

IF IT'S NOT ALREADY A RULE OF THUMB for judging secret Pentagon projects, maybe it should be: If the name is astral, the premise is spacy. First Star Wars. Now Star Gate. That is the real code name (not the postscandal tabloid headline) of a secret program that spent \$20 million in the past 10 years to employ psychics in pursuit of the unknown. What the Pentagon's ultra-secret Defense Intelligence Agency hoped it might get from the paranormal was a real advantage in the world of military intelligence. What it often got instead were tidbits of the kind offered to them by one psychic in the 1981 kidnapping of an American general, James Dozier, in Italy. Dozier, the psychic told his Pentagon employers, was being held in a stone house with a red roof.

The fact that this description applies to a good portion of the houses in Italy did not prevent the Pentagon from regularly consulting crystal-ball gazers. Until last week, that is, when the CIA (which spent \$750,000 on psychic research from 1972 to 1977) determined that the program was a waste of money and moved to shut it down. Congress had ordered the agency to take over Star Gate last year and conduct a study of its effectiveness. "There's no documented evidence it had any value to the intelligence community," says David Goslin, of the American Institute for Research, which the CIA hired to do the study. So the three full-time psychics still operating on a \$500,000-a-year budget out of Fort Meade, Maryland, will soon close up shop.

At least a few powerful Senators on the Appropriations Committee will miss them. Senators Daniel Inouye and Robert Byrd, intrigued by stories of psychic successes, pushed hard during many years to keep Star Gate going. Tales of the effectiveness of psychics as spies have long been circulated. CIA credited psychics with creating accurate pictures of Soviet submarine construction hidden from U.S. spy satellites, and a 1993 Pentagon report said psychics had correctly drawn 20 tunnels being built in North Korea near the demilitarized zone. "I'd close my eyes and clear everything from my mind," explains Joe McMoneagle, a Pentagon psychic from 1978 to 1984 who claims to have predicted that Dozier was being held in Padua. "Then I'd try to imagine where the person was and sketch it on a piece of paper."

Sketches were not always on target. To no avail, one set of Pentagon planners consulted psychics to pinpoint where Colonel Muammar Gaddafi was staying before U.S. warplanes attacked Libya in 1986. Another intelligence unit asked psychics to picture where an agent suspected of being a double stashed the money he made spying for the other side. (They could not say.) "Sometimes it seems that these people are right on," says Jessica Utts, a statistician at the University of California at Davis who contributed to the CIA study. "But nobody knows when those times come."

Actually, the study came up with an estimate: Star Gate psychics got it right only about 25% of the time. Typically, their reports included "a large amount of irrelevant, often erroneous information," the study said. And when the reports did seem on target, they were "vague and general in nature."