

psychotic readings

I'M NOT PSYCHIC, but here are some of my past run-ins with psychic ability:

Fifth Grade — I decide to do my annual science fair project on ESP. I give ESP tests to my entire classroom and everyone fails. Not only is my class's psychic ability proven to be discouragingly low, the results kind of wreck my project. Despite an impressive posterboard display, I place much lower than the year before, when I rocked the house with my "Are There Microscopic Creatures in Water?" concept.

Senior Year — Two weeks before college graduation, my best friend becomes totally unable to make decisions about anything relating to the future. She decides she needs spiritual guidance and I am dragged to a series of psychics at strange hours of the night but am never allowed into the fortune-telling room. Even more annoying, she refuses to tell me the predictions, saying only she "thinks this one was right this time."

My 22nd Birthday — My parents and I go to a restaurant that, for some reason, has a visiting psychic. My mom pays for a reading for me. The psychic is full of stories about new boyfriends I will meet in October and March that will be life-changing romances. I then enter the longest dating dry spell of my life and meet no new boys for over a year.

Okay, so I'm not exactly a *believer*. Flash-forward to a few years later: I'm looking for a little guidance. Is my career improving? Will my dating increase? Am I cursed with the negative energy of the universe

until I'm over 30?

I didn't ask that last question — but apparently, that was the answer that was awaiting me. I started out with a plan to visit three psychics to see if their predictions matched up. I thought it would be funny.

Yeah.

PSYCHIC NO. 1

On a sunny summer afternoon, I climb a psychic's tall staircase. She lives about three blocks from Wrigley Field in Chicago, and her hallway isn't much different than many of the building entrances in her neighborhood — except hers is painted light blue and has gold moons and stars hanging from the walls.

The psychic, a woman in her 40s with her hair pulled back in a loose ponytail, big mom-like glasses, and a general I-might-own-a-minivan feel, meets us upstairs. She lives here with her husband and kids. Two of them are watching TV in the waiting/living room.

She offers a number of astrological services — everything from palm reading to \$5 bargain readings. She leads me into a tiny room. If the psychic were to do a past life reading on the room, it would probably reveal the room was once a closet and it would cost the room \$50, her going rate for about everything. I opt for a Past, Present and Future tarot card reading, figuring that I could disprove her on at least two-thirds of it.

I have to say my full name and birth date out loud with my hand held over the cards (presumably so the deck can ask my lifeline some

"AURAS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE PASTEL COLORS, LIKE PURPLE OR PINK," SHE SAYS. "YOURS IS BROWN."

ONE WEEK, TWO PSYCHICS AND SIX YEARS OF BAD LUCK LEADS ONE GIRL NO CLOSER TO THE TRUTH ABOUT PSYCHIC ABILITY.

intimate questions). The psychic lays out the tarot cards, each of which have a different meaning.

I ask her when she discovered her powers. She knew as a child — she says it was a nightmare, especially with dating. But her grandmother (also gifted) taught her how to turn it off. My grandmother taught me how to crochet, but I don't mention this because it's not as impressive.

There's weird stuff in the little room: half-melted giant candles, more hanging moons and stars, crystals. The psychic is examining the cards.

"Hmmm..." she says. First she dissects my past — really, she just describes me. I'm motivated, caring, a good listener. I'm outgoing, but shy at first.

This is all true. But it's true of many people.

Then she moves on to my present. Sort of. She tells me there will be two significant boys in my life. One of them is apparently somebody I met two years ago and has a crush on me. He's going to tell me next month.

What? Instantly, I rack my brain for cuties I met two years ago. There's no one. Everybody in my life right now has been my friend since grade school or college. Is this someone I *want* to have a crush on me? She says yes. I'm not convinced.

She moves on to my future. Her features scrunch up; she looks pained. There's a moment's pause and she says, "Do you know what your aura is?"

I do. A little. I'm pretty sure it's the spiritual energy that surrounds your body in the form of light. Sort of like an all over glow.

"The positive and negatives are *waaaay* off in your aura," she says. Positives and negatives? Do I need a calculator for this?

The psychic then begins to explain that I have been surrounded

by a tremendous amount of negative energy that's pushing people away from me. I was supposed to meet my soul mate two years ago and he got chased off by my charge. And this bad vibe's going to be with me for six years.

I instantly wish we had never moved on to my future. My future sounds bad. An aura that would cause static cling and electric shocks? Six years of unhappiness?

The psychic explains this wasn't the result of anything I'd done, just energy I had picked up along the way. Like pennies you find on the sidewalk, only terrible and bad.

I start to worry. "Is there anything I can do to remove this energy, maybe some community service?" I ask.

"Of course," the psychic smiles. As it turns out, she could lift it for me with the help of some crystals and candles that were very special — so special they cost \$300. The money is for materials, she explains. She couldn't take money for using her gift, that wouldn't be right.

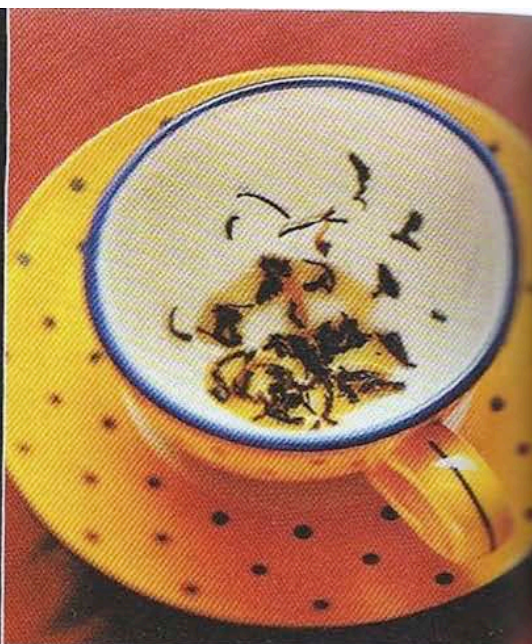
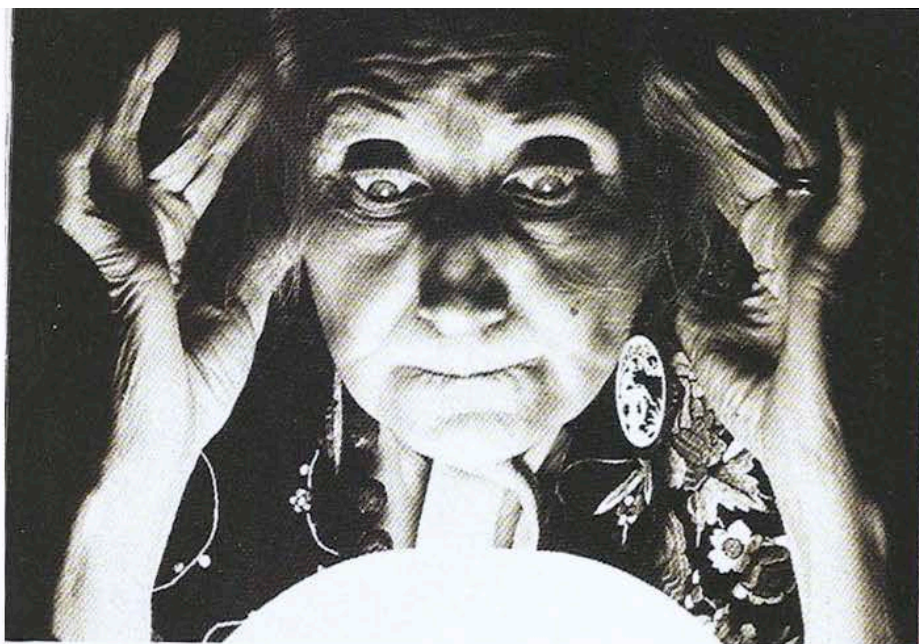
The crisp \$50 that I owe her disagrees. With my unbalanced charges crackling, I make my way back outside to go get a second opinion.

PSYCHIC NO. 2

Laughing off the first psychic, I head to a different seer several blocks away. Her apartment has a sign in the window with her phone number, business name and two giant, creepy psychic neon eyes.

I knock on the door. No answer. I knock again and call the number

**who used her real name after some debate because she trusts in the kindness of the psychics profiled in this article and knows they would never put a curse on her.*



I'M UPSET. ALL THIS TIME I'VE BEEN WALKING AROUND WITH A BIG MUDDY AURA AND I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW IT. AND NOW I'M STUCK WITH IT FOR YEARS AND YEARS AND AM DOOMED TO FAIL UNTIL IT SCRUBS CLEAN.

on my cell phone. I get her machine.

I begin to question her psychic abilities. If she were indeed psychic, wouldn't she have known I was coming?

PSYCHIC NO. 3

Two neighborhoods over, I find another psychic. Her office is a small storefront near a grocery store. This is good, I think, just in case my future makes me weary and I need snacks.

Intrigued by the list of services on her sign (she actually gives crystal ball readings!), I knock on her door. No answer. Surely she's predicted that I'd be stopping by... This is not boding well for the Chicago psychic community.

Finally, after 10 minutes, a small girl comes to the door.

"She's not in," the girl says darkly. "Will she be back soon?" I ask. The girl glances from side to side. "Yes," she says.

But I'm not. Crystal ball or no crystal ball, it all seemed kinda shady.

BACK TO PSYCHIC NO. 2

I wait a few hours and return to the second psychic. She's in. She must've felt my negatives and positives rolling down the street.

This psychic is much younger, in her early 20s. She's got dark hair and is wearing a very simple sundress. I get my prediction on the couch of her apartment. She also uses tarot cards, but her deck is dog-eared. She has some generic comments — I care about people, etc. But then she starts weirding me out.

"What happened to you two years ago?" she asks. I look at her blankly. "Nothing," I say.

"Something happened, and it's had a bad effect," she says. It seems I was supposed to meet this boy two years ago...

I am officially freaked out. She's pinpointing almost exactly what the other psychic said. I desperately try to think what I was doing two years ago. Working. Nothing exciting.

"I can't tell what it is because the cards are blocked," she says. And why, you may ask, are the cards blocked?

Big surprise: my aura.

"Do you know what an aura is?" she asks. I groan.

"Auras are supposed to be pastel colors, like purple or pink," she says. "Yours is brown."

Brown? BROWN?!? Like dirt?

She nods. I look around her apartment sadly. The neon sign is humming in the window.

"How did I get this?" I ask. It could be several ways, she explains: "From a person, a cursed object, or if you used an Ouija board before age 12."

Excuse me? Didn't she ever go to sleepovers as a kid? I had to! You couldn't play *Light as a Feather, Stiff as a Board* all night!

I'm upset. All this time I've been walking around with a big muddy aura and I didn't even know it. And now I'm stuck with it for years and years and am doomed to fail until it scrubs clean.

"But I'm not a negative person," I say, frustrated.

"It's not a person's disposition, it's energy they picked up," she says. I wait for her to tell me she can cleanse it for some outrageous charge so I can write it off as a scam and feel better, but she doesn't. She tells me she can do it for free if I buy some \$5 candles — the amount of candles is enough to cost some money (more than I wanted to spend), but not so much she'd really make a profit.

Sadly, I think she is telling the truth. My aura is nasty.

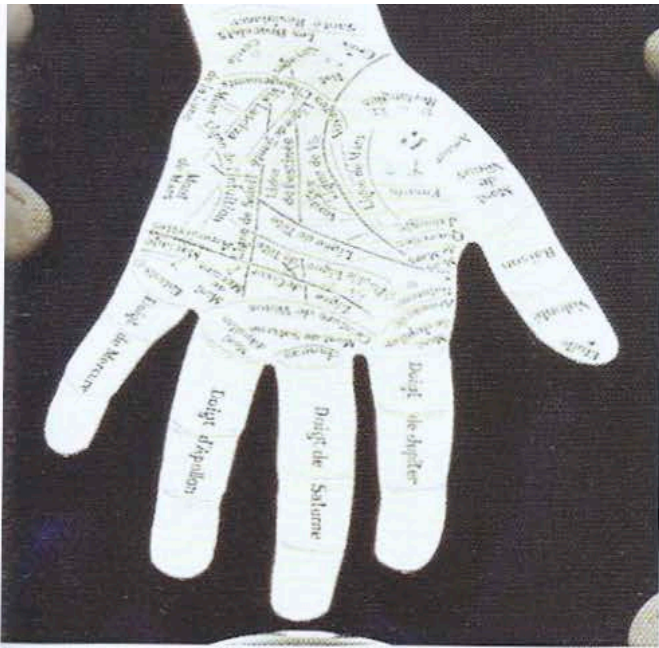
PSYCHIC NO. 3

I am totally too depressed to go to Psychic No. 3.

I go home. I tell all my friends about my stinky aura. I start to think that everyone can see it. I look at other people and imagine them surrounded by shimmery Lucky-Charms rainbows (purple horseshoes! green clovers!) and sense they can see a layer of dirt on me, like Pigen from Peanuts. It's depressing.

My friends' e-mails, which used to end with phrases like "Talk to you soon" now close with "Don't worry about your aura."

I feel like everything I do makes it turn a darker shade of brown. I cut in line at the store; it goes from taupe to tan. I don't call a friend



back for a week because I'm busy; it's burnt sienna.
 I start consulting my Magic 8 Ball for all decisions.
 Is my aura really as bad as I think?
 MAGIC8BALL: "Outlook not so good."
 Will my aura improve without the help of expensive candles?
 MAGIC8BALL: "My sources say no."
 Is my aura ruling my life?
 MAGIC8BALL: "Reply Hazy. Try Again."

PSYCHIC NO. 4

After two weeks of feeling psychically funky, I decide it's time to consult one last psychic.
 I call the Midwest Psychic Institute, a school in Chicago.
 I drill the receptionist, who is probably frozen in fear on the other end of the line.
 "Do you know about auras?" I ask angrily.
 "Some," she says. I picture her backing away from the phone.
 "If you have a bad aura, will it go away?" I demand. "Will it evaporate?"
 "Ummm... it depends," she says. "It depends on the aura."
 "Mine's BROWN," I shout. Surprisingly, she laughs.
 "Nothing's wrong with brown," she says, still chuckling. I stop.
 "Really?"
 "Brown's okay," she says.
 "I heard auras had to be pastel," I protest.
 "Nope," she says. I relax.
 "Maybe those were last season's colors," I joke. She laughs again.
 We're celestial friends now.
 "Your energy is good stuff," she says.
 I feel better. I feel cream-colored. "It is, isn't it?" I say.
 "There are many layers to your aura," she says, and pauses. "And you know, you shouldn't listen to everything people tell you."
 Me and my big brown aura heave a sigh of relief. It may not have come from the heavens — in fact, it came from a secretary — but that's the best life advice I've heard yet. ■

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