

"It's a very dangerous thing to believe in nonsense."

-- James Randi

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Psychic Junk-Mail Hell

by David Bloomberg

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Where did it come from? Well, it's hard to say. I signed up for more information at one booth at the Holistic Health Fair a few months ago. Maybe they sold my name (while I admit that my signature is not exactly neat, it's a bit of a stretch to get "Leo" from my signed "David"). The other alternative is that somebody did it as a practical joke on REALL (though you'd think they'd at least get the name right). Either way, I suspect I'll be getting this kind of junk mail for quite some time to come.

All but one of the pieces came from Sioux Falls, South Dakota (and that one remaining shares a Fort Lauderdale, Florida, address with several of the pieces that did originate in Sioux Falls). So either Sioux Falls is the psychic capital of the U.S., or we're really dealing with just one company there. The other clues point mostly toward one company, as the name "Joyce Jillson" appears on several different letters and the same website appears on many of them as well.

Ms. Jillson is apparently the "Psychic Director" for the Personal Enrichment Society of America. She is so psychic that she doesn't realize there is no person named "Leo" at this address, and that, in fact, all her mail will be a waste of money because it's going to a skeptics group!

But let's see what she has to say. On one postcard, she has given me "special codes" that I am not supposed to give to anybody else. "Only the candidate can obtain this information with the codes provided on this card," it says. I don't know – I'm thinking that one shouldn't put secret codes that are not to be shown to anybody else on a postcard. I don't even think you have to be psychic to figure that one out. At least, that's not what you should do if the codes really meant anything.

This and a second postcard implore me to call right away if I'm concerned about "love, money or career." At least they have pretty much covered their bases (they forgot health, though). And she says it's "so important" that I will speak directly to a "Master Psychic." She wants me to "be helped, right now." The second postcard says, "Here is what you MUST do:" (emphasis in original).

Another letter from good old Joyce contains essentially the same information (with a different code number), offering me some free psychic reading time on the phone.

Several of the letters and postcards (not from Joyce this time), talk about "the intensity of [my] last psychic reading" or how "the connection we enjoyed during [my] last reading was more intense than what we usually experience with most clients." (Emphasis in original.) Also, I was "specially selected due to the nature of [my] last call. Hmmm. Since I've never had a psychic reading in my life, let alone one over the phone, you don't suppose these folks could be lying, do you? It almost makes me suspect that the "opportunity for tremendous wealth of \$1,225,000 or more" might not be completely valid.

But they say they have "years of experience in the specialized skill of Astrology, Numerology, Tarot, and Clairvoyancy" and that they are "the foremost experts in prediction and guidance." Again, I guess that guidance doesn't extend to their mail room.

Jenni Sinclair is so excited about the information she has for me that she is having trouble sleeping. She says, "Last night I was up to 3:30AM literally shaking with anticipation." Gosh, I hate to keep the poor woman awake like that. You'd think she'd have other people to worry about, since she is "a psychic numerologist to the stars." She said that something was going to happen on July 12, 1999 (I guess this one had been sitting in the box a while). She said I should "be prepared to sense a rush of energy soon after" that date. Well, I had two meetings on the 12th, and believe me – there was no rush of energy in either of those. Here it is, a week later as I'm writing this, and still no energy rush. Bummer. With a three-year-old and a 5-month-old, I could use that extra energy.

This particular letter has some very interesting language in it. She says she has been seen on NBC, ABC, CBS, and in magazines. Another part of the letter says "SEEN ON TV DURING:" and lists a few talk shows. I'm thinking she wasn't actually on those shows, but maybe a commercial about her aired then. Or maybe she was sitting on top of a television set during those shows and somebody saw her. Whatever the real story is, the tortured language gives her away to anybody looking closely.

Ms. Alycia asks, "Leo, Have you found your lovmate..." Well, gosh Alycia, if you're a psychic, shouldn't you know? For some reason I'm not inclined to use her "psychic abilities."

Another letter has all the official-looking trappings of a government document. "U.S. MAIL" it cries from the return address block, "IMPORTANT & CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENT." There is an eagle stamped on it and above the address window it says, "BUY AND HOLD U.S. SAVINGS BONDS." Frankly, I'd think a psychic would be in the stock market instead... There are some other official-looking statements on the envelope as well, referring to parts of the mail code, but they are pretty meaningless.

Inside the official-looking envelope is (surprise) another psychic come-on. Do I know who my long-forgotten love is and when she will be re-entering my life? Will I win the lottery? How about a sweepstakes? And don't forget that I may make costly mistakes if I don't call and get their advice. "Things are very urgent right now."

Finally, I also got two letters from Michelle Barry containing a sealed envelope with Tarot cards inside. She warns me not to open them until I call her. After all, she says these cards "radiate metaphysical powers that promote self-improvement and ward off the negative energies that may surround you." They were even "protected in a sealed envelope and surrounded by a mysterious aura." Hmm, guess I didn't notice it as I ripped open the seal.

In the first, I got The Lovers, The World, and The King of Cups. The second brought me The Lovers again, as well as Judgement, The Fool, and The Hermit. I'll have to contact REALL's official Tarot Card reader, Derek Rompot, to find out what they mean.

At the very bottom of all of these, in small print, is a note that this is for entertainment purposes only. Of course it is. That's why they include dire warnings and mentions of possible monetary winnings.

What I can't quite figure out is the saturation bombing effect here. If I was prone to believe this stuff, would I really be more likely to call because I got twelve letters and cards instead of, say, three (one per week)? Do they just hit their victims all at once, hope to drain their bank accounts quickly, and then move on? Is this the mail and phone equivalent

of a mugging? It must be a pretty profitable enterprise if they can afford to send out this many mass-mailings. But I'd rather they come to REALL's post office box than to somebody who might be conned into calling. Let them waste their money on me. If nothing else, we got a newsletter article out of it.