



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

The rain was falling in sheets outside the small but plush New Jersey restaurant. My friend and I had finished our dinner but there was no way to get to the car without being drenched. We'd just have to wait.

Sipping my fourth cup of coffee and chatting with the waitress I noticed the well-dressed man at the table next to us was deeply engrossed in a deck of cards. When I asked the waitress what he was doing she shrugged.

"They're tarot cards," she said. "He comes in here twice a week, sits at the same place and reads the cards. He says they've never lied to him yet."

Tarot cards, as perhaps you know, are the special playing cards first used in the 14th century in Italy, now making a big comeback in America as tools for fortune telling.

I watched the man, impressed with his concentration and obvious sincerity. He was seeking information about the future, no doubt so he could plan his life.

This man was no odd-ball. He was simply a member of that rapidly increasing number of confused, searching Americans who are turning to the occult for guidance in life.

Phil Thomas, a wholesaler of magicians' gear and the founder of the Magic Dealers Association, was recently interviewed by the New York Times. He said, "Business is wonderful. People are looking for a way to escape their worries, and they find that magic takes them quickly into a fantasy world."

Facts bear him out. In Los Angeles, Ouija Board sales are booming. In Washington the demand for magic oil and tarot cards has soared. Many national

women's magazines carry an astrology column and crystal ball gazer Jeanne Dixon and white witch Syble Leek have become millionaires through sorcery. The late Bishop Pike openly practiced necromancy (communion with the dead) and despite repeated attempts by some in the Episcopal Church, was never disciplined. Alpha Brain Wave and Mind Over Matter groups are springing up all over the country. One of our astronauts openly practiced ESP while on the moon. Interest in witchcraft is more intense than at any other time in the history of the world.

The present boom has been helped, of course, by movies like "Rosemary's Baby" and "The Exorcist." However, most qualified observers believe these shows have grown out of the public's interest in the occult, rather than being a contributing cause.

The manager of a New York magic shop told me that where he used to sell two Ouija Boards a week, he had sold more than 500 in the last two months — many of them to Wall Street tycoons. One church I know regularly holds magic shows and last month at a church banquet I ate off place mats decorated with the signs of the Zodiac. Everyone, it seems, is trying to find supernatural answers — regardless of the source.

Recently when I approached this subject with a friend of mine he just laughed and said, "Pshaw! It's all harmless drivel." I have a feeling that many in the ancient city of Sodom probably had that same attitude.

Like the gal in the cigarette ad, "we've come a long way, baby." I'm grateful for those few with knee still unbowed to Baal, who are questioning which way we've come.