



# Just Like Jedi Knights (If Only)



Leon Jay (center) tries to knock down Luigi Garlaschelli (left) with a *qi* punch, while Massimo Polidoro (right) looks on.

“How would you like to be knocked out by a karate master for a National Geographic documentary?” This is the strange request that my friend and colleague Luigi Garlaschelli, a chemist at the University of Pavia, and I received some time ago by the producers of the National Geographic Television series *Is It Real?*

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We had already collaborated with the show for other episodes on miracles, human magnets, psychic detectives, and stigmata. This time, however, was different.

Were we willing to test the claims of a karate master who said he could do amazing things with his psychic abilities? Of course we were, even if that meant being exposed to the possibility of great bodily harm. Luckily, the strike would not be performed with brute muscle force but through *qi*, the elusive “natural energy of the universe.”

## No-Touch Punches

First we were given some videos of a man named George Dillman performing demonstrations of “no-touch” knockouts. Dillman is a ninth-degree black belt and one of America’s best known karate personalities, according to his Web site. He claims he has discovered mysterious “pressure points” and the even more mysterious technique that allows him and his students to flow *qi* toward a target and knock it to the ground.

In the videos you can actually see a master waving his hands in the air and a volunteer standing in front of him first oscillating and then collapsing to the floor—exactly as Obi Wan Kenobi would do on an Imperial guard in the *Star Wars* films.

It was very interesting, but we were not impressed. It looked like the old hypnotic stunts where the hypnotist stands in front of someone, points a finger to his face telling him that he is going to fall backward and, after a while, the person falls as expected.

It’s a game of expectations, if you will. I tell you what you are supposed to do, and if you feel you are put on the spot or are willing to comply with my request (out of sympathy, admiration, fear, or simple compliance), you will do it.

## Taking the Challenge

Of course, watching a videotape and actually standing in front of a karate master who could kill you with his pinkie are two very different experiences. I talked with Luigi and we both agreed that the human element had to be taken care of. Even if you put a skeptical person in front of the

master, there is no guarantee that he or she will resist the suggestions of the *qi*-weaver. Anxiety or fear could still be instilled in the volunteer by the presence of many other karate specialists, the presence of the cameras, or by the expectations of everybody there.

So, we thought it would be best if one of us could be the volunteer instead of a stranger.

Luigi is always ready to try new things. Through the years he has eaten glass, washed his face with fire, put an eight-inch nail up his nostril, pierced his skin, slept on a bed of nails, and had a thirty-kilo (about sixty-six-pound) stone broken on his chest by a sledgehammer. Although he would be on the spot, I would sit close by and watch the scene (someone has to do the dirty work!)

### Mesmer Reloaded

The experiment was going to take place in a gym located in Milano, Italy, where an associate of Dillman's, Leon Jay, was visiting especially for this filming. Jay is a very likeable fellow and was ready to help and willing to be tested.

First he demonstrated his ability on a series of volunteers from various gyms, karate students who were ready to be knocked out by Jay's imaginary punches. And they were. One by one, all of the students fell on the floor with dramatic movements.

It was then the turn of the skeptics.

Luigi took center stage as we all watched. Jay started to wave his hands around Luigi, who just stood there with his eyes closed at first, as suggested, and then open. Nothing happened. Jay attempted again for a few minutes, but nothing really happened.

Luigi explained that with closed eyes it was easier to lose balance, which is why he had opened them. Other than that, it appeared he was immune to the *qi* punches.

We then tried a different test. We decided that it would be interesting to subject Jay to the same kind of experiments that were presented to the proponents of human magnetism in 1784 in Paris by a Royal Commission created to investigate Mesmerism. The test was simply to have Jay again demonstrate his powers on one



George Dillman explains the proper toe positioning to avoid being knocked out by *qi*.

**So you see? It's only a question of toes and tongues. You can be the most powerful Jedi knight in the universe, but if I keep my toe down, you are nothing more than a useless C3PO.**

of the best students, one of those who had reacted beautifully to his hand weavings. This time, however, the student would stand behind a dark bed sheet with Jay on the other side trying to project *qi* at given intervals dictated by us. Of course, the student did not know when Jay was sending his punches or when he was just standing there motionless. In other words, he did not know what to do or when to react. He just remained standing there with a puzzled look on his face, waiting for the *qi* blow.

### A "Precious Secret"

Jay took the results of the tests quite well, even if he could not explain what went wrong in the demonstrations. It had always worked before, even if he had never subjected himself to this kind of testing. It was very interesting, when the filming was over, to hear the comments by George Dillman himself. Interviewed by National Geographic, he was ready to explain the failure of his pupil.

"The skeptic was a total non-believer" he said. "Plus . . . I don't know if I should say that on film. But if the guy had his tongue in the wrong position in his mouth, that can also nullify it. Yeah. In fact you can nullify a lot of things, and you can nullify it if you raise your two big toes. If I say I am going to knock you out and you raise one toe, and push one toe down, I can't knock you out. And then if I go to try again, you reverse it. If you keep doing this I won't knock you out."

So you see? It's only a question of toes and tongues. You can be the most powerful Jedi knight in the universe, but if I keep my toe down, you are nothing more than a useless C3PO. Handy to know.

### Note

A video of the test can be seen (when it is not removed by someone who prefers it not to be seen) on YouTube. Recently, it could be reached at this address: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7DHzZvCIWo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7DHzZvCIWo). □