

Flim-Flam in the UK?

Written by James Randi
Friday, 12 June 2009 00:00

It just never stops. Otherwise intelligent people still turn to woo-woo to solve their problems. One of the latest is Simon Trussell, 41, of London, UK, a lovesick restaurant owner who was estranged from his lady friend Mary Pratt. He feverishly consulted *Psychic TV*, a Sky and Freeview channel in the UK serving mediums and spiritualists, and was given a phone number to call and speak with a "psychic" advisor, George Lavery, 42, who uses the professional name Simon Lavery. The con man assured his victim that all would be well after his awesome powers were unleashed. To begin, he told Trussell to purchase a cell phone which he said he would pass to his ex. This was done, and Trussell began receiving dozens of text messages on his own cell phone in which Mary asked for cash and gifts - to be sent through Lavery.

He naturally complied. Over the next eight months, Trussell, 41, handed over as much as £6,000 cash, £800 of naughty leather fetish gear, a sofa, and even a £6,000 engagement ring - a total of £12,800 [US\$21,000].

You guessed it: the "psychic" was lying - hard to believe, but true! He and an accomplice were stealing the cash and goodies, not sending them to Miss Pratt! Lavery, demonstrating his obviously well-developed gift for precognition, fled to Gibraltar with his co-conspirator John Hamilton, in advance of their possible conviction at a fraud trial. When they didn't show up in court, the two were given - *in absentia* - lengthy jail terms, three years and 30 months respectively, and ordered to pay £10,000 in compensation. At the trial, Mr. Trussell told the court how he'd started by paying up to £45 [US\$75] for 45-minute sessions with the psychic and was told Miss Pratt would be coming back into his life. He testified:

The first message was that she wanted to start the relationship up, and Simon was helping her through a difficult period, and what a great guy he was and I should help him.

After some time, during which he sent the cash and gifts, said Trussell, he received a text message - supposedly from Miss Pratt - announcing that she now wanted to get married, which led him to buy the engagement ring. Then when he heard nothing back from his ex, he thought it was very rude of her. Then he solved the problem, and decided he'd been flummoxed. It was all over, and he called the cops.

As a result, Trussell said, he'd now moved on from that relationship and found a new girlfriend. But I'm sure he now knows what to do if this relationship goes sour. He'll consult *Psychic TV*, of

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Why not?