Uri, we are negotiating with the

Palestinians, but we are at a point where I think we need your help.” So I said, “Yes, I’m sure I can help, but you’ve got to make me legally something in your organisation.” So they activated their lawyers and made me legally, the president of the Friends of *Magen David Adom*. With that done, we flew to the State Department in Washington, we went to Korea, and gradually I started to be introduced to the Palestinians in Ramallah, especially to the head of the Red Crescent, Younis Al-Khatib.’

‘So soon, the next round in the negotiations were beginning, all orchestrated by the International Red Cross and the head of the American Red Cross, Bonnie McElveen-Hunter. It was proving very difficult, however, to speak with the Palestinians. They were continually raising questions that were difficult to answer, especially about Israeli checkpoints and about injured and pregnant people being stopped at the checkpoints when they are going to hospital and so on. So I said, yes, we will stop that, we will ~~remove the checkpoints~~ if we come to an agreement. But then they also wanted Red Crescent ambulances to operate in Jerusalem, and that gets political. To have an ambulance with a Red Crescent logo in Jerusalem would be tricky. Then they said, well your doctors are also carrying weapons in the ambulances. So there were a lot of negotiating problems to get through and a lot of ups and downs, and it was all pretty much stalled.’

‘But then at one meeting in the dining room of the Swiss Foreign Ministry in Bern with the Palestinian officials and dignitaries, I could see that things really weren’t going anywhere and I said quietly to Shipi, “Hey, tell the maître d’ to bring me a spoon.” I figured that the Palestinians don’t know who I am or what I do, so maybe

this was something worth trying to change the atmosphere for the better. And the headwaiter comes in with a spoon on a silver tray. I pick up the spoon and I bend it. And I hand it to Younis Al-Khatib and he freaks out because it continues bending in his hand. And they go into a huddle, I can hear they're talking about the supernatural and powers and someone is saying, "You see, that's why we have to talk", and suddenly, it all took off. Suddenly, they're all laughing and smiling, and it was like the whole Berlin Wall was dismantled at once. The negotiations were working.'

'But meanwhile, we were being inundated with people from the Israeli State Department and the Foreign Ministry, watching us, wanting to know how can we allow Red Crescent ambulances into Jerusalem. But in the end the government officials said to us, "Yes, you can sign," and a big press conference was arranged for early the next morning for [Noam Yifrach](#) to sign with Younis Al-Khatib. But suddenly, very, very late at night, the State Department start saying they can't give us the OK without prime minister Ariel Sharon himself agreeing. By now, it was 4am in Geneva, there were four hours to go before the signing, and they weren't willing to wake Sharon at 5am. They were insistent that they couldn't.'

'But then Shipi remembered that Bonnie McElveen-Hunter had given us her mobile number and I jumped on the phone. We dialled her and luckily, she had her mobile on because it was about midnight in the US. And I said, "Bonnie, you've got to pull a miracle, the Israelis are giving us problems now. You've got to call the White House and wake up President Bush and ask him to get you Arik Sharon's personal number. I know him, I can call him, but I don't have his number. So she finds a number from the White House – I believe they actually did wake up Bush for it – and pulls off

exactly the miracle we had asked her for. She called us back with Sharon's number. So we called Sharon and the government officials tell him that he's the only person who can give the green light to Yifrach to sign. And Arik Sharon goes to his desk, sits down and spends an hour looking at everything, calls the Foreign Ministry and tells them it's OK, they can sign. And then, because it was signed, Israel was accepted into the International Red Cross after 56 years of exclusion. The Red Cross created the new symbol, the crystal, to go onto ambulances in war zones. [Se](#) if Israeli ambulances have to go into Gaza, they can have the red crystal, which isn't political like the star of David. [T](#)hey called it The Third Protocol, this Red Crystal.'

Acclaim for Uri's success at 'bending' the negotiations came from the highest quarters. The Swiss foreign minister – later elected president of Switzerland - Micheline Calmy-Rey, said in a speech to the assembled dignitaries: 'Uri Geller did not just help break the ice with the skills that have made him famous - a considerable number of bent spoons line the road that led to this agreement. He has also played a pivotal role in helping everyone focus on the main objective and overcoming differences over secondary details at key junctures.'

The Red [Crystal](#) negotiations were not Uri's only recent intervention in his home country's affairs. Indeed, his renewed ties with Israel have been steadily becoming tighter over the past decade. Israel's deadly war in Lebanese territory against Hezbollah in 2006, for example, brought Uri's patriotic streak to the fore. 'When the war in Lebanon broke out, I said to Hanna and to Shipi, 'You know, I'm not just going to sit here in England, I'm going there. And they both said they were coming with me. I don't know what it was, we just had to experience this and be part of what

our country was going through. So we got on a plane and the next thing we know, we're landing at Ben Gurion Airport.'

'Now Leonard Lauder, the son of Estée Lauder, lives in New York, but he keeps a \$1m armoured vehicle in Tel Aviv for his safety when he's there. It's a Chevy Suburban, and he gave it to us along with his driver, Uzi, and we drove up to the border and went into the war with the tanks. While we were still in Israel, we drove into Kiryat Shmona [the town in northern Israel that was bearing the brunt of Hezbollah's missile attacks] Then we went to Rosh Hanikra, which was also under attack, to greet Jakob Kellenberger, president of the Red Cross International Committee, who had driven down from Beirut to see the devastation on both sides. So we showed him around. And as we took him in, the Katyushas started coming down. He almost didn't take it seriously when the sirens went off to say they were incoming. We practically had to push him into the shelter. And then we heard the explosions. It was so strange and unbelievable.'

'When we got across the border into Lebanon, I think people were quite surprised to see this civilian Suburban with thick windows in a war zone. We had, I think, the most surreal moment of our lives, sitting and having coffee up there in Lebanon with big guns firing on our left and right and tanks right next to us. We called Natalie in Los Angeles so she could hear all this. We were right there with the soldiers, being shot at. Hanna went to use the bathroom in a police station and the next day it wasn't there. Of course, all the big TV people were up there too, Fox, CNN and the networks. Fox wanted to interview me, but I declined. But usually, we were the only civilians there. It was an amazing two or three days. We went quite deep inside

Lebanon. It was terrible sometimes, seeing all the young guys and knowing some of them wouldn't come back. What I was doing was entertaining the troops. I was stopping the car all the time, bending spoons under their noses, everything. The kids in the fighting units were mostly reservists so they were generally over 30 and knew me.'

'The effect of the trip was that we felt now reconnected, that we were a part of it and it was back to my roots, back to my patriotism, back to my devotion and convictions about Israel. It was all about that. I felt that I'd been away so long I had to get that powerful spiritual feeling and I couldn't find any other way but this. It was the glue that brought my soul back. There was something funny, though. We picked up from the ground in Kiryat Shmona a missile fin with an attached piece of fuselage, and when I got it, I decided to take it back to England and take it on TV to show people what's being showered on Israel's heads, because there was so much talk against Israel there.'

Anyway, when I got to Ben Gurion, I had this lump of a charred missile in my suitcase and the security machine obviously picked it up. I saw a big commotion and thought I'd better go and tell them the truth. So I went straight to the security people. They all knew who I was. And so I said, "Listen guys, there is a Katyusha in my suitcase. But there's no explosive in it and I'm taking it back as an educational item. And they all said, "Fine, you can take it."

Another quite different re-connection with Israel that ultimately had great ramifications for Uri's ever-flourishing showbusiness career was forming out of the

mist at about this time. ‘I was in a hotel in Tel Aviv when I got a phone call from a local TV producer, Elad Kuperman,’ Uri recounts. ‘He said he’d read in the papers that I was here and was thinking he’d like to do a TV show with me. I said, “Sure, come to the hotel and we can speak for 10 minutes. I am pretty busy, though.”’

Kuperman wanted to bring along Avi Nir, the head of Keshet, one of the owners of Channel 2 TV in Israel. Now as it happens, one of the owners Keshet is, Haim Saban, the billionaire who produced *Power Rangers*, and also owned at the time ProSieben, a major German TV channel.’

‘So we sat in the business lounge and I said, “Listen, I hope you’re not wasting your time because you should really be finding the new Uri Geller rather than talking to me. And as I said this, their eyes met and I felt the energy build in a split second between them. And Kuperman said, “Uri, you just said the name of the show. That’s the show.” The three of us looked at each other, laughed, shook hands and that was it.

‘Four months later, we rolled out the show, actually with another name I had come up with, *The Successor*. The premise was that with my 60th birthday approaching, the world needs someone to take over from me. And I’m not kidding, the streets of Tel Aviv were empty when it came on the TV. It was the most successful Israeli TV show of all time. There wasn’t a car in the street. It got 54 per cent market share. The next day, I couldn’t walk in the street. It was such a huge hit. It was incredible, being back in Tel Aviv after so many years and all the problems and disasters of the past, when I was almost drummed out of town because of that stupid business with the faked photo with Sophia Loren. And suddenly, 38 years later, I’m back and in a bigger show than

anything I did back then. After all that time not performing in Israel, I never thought I would get this acceptance and love.’

Understandably, given the passage of time and the contemplative side that grows in us all as we get older, Uri couldn’t quite get the homecoming side of the story out of his mind. In one newspaper interview, Uri said tellingly: ‘They say there is no prophet in his homeland. When I left there was envy, there were those who did not like my success. I admit today that I was on an ego trip. I had to prove myself. But so what? I came from a poor family.’

The Successor was aired live, every week for eleven weeks, a simple but compelling formula, with Uri sitting in a big chair judging the performers, all of whom were competing to perform the best Uri Geller-style mentalist, psychic (or whatever they chose to call it) act. ‘It wasn’t only the act I was looking for. I’m looking for charisma, for character, for personality, because I know that’s what makes an act, not the act itself, It’s like presidential elections in the United States, it’s the most charismatic person that wins. It’s been like that through our history.’

‘There are five performers per night and the one who impresses me the most, I give immunity so he or she will go through whatever the public votes. It’s Pop Idol with mentalists. I keep away from words like magic and illusion. I create an atmosphere of mystery and mystique, powers of the mind. But I make it very clear every time I start the show that the host must ask me, “OK, what are these guys? Are they magicians, are they mentalists, are they psychics, are they paranormalists? And my answer is to say, “Listen, I don’t care what they are and I don’t care how they do it. All I care

about is one thing. I want to see the most mindblowing performance on this stage. I want to be impressed, I want to go, “Wow,” I want my hair to stand on end. I want the people at home to ask, “How did they do this?”

‘And then,’ Uri continues, “I say something very important. That we do not claim any supernatural powers here. I don’t want to know how they do it. And that’s it. By saying that, I neutralise controversy, which comes anyway. But the people who are performing, whether they’re real or not, they don’t have to worry about what their colleagues will say in the business, that they’re suddenly pretending to be supernatural or psychic. I went through all that shit and I need to protect them from it.’

‘Of course, I know that the controversy is actually good no matter what people say and write and blog. I always remember Oscar Wilde and that very important thing he said – that there’s only one thing worse than being talked about, and that’s not being talked about. That’s what I’ve been doing now for more than 40 years and I’m still around and bigger than ever with all the Randi controversy, all the people who’ve tried to shoot me down and debunk me. Those people made me a super millionaire, they made me more popular than ever. I actually openly thank them on my Website in “A message to sceptics”’.

‘So this is what the show is about. It’s an amazing, eleven-weeks of phenomenal performers, and then each week, I do my show, just one thing, fixing broken watches in people’s homes, bending spoons in people’s homes, doing telepathy with them. Now there’s a call centre next to the studio with eight girls, and when I do my things,

people call in. The technology is such that now people can film the phenomena, the spoons jumping off the TV, the tables moving and report it and send the clip in immediately.'

The first series of *The Successor* was won by a 25 year-old mindreader from Haifa, Lior Suchard, who had already been performing internationally as well as in Israel, and, apart from looking a little like Uri, does a lot of similar, and very impressive, material with some innovative twists and effects of his own. Suchard does not explicitly claim or deny supernatural powers.

The Successor, aside from re-establishing Uri with his home audience, a goal which can never be underestimated for anyone from any country who has sought fame and fortune overseas, opened the floodgates for another round of international interest in Uri. Keshet gave it to SevenOne International, a distribution arm of ProSieben, the show went to the international TV marketplace event, MIP TV, in Cannes and was snapped up by country after country. It was America, however, that Uri was dreaming of re-capturing. Uri had almost as tough a time in the US in the 1970s and ended up leaving for Europe under a similar cloud to the one that overshadowed his early fame in Israel.

'I had this vision that somehow it was going to get to America, even though realistically, it was an impossibility for us. No Israeli show has ever sold to an American network. But the NBC executives at MIP were very enthusiastic about it. They went back to LA, but the big bosses there said "No". So I went to Matthew Freud, the London PR guru, who I helped when he was young. I wanted him to help

me through his wife, Elisabeth Murdoch, the daughter of Rupert Murdoch, to call Fox and maybe try to sell it to them, Fox being Rupert's channel of course. I really believe in the Law of Attraction. I believe if you want something that badly, you send out your request to the Universe, and the Universe makes things happen – and it doesn't like delays. But this wasn't yet happening for me.'

“Matthew said, “No, forget Fox, I know Ben Silverman, who owns a big production company in LA. I'm going to call him.” And soon after, Ben emailed me, said he knew all about me and about *The Successor*. And amazingly, that very week, the head of NBC was fired, and Ben took over as co-chairman of NBC Entertainment and Universal Media Studio and bought the show immediately.'

The announcement came from NBC in Burbank, California, on July 16, 2007. Silverman's big idea was to give the new Uri Geller show, to be called *Phenomenon*, a contemporary twist by having Uri co-host it with Criss Angel, the prominent young mentalist who had made the phrase 'Mindfreak' his trademark.' 'The match-up of two world-famous personalities, Uri Geller and Criss Angel, who have demonstrated astounding skills, makes for a riveting series format,' Silverman told the media. 'Factor in the mystery of the genre, the live competitive angle as the contestants attempt to follow in Criss and Uri's footsteps, and incredible interactive applications, and we think viewers will have many compelling reasons to watch.'

Christopher Nicholas Sarantakos was born of Greek American parents on December 19 – the day before Uri's birthday –1967, making him 30 when *Phenomenon* first aired. Criss is of the modernist school of thought which holds that everything done by

Uri or any other performer claiming psychic powers is trickery and sleight of hand. Angel is evangelical – militant, in fact - in this belief; he has often revealed the methods for his tricks to viewers at home on TV and in videos, and in a book, *Mindfreak*, which became a Los Angeles Times bestseller.

‘He’s an amazing guy and a great performer,’ Uri says. ‘He’s astonishing, he has charisma, he has the looks, he’s talented and skilled and he’s done about a thousand TV shows. But I felt he neutralised the mysticism of my series. Criss doesn’t believe. His father died a few years ago and I think that deep inside Criss Angel wants to believe there’s life after death – but that’s just me saying it. I spent eight weeks seeing him a lot. He’s a sensitive person, and I think every sensitive and intuitive individual must believe that there is something more to our senses.’

Although Uri got on well with Angel, the two still speak and exchange emails and the show was won by Mike Super, an established 31 year-old magician from Pittsburgh, was a great success, Uri believes having *Phenomenon* co-hosted by a denier of psychic phenomena was a mistake on NBC’s part. ‘I believe if I get the time and NBC take another season, it will be as with just me, as it is in all the other countries. Criss, I understand, signed a multi-million dollar contract with Las Vegas immediately after *Phenomenon* anyway and so he’s very busy.’

By far the most controversial and interesting part of the show, and the incident which is still being battled out on the Internet, was towards the end, when Angel unexpectedly issued a challenge to Uri live on TV (and previously to another psychic entertainer Jim Callahan, to guess what was written in an envelope in his pocket, and

offered him \$1m of his own money if Uri could get his envelope's contents right. The resultant unplanned brief sequence with Uri (things had previously got extremely heated with Callahan, who refused the challenge) may be seen in retrospect as one of the key moments in Uri's career – and, like so much of his life, is so intriguing yet frustratingly inconclusive that it serves only to heighten global public fascination with Uri.

Uri is in no doubt that Angel was concerned – he actually looked a little panicked - when he started to guess what the young American had written on the paper - it was the simple yet evocative numbers, 911. 'I do believe I freaked him out with the envelope. He stopped me in the middle because I started saying the number. A lot of people feel I should have got the \$1m.'

In a CNN interview about the show, Angel had told Larry King, 'No one has the ability, that I'm aware of, to do anything supernatural, psychic, talk to the dead. And that was what I said I was going to do with *Phenomenon*; if somebody goes on that show and claims to have supernatural psychic ability, I'm going to bust him, live and on television.' It can easily be seen, then, how for Uri to have been seen to win the challenge would have meant much more than having to sign over \$1m he could easily afford or suffering a minor embarrassment; it would have destroyed Angel's 'rationalist' stance on magicianship and pitched the entire magician establishment, from James Randi upwards, into chaos. Indeed, it would have destroyed Angel's career, because there can be no doubt that, in their panic, the rationalists would have set out determinedly to bend the truth and present Angel either as a collaborator with

mysticism – or as having rigged the show to present Uri in a good light, either of which would have meant professional death.

The incident, therefore, deserves examining word by word. This is how it unfolded. Angel, handling the envelope, first asks Uri if he would like to ‘take a gander [a look] at this’. ‘I knew you’ll challenge me once more,’ Uri replies. ‘A million dollars bucks, cash,’ Angel says.

Uri: ‘But let me tell you something. Although we were born one day apart. I was born on the 20th December and you on the 19th. [Uri stresses the number 19 here]

Angel: I told you that, correct. [Angel smiles weakly and nods]

Uri: There’s a lot of years between us, 40 years. You were one year old when I came out [Uri holds up one finger at this point and wags it repeatedly at Angel] with my spoon bending.

Angel: I guess this is a ‘No.’ [Angel seems in a rush, holds up a hand to stop Uri speaking and moves his gaze to the envelope. He then throws his head back, laughs and starts opening the envelope as Uri is trying to continue]

Uri: And I wish you a lot of success ...

Presenter: We need to know what’s inside that envelope, please.

Angel: Here it is [opening envelope]. It's a travesty that happened to people all around the world but specifically to New Yorkers and people in New York. If somebody could have predicted or told us on 9/10 that 9/11 was going to happen. [Angel reveals paper with 911 handwritten on it] then maybe that could have prevented it. That's why it's a sad day that non one could do that and people [indicating Uri] claim they can.

As will be clear from the above, the *Phenomenon* envelope incident, which is much viewed still on YouTube, is wide open to interpretation. It seems that Uri had an idea that the envelope contained some combination of the numbers 1 and 19 and seemed to be formulating a final answer in his mind and marking time by developing a dramatic build-up to stating the answer. It seems equally clear that Angel was overly anxious to terminate the experiment from the moment Uri, having mentioned 19 pointedly then started heavily emphasising the number 1. What remains odd, however, is that Uri remained silent, and looked almost paralysed, throughout the 18 full seconds that Angel took to build up to revealing the number. Uri certainly seemed annoyed with himself as Angel started speaking about 9/11, but said nothing.

What, then, is Uri's explanation for his untypical silence at this all-important moment? 'When I was sitting next to Criss during those 18 seconds, there were a number of thoughts going through my mind at the same time. Number one was I was questioning myself why I was uttering those numbers. And then I was answering them to myself, saying, "Probably, those numbers and birthdays are the basis of what is inside his envelope, but, I was thinking to myself, what would happen if I was right. Would he even open the envelope or not? I didn't want to mess up my own show.

Remember, this is my show, my format, I own it, I created it. And he wasn't supposed to do that on the show. Another thought that went through my mind was, what if those weren't the numbers in Criss's envelope? And my last thought was, I actually planned to say, "Well, if you open your envelope, you will see that the numbers I have just spoken correlate closely to what you have in there," But then I was cut off very sharply. So all these thoughts took up that 18 seconds, they flew by and by then it was too late to say anything.'

The controversy, of course, helped develop an even more insistent new buzz in the TV world about Uri's renaissance. The show went from the US to Germany (*The Next Uri Geller — Unglaubliche Phänomene live*) and then to the Netherlands (*De nieuwe Uri Geller*). Both shows were made in the same studio in Cologne. Just as Germany had been an emotionally loaded country for Uri and any Israeli early in his career, it continued to have special significance for him in 2008. 'At one point, the executive producer for ProSieben, Oliver Brendel, said to me, "You know what, Uri. What I'd love you to do for me is do your trademark 1, 2, 3 in Hebrew." I said, "What, you want me to count Hebrew and not to say Eins, Zwei, Drei?" And so, incredible as this was in Germany after all, I started triggering my performances with *Achat, Stayim, Shalosh* and within a few days, kids all over Germany, who were already mesmerised by the show, were going *Achat, Stayim, Shalosh* at home, in school playgrounds, everywhere. Imagine, German children counting in Hebrew with no embarrassment or agenda at all. It was an amazing thing to see and hear. Again, it was soon all over YouTube and children started shouting *Achat, Stayim, Shalosh* at me in the street. Amazing and very emotional for any Jew.'

The show became enormous in Germany, capturing 20 per cent of the market share. The Germans being a people as ever committed to going the extra kilometre to do things to the ultimate extreme, there were scary moments with over-keen contestants. ‘One performer wanted to shoot a nail gun into his arm, and then into his head. I had to stop him - it would have been so easy for it to go wrong. But generally, it was all fantastic. Some German sceptics were ranting all over the Internet, in blogs and on YouTube revealing how the contestants may have done their acts. They got Randi over for another show on the RTL channel exposing some of the performers and, supposedly, some of my feats.’

‘RTL were rattled by the success of my show, so they decided to undermine it by producing a rival. And as promotion for that show, they placed a full-page advertisement in *Bild Zeitung*, which naturally ended up promoting my show and the next edition got the highest rating yet. It was really very good of them to do my publicity for free, but then the sceptics have really been doing that for 40 years. ProSieben received 1.6m phone calls during the series. There were cartoons of me in *Stern* and *Der Spiegel*. They ended up giving me a multi-million Euro contract to do more shows - and I’m also creating for them a big UFO show.’

A Hungarian version of the show, *A kiválasztott* followed, which led to a new cult in Hungary, of children imitating Uri’s odd Hungarian accent. Many of the Hungarian public’s impressions of Uri can be viewed on YouTube. Turkey was next in line for what was rapidly turning in to a new Uri Geller juggernaut. The Hungarian and Turkish shows ran concurrently, which meant Uri and Shipi commuting by private jet between Budapest and Istanbul.

Turkey was an interesting new audience for Uri because he was wholly unknown there. It was, indeed, the first primarily Islamic country he had performed in, even though Uri counts many Muslims, including Mohamed Al Fayed, as his close personal friends. For safety's sake, in the extensive publicity given to *Fenomen* in Turkey, only very limited mention was made by either Uri or the media of his Israeli roots, although it was made clear that the show had played in Israel. But even if people were doing their own research – not difficult in the Internet age – and discovering that Uri is an Israeli Jew and Israeli army veteran, it made little difference to *Fenomen's* high profile reception – or the level of scrutiny (although balanced) Uri's psychic credentials were subjected to in the media.

The Turkish Daily News, for instance, ran a lengthy article under the headline 'Famed psychic transfixes Turkish television'. It quoted a Turkish illusionist, Sermet Erkin, as saying that Uri's claim of mental power is deceptive, but added that notable figures around the world and in Turkey were standing firmly behind the things they had seen him accomplish. The famed Turkish singer Ibrahim Tatlıses, an early guest on the show, had said he did not believe in mental powers such as Uri's but was dumbfounded when he drew a picture sight-unseen that another person had drawn live. 'Oha, what's going on here?' Tatlıses said on the show.

Fenomen's host and movie producer Sinan Çetin also told the journalist that he did not believe the mind could move objects and tables before meeting Geller. 'Now, yes, I believe him,' he said. Fasih Saylan, deputy general manager of the broadcaster, Star TV. Saylan said men especially were calling in to the show week after week

exclaiming that they could not believe what had happened in their houses, from moving objects to fixed clocks. ‘Our whole crew is getting text messages about strange things their friends are seeing. I don't know what he's about,’ said Saylan.

Russia was the next – and biggest – new territory in which Uri was determined to break through, and he was especially excited about it not just because it is the biggest country in the world – but also because here was another market where he was barely known. His 1970s heyday had come at the height of the Cold War and when, additionally, Soviet-Israeli relations were frosty at best.

The coming of Uri's show to Russia was announced on July 30th 2007, with TV Channel Rossiya saying they would be launching an eight-episode 90 minute per show run on Saturday nights at prime time, with Denis Semenikhin as host. At the packed launch press conference, Jens Richter, the managing director of SevenOne International, said, ‘TV Channel Russia is an excellent partner. And in terms of its content, *The Successor with Uri Geller* fits in perfectly with Russia, a country that has often been said to have a mystical soul. We are positive that TV Channel Rossiya will be as successful with Uri Geller as all the other channels before.’

The media coverage reached near saturation in Russia in the summer of 2008, with one controversial incident (not, as it happened, very much connected with Uri or his powers) making world headlines. In the weeks leading up to that seminal moment, of which more shortly, the customary fervent discussion of Uri's abilities rolled out as they have everywhere else these past 40 years. Anna Malpas, for the Moscow Times noted the celebrities in the audience for the Russian *Fenomen's* debut: ‘They included

actor Mikhail Dorozhkin, who said straight away that, “I have believed in miracles since my childhood,” and a former Miss Universe, Oksana Fyodorova, who hyperventilated as Geller promised to stamp his fingerprint on a spoon. “If you do that, I’m going to faint,” she warned. She didn’t, but Uri revived her anyway with a quick kiss.’

The big drama that transfixed Russia came on the show’s second airing, and was political comedy rather than psychic mystery. Natalya Krainova summed it up for the Moscow Times under the headline, ‘Knife, Munich, Putin on State TV’. ‘So rare is it to hear anything but fawning praise for Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on national television that the mere mention of his name in a less-than-flattering context can put television hosts and producers on the edge of a nervous breakdown,’ Krainova wrote.

‘In a live broadcast of the show *Phenomenon*, which features magicians and mind-readers, Alexander Char, a self-proclaimed telepath, swore that he could plant the plot of a detective story in the minds of audience members merely by looking them in the eye. The story, Char said in the September 5th broadcast, had already been put on paper and locked in a safe, and now he would telepathically relay to three spectators three key details of the crime: the murder weapon, the place of the crime and the name of the perpetrator.’

‘The first two participants answered “knife” and “Munich,” respectively, responses that Char’s assistant dutifully wrote down on what appeared to be a dry-erase board. Char then asked a third spectator to name the perpetrator. “Tell me the name of a famous person not in the auditorium,” he said.’

‘After a long deliberation, the young man answered, “Putin,” prompting a burst of laughter and applause from the audience. Char gave his assistant the go-ahead to write down the response, resulting in a curious combination of words staring out at viewers: “Knife. Munich. Putin.”

It was only a matter of seconds before the host, Denis Semenikhin, rushed in from offstage, his earpiece visible, informing the startled telepath that he was being told the use of the prime minister’s name was unacceptable. “This is simply inappropriate,” Semenikhin said.’

‘Confusion reigned for several seconds while the host, the psychic and the assistant tried to figure out what to do. Attempts to erase Putin from the board proved futile, and the eventual solution only seemed to make things more awkward. Putin’s first name was acceptable, they agreed, and was subsequently written at the bottom of the list, which now read: “Knife. Munich. Putin. Vladimir.” When Char read the list aloud, he omitted the third line.’

Krainova concluded by quoting television journalist Maxim Shevchenko, who argued that Semenikhin’s and the producers’ reaction was natural because Russians are loath to lampoon their leaders. ‘This is not Oprah, where they freely parody the [U.S.] president,’ Shevchenko, said. ‘Russians have a different mentality.’ Another commentator, Alexei Mukhin, an analyst with the Center for Political Technologies, made an interesting point that went some way to explaining the station’s reaction within the modern Russian context.

The explanation to the event was to be found in an unfortunate combination of words that had formed on the whiteboard, Mukhin told Krainova. ‘At a security conference in February 2007, Putin gave a hawkish address that became one of the more memorable speeches of his eight years in office,’ said Mukhin. ‘The site of the speech, which was filled with sharp criticism comparing U.S. foreign policy with that of Nazi Germany? Munich.’

Thus did Uri’s second major exposure in Russia lead to the very kind of controversy (albeit in a very different form) which has, to his great satisfaction and profit, reliably followed him since the age of three. Not that old controversies about Uri ever show any sign of dying. Extraordinary to say, questions and mysteries about him continue decades on to be illuminated by new snippets of information from years ago, new perspectives, new assessments and new clues. It is almost as if Uri’s exploits in the 1970s were a mid 20th century re-run of the Jack the Ripper mystery in Victorian London.

The most surprising new piece of evidence about Uri’s past –both to those who study his life and power and to Uri himself – emerged in 2007, when a retired Israeli reserve Air Force captain, Ya’akov Avrahami, came forward to say he believed that at some time in the early 1950s, he had witnessed the incident related in Chapter 2, when Uri encountered a strange ball of light on a patch of derelict land close to the apartment on the corner of Betzalel Yaffe and Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv.

‘I was walking to the bus stop, down the road next to the Rothschild Cinema,’ Mr Avrahami said on camera in *Being Uri Geller*, ‘when I suddenly saw a powerful light,

a sphere-shaped light, a metre in diameter, bright and dazzling. At the same moment, I noticed that from a building on the left, a small child coming out dressed in a white shirt. The light halted again and, as if it had senses, for some reason, it suddenly turned around and approached the child. The light embraced him.

‘When I was negotiating the Red Cross agreement with the Palestinians in 2005, the BBC *Reputations* documentary played in Israel, and soon after, I got an email from Mr. Avrahami saying, “Mr Geller, you don’t know me, I’m a retired officer in the Air Force and I watched your documentary and I believe I was there when you saw that sphere of light.” I immediately put it to him that it was a hoax but later, I met him. He was an older gentleman, married with children and he told the story again. And it was the way he described me as a little boy with a white shirt and black trousers, which is what my mother always dressed me in that convinced me. He remembers that I ran home and this sphere of light chased me, and when I got to the apartment building entrance, and went in the door, the sphere of light exploded on the building and left a black residue. He was so shocked that he couldn’t believe his eyes. And when I told the story on the TV, he realised at last, after all these years that it was me.’

‘So after 55 or more years of me repeating this story, because I know it happened, but being told all these years that it was my imagination, or I was hallucinating, for the first time in my life, someone was validating what I’ve always known occurred. It was a very emotional thing for me, this man coming forward. Doubts have often slipped into my mind about the incident, whether maybe I dreamed it. But it was always very, very real to me and now with this man’s testimony, I know he’s not lying and now I know it definitely did happen.’

Other new evidence that has come to light in recent years emerged in November 2007, in a lengthy and meticulously researched re-examination of Uri by Brendan Burton, a UK-based founder and co-Administrator of the Open Minds Forum (www.openmindsforum.com) appeared in the online *American Chronicle*. The OMF includes astro-scientists, biologists, psychologists, journalists, theologians, forensic experts and other professionals and is particularly interested in the UFO issue.

Among Burton's fascinating findings and observations – that the CIA continued working with Russell Targ and Hal Puthoff for many years after their SRI work with Uri, suggesting, as Burton says, that even if there were some doubts in the scientific world about the pair's SRI work, the CIA saw no problems with it.

Burton also reported that he had asked Dr. Jack Sarfatti, an American theoretical physicist who supported Uri in the 1970s, to discuss the ability to bend metals by mind power. 'I have seen things in my trip to Brazil in 1985 shown to me by a General in the Brazilian Army, allegedly from a UFO that landed in the Amazon jungle, that is like what Uri did with metal but even more complex than what I saw Uri do in 1974,' Burton quotes Sarfatti as saying.

Burton also had one of the last interviews with the metallurgist and US Naval scientist, Eldon Byrd, before Byrd's death in 2002. He asked Byrd for his most up to date knowledge of psychokinesis. 'I developed several theories about how PK might work in the metal bending phenomena,' Byrd said. 'As a physical scientist I have

always been more interested in phenomena that produce hard analyzable data, rather than the soft statistical pablum of parapsychology. Recently, I have become acquainted with new information on how the mind can interact with biological processes; I have altered my previous theories. That is how science progresses - not with “proof”, but by coherency. We are close to understanding how intention can create action at a distance.’

‘In respect of Geller,’ Brendan Burton wrote, ‘there is too much credible witness evidence to suggest that he is just employing mere trickery. Indeed, if such were the case, he would be perhaps even more of a phenomenal person, having maintained a level of deceit so powerful it has managed to fool some of the most credible academics in history, people with high level security clearances, physicists, metallurgists, astronauts, magicians, politicians and world leaders, in short - the kind of people we tend to invest our trust into. Such supposed “trickery” to such a large and grand scale has certainly never been done before, and leads even some of the most sceptical to consider: “This can't be possible ... can it?”’

Burton concluded: ‘Sceptics often claim that these people are not experts at recognising the tricks and tools of deception, yet how do we explain the witness accounts of some of the worlds finest stage magicians, also seeing the first hand “bending” phenomena? The testimony of these people alone show that Uri Geller is perhaps NOT the “parlour trick” charlatan some pseudo-sceptics claim.’

Another writer fascinated by Uri but more so by Dr. Andrija Puharich, the esoteric author Phillip Coppens (www.philipcoppens.com) has been continuing his life-long

research on Puharich and concluding that the mysterious Serb was very probably a CIA agent on a long term, if eccentrically executed, mission to investigate Uri. ‘Uri Geller stated in 1996 that he “probably” believed that “the whole thing with Andrija was financed by the American Defense Department,”’ wrote Coppens on his website. That opinion was also expressed by Jack Sarfatti, who added that Puharich was Geller’s case officer in America with money provided by Sir John Whitmore.’ (Whitmore is a former champion professional race-car driver and sports psychologist who works today as a management consultant and is also a supporter of Puharich’s more far out theories.)

The evidence, Coppens concluded is that Puharich’s ultimate mission was to discredit Uri’s powers, or at least to turn them into an unverifiable myth and disinform the public. ‘Why? Perhaps Puharich did not want the paradigm shift to happen after all. But perhaps (more likely) he was following orders, and the orders were that the status quo had to remain. It seems a logical enough assumption that the US government was not interested in paradigm shifts, but instead preferred status quo, in which the existence of ESP was contained within the corridors of their own buildings, and not displayed in every street of the world. With such a paradigm shift, there was more than the state of the family silverware at stake.’

Another possibly significant new reworking of old evidence, on the website www.starstreamresearch.com followed up an interesting new snippet of news on Uri discovered by the respected British author and documentary maker Jon Ronson while researching a 2004 book, *The Men Who Stare At Goats*. Ronson discovered from Uri, following the 9/11 attacks, that he had been reactivated into the ranks of intelligence

agency psychic spies to help track the movement of terrorists and weapons of mass destruction. Ronson wrote that Uri had told him that he knew the man who reactivated his mental powers for intelligence merely as 'Ron'.

'Based on information provided to us by various sources,' Starstream.com reported, 'we strongly suspect that Ron is a former high ranking CIA agency analyst, previously tasked to monitor technology developments in China. The big question remains: which intelligence agencies might be involved in the latest version of a psychic black ops antiterrorist unit? MASINT (Measurement and Signatures Intelligence) is a likely candidate, but our present understanding is that Ron is working for John Negroponte at the Department of National Intelligence.'

'Rumours persist that America's DIA trained psychic intelligence sources are viewing mushroom clouds over numerous cities in the homeland. Taken in tandem with the constant rumours of loose nukes, it appears that the psychic spies have been reactivated, at least in part, by the man said to have had a hand in shutting down the original DIA STAR GATE psychic spy program,' the Starstream article continued.

'All in all it would seem that there is something about space, time and beyond that we don't understand. Researchers have discovered mirror neurons that empathetically fire in your brain when you are watching someone else get poked by a needle, for example. Somehow the neurons in a remote viewer must fire empathetically for information about distant events, removed from ordinary sensory detection.'

‘Last year, the [US] Air Force received a great deal of flak from the press about a research paper they commissioned to examine the use of teleportation for military purposes. Apparently the journalists didn’t realize that quantum teleportation has been an active area of mainstream research, ever since it was discovered by a team at IBM in the 1990s. MIT Professor Seth Lloyd has been researching the use of quantum teleportation for communication networks. Lloyd’s support includes DARPA, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. Recently he also developed an interest in quantum gravity, the elusive theory that would unite Einstein’s theory of bending space and time with the foundation stone of all modern electronics and atomic engineering: the quantum theory.’

So what exactly is Uri’s position today regarding his own powers? While he was in Germany in 2008 doing publicity for the German version of his show, Uri gave an interview to a magicians’ magazine which, while never penetrating the mainstream news agenda, nevertheless caused a maelstrom in the magicians’ world. This was, perhaps, understandable, because, taken out of context, it appeared that Uri was in the process of ‘rebranding’ himself as not a psychic, but a ‘mystifier’. This is a job description which is very fashionable today among the likes of Criss Angel, the NBC show’s winner, Mike Super and Lior Suchard in Israel. What was Uri doing? Was it a climbdown, even, after decades of insisting that he is the real deal, a psychic?

‘Look, I’m the king of PR. I know how to flow with time and with trends. So 25 years ago, if you asked me what are you, I immediately said, “I’m a psychic, I have supernatural powers. I’m real. I’m authentic and genuine.” Today, I’m not saying I’m not – I assure you of that – but I prefer, or at least I think it’s a better idea now, PR-

wise, to be known as a mystifier. And that is the truth; I mystify people. I've mystified them for 55 years.'

'The reason I have climbed a notch down is that I have to protect my performers. I have to give them safety, that they shouldn't worry about appearing with me because I'm claiming supernatural powers and they're not, and what damage that may do to their career. So I have to do that because this series is important to me. It's my baby. I love it, I enjoy it. Money doesn't motivate me to do this any more. It's the creativity of it. It's giving a chance to young performers. Can you imagine how flattered I was in America when one of the young performers said to me, "You know, I feel like your child. I grew up on your books, I saw you on Mike Douglas and on Merv Griffin when I was a 10 year-old boy. And here I am in your show." That was amazing to hear.

'I know exactly that I'm real, but you have to be flexible in life. You have to compromise. That's showbusiness. Of course all the sceptics jumped on my words. But I never said in that interview that I'm not a psychic. Sceptics still lie and invent things about me. They still make up stories ... you know the kind of thing, that he had a magnet on his thumb when he moved the compass. There's a YouTube video showing me in Israel, the sceptics say, with a magnet on my thumb— actually a false magnetic thumb that, according to them, I kept hidden in my hair. Can you imagine me doing that when eight cameras are rolling? Come on, I'm not that stupid. But they believe what they want to believe these people, they see exactly what they want to see. For my part, I loved it that 1.4 million people clicked to watch that video. It's all amazing publicity, and it's still going on nearly 40 years on from when I started.'

Does Uri know today any more than he did when we first used to discuss his powers how he does it? ‘No. I still don’t. It just happens,’ he replied. ‘But let’s just say I am the greatest magician in the world, and I did manage to do all this for nearly sixty years with hidden chemicals, by sleight of hand or whatever. What you can’t take away is, let’s say 10,000 phone calls come in to a TV show from people saying their spoons bent or their watches restarted or something else strange happened. And let’s imagine that 50 per cent of them were lying. And let’s say half of the remaining 5,000 imagined it. What I want to know, and what I’ve wondered all these years, is what about the rest? What about the other 2,500, or the 1,000, or the 500 or the 50 that weren’t imagining and weren’t lying or self-deluding? How does it work for them? I honestly don’t know, I don’t really think I want to know, and I’m not sure the Universe wants us to know. I don’t believe we’re ready for it.’

‘I think the amazing thing that has happened over these many years is not the science of it but the fact that I have brought this kind of phenomenon, into modern culture. People didn’t believe in miracles any more, in inexplicable things. But then I brought in this simple, everyday icon of a bending spoon – a simple little thing like a spoon – and years later, you’re watching a massive Hollywood production, *The Matrix*, and Keanu Reeves walks into the Oracle and witnesses these children handling a whole bunch of bent spoons. The little boy in the scene then bends a spoon and straightens it out again before handing it to Reeves and saying, “Do not try and bend the spoon, it’s impossible. Instead, only try to realise the truth”. Reeves asks, “What truth?” and the boy replies, “There is no spoon.” Reeves replies, puzzled, “There is no spoon?” The boy comes back: “Then you will see, it is not the spoon that

bends, it is only yourself.” And with that, Reeves stares long and hard at the spoon, before it appears to bend for him too.’

‘And that’s not the only appearance of spoon bending in popular culture,’ Uri continues. ‘Kenny Rogers sings about spoon bending. Johnny Cash, Michael Stipe from REM, both mention it, Incubus sing about it in a hit song. And that’s not taking into account the thousands of magicians that have made their living replicating, and by doing so publicising and even in a quirky way, validating my powers with carefully worked-out, rehearsed tricks.’

So specifically, does he believe people like Lior are psychic? ‘The thing is,’ Uri says, ‘I’m not a magician. I don’t know anything about magic effects or tricks. So when I see them perform, I don’t know how they do it. I’m watching them like I’m one of the people at home watching. Before the show goes on, I always meet the contestants and say, “Listen, guys, don’t worry when you see me sitting there. Don’t think that I know how you do it because I don’t.”’

‘So the truth is, I don’t know whether Lior has supernatural powers. This show isn’t about whether you’re real or not. I want to believe he has supernatural powers but I don’t know. He’s a great mentalist. David Berglas always said about me that if I’m not a psychic, then I’m the greatest mentalist in the world. This is not a scientific show, it’s pure entertainment and in the press conference in Moscow I made it absolutely clear to everyone that this is the case. I think more and more that there doesn’t really need to be this divide between whether performers are psychic or not. The question is unlikely to be resolved in the near future. The phenomena are too

fleeting and subtle to categorise by traditional methodology. The more sophisticated commentators like Berglas understand that there is a wide grey area in all this. Marcello Truzzi [the former leading sceptic who became a firm friend of Uri] understood this too. Marcello never ever “believed” in my talent or my gifts or my powers, but he was always with me. He was an honest, non-vicious man, a real friend to me.’

‘People sometime ask if my powers are diminishing with age, and the answer is, no, I am actually experiencing these days a surge of energy that I’ve never had. And all around me, these crazy things keep happening all the time. I’m still bending spoons, making them fly off television sets. You should see the stuff on YouTube. So I’m more inclined today to believe that there is a thinking entity behind all this, my powers. So the Puharich tales, the Lawrence Livermore voices, the tapes materialising, the voices appearing on the tapes. They’re all beginning to fall into place now. That there is definitely some kind of intelligent energy here that is thinking, that is directing, that is motivating and telling us. The fact that I can make these weird things happen is this presence saying listen to us, there is something really behind all this.’

In this new, more contemplative and relaxed phase of his life, Uri has been quietly developing, year on year, a more textured, nuanced theory of his and others’ inexplicable powers. On the one hand, he has, so it seems, come to an accommodation (up to a point) with the conventional magic world. Once he might have been offended by it because of the name of the magazine, but today, he is proud of a statement that appeared in the journal *Magic* in the US in May 2008: ‘Continuing

what has to be one of the biggest comebacks in modern times,' the piece read, 'Uri Geller successfully continues his conquest of worldwide television.'

On the other hand, Uri's spiritual side seems to be maturing apace. In his 1999 book, *Mind Medicine* he summed up in a particularly interesting and profound way what this 'mind power' might consist of. He wrote: 'I believe it represents a deep wisdom that we all inherit from our forebears and which, once harnessed, can effectively give every one of us much greater knowledge and insight into our lives. I believe that with such awareness comes healthier minds and bodies. Some of us learn how to tap into this energy earlier than others; some come upon it through trial and error. Others cannot explain it but trust it totally. Its power is formidable and this frightens those who have not yet reached the point of understanding the potency of such an invisible force.'

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I will conclude this update chapter in the extraordinary life story-so-far of Uri Geller on a personal note. To my surprise, the accounts earlier in this book of my own and my family's interactions with Uri back in the mid 1990s were what caught the eye of a large number of favourable reviewers. To take just one, Andrew Billen, a highly acclaimed British journalist and critic wrote in the *London Evening Standard* newspaper: 'Jonathan Margolis clearly spooked himself writing it and I got an attack of the flesh-creeps one night just reading it.' And in the intellectual *New Statesman*

magazine, the British novelist and reviewer Martyn Bedford wrote: ‘Jonathan Margolis was plagued by bizarre incidents while writing this appraisal of the Geller phenomenon. Crashed computers, broken clocks, telepathic wake-up calls, camera malfunctions, the destruction of two tape recorders . . . and by the end he was bending spoons himself as though they were made of Plasticine.’

So when I found myself back at Uri’s house in August 2008 with digital recorder in hand - more than ten years after the last such encounter - I wondered whether he was about to resume his role in our lives as a lightning conductor of weird events. I have, inevitably, thought a great deal about Uri these past years, spoken to him to exchange news every few weeks and occasionally bumped into him or popped by his house if I was going past. But we have not needed to engage in any intense mind connection as you do when working on a book together. And as a result, perhaps, the strange, enigmatic events which characterised our time together in the 1990s ceased almost as soon as we finished the book tour of the UK we did together in 1999.

I have to say that in the intervening decade I have also done quite a lot of research into the paranormal as well as magicianship and was starting to drift towards a tentative re-assessment of the Geller phenomenon as being an ill-defined form of benign mind control that appears paranormal because it interferes with the very imprecise compass of our own perception of the world around us. I have seen many mentalists at work since then – the brilliant Marc Salem being just one – doing things very similar to what Uri does whilst strenuously disclaiming any psychic ability, and I am inclined these days to believe them. In other words, what I was starting to conclude was that certain individuals have the ability to mess with our minds and

convincingly alter our perception of things, even when we are in a crowd. This ability can be learned, but in to a limited extent is a natural, charismatic gift. What remains truly extraordinary about Uri is that he never had to learn to do what he does; he could do it at three, and that remains the reason why I continue to believe he is, for reasons unknown to anyone, himself included, an enabler of events and phenomena we can only call paranormal.

Despite the ten-year drought of odd events in mine and my family's life, I did not have long to wait in August 2008 for peculiar stuff to start happening again; it all started happening again after about two hours. The day we met up happened to be my older brother's birthday, August 1st. I woke up with the unpleasant realisation that I had forgotten to send him a birthday card as I always do. I sent him instead first thing in the morning an e-card with the jokey explanation that I had made the mistake of thinking that July this year had 32 days, so I had been planning to send the card today, July 32nd. I remember thinking at the time how odd that date looks written down. A couple of hours after sitting down to record some updated interviews with Uri, we stopped for a coffee break and Uri presented me with a gift – a box containing one of his new line of beautiful mechanical watches. Delighted, I was turning the watch round in my hands and admiring it when Uri asked if I could see anything strange about it. I replied that I couldn't see anything strange – beautiful, yes, but not specifically strange. 'Look at the date,' he said. I did. The watch was set to July 32nd. Uri explained that it was a built-in peculiarity about the watch, a little joke that it counted beyond the normal calendar month, but I couldn't help thinking just how utterly bizarre it was that the expression July 32nd, which had never occurred to me in 53 years, had now entered my life twice on the same day.

The next couple of weeks were free of strange co-incidences, but then one day in mid-August, an astonishing and deeply disturbing eight startling and, to me, remarkable occurrences piled in on us within 24 hours. It truly felt as if the Universe was reminding me of how powerful Uri Geller is- and how important it was to get this new update chapter finished as there was a vast new public in Russia desperate to know more about Uri. Interestingly, I think Uri himself was during this time impatiently urging me (consciously or sub-consciously) to get on and write this. The original plan had been to complete it by August 19th, but a series of urgent deadlines for other work was setting this deadline back – plus we had a pre-booked week's holiday in Devon, in the south of England, and I had promised the family I would not do any work during the week away.

Now readers may remember back in Chapter 4 that I was with my family in Devon when I was first working on the proposal for this book in August 1996. Although here I was in August 1998 involved with Uri again, having not been back to south Devon since, I did not make the connection. Then, one day in August 2008, when we were at a beautiful private beach, Blackpool Sands, I went up to the café to get some coffee and my mobile rang. It was Uri, calling from Moscow, where he had just arrived, to urge me onwards with the book. We had a brief chat and I continued on my way to the café. It was only a minute or two later that I realised that he had called me on the precise spot, to within a metre, where, in August 1996, I got the news (on an old fashioned pager) from my agent that a publisher wanted to commission the first edition of this book.

Minutes later, while I was queuing for coffee, I received an email on my iPhone from an important contact with whom I was working on a business deal. I replied that I was on holiday this week in Devon. It turned out that he had been on the same little-known beach the previous week. It was a small but curious coincidence, since Ben and I had been so deeply embroiled in negotiations over the previous few weeks.

That evening, however, something far more bizarre happened. My youngest daughter, Eleanor, called from home in a state of excitement. She had been reading on a commuter train in London a movie comedy script written by my son, David, who now works in the film industry. He had spent three years writing the screenplay and was now in the process of looking for a producer. Ellie was giggling as she read, and a middle aged American sitting next to her asked her if she was enjoying the script. She explained that, yes, she was, and that it was by her brother. The man said he would love to read it if she, a 19 year-old, liked it, and asked if David could send it to him. It turned out that he was a well-known movie producer. His card bore the name of his company – 111 Pictures, whose address was 1t Floor, 111 Wardour Street in London.

Apart from the fact that meeting a movie producer on a train when you happen to be trying to find one is the kind of thing that only really happens in movies, David and Ellie, remembering Uri's fascination with the number 1111, were fascinated by the forest of 1s involved in the producer's card. Things got weirder the next day, but in the meanwhile, the Uri-style coincidences continued to crowd in. In the evening, I received an email from an old contact whom I hadn't heard from for ten years; I had thought about him while we were at the beach during the day. Also while at the beach,

my wife, Sue, had wondered what was happening about a movie that was possibly going to be made by Disney in Hollywood based on an old novel of hers. She had not heard from the producer in months; the producer emailed her the same evening with some positive news. While having dinner with friends that night, they selected some music on our sound system; it was a selection by the 1980s indie band Prefab Sprout. Two remarkable things emerged from this selection. They are difficult and too personal to explain in detail, but they involved the lyrics of two successive songs which I had not heard in 20 years, but were both directly and meaningfully – shockingly, to be honest - related to things happening in my private life at that moment.

The next day, less than 24 hours since this run of odd coincidences had started, we were on our way to another beach on a narrow country lane when we saw approaching us, impossibly large for the road, a double decker bus. I was wondering how we were going to deal with such a huge vehicle on a narrow lane and preparing to reverse into a farm road when I noticed the bus's number; it was a 111 bound for Plymouth. I said to Sue that we should make a note of the time, because I wouldn't be surprised if David is mailing his screenplay around now to 111 Wardour Street. When we got to the beach, we called David and asked what he was doing at 12.46; he replied that he was hand delivering the script to 111 Wardour Street. We later discovered, by the way, that the 111 bus to Plymouth does not normally go down the lane on which we encountered it; it had been diverted because of a traffic accident.

It was almost too much to take in, this intense burst of craziness, but I tried to rationalise it. I was aware after all these years that the number of spooky coincidences

that *fail* to happen vastly exceeds the number that that actually do happen and that consequently, coincidences are not as significant as the likes of the psychologist Jung believed. But eight of these startling chance happenings in such a short burst was still, as Uri would say, mind-blowing.

So what, after all this, do I now think of the Geller phenomenon? Well, I agree more than ever with the idea of William Tiller, professor emeritus of Materials Science and Engineering at Stanford University, who believes Uri absorbs energy unconsciously given by others and transforms it, also by an unknown, unexplained mechanism, into kinetic energy

If this idea turns out to be false or mistaken, and even if it has truth, then I still think hypnosis or some other form of mind control has a large part in Uri's abilities. If this is the case, however, I have to wonder again, how did he learn such a sophisticated psychological technique as a little boy from a poor family? Surely an ability to hypnotise can't be inherited? It is a great shame, I now feel, that we do not know more about Uri's father.

Of the peculiar events that have happened to me and to my family, even 13 years on, the incident with my elder daughter Ruth and the Dani Lane chair that I related in Chapter 4 still stands as the strangest single thing that I have seen Uri do

Overall, the idea that somebody who has been using just four magical-style effects so successfully for nearly 60 years continues to defy logic for me. It is beyond me, if we accept for a moment that Uri is one of the world's most notorious fakers, that such

a man would not have re-invented himself – and done so repeatedly – by perfecting a few new tricks. If he had managed to learn his four trademark effects to such a cosmic standard, what possible reason would there have been for him not to have then learned more? Had he done so, he would by now be bigger and more respected than Copperfield and Angel, Blaine and Derren Brown put together.

I have also thought newly that because Uri is not particularly scholarly in academic terms – despite having now written 17 books - he simply isn't the type, when all else is considered, to have learned magic tricks. I have looked in quite some detail lately at how magicians' tricks are done, and they take great technical expertise and patience. Uri confided to me in 2008 that he has finally bought his first ever magic text book - a copy of the 1958 volume, 'Thirteen Steps to Mentalism' by Tony Corinda. This was, of course, the very book he was accused by magicians of having studied back in the 1960s, when his fame was first beginning to spread in Israel.

As things stand in 2008, I do not believe Uri possesses either the patience or the temperament for magic. I may develop my personal view on this more in another ten years, or I may come across some great piece of evidence to contradict it, but for the moment, this will be my own verdict on Uri Geller. He was a mystery 40 years ago; he was a mystery ten years ago. And today, he remains, when all is said and done, a mystery. Which is, interestingly enough, exactly how he wants it to be. To that extent if to no other, Uri has successfully bent my mind and those of billions of other people.

