

SPECIAL REPORT

Tests and Investigations of Three Psychics

James Randi

Part of page 25, pages 26 to 29, and part of page 30 have been purposely deleted from this issue.

Exit Jean-Pierre Girard, "The World's Greatest Psychic"

In *The Humanist* (Sept./Oct. 1977) I outlined tests that had been conducted on Jean-Pierre Girard in Grenoble, France, by members of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal in June of 1977. The tests were absolutely negative. With all test objects, under controlled conditions agreed to in advance by all parties, Girard was unable to produce any effects whatsoever over a period of three and a half hours.

Girard, once highly regarded in Europe as a psychic, has met a number of Waterloos recently, and for once the parapsychologists cannot complain that he was treated unfairly. The complaint is repeatedly heard that (a) scientists refuse to examine the claims of the parapsychologists, (b) tests are not done properly, in accordance with established latitude, and (c) enough chances are not given for these elusive powers to be

demonstrated. No longer can these cries be made legitimately, if they ever were valid objections in the first place.

In the February 1978 issue of *La Recherche*, the French scientific magazine, eight authorities give accounts of experiments done with Girard that should prove definitively whether his claims of psi powers are genuine or just more of the hot air that one has grown accustomed to in these matters. The experiments were largely based on the protocols we designed to use in Grenoble with Girard. He was given marked aluminum-alloy bars to bend while watched by a video camera. In all cases he failed to produce any paranormal effects.

Girard has now undergone four carefully designed and conducted tests: with scientists Leprince-Ringuet and Trillat on September 29, 1976; with Randi, Davies, and Evans in June of 1977; with Bernard Dreyfus in September of 1977; and with Yves Farge on January 19, 1978. All of these people, with the exception of myself, are trained scientists, and members of important bodies, such as the French Academy.

So we can state with confidence several facts: (a) Prestigious and qualified scientists *have* examined in detail and at length the claims of psi powers made by a prominent performer. These claims have been supported and endorsed by leading parapsychologists in the past, and they must now explain the inability of these other investigators to see any miracles in the tests. (b) In *all* these tests, the conditions were outlined in advance (as is the case in any legitimate scientific procedure) and agreed to by the participants as being proper, fair, and adequate. Thus there is no basis for claims that these were badly designed tests. (c) Four tests, over a period of more than fifteen months, were conducted with the subject, thus giving adequate opportunity for these miracles to occur. They did not.

There remains, of course, the Catch-22 of the parapsychologists, that "negative" or skeptical persons present can inhibit the results. (I point with sad amusement to the remark of Charles Crussard that *I* have psychic powers, and used them to inhibit Girard's results!) If this is so, then the para-scientists have surrendered their rights to real scientific investigation, since a genuine test requires good observing conditions and proper design in order to be called scientific. Indeed, some investigators have stated that these wonders are not amenable to regular methods of scientific investigation and must be observed under "loose" conditions that allow room for trickery and poor conclusions. If this is so, then I call upon them to abandon their pleas for scientists to look into their bag

of tricks.

We print here a report by Marcel Blanc, a science writer with *La Recherche* who has followed the Girard matter to its conclusion. (A briefer version appeared in *New Scientist*, Feb. 16.) Though the evidence that makes this case is definitive, I am not at all persuaded that supporters of Girard will abandon him. They have far too much invested in him, financially and academically. Several persons have staked their reputations on his authenticity; they cannot retract their support without losing credibility. But this unfortunate circumstance does not affect the overall fact that the public has depended upon these persons as spokesmen for science, and belief in such para-powers has been largely a result of dependence on these "experts." True, it is a huge thing to expect a scientist to reverse himself after committing his career to such a chimera. But such painful obligations are a necessary part of their dedication to science.

With the publication of this account, I personally feel that the Girard matter may be considered closed. But should he wish to be further tested, the CSICP has the obligation, funds and time permitting, to accommodate him. Such is the nature of scientific endeavor, and this committee is totally dedicated to the scientific method, with all that it implies. We await further offers from Jean-Pierre Girard.

Skeptics Look at the Paranormal

by Marcel Blanc

As the new year started, psychokinesis, also known as spoon-bending science, again failed to reach the orbit of orthodox science. On January 19, Jean-Pierre Girard, the French Uri Geller, was unable to produce anything paranormal during a two-hour test in a Paris laboratory, organized by the French television channel TF1.

The experiment was directed by the physicist Yves Farge, Director of Research at the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique). He was assisted by two colleagues—Yves Petroff and Etienne Guyon, as well as by the expert magician Klingsor, President of the International Magicians' Union. The first part of the test consisted of an attempt by J. P. Girard to bend some metallic bars paranormally. He followed the same protocol as the one worked out for his test in Grenoble last June by U.S. magician James Randi, *Nature* editor David Davies, and psychologist Christopher Evans (see the *New Scientist*, July 14, 1977).

During the second part of the test, Girard tried to make small objects move paranormally on a table, and make them levitate. The protocol for

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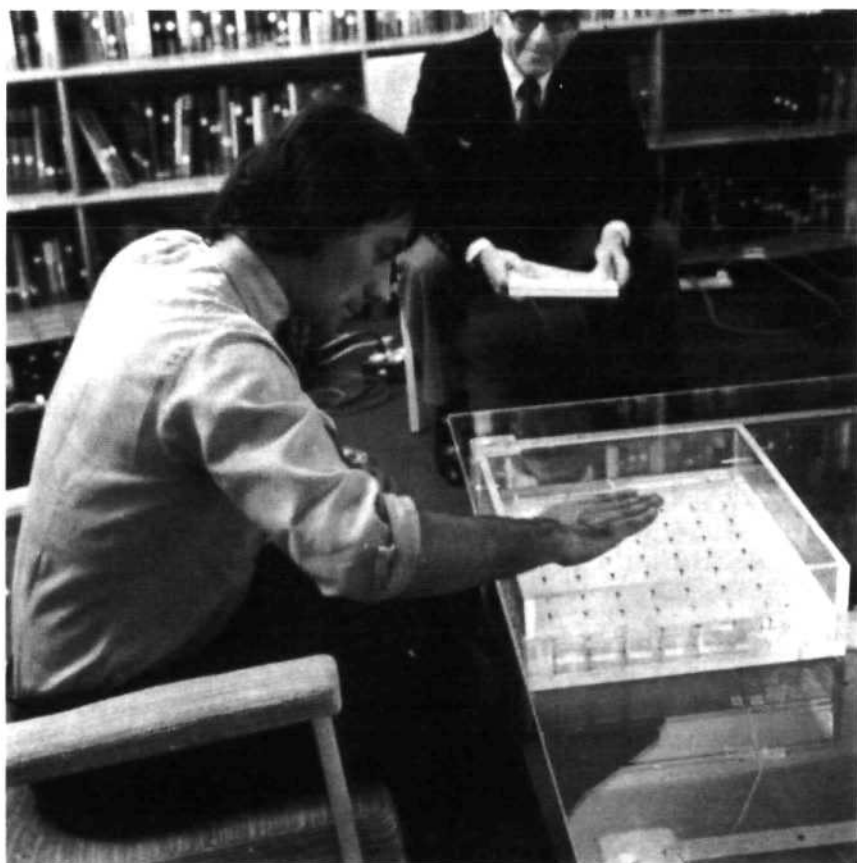
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During the second part of the test, Girard tried to make small objects move paranormally on a table, and make them levitate. The protocol for

this purpose had been devised by Yves Farge, together with French magician Gérard Majax. In both experiments, J. P. Girard knew exactly what the protocols would be and had agreed beforehand to their use. He nevertheless stated after the tests were over that he had been hampered by their short duration (one hour each). As for Charles Grussard, Research Director of Pechiney and Girard's foremost supporter, he told Yves Farge that as far as his team was concerned, "its members had agreed to work according to not-too-tight protocols," to enable Girard to display his fragile psi-power.

Physical Nature of Psi

The French Uri Geller was tested on two occasions in Grenoble during the



Girard trying to shift compass needles during test conducted by physicist Bernard Dreyfus at the Grenoble Nuclear Study Centre, Sept. 24, 1977. (Photo: P. Moser)

interval between the June 1977 experiment with Randi and the more recent one with Farge in January 1978. A detailed account of both tests appeared in the February issue of *La Recherche*.

The Pechiney team had succeeded in persuading Bernard Dreyfus, Research Director of the Nuclear Study Centre in Grenoble and Chairman of the French Physics Society, to come to see J. P. Girard at work. In reality, however, he was only told at the last minute (on the evening of June 15) that he was expected to act as scientific guarantor for the report to be sent to *Nature* on the experiment he was about to witness. A magician* was also present as an expert, and Dreyfus was told that *Nature* had devised the protocol (it had in fact been worked out a fortnight earlier by Randi, Davies, and Evans). As a result, Bernard Dreyfus became suddenly aware of the official nature of the meeting, which made him extremely cautious. He refused to authenticate the one slight bending of a bar produced that evening because it did not happen until the final agitated minute of a session that lasted from eleven o'clock until half past three in the morning. He therefore wrote to *Nature* that he had seen nothing paranormal that night.

[Note (by J.R.): To quote from Dreyfus's own account—"... a little after 3 o'clock (3:04 exactly) J.P.G. turned to Prost and was speaking with him, eye-to-eye. I noticed—and so noted in my notebook—that his movements were now very much less gentle, very much more energetic. Immediately after, and for the first time that night, the bar suffered a bend of one-tenth of a millimeter. It was slight, considering what Girard usually did, and he asked to continue . . ." The bar soon took another slight bend, accompanied by J.P.G.'s very strong gestures, and the session was ended. Dreyfus's account of this was not published by *Nature* . . .]

On September 24, 1977, Bernard Dreyfus again had J. P. Girard perform tests in his laboratory at the Nuclear Research Centre. Apart from a protocol supervised by two magicians with the aim of forestalling any cheating, the special feature of these experiments was the use of instruments to test the physical nature of Girard's hypothetical psi-power by detecting any changes it might cause in the gravity or electromagnetic fields. Nothing of the kind occurred, except for slight oscillations of compass needles, and these were produced under conditions that, according to Bernard Dreyfus, might have allowed Girard to conceal a magnet on his person. At any rate, he had been proved incapable of bending any bars or changing the structure of metals, as the Pechiney team maintained he could do. Bernard Dreyfus concluded his report as follows: "At the present stage it seems premature, to say the least, to conclude that paranormal phenomena actually exist."

[Note (by J.R.): Dreyfus's account specifies that not only did Girard accomplish the movement of the compass needles when most of the experimenters (including both

*Jean-Yves Prost, a magician from Lyons.—J.R.

magicians) were out of the room, and when the experiment had been temporarily suspended, but subsequently one of Dreyfus's colleagues discovered that it was possible to duplicate such movement easily with a small (3mm) magnet concealed beneath a fingernail and undetectable with the instrumentation used in the test.]

It should be said in passing that Bernard Dreyfus also tested 13-year-old Steven North, from Britain, at a session held in Grenoble for TF1 on December 19. North was brought to Grenoble by the British parapsychologist John Hasted. Again, the result of the test was negative.

A New Copernicus

Between June 1977 and January 1978, several parapsychological experiments were conducted by skeptical scientists. This is doubtless the most important event of the past few years in the field of parapsychological research, and shows the desire of parapsychologists for recognition by established science. On the other hand, the reactions of Bernard Dreyfus and Yves Farge are evidence of a new attitude as regards the scientist's responsibility toward society. For it was not merely in order to test parapsychological claims as such, in which they were not particularly interested at the outset, that Farge and Dreyfus agreed to invest time and work in preparing these laboratory experiments. Their real motive, as they both told me, was to counter present criticisms of scientists, who are often accused of being the aloof guardians of orthodox rationalism and deliberately ignoring psi effects, despite the growing craze for the paranormal among the general public.

Charles Crussard, on the contrary, likes comparing himself to a new Copernicus or, as he told me, to Newton. At any rate, he cannot say, after the recent series of experiments, that he has been treated like Galileo or Giordano Bruno.

However that may be, the attempt by Girard and Crussard to put psychokinesis on the same orbit as established science seems about to collapse. The January issue of *Grands Articles du Mois* reported that Girard has given up his lawsuit against Jean-Pascal Huvé for which he was condemned to pay costs. In the thirty-sixth issue of this review, published in December 1975, Huvé had written an article entitled: "*A propos de Jean-Pierre Girard, le nouvel Uri Geller: Psi, escroquerie ou à-peu-près scientifique?*" (About Jean-Pierre Girard, the new Uri Geller: psi, swindle or more-or-less scientific?) Huvé, who had known Girard personally ever since he started spoon-bending at private meetings, wrote in the article: "We can state that all the experiments we witnessed were fraudulent, *on Girard's own admission.*"

In a book on cheating in parapsychology, to be published next spring, Gerard Majax, star magician on French television channel A2, states he made Girard's acquaintance in the course of the magician's opposition to Uri Geller. Majax discloses that, at the time, "Girard was attracted by the

idea of staging a joke which would take in the scientists, and of unmasking the whole thing afterwards, thus proving how far they could be misled."

Girard now admits that he does sometimes cheat to avoid disappointing the public, but insists that he nevertheless has genuine psi power. Crussard remains convinced that Girard has such power. He told me that Randi had it too but refused to acknowledge the fact, and had used it to inhibit Girard's power last June.

Everyone knows that Randi travels a great deal. It is high time for him to admit that he travels on a flying carpet!

The CSICP Conducts a Test of Psychokinesis

Professor John Hasted, of Birkbeck College, London, has criticized the CSICP, and this writer in particular, for improper design of a test conducted June 12, 1977, at the University of Bath, England. This is a report of the conditions, conduct, and conclusions of this test. The reader may judge whether or not the claim of Professor Hasted is correct when he says in a letter to the December 1977 *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* that the test was done "under rather complicated protocol, which no doubt did not greatly assist the spontaneous phenomenon."

From the beginning, every effort was made to keep the rules for the test as simple and direct as possible. I was in England briefly, having Committee business in France; and in passing through on my way back, I visited Bath in the company of Mr. Michael Hutchinson, who has assisted the CSICP greatly in the U.K., doing research for various projects there. I received a number of calls from Mrs. John Hasted asking me to visit Bath, and I made the time to do so at her request. Hasted himself referred to it as "an urgent matter." I was to witness a test supervised by Harry Collins of the university, who had conducted other, less formal tests with other spoon-benders there. None of the tests had been positive. In fact, the children had been caught cheating, as reported in *New Scientist*.

The subject of this test was to be Judy Knowles, a young woman who Mrs. Hasted had assured me was able to perform on demand, and I was repeatedly assured as well that I would see proof of her powers on this occasion. I in turn told Mrs. Hasted that I would give my personal check for \$10,000 to Miss Knowles immediately upon her performance of a genuine paranormal feat, in accordance with my standing offer. But I assured her that the main purpose of my agreeing to test Knowles was



The spoons were easily bendable by this means.



Judy Knowles with test spoon she tried unsuccessfully for almost two hours to bend paranormally.

to obtain proof for the CSICP that she was indeed able to perform as claimed.

In the *JSPR*, John Hasted has faulted Collins's experimental procedure, referring to it as "crude." This is simply not true. Hasted refused to participate, though he witnessed the test, and was therefore unaware that, contrary to what he claims, the spoons were marked secretly to prevent substitution, and the security was very tight. One need only read the protocol designed by Hasted on other occasions to know that ours was quite adequate in contrast to his.

Those participating were: Harry Collins, Bob Draper, Joseph Hanlon, Mrs. Hasted, Farooq Hussain, Michael Hutchinson, Judy Knowles, Mr. Pinch, and James Randi. Everyone agreed to the protocol in writing before the test started. Should any of the observers believe that the protocol had been broken, that person was to announce it immediately, and a decision would be made on what to do. If protocol were broken, the run was to be considered void.

All but Pinch and Miss Knowles were designated "observers." Pinch was the "experimenter" and Miss Knowles the "subject." John Hasted was to deliver the subject to the test room, and sit away from her during the test.

The observers were located in one part of the room, separated from the test area by a "one-way" mirror. A video camera was aimed through the mirror, and registered on a videotape recorder, which we controlled. Miss Knowles sat at a table and a mirror was located to show a back view of her hand. A candle was present to provide "blacking" for the bowl of the spoon being used. A clock was constantly running in view of the camera.

Pinch was instructed to take a spoon from the control area to the test area in a sealed jar, after the spoon had been examined by the observers and approved. He was to remove the spoon in the camera's view, placing it upon the table after marking it with the candle blacking on the inside of the bowl. Miss Knowles was to show her hands clean and the spoon bowl blacking intact, to the camera, after which the start of the test was announced. She was to hold the spoon without allowing her thumb or finger to touch the blacked surface. She was to hold the spoon in one hand only. Identical spoons had been tested and it was found that they could be bent if force was applied to the bowl. A bend *downwards* was to be accomplished, which if done by ordinary physical force, would disturb the blacking.

At the conclusion of a run, the spoon and hands would be shown to the camera, to show blacking intact and hands clean. Pinch would then bend the test spoon on camera, to show it was easily bent. This spoon was then marked, discarded, and not used again. It was to be replaced in the container, and returned to the control area.

A comparison spoon was kept on camera at all times, and properly marked as such. It was used to determine if the test spoon would fit closely against it, and an agreed-upon deviation was established that would be considered a "bend."

Hasted and Miss Knowles were in the test area, with Pinch able to pass back and forth as experimenter, and Hutchinson as well, to protect the interests of the CSICP by observing but not handling the articles.

The protocol was considered broken if (a) the test spoon went out of camera view, (b) both hands of subject touched the spoon at the same time, (c) spoon was touched to table, (d) anyone but Pinch or Miss Knowles touched the spoon during the test, (e) any other body touched the test spoon.

Miss Knowles refused to sign a statement agreeing to the use of her name in a written account of this test.

Conclusions: After two lengthy sessions, the subject abandoned the experiment. Hanlon, Hussain, Hutchinson, and Randi agreed that the subject had on this occasion been unable to perform paranormally. In contrast, the others stated that the results were "inconclusive." This difference in language reflects, I feel, the difference in attitude.

In the *JSPR* article, John Hasted makes two erroneous assumptions to prove that the writer is not a good observer. He puts in my mouth a claim that I am "a better witness than scientists." I have never said that, only that I am a better witness than *some* scientists. In fact, Collins, Draper, Pinch, Hanlon, Hussain, and Hasted *are* scientists; only Hutchinson and Randi are not. The protocol that was used was (a) scientific, (b) adequate to the purpose, (c) simple and direct, and (d) quite properly applied and adhered to. And under this protocol, Miss Judy Knowles, who is able to perform successfully when *not* observed, *produced no results*.

Hanlon and Hussain were asked to serve as *pro tem* members of the CSICP, assisted by Hutchinson. This was a test conducted by the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, and was announced as such in advance of the test. The test was negative.

We await another opportunity to test Miss Knowles. ●