

The twilight zone in Washington

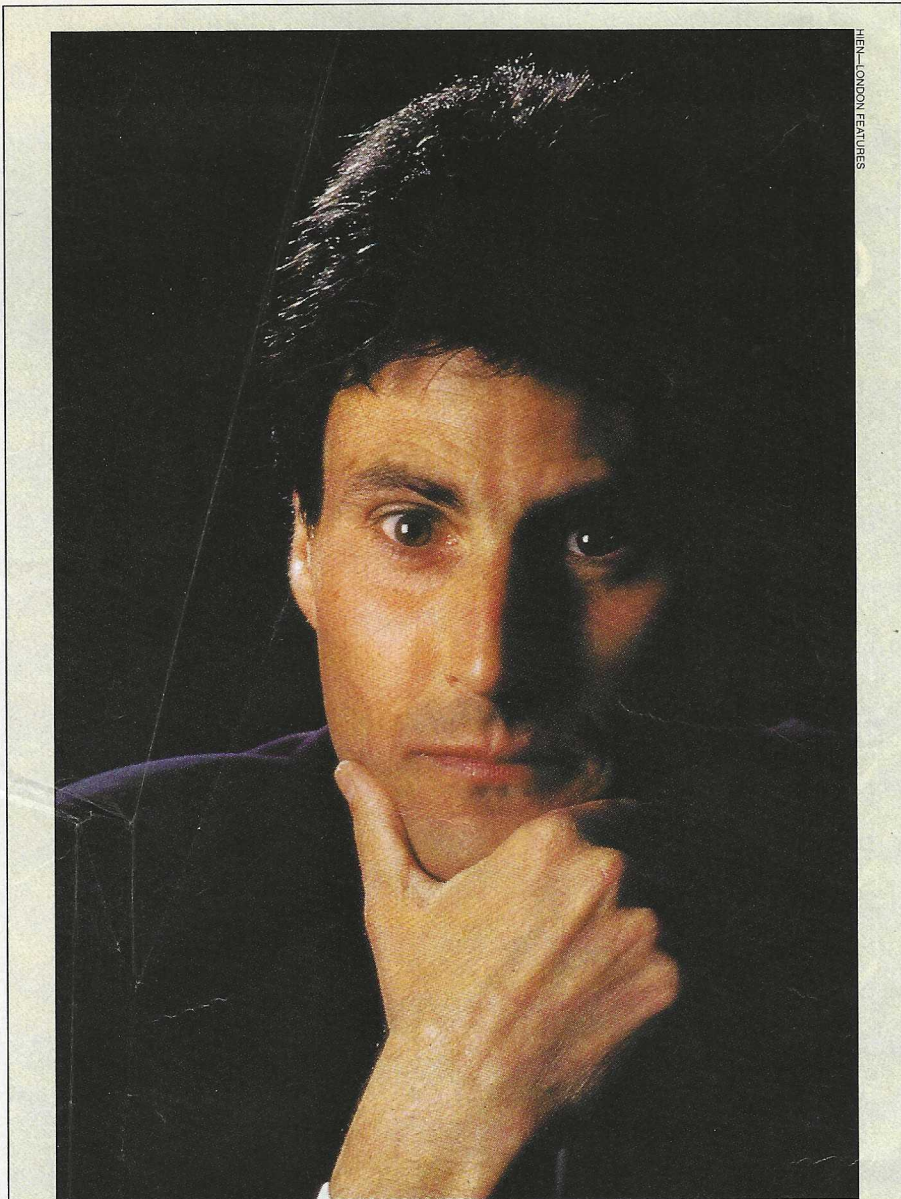
There are some important people in government who have enlisted psychics' help

It turns out that Nancy Reagan has plenty of good company. Last May, she was the butt of jokes around the world after it was revealed that she routinely consulted with a San Francisco astrologer about presidential-scheduling decisions. Former White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan, who made the revelations, derided the scheduling as a "long-established floating séance." Despite such digs and skepticism from mainstream scientists, there is extensive interest in psychic phenomena (called psi) in Washington. "At any given time, about one fourth of the members of Congress are actively interested in psi, be that healing, prophecy, remote viewing or physical manifestation of psychic powers [such as bending spoons or erasing computer tapes]," according to Representative Charlie Rose (D-N.C.). He is an eight-term veteran who founded the Congressional Clearinghouse on the Future, a forum that has given some psychics a platform in the capital.

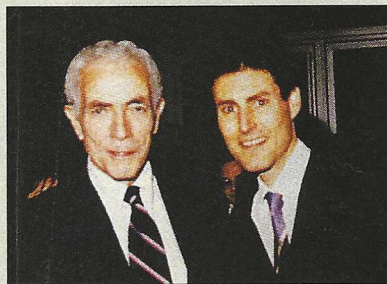
"Sharpening intuitive powers." Most legislators and aides interested in psychic phenomena will not go public for fear of being ridiculed. Another fear among politicians is that they would be condemned by fundamentalists as being in league with the devil. But sources say that the capital's many psi aficionados satisfy their curiosity in the Eerie Zone by privately consulting with seers and discussing the subject with like-minded colleagues.

For instance, Speaker of the House Jim Wright (D-Tex.) and his wife Betty have attended classes and lectures that teach techniques of prophecy. According to one congressional source, "Jim thinks he has a great future, and he is interested in sharpening his intuitive powers to anticipate and shape the future." Anne Gehman, a Fairfax, Va., psychic who says she evaluated him, claims Wright has strong psychic gifts that he has developed in recent years. Wright's office denies he had extensive contacts with Gehman, insisting he only saw her lecture in Georgetown once or twice several years ago.

There has also been a long-running interest in some military and intelligence circles with psychic research. But advo-



HEIN—LONDON FEATURES



URI GELLER. Age: 42.

Job: Lecturer, inventor, consultant who uses psychic skills to explore for minerals and oil.

On skeptics: "I don't care what those schmucks think. I'm a millionaire."

Hobby: Bending spoons for the likes of Senator Claiborne Pell, left.

Best claimed feat: Found gold in Amazon for Japanese firm.

cates of such research fear that government aid for future studies might be jeopardized following release of an Army-funded National Academy of Sciences study last December that found no laboratory evidence that psi was real or that research in psi merited Army funding. The committee, established by the NAS's research arm, the National Research Council, looked at the best-documented

psychic phenomena, including remote viewing (RV) and psychokinesis (moving objects with mind power), as part of a wide-ranging study. The panel found that the laboratory studies of psi were plagued by sloppy methodology and inadequate security against fraud. Psychic proponents denounced the panel as biased and dominated by skeptics.

Whatever the outcome of that debate,

there is clear evidence, according to knowledgeable sources, that psychics have played important roles in some key government circles:

■ The Pentagon continues to fund small-scale classified psychic research at SRI International, formerly Stanford Research Institute, a think tank in Menlo Park, Calif., while the Central Intelligence Agency and the Pentagon monitor Soviet work in this area.

■ The U.S. military and CIA have occasionally used psychics to spy on Soviet weaponry and Gen. Manuel Noriega and to find terrorists and hostages in Iran and other countries.

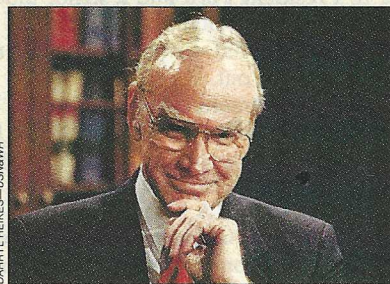
■ The Federal Bureau of Investigation has hosted lectures to police officers by psychic Noreen Renier at its Quantico, Va., training center. She impressed her listeners by predicting in January, 1981, that there would be an assassination attempt on President Reagan in the spring, which indeed took place. FBI agents subsequently recommended her to local police departments, according to court documents and law-enforcement sources. FBI spokeswoman Kathy Bradford says, "The FBI doesn't use psychics to solve cases." But, she adds, "if they [local departments] want a psychic, we'll help anybody who needs help."

Communicating with the dead. In addition to seeking help in this world, some legislators, congressional aides and government officials have sought spiritual guidance. Senator Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, is the most vocal advocate of psychic research on Capitol Hill. He has had an interest in the supernatural since his college days, when he considered becoming a minister. His bookcase in his private Capitol office is a testament to his fascination, with shelves crammed with such books as *The Astral Body*, which examines "out-of-body experiences," and the works of Shirley MacLaine. Pell notes that as he has gotten older he has become increasingly absorbed by the question of life after death. At times, he has sought to communicate with dead relatives. "I've been to mediums," he says, "but nothing has happened." He adds, with regret, "I don't have these [psychic] powers."

Nevertheless, from his readings and talks with researchers, Pell believes that there are genuine psychics. "Psychic claims are important, and they shouldn't be ridiculed or spoofed at," Pell says. "They should be studied." His office has been urging the National Science Foundation, the Defense Department and other government agencies to fund far more psychic research. He also asked for the skeptical NAS study to be withdrawn because of its alleged bias. But his efforts have met with little success.



CHARLIE ARCHAMBAULT—USNEWS



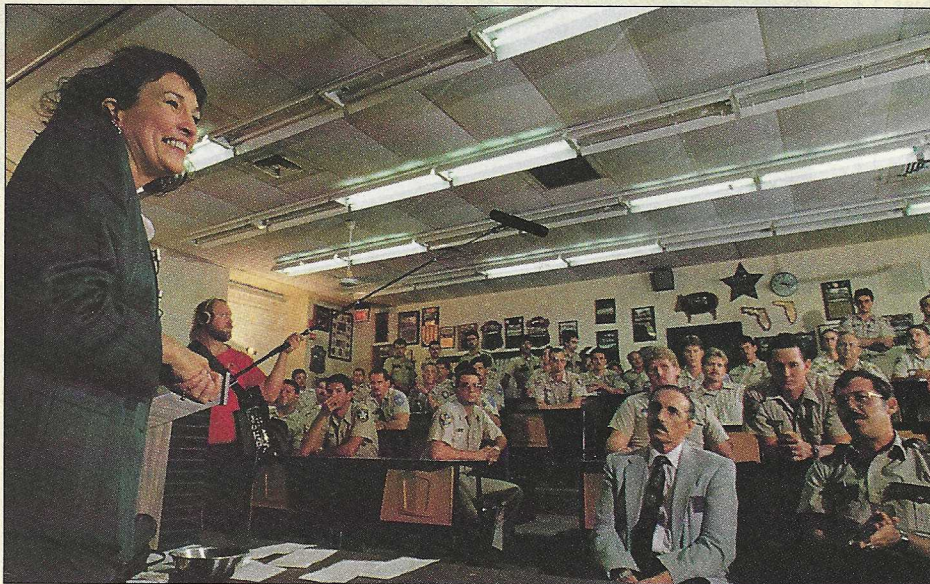
DARRYL HEIKES—USNEWS

ANNE GEHMAN. Age: In 40s.
Job: Psychic, lecturer and teacher.
On her skills: "You can communicate with the unseen world."
Listeners: House Speaker Jim Wright, left, has attended her lectures.
Best claimed feat: Prediction that Reagan would become President, which she said in a newspaper interview in the mid-1960s.

Pell's interest in psi is so strong that he has had a full-time aide, former naval intelligence officer C. B. Scott Jones, whose primary responsibility for 3½ years has been to monitor and encourage "consciousness" research, including studies of psychic phenomena. Indeed, Pell says, Jones "screens" psychics for him. In his off hours, Jones helped arrange at least one session in which efforts

were made to contact dead Soviet leaders. According to some accounts by psychic activists, the aim was to encourage these ghostly dictators to bombard the minds of living Soviet leaders with thoughts of peace. Jones will not discuss details. He will only say, "It was a very private experiment. We closed it down. We felt it was unnecessary." He adds, "This has nothing to do with the senator

JAMES KAMP—BLACK STAR FOR USA/AVR

**NOREEN RENIER.** Age: In 40s.**Job:** Lecturer, teacher, consultant to police in more than 10 states.**Philosophy:** "I believe in the mind. What I'm learning to do is use a little more of my mind."**Top clients:** Besides helping police, she lectured at the FBI Virginia training center.**Best claimed feats:** She predicted the assassination attempt on Reagan. In the early 1980s, she helped solve a double homicide case in Cassopolis, Mich., when she described the murderer and the crime scene after being given an earring belonging to one of the victims. The suspect was convicted.

or my job." And in the spring of 1986, Jones invited psychic buffs, including some Pentagon officials, to his home to hear a tape recording of "spirit" voices and messages, according to sources who attended the meeting. The tape has been obtained by *U.S. News*. The purported spirit-world communications ranged from William Randolph Hearst discoursing on power to a long-dead physics professor saying, in robotlike tones, "I love fried cabbage."

Pell's own pursuits have not been as unusual as his aide's, but he has offered psychic Uri Geller platforms to demonstrate his skills. They first met in a London hotel in 1986, where Geller impressed Pell by bending spoons and duplicating a drawing Pell made, apparently without looking at Pell's sketch. As mementos, Pell keeps in his Capitol office the bent spoon and two drawings of a smiling, happy face. Though Geller has even been denounced by some psychic advocates as a charlatan, Pell says that he remains impressed, adding with a touch of self-mocking irony, "I'm a sucker."

Sucker or not, Pell has arranged for Geller to perform mind-reading stunts at high-powered Washington gatherings, and in Geneva, where, Geller claims, he beamed peaceful thoughts into the mind of Yuli Vorontsov, the Soviet arms negotiator. The next day, Geller notes, the Soviets offered to eliminate medium-range missiles from Europe.

"Psychic Manhattan Project." Rose's interest in psi stems from his desire to harness it for foreign and military policy. After he joined the House Select Committee on Intelligence in 1977, he became fascinated by CIA-backed remote-viewing experiments, which involve alleged

psychic ability to describe sites and even documents at long distances. At one point, he advocated a "psychic Manhattan Project" for RV and other mental techniques. He now favors sharing information on psi with the Soviets and Chinese because of changes he sees in Communist societies.

Rose's positive view of psychic abilities has been quietly shared by some other congressmen and influential political leaders including at least one Reagan cabinet member, ambassadors and numerous politicians, psychic sources and other witnesses say. One congressman interviewed and evaluated about 20 psychics, who were brought to his office one by one and tested by a staffer, according to Milton Friedman, former speech writer to President Ford and a senior aide to Senator Jacob Javits (R-N.Y.) in the 1970s. Some did surprisingly well and others struck out.

The government's use of psychics has focused on military matters. In the late 1960s, for example, the CIA was ordered to get a picture of a new Soviet rocket, according to a CIA source. Stumped, the agency hired a Chicago truckdriver who had a reputation for being able to cause images of objects many miles away to appear on a photo negative held against his forehead. The photo produced by the truckdriver showed details that enabled the CIA to pinpoint the way a booster was strapped to the rocket.

The truckdriver was a "messy, disagreeable fellow" who insisted on drinking a lot of beer before he delivered his pictures, recalls the official. But the rocket image turned out to be accurate, and the experiment raised a lot of interest. "Most people were skeptical," says the official,

"but the truckdriver's work was not dismissed as a trick. There was enough evidence to validate further study, but there was never enough to prove that psychic research is a reliable, useful tool for intelligence purposes." Even the most talented psychics, the CIA official says, tended to lose their powers over time and were not consistently accurate.

Systematic, multimillion-dollar experiments began in the 1970s, when Pentagon and CIA officials became increasingly alarmed over Soviet research in the field. And some of the conclusions of analysts in the Defense Intelligence Agency, CIA and Army make for scary reading. A 1972 DIA report warned that the Soviets might someday be able at a distance to control the thoughts of U.S. leaders, disable military equipment and even "cause the instant death of any U.S. official." One problem with these reports, some analysts outside the military say, is that they lack scientific documentation and may even unwittingly subscribe to Soviet disinformation.

Remote viewing. Since the 1970s, the U.S. has focused primarily on researching remote viewing. The work has been subsidized at SRI, the California think tank, by the CIA, DIA and other government agencies, sources familiar with the research say. Details of the current work are classified, and the director of the research, Ed May, declined to comment. Military support for SRI's psychic research is estimated to be a few hundred thousand dollars annually. The researchers at SRI have claimed nearly a 70 percent accuracy rate for their remote-viewing tests. In a typical experiment, a psychic is closeted in a laboratory and asked to describe an undisclosed locale



Soviet healer Dzhuna Davitashvili showing "contactless massage" technique

IS THE EVIL EMPIRE UP TO NO GOOD?

The Communists' psychic edge

The New Age movement has been taken over by Communists: There is a growing public fascination in the Soviet Union and China with psychic phenomena. In Moscow, a famed healer, Dzhuna Davitashvili, is mobbed by admirers at a demonstration and studied in prestigious labs. In Mongolia, a psychic master lectures before 35,000 people in a football stadium. The difference on that side of the iron curtain is that prominent researchers, institutions and public officials have taken psychics seriously. Both nations spend much more lavishly than the \$500,000 the U.S. puts into private and government psychic research. The CIA reportedly estimated in 1985 that the Soviets spent between \$70 million and \$350 million on psychic research.

It is not clear what the Communist giants are studying. But there is no question, as a 1976 CIA-funded review pointed out, "The Soviets assume the reality of thought transference." Soviet parapsychologists who have emigrated have contended that Soviet researchers funded by the KGB have studied evil applications of paranormal phenomena, such as trying to stop a frog's heart through mind-power or telepathically inducing sensations of suffocation and pain in a man over a span of 500 miles. "Why transmit all this nega-

tivity?" asks Larissa Vilenskaya of Monterey, Calif., a former psychic researcher in Moscow. Most Soviet officials and some American researchers say Soviet interest is far more benign. And it has become more visible and accepted under the *glasnost* of Mikhail Gorbachev.

"I have been convinced." In China, too, political reforms have led to a revival of government research in the occult, spurred in part by treatments some older leaders have reportedly received from healers. By April, 1986, for instance, Zhang Zhenhuan, the minister in charge of defense-related science and technology, was elected chairman of the China Qigong Scientific Research Association, the body that studies long-distance healing arts. Psi's most prominent advocate is the country's leading rocket expert, Qian Xueseng. "I have been convinced," he says.

Still, the psychic fad has been criticized by some younger scientists. Lin Zixin, editor in chief of *Science and Technology Daily*, worries that interest in the paranormal could harm China's progress, by promoting a passive hope for miracles and scientific illiteracy. Funny, capitalist scientists have made the same complaint. ■

by Art Levine with Esther Fein
in Moscow and Dusko Doder in Beijing

that is being visited by SRI researchers. His descriptions are then compared with the actual site. Over the years, there have also been several published reports about the U.S. using SRI's psychics to spy on such things as a Soviet nuclear facility. However, last December, the National Academy of Sciences panel found the case for remote viewing to be "virtually nonexistent."

Yet true believers as well as desperate pragmatists in government have turned to psychics in emergencies posed by counterterrorism and espionage, according to government officials and psychic researchers. Some highlights:

- The families of American hostages in Lebanon have employed psychics to provide information, and some of these visions occasionally have drifted into weekly reports filed with President Reagan by the National Security Council about the hostages' whereabouts, sources say.

- In 1980, government officials asked a psychic hired by SRI to describe the health of hostages held in the Teheran embassy. The psychic, according to some accounts, was accurate regarding Richard Queen, a multiple-sclerosis victim Iran eventually released in July, 1980. But one former White House official familiar with the incident recalls: "I was unimpressed," because the psychic's description of Queen's condition was vague.

- Psychics were extensively used in the planning of a projected Iranian rescue operation following the debacle of Desert One in April, 1980, as well as in late 1983 during an operation to track down those responsible for the deaths of the 241 U.S. servicemen killed by a suicide bomber in Lebanon. But the missions were never carried out, and the psychics' reports could not be confirmed.

- In the early 1980s, sources say, the Army's Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM), under the direction of psychic believer Gen. Albert Stubblebine arranged for psychics to describe the interior of the home of General Noriega, who was then suspected of drug trafficking and other crimes. The U.S. counterintelligence operatives in Panama who were given the psychics' top-secret two-page report never corroborated it because they were spotted by Noriega's guards before entering his home.

The future of such official use of psychics is cloudy, though it is likely that there will always be those who will turn to psychics in emergencies when other recourses have failed. It is even more certain that government leaders in Washington, like many citizens in other parts of the country, will continue to be drawn to the mystery of psi. ■

by Art Levine and Charles Fenyvesi
with Steven Emerson