

SPECIAL TOPICS IN TAROT



TAROT

OUTSIDE THE BOX



THE FOOL



VALERIE SIM



FOREWORD BY MARY K. GREER

TAROT
OUTSIDE THE BOX

About the Author

Valerie Sim has been practicing Tarot since 1968. She is a Certified Tarot Grand Master (CTGM) and frequently contributes to Tarot-themed magazines. Valerie named and was the first to publicly write and teach about the Comparative Tarot Method. More than eleven hundred Tarot enthusiasts belong to her Comparative Tarot e-mail list.

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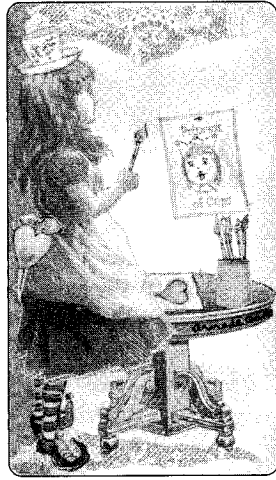
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*Dedicated to my Princesses of Cups, Tiffany, my gorgeous grown Princess; Tiff, you have my heart always . . .
and to Grace, Isabella, and Giavanna,
with love, from “Gramma Vai-ee.”*



The Princess of Cups, by Arnell Ando

The Princess of Cups enjoys losing herself in watercolors. She is dressed in green, the color of the Heart chakra, and gracefully wears a teacup on her head. She likes to play with fantasy fashion. Her dress ribbon is tied with a bow and heart—no arrow here, as she's never been struck by love, but rather enjoys fantasizing about how perfect it will be someday. She playfully wears the shoes of a court jester and has a connection to the Fool card in the way she takes risks, but is yet unafraid of consequences. She wears her heart like an ornamental accessory that matches her current mood and outfit.

—A. Ando

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Foreword

Surveys of Tarot readers done on different e-lists show that the majority use one to three Tarot decks predominantly and only a couple of spreads for most of their Tarot work. They will buy other decks and use alternate spreads on occasion, but return to their “comfort deck” (one of Valerie’s terms) or spread with surprising regularity, leaving the rest on the shelf gathering dust. Sure, they get to know the many nuances of their favorites, resulting in a depth of meaning and a perception of complex patterns that add richness and insight to their interpretations, but they can get stuck with seeing things from only one perspective. You won’t find Valerie Sim’s decks getting dusty!

This book presents a multitude of surprising and exciting ways to break out of the box, which can become too narrow, constricting, and dogmatic. It shows you how to escape the supposed rules and stimulate creative thinking and learning.

Not so long ago, in the early days of e-lists, I suggested mixing several decks together in a big “pool” and then drawing cards from this pool for a reading. This was met by quite a few outspoken individuals with shock, horror, and derision, as if it were an outrageous sacrilege equaled only by my admission that I also cut the borders off some decks. They felt that I was treating the cards with gross disrespect. To me, it was not that at all, but rather a desire to spur inspiration and an effort to explore Tarot’s

untested potentials. This is Valerie Sim's viewpoint, and this book shows the lengths to which she will go to probe the vast terrain that modern Tarot has to offer those who are willing to go beyond the box.

For Valerie Sim the innovative potential that comes with mixing and matching all the elements of Tarot can go much further than even I had imagined. The e-list she created, Comparative Tarot, is not only one of the largest and most friendly of Tarot communities, it is also one of the most wide-ranging, offering opportunities to be involved in the actual making of new decks and fiction stories, or in discussions of unusual decks, or exercises that will help you hone your reading skills, and much, much more. She encourages the idea that there is not one "true" Tarot and that a person can experience myriad delights and gain wisdom through comparing the characteristics found in a variety of decks and perspectives.

First you'll learn her comparative methods, then combination readings and interactive techniques. You'll go on to formulating questions, exploring new spreads (several created by members of Comparative Tarot), using elemental dignities, plus writing stories and poems. Throughout the book you'll find plenty of examples that not only show you what the techniques look like in practice, but also introduce you to intriguing new decks.

Sim's methods offer wonderful ways to introduce yourself to any Tarot deck and for it to quickly become a familiar addition to your Tarot repertoire. In that spirit, I'd like to offer the following suggestion for getting to know a new deck straight "out of the box."

You'll need a large space on a table or the floor. Take the cards from their box and lay them out in the following rows: Major Arcana I to X, and directly above these the cards XI to XIX, and above these the XX, XXI, and 0. Under the Magician place all the Aces of the suits as the beginning of four rows (use their suit order or your own). Follow with the Twos under the High Priestess, and so on. Place the Court Cards at the end of the suit rows. Now, examine the patterns. Is each suit differentiated from the others? How? Is a story line or other development

apparent as the suit progresses? Do all the cards of the same number show some kind of resonance or similarity—for instance, among the Empress (3), Hanged Man (12 = 3), World (21 = 3), and the Threes in the four suits? Can you discern any pattern of relationship or repetition of shapes, colors, objects, or themes among the cards? Which cards do you like most and which do you like least? If you want, lay out the cards from your favorite deck next to these cards and compare and contrast. How are the cards similar and how are they different?

Gather up the cards from your new deck and shuffle them, asking something like, “What does this deck have to offer me?” or “What is this deck best used for?” Pull one card. Describe it. Read what the accompanying book says about it. Summarize what you feel is its response. Take the same card from a couple of other decks and see what additional insights they offer. You may want to complete this process with a welcoming and dedication ritual for your new deck that acknowledges the message you received from the card.

Now it’s time for you to break out of the confines of everything you thought you knew about the Tarot. Enjoy your journey.

—Mary K. Greer

Acknowledgments

I am a confessed bookworm who has read countless books, both fiction and nonfiction. Yet before I became a writer I was mystified by that section of most books entitled “Acknowledgments” that thanked all of the people involved with the book. I confess I was bored by most acknowledgments and had no idea why any of them were necessary. It seemed ridiculous to me to credit so many people for each book. An author has an idea for a book, it is written and it is published. Right?

Wrong.

Now that I am an author, I understand both the importance and the necessity of acknowledgments. No book is written in a vacuum. All books have human connections that extend far beyond the story line within them. These acknowledgments may be just as mystifying and boring to you as some of the others were to me, but I, the writer, owe many thanks to many people. I hope you will read on.

Thank you first to those people who insisted I must go forward with a book idea for which I wasn't sure there was a market. These early supporters include Michele Jackson and Alexandra and Ken Genetti.

Thanks also to those who encouraged me as I wrote, primarily my long-suffering family, with whom I missed many a family dinner and social event, and my cherished friends who understood when I couldn't be disturbed, sometimes weeks at a time, while writing. Gordon, Alfreda, Tiffany, Tony, Nancy: Thank you! Looking back, it is

amazing that I still have any family or friends at all. I was frequently “unavailable.” Thank you all. You are much loved. Your sacrifices are not unappreciated, even when they may have been insufficiently acknowledged at the time.

Many thanks are also due to those who helped to edit the manuscript for this book, over and over, in bits and pieces, and then finally as a whole. Thank you, Tracy and Rickey Hite and Ellen Lorenzi-Prince, for your patience and your dedication in spite of your own hectic schedules and immensely worthwhile projects. Thanks also to Leah Pugh, my captive audience at work who patiently read and re-read many of the early passages I later forwarded to my official editing crew. Leah, your initial attention and vision were invaluable.

And where would I have been without my intrepid Llewellyn editor, Karin Simoneau? Karin, you were marvelous and gently but efficiently led me through the editorial process with this, my first book. Not an easy task! Thank you for your patience and your guidance.

Another nod to Barbara Moore, acquisitions editor incomparable for Llewellyn. Barbara, I could always count on you for concise and pithy advice. You were always there to encourage me, yet you were also always ready to raise the bar of accomplishment. I appreciate you for both. This book simply could not have been without you.

A special consummate thanks also to Mary K. Greer, who was my initial inspiration in 1987, when I first came across *Tarot For Your Self*, and who then became my mentor, teacher, and friend in 2000. Mary, I salute you! You will never know how much you have inspired me in the past and continue to inspire me today.

Another special thanks goes to my friends and co-moderators of the Comparative Tarot e-list, Diane Wilkes, Sally Anne Stephen, Janet Selman, and Debbie Lake, for covering my backside when I repeatedly had to cut and run with very little notice, simply to write. Thanks also to my fellow American Tarot Association Board members, Sandra Thomson, Mark McElroy, Janet Selman, Teresa Michelsen, and Tracy Hite. Words cannot express my appreciation for your tireless and

unselfish efforts, for your understanding and cheerful encouragement. You own a piece of my heart.

The term *friendship* fails when applied to all of you. You are Olympian friends, simply the best, and I will never forget what your unselfish love and friendship have meant to me.

Love and many thanks to you all.

Permission to Use

This book has been many years in the making. Because of the subject matter, I approached every publisher of Tarot decks, mainstream or independent, for whom I could find an address or e-mail address seeking permission to use images from one or more of their decks. Why a couple of publishers did not respond at all mystifies me, but I have chosen to move on without them in order to present my ideas about working with multiple decks in innovative ways. Some of my friends were beginning to doubt whether this book would ever be finished.

My purpose here is not to bash those publishers who were mute, but rather to explain to my readers that it is an incorrect assumption that those excellent decks not illustrated herein are not used and enjoyed by me personally. Lack of necessary permission is the usual reason for such omission. I attempted to provide every deck with which I am familiar an equal forum within this book—a book that is in itself a celebration of the diversity of Tarot. Those decks from which you see one or more illustrations are provided by the courtesy of their publishers, with or without minimal charge, who allowed me to include cards from one or more of their decks. I thank them for becoming a part of this project.

Also during this time, I approached many of my friends within the Tarot community who have as yet unpublished Tarot decks or decks that are not yet complete. At this point, I would like to formally thank my

good friends Arnell Ando, Julie Cuccia-Watts, and Marie White for actually creating the Nine of Cups cards from their decks *early* just so I could use them in this book. Thank you, ladies! I am still touched beyond words that you did this for me, and I know the public will love this sneak preview of your current projects. And a second heartfelt thanks to Arnell for allowing me to use her wonderful Princess of Cups as part of my Dedication.

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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT ME

I was raised in a very conservative middle-class family of Southern Baptists on my mother's side and Methodists on my father's. A family member who sincerely thought she was giving me regular playing cards gave me my first Tarot deck. I knew the minute I touched them that they were far more.

I laid the cards out in the spread suggested by the small accompanying pamphlet and was startled to discover that I could read them. This is not to say that I knew the exact names of the cards or their precise individual meanings, as I didn't know a Major from a Minor or a Cup from a Sword, but looking at them together, I knew almost instantly the overall meaning of the spread as confirmed by the instruction booklet. I tried several other spreads and experienced exactly the same thing. I had a feeling of déjà vu and my fundamentalist skin crawled. As my grandmother before me had convinced herself that her precognitive dreams were "bad," so I, too, spooked myself into assuming I was tapping into something that was far better left alone. I threw the deck out and had no doubt that I had ended my Tarot journey.

At twenty, I was married and had an infant son. I lived in an apartment complex and became close to my nearest neighbor, Cathy, who had twin sons just a couple of months older than my own. One day when I arrived at her apartment, I saw Cathy using a Tarot deck very similar to the one I had once owned, and I related my own experience with the cards to her and mentioned that they made me *very* uncomfortable.

Cathy's eyes twinkled and she tried not to laugh as she told me that I had simply psyched myself out because of the religious "programming" of my upbringing. She told me then what I now know to be so true, that *the cards in and of themselves have no power!* They are no more bad or good than the individual that deals them, but rather are useful keys for accessing the ancient wisdom we all possess. Used as a tool for tapping into your own mind and into your connection with the One, they are incredibly helpful and illuminating. They are the antique predecessor of the "Whack Pack" used now for brainstorming in corporate America, but created centuries before such a Whack Pack was even postulated. In a very similar way, they allow you to focus and draw on solutions that already lie hidden, but waiting, in your subconscious. I wonder if those high-power executives who consult the Whack Pack in corporate think tanks today have any idea how close they are to Tarot consultation.

With my earlier misconceptions stripped away, I was now ready and eager to use this tool. I shuffled and dealt the cards into a small spread and stared at them, expecting my earlier innate facile grasp of their collective meanings. Nothing. I found them interesting, even quite emotionally evocative, but there was no intuitive leap, no flash of understanding. The ability I had in my early teens had deserted me and I found myself simply gazing at colorful cards on a well-worn kitchen table. I was disappointed, but not daunted. I would just have to apply myself to learning the cards' meanings! But looking back, I can almost hear a little voice whisper, "You snooze, you lose."

This was the beginning of my relationship and fascination with the Tarot that would wax and wane over the decades that followed, yet

would never totally be eclipsed. There were periods of time when I read constantly. There were other time spans, sometimes encompassing many months, during which I hardly touched the cards. For the first couple of decades I read rather furtively with only one or two friends, as my family and many of my peers did not understand my fascination with misunderstood occult passions such as Tarot and astrology.

As the years went by, my “non-Tarot periods” became fewer and farther between. By the mid-1980s I began to slowly acquire other Tarot decks, and in 1987 I discovered Mary K. Greer’s *Tarot For Your Self*, a book that literally opened up a whole new world of Tarot for me. Previously, I had read only books by A. E. Waite and Eden Gray, and found their works to be helpful, but basically uninspiring. Mary’s book was different in that it suggested that it was acceptable, even beneficial, to do something with the Tarot I had previously only dared to do privately: Have *fun* with the cards! She was the first person to advocate both an open mind and a relaxed way of relating to the Tarot. From that time on I put the “rules” aside and read intuitively, whenever and however it felt right to do so. I began creating my own spreads, and I discovered a couple of methods that helped me as well as those whom I was beginning to teach.

One of the techniques that I found most helpful was studying and reading Tarot cards using side-by-side comparisons of the same card(s) from multiple decks. Looking at the same card via different decks adds valuable nuances of meaning. I named this technique the “Comparative Tarot Method,” and taught using this method for many years. Little did I know then that many long-term readers had happened into a similar practice with multiple decks. From talking to other Tarot teachers now, I realize that I was just the first person to name this technique and base a teaching curriculum upon it.

I discovered the Internet Tarot community in 1996 and conceived of the idea of forming an e-mail list to discuss this method in 1998, but with typical Piscean insecurity I convinced myself that it was a “dumb idea” and that “no one else would be interested.” With that

mind-set and excuse, I succeeded in not moving forward for a little over a year.

One day while getting ready for work, I found myself thinking about a Comparative Tarot e-list again and thought that if I could get some kind of “sign” that I should start such a group, I would. It wasn’t anything stronger than a passing thought that made me smile, it was certainly not a challenge to the universe, but when I opened my front door to leave for work there was a single perfect magpie tail feather lying on my porch. For those who have never been gifted with a magpie tail feather, these feathers are so deeply and darkly iridescent green they appear to be black even on the bird itself unless the sun caresses the feathers at precisely the right angle. They are magnificent.

In many Native American cultures magpie is considered to be a symbol of divination and magic. For someone who was by this time on the shamanic path, it was far too strong a sign for me to ignore. Looking at the shimmering feather as I held it in my hand, I knew that I couldn’t do so. The Comparative Tarot e-list was “born” that night. To my surprise, it was instantly popular. It has been a labor of love ever since then and is currently home to well over eleven hundred members. Comparative Tarot became far larger and broader in scope than I had initially envisioned. My work as listowner and moderator of the list over the last several years, as well as my teaching, both privately and on the Internet, have been the arena in which I defined and tested much of what you will find in this book.

I should add here that Comparative Tarot is no longer just “my” list. It belongs to all those lovers of Tarot who are able to leave their egos at the door and discuss the cards with respect for all they meet on the site, be they Christians, Jews, Universalists, Buddhists, Witches, Wiccans, or those of other spiritual faiths and/or eclectic or even indefinable paths. It is home to both Tarot beginners, or “newbies” as we call them lovingly on the Web, to several Tarot Grand Masters, and to the many *many* who find themselves somewhere in the tremendous learning curve in between. Members include deck authors, artists, publishers,

reviewers, students, teachers, and collectors. It is also no longer solely about the Comparative Tarot Method, but now includes subtopics for the discussion of almost every aspect of Tarot, from history to meditation, from Tarot poetry to innovative spreads. It is a knowledgeable and compassionate group that has inspired me from day one. In more ways than they will ever know, the listmembers of this group, many of whom are now cherished friends, helped to write this book.

About the Book

This book is not a “cookbook.” It does not contain the meanings or analysis of the seventy-eight cards in the Tarot deck, nor will it teach you beginning reading skills. It is assumed by your interest in this book that you have a basic understanding of both the cards themselves and ways to use them.

1. You already know the basic meanings of the seventy-eight cards in the deck, including reversals or a comparable system.
2. You know how to read the cards in several different spreads.
3. You are thoroughly comfortable and at ease with at least one deck on a day-to-day basis and are receptive to increasing your Tarot knowledge via the use of other decks as well.

In short, this is an intermediate-level book written specifically for those Tarot students ready to take the next step, to think “out of the box.” This book will show you ways of reading and looking at the cards that are not included in introductory texts. If you have read several beginner’s books and are wondering, “What’s next?” or “What am I missing?” this is the book for you.

You will learn ways to expand your practice and understanding of Tarot. You will learn the comparative method, the combination method, how to read interactively, how to use storytelling and other right-brained activities to increase your left-brain knowledge, how to formulate a question when you just can’t seem to formulate the right one, and

how to add Elemental Dignities to your repertoire. Some exciting new spreads are also included for you to consider, as well as a few new ways to look at familiar spreads.

You will find this book to be unique in maintaining that “out of the box” focus, as it teaches you new methods, a new mind-set, and in general, how to relax and have fun while continuing to learn. This book is not about rules, but is about ways to break them in an effort to stimulate creative thinking and learning. It will dare you to write your own rules and inspire yourself in the process.

This book is not a new perspective on old ideas, but is about new ideas and a new approach to a fascinating and growing subject. It is unique because of its refusal to cover old ground, and because of its desire to teach the reader how to break new ground by getting “out of the box” along with his or her cards.

Follow along, and I will show you new ways of looking at, and relating to, the cards. Alternate angles and approaches will ensure that your cards will never bore you. Those who are continually stimulated and taught to question and explore do not suffer from Tarot “burnout.” Living, learning, and even laughing with your cards will keep you eternally fascinated by the messages and wisdom that can be accessed via the Tarot.

Join me in looking at that magpie feather: Is it merely black, or is there a shimmering world of color deep within?

ONE

THE COMPARATIVE TAROT METHOD

How many times have we rejected or missed a message from one person only to take it to heart later when delivered by another person with a different approach or choice of words? Why is a musical remake proclaimed by some people to be incredible, yet detested by others who see it as an insipid imitation at best? It is this sort of thinking that led me to a method of teaching and reading Tarot cards that I call the Comparative Tarot Method.

Comparative Tarot is a method of studying and reading the cards that utilizes the subtle nuances of meaning found in the same cards as depicted in different decks. Because of these nuances and the artwork with which they are portrayed, one deck will be regarded as meaningful and evocative by some, yet useless or ugly by another. Those of you who enjoy working with several decks may be intrigued enough to give this method a try.

I began my Tarot studies, like many people, by making a journal out of everything that each card meant to me. I included meanings from different authors and readers, and my own personal meanings and associations as they

occurred to me through working with the cards. As I became a collector of decks, I started adding to my notes the various meanings attributed to these new decks by their creators. I saw many reinforcements, yet many differences. I became fascinated by the richness of symbolism possible in portraying the various Tarot archetypes, in the artwork itself and in its interpretation. Cards that I had previously found to be relatively “flat” in meaning frequently came alive by this method. Cards that were previously somewhat mute screamed for my attention.

I began to take this a step further by physically using this method in my studies and readings. Repeatedly I was excited by the added layers of meaning and subtle nuances to be gleaned by incorporating a second deck as an echo into the process. I now use this method when I teach. Countless times I have seen a student that couldn’t grasp a card’s meaning with his or her deck suddenly get that “Aha!” moment when a card from a different deck was laid next to it. To illustrate this, let’s do an exercise using *The Robin Wood* deck (RW), a softly-colored rendition of the *Rider-Waite* deck with a pagan orientation, as the primary deck, and *The Shining Tribe Tarot* (ST) by Rachel Pollack as the comparative deck.

Exercise One

Our spread will be a simple three-card spread addressing underlying problems (cards 1 and 2), and a direction or potential for alleviating those problems (card 3), in response to a client’s desire to identify what the crux of the communication problem is in a familial relationship.

The following cards were drawn:

Card 1: Five of Swords

Card 2: Ten of Wands

Card 3: Page of Cups

Interpret the RW cards according to their positions and synthesize the combination.

What message or insights are you getting from these cards? Now, using the ST, select the same cards from this deck and lay them alongside their RW counterparts. What do these cards tell you that you might have missed in the previous layout? What further amplification are you getting with these cards? How are you hearing that “second voice” with this deck? Is the message stronger? Does it change? Are you getting reinforcement of the initial message, or is this additional information that needs to be synthesized?

Five of Swords

The Five of Swords in the RW deck shows a man in possession of three swords while two lay behind him on the ground. He has a smirk on his face and appears by expression and posture to be gloating as he looks at the people in the background. In the ST deck's depiction of this card, Rachel Pollack has painted a dead Shaman, around which circle many-feathered vultures. As she mentions in her book, one is tempted to turn the card around seeking the proper orientation, which seems slightly elusive from every angle. She has made the card deliberately disorienting in an effort to shake us out of our fixed Western perspective. While cultural biases may lead you to concentrate on the dead body or the vultures themselves, it is important not to miss the nimbus of light surrounding the head of the Shaman, which signifies his understanding and self-knowledge. This takes us beyond the usual RW meanings for this card (self-interest of the personality/body, discord, possible dishonor) to self-empowerment from the proper confrontation of a situation and the resultant process of healing in order to release that inner light.

Problem

This family seems to suffer from competitiveness carried to the extreme, a sense of one-upmanship and a tendency to gloat over minor victories. All of these things aggravate communication and make it a real sore point. This problem will only get bigger if ignored. Things need to be put back into perspective and healing needs to occur.

Ten of Wands

The Ten of Wands in the RW deck shows a man struggling with ten heavy wands he is carrying awkwardly as he heads in the direction of a house in the distance. His back is bowed under the weight of the wands. In the ST depiction of this card (the Ten of Trees), we see a Tree of Life bursting forth with energy and signifying the pleasures and satisfactions of daily life. The abundance and variety of our lives is accentuated rather than the “burdens” of attaining such joys. I find in this Ten a message we should heed more often, that of thinking less of our burdens and more of the blessings they truly represent. Only through experience, both challenging and rewarding, can you arrive at consciousness. Perhaps the man in the RW card should glance up and see just how close the beloved home to which he journeys really is?

Problem

One or more members of this family feel overburdened. The family has the health and strength to offer support to the burdened member(s). All members seem to have suffered from dysfunctional communication for so long they have missed seeing how close they were in the past and can be again.

Page of Cups

The RW Page of Cups shows a young girl holding a cup from which a flying fish protrudes. Common interpretations of this Page would include: Listen to your emotions and intuitions; don't miss the opportunity to experience deep feelings and your inner life; don't be afraid to receive guidance from within. The comparable ST card (Place of Rivers) is a simple and beautiful depiction of inner peace. An androgynous figure kneels before a pool of dark water fed by two lighter-colored streams. Ms. Pollack mentions that we enter this place “simply by stopping our compulsive outward rush of attention and turning our awareness inward” (Pollack 2001, 249).

Solution

Get rid of that “neener-neener” approach, that sense of superiority and preoccupation with who is richer or more successful than whom. Remember the love that unites you, that bonds you at a root level, but has been overlooked for so long. And most importantly, remember to love yourself. Until you have discovered yourself and are truly happy on a soul level you will not relate well with others, nor will you find peace within. Look into your cup. It is truly full. See your reflection and then experience the depths of the liquid within. Therein will you find inner peace and the love for and communication with others you misplaced along the way.

Exercise Two

A second example of this method will be a three-card Past-Present-Future spread using the RW deck and the hauntingly beautiful *Legend* deck by Anna-Marie Ferguson. A friend had asked me to read for her when her sister approached her for advice on her current troubled relationship. The sister had asked her to give her situation thought, prayer, and even to seek a confidential second opinion if necessary. Accordingly, my friend approached me to obtain further insights via the Tarot on her sister’s relationship so that she could better give the advice her sister sought.

The following cards were drawn:

Card 1 (Past): The Tower

Card 2 (Present): Four of Cups

Card 3 (Future): King of Cups

The Tower

The Tower in the RW deck shows the infamous image of the lightning-struck tower from which bodies tumble to the earth. In the past position, does this indicate that the relationship has sustained some

sudden dramatic upheaval or some quick and possibly explosive change? What else can we learn with the addition of the second deck? The *Legend* deck shows us another threatened edifice, but this image shows us there is a specific reason this tower tumbles. Here we see Vortigern's Fortress and the pair of legendary dragons that troubled it. Time and time again Vortigern built his fortress, and repeatedly it came tumbling down. In that legend we learn that Vortigern chose to build upon a spot underneath which was a subterranean pool of water in which slept two dragons. Merlin explained that the destruction of the fortress was due to the nocturnal battles of the awakened dragons. Perhaps fortresses (relationships) built on battling dragons can expect constant strife? Is constant stress and endless strife a good foundation on which to build your castle?

Past

Foundations have been built on turmoil; relationships need to be built on solid ground.

Four of Cups

The Four of Cups is often called the apathy card and is commonly interpreted as boredom and dissatisfaction of an emotional nature. In the RW deck a self-absorbed man is seated at the foot of a tree and gazing listlessly at three cups in front of him while completely missing the cup in the outstretched hand close by. In *Legend* we see the disenchanting Knights of the Round Table. They are disgusted, disillusioned, and uninspired. The tournaments have been fought, the damsels rescued, and Arthur is away fighting in a distant land. They need something to motivate them and inspire them anew. In the legend the inspiration they sought appeared in the appearance of the Grail, symbol of inspiration and love. Caution is urged here not to let self-imposed apathy allow you to miss the apparition of your personal Grail. How can you find love if you see it not?

Present

Hello! This is a wake-up call. You are bored and you know it. You have emotionally “sold out.” You have the right to real love. Open your eyes—only then will you not miss it.

King of Cups

The King of Cups (RW) represents the mastery of all that is embodied by the suit of Cups. As with all Court cards, the appearance of the King can signify both self and another in a reading. This King encourages you to acknowledge your own emotions, feelings, and intuitions. Given the nature of the question, I feel that the King has definite double meaning here: Only by knowing your own heart fully and by being ready for an emotion that empowers as it grows can you share such an emotion with someone else. This card in the *Legend* deck is illustrated with the Fisher King, the name given to the various “kings” entrusted with guardianship of the Holy Grail. In the legend, only via the Fisher King could one obtain and unlock the mysteries of the Grail. What better way to meet your King of Cups than by using that King’s energy?

Future

Embrace the healing energy of this King. He lives within you. Know your own heart and you will heal yourself.

As you use this method, you will find that certain decks work better together than others, and you will begin to realize which decks to use for certain querents or types of questions. The messages are endless and the many voices of Tarot a siren’s song to further study.

Looking at the Comparative Tarot Method with One-Card Comparisons

I have to stop before going any further and make the necessary disclaimer here: There are no cards that are totally “good” and there are no cards that are inherently “bad.” Some cards are generally viewed as beneficial and others are widely seen as challenging, but all of the cards can run the full spectrum between positive and negative. Until you see both the promise of the challenging cards and the pitfalls of the welcome ones, you are not a real reader. The Comparative Tarot Method can help you to discover the full spectrum inherent in each of the cards.

To illustrate, let’s start with a card that most people are delighted to have appear in their readings: the Nine of Cups. I will begin with the *Universal Waite* version of this card, as its predecessor, the Rider-Waite deck, was my original comfort deck and is known to most Tarotists in the United States. The Rider-Waite deck was created by Arthur Edward Waite and Pamela Colman Smith, and was originally published in 1910 by William Rider & Company, hence the deck’s name. I have always felt that the deck would have been more appropriately named the Waite-Smith deck, but such was not the trend in the patriarchal business structure of the early 1900s. Happily, more and more Tarot lovers today are collectively renaming this deck, and you will see it referred to as Rider-Waite-Smith, or just RWS, on the Internet.

Universal Waite Tarot

In this card we see the visage of the familiar chubby-cheeked and smiling older gentleman. He looks like he is very happy, good-natured, and well fed. But is he happy or is he inebriated? Sometimes he strikes me as merely jovial, while at others he seems clearly besotted.

Many people know this as the “wish card.” I have heard countless beginners say it indicates that your wishes will be fulfilled and that you will get whatever you want. As a general rule, I tend to see it more as a card that indicates you will get what you *think* you want, and

often as a message to “watch what you ask for; you just might get it.” For the sake of this example, though, let’s just consider it as indicative of a sense of satisfaction and the enjoyment of desired results. Now let’s take a look at the Nine of Cups in numerous other decks to see what they might have to add utilizing the Comparative Tarot Method.

Blue Rose Tarot

The idea of the wish card is conveyed literally in Paula Gibby’s Nine of Cups from the self-published *Blue Rose* collage deck. Here we see the famous lamp of Aladdin complete with the stroking hands and the wise genie in the background.

Ma’at Tarot

Julie Cuccia-Watts’ *Ma’at Tarot* endows us with another version of the “wish card.” Quoting Ms. Cuccia-Watts from a private e-mail, she states: “Wishes as dandelion seeds in the wind.” This fits in well with the waxing Virgo Moon because Virgo in this deck denotes the barren earth of Spring. The dandelion seeds represent the symbolic power of wishes that can fill this virgin blankness. The woman in the card is literally sowing wishes on the wind. Will she like her harvest?

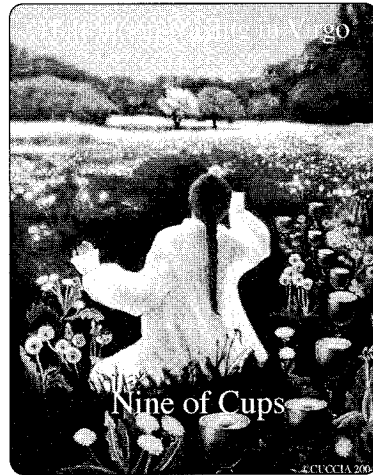
It should be noted that the dandelion has witnessed many changes and has been viewed in different ways over the centuries. Although its young leaves can provide a highly nutritious salad, and often did so for humans beginning in an era thousands of years ago, in this modern age we have relegated the dandelion to the status of a weed.

PoMo Tarot

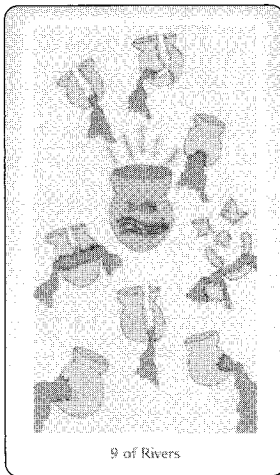
In the *PoMo Tarot* by the late artist and historian Brian Williams, this card is titled the “Nine Bottles.” Edouard Manet’s *A Bar at the Folies-Bergeres*, painted in 1881–1882, inspired this card. Here our modernistic Mona Lisa looks tired, dissipated, and used up, though her eyes contain a glint of life yet unstirred. Brian Williams likened this to “The silence under the cheerful noise, the emptiness under the glitter,



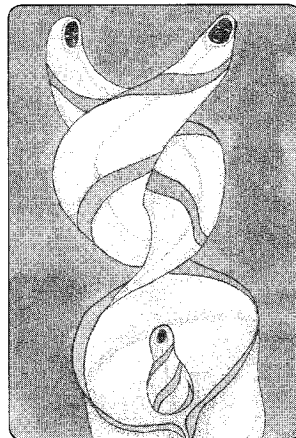
Universal Waite Tarot



Ma'at Tarot



The Shining Tribe Tarot



Tarot of the Crone

the loneliness of the crowd” (Williams 2003, 69). This is a snapshot of the busy social life that hides the fact that this social butterfly is one who is privately lost and floundering.

Here we have a tongue-in-cheek look at wealth, opulence, and affluence, yet we see the emptiness that may lie behind such riches. I look at this modern-day Manet and think of poor little rich girls like Barbara Hutton or disillusioned stars like Marilyn Monroe. You can have wealth, fame, riches, and so on, yet still feel empty and hollow. The dream, though achieved, is not a source of any lasting happiness. To the simple wish card of the *Universal Waite* deck I would like to add with the *PoMo Tarot*, “Is that all there is?”

The Servants of the Light Tarot

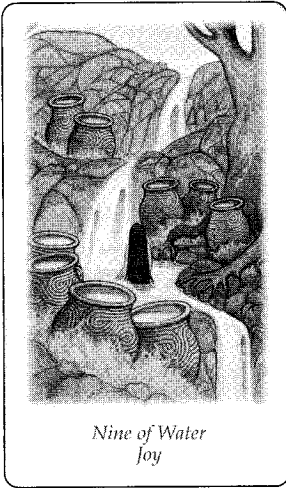
The next deck we will consider is *The Servants of the Light Tarot*, by Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki. This deck is fairly unusual in that the Major Arcana were drawn by Josephine Gill, while the Court cards and Minor Arcana were drawn some years later by Anthony Clark. In the Nine of Cups for this deck we see a Christmas tree standing on a windowsill. The theme here is celebration and happiness complete with presents and good cheer. From suggested visions of figgy pudding to bank notes, this card is at first glance totally positive, but reversed or ill-dignified (for information on Elemental Dignities, see chapter 5) it could mean riches or inheritance via ill-gotten gains. So is it treasure or tinsel? And who is paying for all those fantastical presents anyway?

The Shining Tribe Tarot

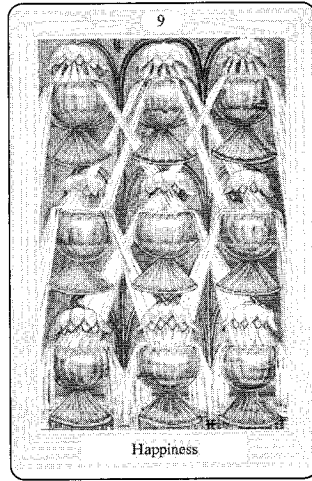
In the book accompanying *The Shining Tribe Tarot*, by Rachel Pollack, Ms. Pollack begins with this poem:

When the ocean fills with tears
the redeemer will come
When we have healed the ocean
we will fill it with light (Pollack 2001, 159).

Illustration from the *Vision Quest Tarot*, reproduced by permission of AGMüller, 8212 Neuhausen am Rheinfall, Switzerland; www.tarotworld.com. Further reproduction prohibited.



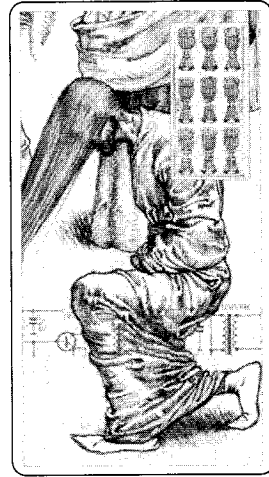
Vision Quest Tarot



The Thoth Tarot



William Blake Tarot



Tarot of the Third Millennium

Rachel Pollack goes on to relate how this card, illustrated with eight cracked jars surrounded by a central whole jar, derives from a creation myth found in the Qabalah. The eight broken pots represent the fragmented areas of our lives. The central pot is healed and shines with the dark waters of the unconscious. Ms. Pollack explains how this illustration conveys our lives of broken shards and refers to them as “pieces of truth in which the light lies buried” (Pollack 2001, 159). The card references the Orthodox Jewish belief in *gilgul*, or reincarnation—the idea being that it takes many lifetimes to become that central healed pot. Along the way we quest for monetary happiness, fame, and/or victories, and consequently experience a lot of broken crockery. Restoration requires helping others by sharing one’s inner truth. Forgive the mixed metaphors, but this is a case where walking the talk makes the pot whole. I like this card’s message about the inner spiritual health that is necessary to attain true happiness.

The Tarot of the Crone

The Tarot of the Crone is a self-published and extremely visceral glimpse of ancient wisdom by author, artist, and poet Ellen Lorenzi-Prince. Ellen’s Nine has a theme somewhat similar to that of Rachel Pollack’s. Again, we look at that which is broken becoming whole, but in a startlingly different and beautiful way. Ellen’s poem to accompany this card she aptly subtitled “Healing” is as follows:

I am the Many and One
I am whole who has been broken
I am the power of redemption
I am the renewal of creation.



The Buckland Romani Tarot



The Shapeshifter Tarot



The Mary-El Tarot



Ancestral Path Tarot

The Wheel of Change Tarot

Another deck that uses pots or large urns to portray the suit of Cups is Alexandra Genetti's vibrantly colorful *The Wheel of Change Tarot*. In the Nine of Cups in this deck we see large pots of olive oil and wine lost in a shipwreck and resting on the deep waters of the ocean (so "cuppish") while schools of fish swim among them. In almost all decks this Nine expresses some aspect of our emotions, spiritual growth, and/or wholeness. This card is no exception. As Ms. Genetti writes, "The Nine of Cups represents significant growth in the understanding of our emotions and their origins" (Genetti 1997, 250). This card is an excellent visual metaphor for that concept, as it is truly necessary for us to plumb the depths of our emotions in order to experience our deepest feelings and to both understand and recover them. The depth of the sea here represents the infinite depth and breadth of the collective unconscious and the emotions and archetypes we all share. Likening back to Rachel Pollack's whole and cracked jars, depth and wholeness are an integral part of real happiness as expressed in many Rider-Waite clones with far different illustrations.

Vision Quest Tarot

The *Vision Quest Tarot* also uses large urns for its visual of the Nine of Cups, and this is another rendition that I really like. In this card, we see a streambed that arches gently up to a small waterfall. A young maiden is wading in the streambed filled with literally life-giving water. The stream is lined by nine large jars filled with these precious waters. This is extremely appropriate, as in almost all indigenous cultures not only happiness, but life itself, depended on the availability and quality of the potable water. The richest people and the wealthiest societies were those that harnessed and controlled their water supply. This card helps us to see that water as a symbol of emotion leads you to think of what you nourish and what nourishes you, how emotions are expressed, how they are contained, and how they are quenched as a necessity of life. What sustains you emotionally? For what do you thirst?



Arnell Ando Deck



The Fey Tarot

The Animal-Wise Tarot

In *The Animal-Wise Tarot* by Ted Andrews, the Nine of Cups is known as the Nine of Shapeshifters. It is illustrated with the ladybug, also known as the ladybird beetle. Ladybug is considered lucky in numerous cultures, many of which wish upon her for good luck. This small red and black beetle is an aid to pollination and dines on aphids, making it the heroine of rose gardeners and many other horticulturists. The ladybug was also said to “fly to one’s true love,” making it a possible messenger or herald of emotional bliss, a symbol of getting what you want, specifically as it applies to emotional needs.

The life span of the ladybug is from nine to eighteen months, so Ted Andrews cites this as the length of the lucky time span indicated by the appearance of this card. This accentuates the lucky aspects of this watery Nine and brings to mind its association with Jupiter, planet of luck, which leads us to our next deck.

Thoth

The *Thoth* deck, envisioned by Aleister Crowley and painted by Lady Frieda Harris, was first published in 1944 as *The Book of Thoth*. Though conceptualized by two concurrent members of the Golden Dawn, no two Tarot decks could be more different in look and feel than those created by A. E. Waite and Aleister Crowley. At the risk of ascending a temporary pulpit, I have to say that I find that Lady Frieda Harris (*Thoth*) and Pamela “Pixie” Smith (RWS) are felt every bit as much in the decks they illustrated as are the men for whom the decks are nominally credited.

In this card we see lotus blossoms pouring wine into nine chalices, a vision that signifies overflowing joy. Astrologically, this card corresponds to Jupiter (happiness, trust, magnanimity, luck) in Pisces (spirituality and universal love). This combination of planet and sign suggests bliss, optimism, trust, and happiness. As per the illustration, it whispers of joy/luck (Jupiter) that lets the heart (cup) overflow.

William Blake Tarot

The *William Blake Tarot* by Ed Buryn utilizes an entirely novel reassignment of the four suits based on the vision of artist and poet William Blake (1757–1827). The closest match to a conventional Nine of Cups is the Nine of Music in the *William Blake Tarot*. In this deck, emotions are perceived not to be the flowing watery type of the Cups in most suits, but are described within the passionate intensity of Fire. Happiness is still the theme of this card, but it is arrived at from a slightly different direction. In his *Ode on the Spring*, Blake demonstrates how happiness, like the flowers of spring, are ever-renewing, but are only available to those who seek them. One is advised to passionately “kiss the joy as it flies.”

Tarot of the Third Millennium

This deck is very novel in both looks and style. Lo Scarabeo, the deck’s publisher, takes pride in producing decks that are consistently excellent artistically yet bound to no tradition or particular school of interpretation. Lo Scarabeo decks are seldom RWS “clones.” This one in particular has a very different feel, yet it works well within the Comparative Tarot Method.

The Minors from this deck are illustrated with what appears to be old-style pen and ink, yet they are over-printed with electronic circuit diagrams and ISBN codes. The feeling conveyed is definitely that of the old meeting the new, or as the box states, “the conflict between spirit and technology.” It is purposely jarring in an effort to force the reader to stop and contemplate the schism between spirituality and science. At some place on each Minor there is a small insert of a card from the *Ancient Tarot of Bologna*, and this portion of the card is the only part of each Minor that is in color.

On this Nine of Chalices (Cups) we see a fully robed figure whose extremely long hair looks as though it is either being blown in a strong wind or being drawn taut by an unseen force or agent. At first glance I thought the figure might be female, but the short beard on

the face nearly masked by the long hair leads me to the opposite conclusion. The posture and clothing of the figure made me think of a spiritual supplicant or mystic, which fits in well with the Suit of Water and the Nines, as defined for this deck in the accompanying brief booklet as “Enigma. Nine is the threshold, the umpteenth contradiction, a mystery, that which still escapes us” (Ghiuselev 2000, 12). John the Baptist in a wind tunnel? How would he have coped with the *improvements* of the modern world and our high-tech, here-and-now priorities? Does modernism and progress truly make one more spiritual, more “advanced,” or more happy?

The Buckland Romani Tarot

In the Nine of Koros (Cups) we see a Rom loading a cart with water jugs. Tiger lilies (representing prosperity) and peonies (representing wealth) grow in the grass at his feet. Another culture, another era, but a message similar to that discussed regarding the *Vision Quest* deck: wealth and material things. Raymond Buckland amplifies this interpretation by pointing out that the job of gathering the water is hard work, but work that pays off by bringing rewards. He states, “By concentrating for a while on building up a reserve of necessities (such as water), it is possible to then focus on your goals and ideals without having to worry so much about the everyday chores” (Buckland 2001, 124). Hard work as a predecessor to wealth . . . novel concept. Perhaps that is why this Rom gentleman is not as chubby as our contented-looking fellow from the *Universal Waite* deck? Have you worked for and earned what gives you pleasure?

The Star that Never Walks Around

Nine of Frogs is the title of this card from the round deck written and illustrated by Stella Bennett. Here a young brave sits before the angels. He holds orbs in both hands that signify his dreams and wishes to the universe. The orbs are offerings to the Spirits. He realizes that by sharing he will renew his inner strength. This card tells us that happiness

must be actively manifested. Only by prayer, meditation, and visualization will we create our own happiness.

Roots of Asia

A similar but culturally far-removed approach to communion with Spirit is revealed in the *Roots of Asia* deck. Here we see that touching the Mind of God can be accomplished via a spiritual housecleaning and an emptying of the mind. Inner happiness and enjoyment of the good life is only attainable via the elimination of anger, jealousy, and other negative emotions.

The Shapeshifter Tarot

This deck is by D. J. Conway and Sirona Knight. In this card, titled "Sustenance," we see an eagle-woman flying exultantly out of a misty lagoon. Droplets of energy fall from her outstretched and feathered wings. The book cautions: "Sustenance encourages you to accept the earthly and divine gifts that are given to you and to be more consciously aware of them" (Conway and Knight 1998, 154). Sounds like good advice to me! Do your relationships sustain you? Do they make you feel like taking flight? Do your emotions soar above the deep pools out of which they were born?

The Mary-El Tarot

Artist Marie White is the creator of this beautiful deck. Here we get a glimpse of a woman from whose head and hair lilies are blooming profusely. Ms. White conceptualizes all of her Minors by means of the clues to the cards character, in this case the "Nine" and the "Cups," or element of Water. She explained to me that Qabalistically Nine is associated with the Moon and Yesod. It is the place where every possibility exists but has yet to manifest itself physically. She often thinks of it as the place we see in our imaginations and visualizations. She says further that it is called *foundation* and is what the earth plane is built upon. She decided to use the calla lilies, grown from the spilled milk

of Hera (along with the Milky Way), and the tears of Eve upon leaving the Garden of Eden, as they are such a feminine flower appropriate for a card with such feminine energy. She points out that they symbolize purity, chastity, and innocence, and that they grow every year from a lifeless bulb, which makes them a symbol of resurrection. Lilies were so beautiful even Venus was jealous of them. They are also related to the lotus, a common symbol of the yoni, the vagina, the birth canal, and so on. Having this watery woman with nine lilies growing out of her head seemed to Ms. White a good way to paint a very fertile imagination or someone who envisions and feels things so clearly and deeply that he or she really seeds that land of imagination and eventually turns it into reality—a lot like she did in painting this card.

Ancestral Path Tarot

The *Ancestral Path Tarot* by Julie Cuccia-Watts has celebration as its theme. This is not the happiness and realized dreams of an individual, but rather a celebration in the communal sense. Fellowship and/or sisterhood are the keys here, and happiness or emptiness is dependent on the relationships within the entire community. The Cups in this deck are conceived around the Arthurian/Grail mythos, and here we see King Arthur, Queen Guinevere, and the Knights of the Round Table at a feast in the great hall.

Arnell Ando Deck

This card represents bliss and serenity while at the same time suggesting an abundance of inspiration and motivation to create new art forms. The artist in the card has reached such a level of success and inner confidence that she can freely indulge in her passions and share her visions wholeheartedly with the world. She is emotional and sensitive, and being a Water/Cups woman, her favorite place to paint is by the seashore. After a nice leisurely stroll on the beach she has found some intricate, marvelous shells to incorporate into her work. They are a personal symbol to her (nine shells for the nine cups are

represented in the suitcase, and nine colors on her painter's palette as well). The nine colorful cups hanging on the hoop skirt represent important experiences and lessons that she keeps with her when she creates. They softly clang against the metal rings of the skirt much like the memories and insights that softly beckon to us when we are immersed in the creative process. The Nine of Cups is written in the sand, but will be washed away once she leaves this spot with her latest masterpiece done and a suitcase of lovely shells under her arm.

The Fey Tarot

This is a delightful new deck that enchants us with its innocent whimsy while probing deeply into the heart of the matter. In this rendition we see a young Fey looking tired but happy, leaning up against a large chalice. Her expression is relaxed, gentle, and blissful. We have now come full circle, but with a new understanding and a different nuance slightly different from that of our origin. Again, we have satisfaction, but this time it is accompanied by a sense of utter abandon and with absolutely no shadows. This card bespeaks the total harmony of physicality and spirit.

We have all heard the expression “the ’nth degree.” The Nines portray this ’nth degree. Water is the great leveler or balancer that seeks to occupy evenly whatever contains it. Putting the number and suit together, we have seen how many different authors and artists have sought to express that “’nth” degree within the suit of Water. Love, relationships, emotions, luck, wholeness, healing, communion, and spirituality—all are connected by this ultimate expression of emotional balance. Are your nine cups half empty or half full? Using multiple decks you can discover this in amazing depth and detail. Get lost in the pictures. Explore their colors and symbols. Get “involved” with the characters pictured on the cards. Discover new meanings even the deck creators themselves only glimpsed. Such is the beauty of art . . . and of Comparative Tarot.

This has been a brief look at one card in only a handful of decks. There are literally hundreds of decks, some of which will appeal to you and some of which will not. Whichever ones you choose to use, practice with this concept and you will be amazed by the subtle nuances and fullness of meaning you may have missed when reading with only one deck.

Here's to multiplicity and to your comparative journey!

The Comparative Tarot Method: A Sample Reading

So far we have demonstrated how the Comparative Tarot Method works in interpretation. Let's try a reading with it. The following is a reading done for the energy of the full moon of September 13, 2000. I chose to use the *Animal-Wise* deck for my primary deck and the *Vision Quest Tarot* as the comparative deck. I also decided to go with the elegance of simplicity and do a small three-card Past-Present-Future spread. I saw this as describing the relatively small time frame of this moon cycle (twenty-eight days) and what was to be learned from it. What could I process now to carry forward in the four weeks to come?

The three cards I drew from the *Animal-Wise* deck were:

Card 1: Cougar: Knight of Four-Leggeds

Card 2: Chickadee: Four of Winged Ones

Card 3: Woodpecker: Ace of Winged Ones

The first thing I noticed was that I had two Air cards and one Earth, which pretty well describes the astrological configuration of elements for this full moon. Six out of ten planets were in an Air sign, and the elevated Sun in the tenth house was in Virgo (Earth). (See more on this type of analysis in chapter 5.)

Cougar

Cougar is subtitled “Coming into our own Power.” This is something that I have felt secure with more and more lately, not in a cocky or overconfident way, but as with the silent padded footsteps of one of North America’s most respected predators. Cougar was admired for his silent strength and supple power by the Native American cultures with which he shared forests, mountains, and plains. Even today, Cougar has persevered on the innermost fringes of what we call “civilization”—a civilization that has resulted in the near extinction of many other large carnivores who have been less able to carve out their niche in the territorial world of man.

Chickadee

Chickadee stands for “Seeking the Inner Truth.” This moon is a special time for that. As a double Pisces this is something I find especially comfortable and invigorating. I am never more comfortable than when going inward; it is refreshment for my immensely private and seeking soul. This Piscean moon was an easy energy for me to feel and follow.

Woodpecker

Woodpecker is “Unique New Rhythms of Success.” We have all heard this guy! His “song” is like no other in the forest! To hear him is to know the joy and individuality of sheer existence. He is an individualist. He expresses himself in a unique way. And with focused sight and attention he moves forward on his path.

Turning to the *Vision Quest Tarot*, we pick out the following comparable cards and lay them above the first row of cards:

Card 1: Son of Earth

Card 2: Four of Air (Contemplation)

Card 3: Ace of Air

Son of Earth

I was immediately struck by the basket of harvest fruits and vegetables carried by this native Son of Earth. Does this sound fitting for the harvest moon? The little white instruction booklet accompanying the deck says “Complete ripeness! The fruits of internal and external labor are yielding a bountiful harvest. You are the beneficiary. Share this wealth with everyone. You will enjoy your success even more if you include others” (Winter and Dose 1998, 95). How very appropriate!

Four of Air

In the Four of Air, we see a nocturnal river over which shines a beautiful full moon. The reflection of the moon’s silvery light extends the length of the river, illuminating the path by which we have come. In the foreground, four feathers are completely still, symbolizing this moment of contemplation, this pause, this reflection, and all it means. Taking this time to “reflect” is a necessary part of the lesson and of the continuing journey.

Ace of Air

The Ace of Air shows one perfect feather in all its clarity and excellence. It is a deceptively simple illustration of the serenity and equanimity that follows initial inspiration. Such serenity is a true gift that should not be missed or rushed beyond.

Comparative Synthesis

I will be as Cougar, secure in my own inner strength and willing to share my “harvest” with others. As Chickadee I will pause to “reflect” on what has gone before. I will nourish my soul with silence and inner peace. And finally, as Woodpecker, I will move forward with clear vision, unafraid to tap out new rhythms within the continuing mysteries and joys of life. Renewed and whole I will sing (tap!) my unique song.

How Far Can You Go with Comparisons?

I don't have an answer to this question. Though I have been comfortable, even enchanted, with this method for over a decade, I generally don't utilize more than two or three decks in a comparative reading. Some of my own students have put me to shame by using five, even ten, decks at a time.

Multiple-comparison is a process that is especially enlightening with the often overlooked and under-credited one-card reading. Many beginners tend to want to move on to large and complicated spreads too quickly. This is a shame, as most teachers will agree that until a novice learns to interpret single cards completely, he or she should not move on to multiple-card spreads. Walk before you run.

The American Tarot Association is a leading proponent of the one-card reading. I have found, via my students who are learning while they read at the Free Tarot Network, that knowledge and comfort with the Comparative Tarot Method has helped them considerably to get the very most out of their one-card readings and to provide their clients with in-depth multilayer readings. I get e-mails all the time from people who thank me for introducing them to this method.

Here are two examples of one-card readings using the Comparative Tarot Method with five decks. A friend and fellow network reader, Debbie Lake, made these excellent comparisons that were published previously in the Free Reading Network Newsletter.

Using the Strength cards from a variety of decks (*Thoth*, *Cosmic Tribe*, *Rider-Waite*, *Victoria Regina*, *Morgan-Greer*, *Enchanted*, and *Tarot of the Crone*), we see some commonalities and some dramatic differences. For example, all of the cards involve a human with an animal of some kind. The most common variation is a chastely dressed woman and a lion. She is usually stroking or touching the lion but not restraining him. However, on *The Tarot of the Crone* we see a woman merging with a snake. On the *Cosmic Tribe* Strength card we see a nude man with a lioness. The *Thoth* tarot variation (which is titled "Lust") shows a nude woman riding a multiheaded leonine creature.

Traditionally, Strength is often seen to symbolize inner strength and fortitude—the ability to see things through, no matter how difficult the circumstances. It also represents the triumph of inner spirit and will over our more aggressive, instinctive impulses, and various additional meanings that most readers have acquired over the years. But in this instance we look at the different Strength cards and see how they manifest this interpretation. In the *Enchanted* and *Victoria Regina* decks we see calm, serene scenes. The woman is sitting near the lioness, petting her and seeming very relaxed and unconcerned about any potential danger.

In *Cosmic Tribe* we have the added image of a nude man standing above the lioness with his arms open, as though embracing any possible interaction with the lioness. He is unafraid and fully exposing himself to whatever the lioness might bring. Rider-Waite and *Morgan-Greer* both show a slightly more active image—the woman is grasping the lion's muzzle and seems to be trying to keep his mouth closed. There doesn't seem to be too much of a struggle, but it does imply a need to exert a certain amount of physical control over the situation. She still appears unruffled and calm, but there is a more direct action being taken.

The *Thoth* image shows a nude woman leaning along the back of the multiheaded lionlike figure. She seems abandoned and uninhibited, holding a leash or cord that connects to the head of the beast. Once again we see someone totally open and defenseless (as in *Cosmic Tribe*), but here we have the additional feeling that this woman is in complete control of the animal. She steers the heads and finds deep sensual satisfaction in the process. She revels in her connection to this animal and the sensations she achieves through this connection.

Looking at *Tarot of the Crone* we see a woman completely encased by a large snake. She is not only within the snake, she has taken on snake qualities and is actually becoming, or merging with, the serpent.

So by examining and exploring these variations on a theme, I have added depth and texture to my initial meaning of the Strength card. It still represents inner strength and fortitude, the ability to see things through, and the triumph of inner spirit and will over our more

aggressive, instinctive impulses. But comparative analysis has helped us to flesh out our original framework of card meanings. We now see that Strength also means being willing to expose yourself and allow yourself to be defenseless when facing the animal within. It means embracing and celebrating our animal nature and allowing ourselves to merge with it, to become encompassed by it and filled by it. It means being willing to shed our inhibitions and to grasp our aggressive, more primitive side and wrestle it into submission (when necessary), but also being willing to allow it an opportunity to express itself. Strength means understanding that our aggressive, animalistic side is not bad or evil, and that if we try too hard to repress it we may find it rears its head at inconvenient times and inappropriate moments.

Let's take a look at another card—one with a very different focus: the Queen of Swords. This card often gets a bad rap. Some of the traditional meanings are: a subtle, keen, quick-witted woman, a widow, or a woman who cannot bear children. It can also mean a mature, coolly confident, competent person with great communication skills and intellectual maturity. She can also be viewed as malicious, spiteful, and controlling. But let's take a moment and look at the different images of this complex character.

The Rider-Waite Queen of Swords seems to be seated on her throne up in the clouds, wielding her sword impartially and confidently—able to see through the falseness and fabrications people offer to her. She is like Solomon, wise and discerning yet fair in her judgments.

The *Morgan-Greer* Queen of Swords offers a somewhat softer image. She holds her sword upright and her crown has sharp, pointed quills sticking out of it. But she is also surrounded by red roses, suggesting a passionate nature shrouded by a prickly personality, a rose hidden among thorns. She may offer wonderful treasures, but you have to be sharp and intelligent enough to pluck the bloom without getting scratched.

The *Cosmic Tribe* Queen of Swords sits proudly nude among the clouds. Her butterflylike wings spread out behind her and she holds

her sword lengthwise in front of her. She possesses the sharpness and keen wit of the other queens, but she doesn't feel the need to show off that fact. She is a gentler Queen—willing to bare her soul but only if you can get past that sword she holds so comfortably and confidently.

Now we come to the *Thoth* Queen of Swords. This is a very different image. This Queen of Swords is sprawled on her throne among the clouds, sword in one hand pointed downward. She doesn't need to wield her sword because she has already vanquished her foe. His head dangles from her left hand. She is in control of the situation and has been able to defeat whatever obstacles try to block her way.

Last, but certainly not least, we come to *The Tarot of the Crone's* Grandmother of Swords—the Storyteller. This image shows a full-figured, serene woman sitting under the night sky, surrounded by hills and holding an armful of smaller figures. Her eyes are closed as she remembers the stories of the ancient ones and passes them on. She is the lore-keeper and the memory of the family or tribe. She has made it to an advanced age by having the wisdom to know that, like the hills behind her, her memories and stories will endure. She will eventually pass on to become an ancestor, but the tales she shares and the wisdom she possesses will endure. She will live on in the memories of her descendents and her students. She nurtures and encourages, but she can be a sharp taskmaster too. After all, teaching and imparting knowledge is not an easy task.

So once again we have seen how subtle shadings and rich textures can be added to our initial image of the Queen of Swords. Yes, she is sharp-witted, keen, and coolly confident, but she is also a teacher, a nurturer, and a defender. She will protect her children and her people, but she will do it through intelligence and logic. She is fierce in defending those she guards, but she also thinks before she acts. She is the air that we need to breathe, to live. She breathes her love and her blessings upon us, and we carry those blessings on into our futures.

Larger Spreads with Multiple Decks

What decks do I recommend for this process? All of them, of course! Seriously, though, I recommend that you reach, get crazy, use decks that are as dissimilar as possible. As witty Debbie Lake is fond of saying, "Not all decks play well together." But many times it is the apparent discrepancies between different versions of the same card that will help you to grasp that card's fullest meaning and subtle nuances.

Using the Comparative Tarot Method with extremely large spreads can be somewhat cumbersome, not to mention the fact that it requires a very large table or expanse of carpet. Three-card readings, however, lend themselves quite well to the Comparative Method. Here is an example of a three-card reading utilizing this method. (The name of the person for whom this reading was done has been changed and certain personal details of the reading have been eliminated.)

For this reading I chose to use the Rider-Waite-Smith (RWS) deck augmented by the *Animal-Wise Tarot* (AW) and *Fey Tarot* (FT) decks. I designed a simple three-card reading that I thought would help us to look at her question thoroughly.

Becky's Reading

Becky is a woman in her early forties who came to me asking, "Should I have more children in the future?"

Card 1: What blessings would the birth of a child bring to my life right now?

RWS: Four of Wands. How fitting, as this card often means "the harvest" or "familial achievement." It is also often a card of marital happiness and accord. Could it be that this child is viewed by either or both of its potential parents as a necessity of the marriage in order to ensure its longevity and/or happiness? Is this a milestone birth for either or both sides of the family? Is an heir expected?

AW: Anole (Harmony and Peace). True harmony comes from trusting your own perceptions rather than that of another. If this is what

you want, no direction is too tough or too complicated for you; Anole can run up, down, even backward, and never fall. (The Anole is a relatively common member of the lizard species. It is slight in build and has a narrow head and a long tail that can be twice as long as the body of the animal. It can vary in color from gray to brown to bright green, with all shades in between a possibility. Anoles have the chameleonlike ability to blend in with their surroundings.)

FT: In this particular depiction of this card many Fey are at work festooning a large tree with garlands, bells, and stars. Their advice: "A party does not need a reason" (Minetti 2002, 114).

Card 2: How would having a child at this point negatively impact or restrict my lifestyle?

RWS: Justice (Reversed). "It's not fair!" That is one of the loudest cries of the Justice card reversed. Is someone pressuring you to have this child? Or do you feel that you *must*? I would never unethically practice medicine a la Tarot, but if this were my own card for such a question, I would pay special attention to metabolic balances and the overall health picture. Balance is key. It is always good advice when planning a pregnancy, or even considering it, to see a doctor for a complete health examination that evaluates all considerations of a pregnancy at that particular time. (Of course, one does not need the cards to heed this sage advice; this card just reinforced that age-old wisdom.)

AW: Elephant (Ancient Powers of Justice at Work). Trust your own instincts. Elephant's long nose alerts you to the fact that if it doesn't smell right, don't trust it. The appearance of Elephant always proclaims that justice will be done. What will be, will be.

FT: In this deck, Justice is herself a child. She is blind, yet sees all. Her heart is pure. Her eyes see the truth beyond any deceit. She represents what must be, what must happen, discovering the truth, and revelation. She is justice of the spirit, not just of the material world.

Card 3: What do I need to pay special attention to in regards to this query?

RWS: Knight of Wands. The Knight of Wands is the quintessential passionate lover: ardent, impulsive, and exciting. His appearance in this position cautions not to plunge into a life-altering (literally!) issue such as pregnancy without ample thought. Desires are running hot here. Will they burn long or might they burn out?

AW: Komodo Dragon (Strong Survival Strength and Impulses). Komodo Dragons lay twenty to forty eggs at a time that have an incubation period of approximately eight months. The next eight months will be the crucial phase for your decision in this matter. You can use that time to initiate a new phase or to acknowledge as completed that which needs to be ended.

FT: This Knight (and in this deck the knight is female) knows no limits and no boundaries. She is very impulsive. It signifies that living life as an adventure means dealing with every obstacle and barrier as a challenge. Surmounting challenges is a wonderful trait. Entering upon them merely for the sake of doing so may be another thing.

Comparative Results

So what was my advice to Becky based on this comparative reading?

These cards are all yang, or male. They are the Four of Wands (Fire), Justice (Air), and the Knight of Swords (Air). Where is the female intuition, emotion, and empathy in this trio? Is it being rundown or overruled by testosterone? This triad is quick, hot, passionate, needy—but is it lasting? More children in your future? I would say this is definitely possible, even likely, if *you* want them. Ask yourself that question honestly and listen to the answer. Becky, where is *your* heart in this?

The Comparative Tarot Deck

The Comparative Tarot Method can be very enlightening, and I encourage you to use it with different decks to see what you can discover. The downfall of the method, as has already been mentioned, is that there are places and situations for which utilizing the Comparative Method can

be impractical because of the necessity of having to go through so many cards to begin the process. Sometimes you just don't have a big enough surface to spread out all of the necessary images. Time can also be a factor, especially in face-to-face readings. When doing such a reading the reader should not be taking up the client's time fumbling through various decks in order to find matching cards.

In November 2003 Lo Scarabeo made a Comparative Tarotist's life much easier by the publication of the *Comparative Tarot Deck*. In this deck, each card contains a picture of cards from four very different decks: *Marseilles*, *Universal Waite*, *Sphinx*, and *Tarot of the Origins*.

When I was approached by the publisher to write the "little white book" (or LWB, as many refer to it) for this deck I was delighted—not to mention flabbergasted that after so many years of using the method I hadn't conceived of such a deck myself. What an obvious and simple alternative to riffling through multiple decks of cards!

Using only this one deck the Tarot reader can do comparative readings quickly and in a smaller space. The novel "flavors" of the *Sphinx*, an Egyptian-style deck, and *Tarot of the Origins*, a very shamanic deck, are complemented by the familiar images of the *Marseilles* and *Universal Waite* decks.

I highly recommend this deck, not instead of the multiple deck approach, but in addition to it. With multiple decks you can choose whichever decks you like, but you must sacrifice some amount of time and space to do so. With the *Comparative Tarot Deck*, deck choices are made for you, but you have "Comparative Tarot portable"—a comparative card tool kit that is always self-contained and ready to go.

Reading with the Comparative Tarot Deck

The reading that follows is an actual reading done via the Free Reading Network. The names and some of the particulars have been altered to protect the anonymity of the woman for whom it was done.

Dear Gina,

Your question was, "How will the move in with his parents affect our relationship?" You amplified that question with this: "At the end of the month, my fiancé and I will move into his parent's basement (fully finished, very nice, not a *Silence-of-the-Lambs*-type basement). He lost his job back at the end of August. We've been living together for about a year now."

Gina's question inspired me to use the multiple voices of the *Comparative Tarot Deck*.

Card 1: Handicaps: Seven of Chalices (Cups). This indicates too many visions or unclear dreams; too many variables; too much going on. Vision here is detrimental, as the multiple visionary process is being used as an excuse to prevent realistic intervention. There are multiple future possibilities, but you are the key to all of them. What do you want, not generally, but specifically? The answer to this should help in a big way.

The picture from the *Universal Waite* deck shows a man who is clearly befuddled by all the airborne cups spilling their confusing riches. In the *Sphinx* picture, the subject has moved to much less confusion and is consciously contemplating her choices. And with the *Tarot of the Origins*, we see a woman who is acting upon her choice. She knows what she wants and is moving forward; she understands that those things that were confusing choices earlier are multiple hints about the future.

Perhaps she is telling you that you should consider what the handicap will be of remaining too long in this basement apartment? Moving into the basement of a home owned or occupied by other adults will almost always become a problem eventually. (Trust me, I am OLD: I have been both a tenant and a landlord in this situation.) Your move there has been precipitated by a job loss. Are there plans to get a new job? Is career confusion leading to the many cups predominant in your Seven of Cups issues? If so, perhaps figuring out the best career move will dispel some of the confusion here.

Though moving into the basement may be a relief, solve short-term problems, and be beneficial for the relationship now, how might long-term tenancy affect your partnership? This card is telling you to get beyond your fantasy and figure out what you want as a couple. If you can do that you will have made an important first step.

Card 2: Helpers: Knave of Pentacles. The Knave (or Knight) of Pentacles is an earthy guy. He's the sort of fellow you like to have come up as a "Helper," as he takes action in the physical and material realms. He focuses on all practical wants and needs. He is responsible, serious, and thorough. All of the four images on this card tell basically the same story: responsibility, industry, and practicality.

Take charge of your own future and allow this Knight to help you. He can prevent a brief and safe sojourn in the basement of loved ones from becoming a prison that binds you later due to inertia.

Card 3: Synthesis: Temperance. Life is all about balance. The various meanings for this card in the different decks pictured are integration, moderation, adaption, healing, calm, serenity, transformation, and cure.

Allow this stay in the non-*Silence-of-the-Lambs*-type basement (loved that description!) to be a restorative resting point for you and your partner. Accept it as the healing and transformational beginning to the rest of your relationship. (And thank your lucky stars that you have caring family members who can provide that.) If you accept it as such, I feel that it will be a great move for you. I think there would only be danger if you looked at this as any kind of permanent or semi-permanent solution.

Your future must be carved by you. Those who shelter you out of love cannot do the carving.

Further “Out of the Box” with the Comparative Tarot Deck

Normally when using the *Comparative Tarot Deck* I use it to answer one specific question and utilize the different pictures on the card(s) to lend amplification to the reading. I had never considered using it to answer more than one question at once, but I couldn't resist trying when the following question hit my roster on the Free Tarot Network: “What do you see in the future for me regarding love, career, health, and money?” That which follows is the way I used the *Comparative Tarot Deck* to handle four questions with one card.

Dear Bill,

Thanks for this opportunity to read for you!

Bill, as you probably already know, the Free Tarot Network uses “one card” answers for all the questions it receives. Whether you realized it or not, your question was actually four completely separate queries. The Tarot is an incredible oracle, but answering four totally different questions with one card is a demanding task even for it.

Normally, when something like this happens, most readers tend to “rephrase” a question diplomatically and in a positive manner in order to make the multiple questions answerable, to combine them into one, or to at least render them approachable in a way that will prove beneficial to our clients. I was going to do just that, and even considered rephrasing in a manner similar to this: “What advice does Bill most need to pay attention to in regards to love, career, health, and/or money?”

But then I decided to have ultimate faith in this oracle that has not failed me in over thirty years of almost constant use. I decided to take your question “as is” and answer it, precisely as dictated, and with *only* one card.

I chose to use the multiple voices of the *Comparative Tarot Deck*, a Tarot deck in which each card pictures four card images from four different decks. (It allows one to compare various artistic interpretations for every card, sort of like consulting four different decks at once.) I will use this deck to answer all four of your questions, one question each per one illustration on the single card drawn. I will admit this is not the way I generally recommend using the deck, so it will be an experiment for both of us.

The card I drew after shuffling was the World.

Following are the four answers to your four questions.

Question 1: What do you see in the future for me regarding love?

The World. *Universal Tarot* by Roberto de Angelis. From the little white instruction booklet included with the deck (LWB): “perfection; completeness; union; integration; fulfillment” (Sim 2003, 6).

Here we see the world-dancing lady in her completed glory. This swan song marks the end of the journey for the innocent Fool that began long ago. As the completion of one journey, this card marks the beginning of another. It is, in effect, the portal to a completely new existence. Here we glimpse Lady World dancing confidently with a wand in each hand (whereas the younger Magician had only one). This card heralds the success and mastery of those forces the young Magician merely invoked. The World Dancer is in complete mastery of, and in synthesis with, her environment. All of the elements are present (Air, Water, Earth, Fire).

This is the cosmic version of an “all systems go!” I believe, based on the card drawn, that you are at a stage in your life when you are ready for a union that can make both partners whole. Remain balanced elementally and you will discover a union that may surprise you. Remember that both life and love are a cosmic dance. Step lightly, but confidently, and remain open to the universe around you.

Question 2: What do you see in the future for me regarding career?

The World. *Tarot of the Sphinx* by Silvana Alasia. From the *Comparative Tarot* LWB: “full result; perfection; reward; accomplishment” (Sim 2003, 6–7).

This card is a visual vignette of the goddess Nut, sky goddess of the heavens. She was the sister-wife of the earth god Geb, to whom she bore Osiris, Isis, Set, and Nephthys. She was sometimes represented with her hands and feet on the earth and the curve of her body forming the vault of heaven. She was goddess of the skies. Even though the god Geb was her twin brother, Nut was still compelled to marry him. Ra was so upset by this that he commanded the god Shu to separate them. She was married to Ra, but also took Thoth for a lover. Nut was then made to form the sky and her husband/brother Geb was made to form the earth. Nut is usually depicted as a woman with blue skin covered in stars, standing on all fours. She is leaning over her husband, representing the sky.

It seems there are some conflicting opinions here among all the positivity. My advice: The “reward” keyword is still accurate. It cannot be denied that there are multiple agendas present. Notice that there is a recumbent figure on the card while another stands erect and is infused with the energy of Nut. You are not the “recliner.” You are the figure that is connected to the goddess and you realize that your career is in your own capable hands. At this point in time, Nut frames the sky for you. Use this time to come into your career potential. This could very well be the time you reach your goals and/or find your calling in spite of competition, known or unknown.

Question 3: What do you see in the future for me regarding health?

The World. *Tarot of the Origins* by Sergio Toppi. From the *Comparative Tarot* LWB: “complexity and reward expressed through megalithic circles of primitive men” (Sim 2003, 7).

Looks “rock solid” to me. You are young. Your body is still rewarding you effortlessly. If you are eating well and exercising it will con-

tinue to do so for quite some time; if not, who knows what the Tarot will have to say next time? This is not to wax morbid. The World card is a positive affirmation of that which is coming into fruitful completion. You are physically not only what you have inherited, but also that which you have built. I suspect that you actively take care of yourself and are building a physical temple to house your spiritual nature. If that is not the case, please consider doing so before youth betrays you.

This card is ruled by Saturn. Take care of your bones and teeth, and make sure you do nothing to hurt your back. Remember: This card is a super card. It is not an augment of problems, but rather a friendly reminder to take care of those bones that literally support you.

Question 4: What do you see in the future for me regarding money?

The World. *Tarot de Marseilles*. From the *Comparative Tarot* LWB: “reward, completion, evolution, celebration” (Sim 2003, 6).

Here we cannot fail to miss the angel, eagle, bull, and lion at the four corners of the card, also representing the four cardinal points, north, south, east, and west. As the early origins of Tarot are intertwined with Christian iconography, here we are also viewing the creatures mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel.

Some attribute the dancing figure to the culmination of the Greek mystery rites. Others think that perhaps the floating scarf refers to the Olympian stole that could be won only by the triumphal initiate. Some of my favorite observations are those by scholar Robert V. O’Neill, who says, “The wreath forms the number 0, thus balancing the Fool 0 at the beginning of the trumps. The shape also may refer to the Tattwa for Spirit. On the other hand, the cross made with the legs and the triangle made with the arms inverts the image on the Hanged Man, symbolizing that the mystical journey is completed” (O’Neill 1986). Likewise, the wreath surrounding the dancer reminds us of the mandala, a symbol of totality and wholeness.

Simply put: This is no lotto jackpot. This is reward accrued by lessons learned. This is success via hard work.

So, are there *any* pitfalls to this marvelous card? Of course!

1. Do *not* wax complacent. If you achieve one goal (in any area), set another! This is vital. The wholeness of the World is not an “over and out” proposition. It is an infinite journey of growth and development.
2. Do not forget that synthesis is the key. Look at the “whole” picture. Draw from all of the elements, all of your experiences, all of your lessons, and continue to learn.

Comparative Results

Bill,

The Tarot has astounded even me here! I feel that together we have accomplished the near impossible and answered four different questions with just one card! I must be honest, however, and tell you that though Tarot has “passed the test,” I still feel that your four questions would better be answered individually and in depth. Please consider that as a further option.

Thanks again for choosing me to read for you.

TWO

COMBINATION TAROT

This is an entirely different approach to the utilization of multiple decks in a reading. If the voice of Comparative Tarot is a multipart harmony, then Combination Tarot is a series of poignant solos. The sky is the limit here. One is restricted only by one's own lack of imagination and sense of daring.

I use Comparative Tarot when I want amplification on a few specific cards, and I use Combination Tarot when I am seeking multiple "second opinions." To use a musical analogy, Comparative Tarot is the harmony—deep, rich, and melodious—whereas Combination Tarot is comprised of individuated solos in which all parts are clearly discernible and distinct.

The easiest way to use this method is to simply draw one card from all of the decks you wish to have *speak*, listen to them individually, and then make a sentence or song based on their meanings. This seems difficult, but it becomes easier with practice. You will find that different decks tend to "stick together" and reinforce each other more often rather than striking discordant notes. When a discordant note is struck, however, it is something to which you need to pay strict and immediate attention.

I admit, though it sounds crazy, that I seldom consciously determine beforehand which decks I will use. I use the ones that seem appropriate each time as my hand hovers over the collected baskets and boxes in which my decks dwell. I won't claim that they physically call out to me (that would be silly, wouldn't it?), but I do operate intuitively as I choose, and sometimes my choices surprise even me.

Simple Readings

Daily Reading

Here is a basic example of a multiple one-card combination daily reading done with three different Tarot decks.

Question: What message does the day ahead hold for me?

Queen of Swords: (*Ancestral Path Tarot* by Julie Cuccia-Watts). This card is illustrated with one of the most endearing Queen of Swords I have ever seen, the Creator Deity, Izanami. In this multicultural deck Izanami is a protectress of her people. The card shows her blessing her daughters, the Japanese islands. She stands above them with her hand outstretched in blessing and her long hair flowing down about her shoulders.

Ten of Rivers: (*Shining Tribe* by Rachel Pollack). Here we see a man and a woman holding hands while standing in front of a shallow river in front of the house they share. The house is a symbol of commitment and shared goals. Their other hands are raised in greeting to the dove flying above, messenger of Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love and the sea. This card references home, family, and life's gifts.

Knight of Cups: (*Wheel of Change Tarot* by Alexandra Genetti). Another fabulous image! In this card we see a saxophone player with a woolen scarf playing his heart out soulfully on a street corner while snow falls around him. Ms. Genetti says of him: "This is the symbol of the man of cups who truly loves his fellow human beings as he loves

himself. He doesn't need to know them personally in order to care for them . . ." (Genetti 1997, 265).

Interpretation

We are all one. Every (wo)man is your responsibility. As the song says, "He ain't heavy. He's my brother." So, what can you do today to help someone in the extended family of mankind? Donate a coat. Buy a present for a needy child. Spend an afternoon working in a soup kitchen. Give blood . . .

Holiday Reading

This is a more ritualistic reading I did for Halloween/Samhain 2001.

As I sat there, betwixt and between, with candles lit and a feeling of communion so strong I could almost see it roll in on the light fog, I decided that I must honor this time of all souls by consulting many different voices of Tarot. I selected several different decks and let each of them speak to me.

I felt completely at peace. My thoughts went to the many people who had passed recently. Some of them passed quietly and in the later stages of life. Others, like the victims of September 11, passed suddenly, and in a way that is difficult for many people to understand and accept.

We have all lost physical incarnations of people, and animal companions that we love, but we have never really lost them because of the eternal love we hold for them. As I prepared to do the reading I could feel my grandmother, could almost see her smile, and felt a momentary caress on my cheek. My granddaughter Grace was present, too, and many others I didn't recognize, but all were welcome and invited to draw near.

I knew instinctively that my question must pertain to how all of us present, whether physically still of this plane or not, could use this night to understand, to accept, to heal. At no time in the next year would the two worlds be closer, and so I began to draw my cards.

From the *Halloween Tarot* I drew the Queen of Bats (Swords). She is a delightfully witchy queen sitting on her throne, teasing a bat, or maybe tickling him, with her sword. Below her is a Death's Head Moth that symbolizes dealing with loss.

Next I pulled the Seven of Ancients from *The Animal-Wise Tarot*. This card is illustrated with Toad and is subtitled "Inner Strength and Resources." Toad's appearance is a message to use all of one's skills. He indicates that one is in a stronger position than is realized consciously.

As I shuffled *Songs For the Journey Home*, two cards fell out of the deck. Like many of you do when that happens, I decided both must be read. The first card was the Four of Wave Songs (Cups). The book says this card means rapid metamorphosis, a transforming experience. A gentle caution is whispered to keep practicing balance. The second card was Flame Innocence (Page of Wands). The deck's author describes this card as a path through darkness and tells us that the people and experiences needed will be drawn in. No wonder these cards fairly jumped out of the deck!

For the last card I drew Awakening (Judgment) from the *Shining Woman Tarot*. Rachel Pollack calls this Transformation with a capital T. She refers to it as a "return to Shamanism" (Pollack 2001, 88).

I sat and just absorbed the cards, mulling them over as the Queen indicated I should. I felt the strength of my ancestors fill me. I was confident that with strength and balance I could find that "path through darkness." I knew that if I doubted or stumbled my loved ones were there to be drawn in and act as guides for my journey. And Awakening was doubly affirmative, coming both on the last day of the year, getting ready to greet a new one, and to someone on the shamanic path.

To conclude the reading, I walked outside and poured a goblet of wine onto the little mound of stones covering the resting place of the guinea pig that had passed exactly one year before. The night shimmered and the breeze blew gently, rustling the ivy nearby. Those who had honored me with their presence nodded and began to fade slowly.

I offered up a silent prayer, “May the portals that some say divide, only connect us on our shared journey. Life is good. Life *is!*”

More Complex Readings

In more formal Combination Tarot readings, or for readings for others, I tend to use decks and/or oracles that work well together as per type or basic ethnicity. Here are a couple of examples:

1. *Egyptian Theme*: A variety of spreads can be used here. The Tarot is not descended from Egyptian roots, no matter how romantic that idea may be, but with tongue-in-cheek I have found that the Opening of the Key, a spread used frequently with the *Thoth* deck, works well here. I like to supplement it with the *Sacred Scarabs* oracle by DeTraci Regula or the *Egyptian Pyramid Oracle* by Veronica McColl.
2. *Native American Theme*: A spread based on the four directions using any of the Native American theme decks and amplified with a card drawn from the *Medicine Cards*, *Sacred Path Cards*, or another Amerindian-based oracle. I frequently incorporate crystals and stones into this type of reading.
3. *Celtic Theme*: A Celtic Cross or other spread done with a Celtic or Arthurian theme deck and supplemented by one to three runes.
4. *Christian Theme*: *Tarot of the Saints*, *Golden Tarot of the Tsar*, or other appropriate deck augmented by bibliomancy.
5. *Shamanic Theme*: *Tarot of the Origins*, with a “casting of the bones” via a shamanic bone oracle.
6. *Affirmation Theme*: Just about any deck plus a draw from an affirmation deck or oracle.

Now let's move on to a couple of examples.

Egyptian Theme Combination Reading

Linda is a successful woman in her midthirties with a good job. She came to me when she was approached by another company to join them in a different but related career. Linda's current job was secure, but had become boring, as it offered Linda few further challenges. The job offer was exciting and offered Linda lots of room for growth, but it was with a new company and its success was not guaranteed.

Linda wanted to take a look at the alternate career choices via the advice of the Tarot. She was drawn to the *Nefertari Tarot*, so I used it to do a three-card reading for her as follows:

Card 1: *Remaining in the same job: Nine of Swords.* In this card the subject is kneeling in front of a large ornate sarcophagus with nine swords visible in the background. This indicates via the sarcophagus that remaining in the same job could make her feel confined, closed-in, dead.

Card 2: *Moving on to the new opportunity: the Empress.* Fertility and renewal are the themes here. The seated figure has her left hand above an urn from which a lotus emerges. The lotus is a symbol of feminine creativity and life force. This Egyptian Empress is secure in the knowledge that she, alone, is responsible for her own growth and renewal. She smiles, fulfilled by that knowledge.

Card 3: *Advice about overall career growth: the World.* Perfection, reward, and accomplishment are indicated here with Nut, the goddess of the heavens, being pictured prominently above and surrounding the card's central figure. In the Egyptian mythos, Nut swallowed the Sun every night and gave birth to it each morning. Follow your heart and give birth to your new career.

I decided to amplify this reading by adding a combination layer via a scarab from Traci deRegula's *Sacred Scarabs* oracle. Before drawing a scarab, with my eyes closed, I asked simply for further elucidation about this reading. I drew the scarab called "the Nile." This scarab has

to do with the river Nile as the physical lifeblood of the civilization through which it flowed. Egyptians were totally dependent upon the life-giving Nile and its seasons. The Nile literally brought life repeatedly into a land that would otherwise have been barren.

My advice to Linda based on the combination reading of three cards and a scarab: Let the waters flow, bring on the flood, and give birth to your career dream.

Shamanic Theme Reading

This is a reading that I did for myself at the end of June 2002.

I used the *Tarot of the Origins* to do a one-card reading amplified by my own personally created shamanic bone oracle.

Question: Should I accept the role in a nonprofit organization that has been offered to me?

The card drawn was the Man of Soul (King of Cups).

The face shown is that of an undoubtedly wise Shaman with a hypnotic gaze. His face is aged and seamed by time. His hair is long, thick, and somewhat wild. He looks wise and strong, with a strength that is sinewy and timeless. He is recognizable as a teacher and as the voice of the oracle.

Interpretation

Seeing the strength and character in this face and almost hearing him speak, do I have a choice? His hand is raised as if in command or in affirmation that he has spoken wordlessly and what he has decided will come to pass. I feel I have been called. The Man of Soul reaches into my heart and opens it for me to see clearly. I see the writing and read what is inscribed there.


To amplify this reading I chose one random draw from my shamanic bone oracle. (I usually throw the bones separately, but sometimes integrate bone oracle readings with Tarot or vice versa.) The piece that my hand encountered first proved to be a wolf tooth. I really never dreamed this would come up. Wolf has been my totem since I

was four years old, first feared, later welcomed, and he has never lied to me. Wolf is a teacher, and beyond that he represents “pack medicine.” Choosing this bone tells me that I need to get my teeth into this role that will benefit “the pack” (my fellow Tarotists) that I love. I cannot quite stifle my doubts that whisper “How will you have time for this?” But then I realize that wolf packs do not view time as we humans do and that time will be found as the seasons turn.

Note: I accepted the nomination of Vice President of Education of the American Tarot Association (ATA) and have been an active board member since that decision was made, though I currently hold the position of Vice President of Communications. I understand the furrows on the face of the Man of Soul now. This work etches lines into the character of all who accept their mission or calling.

THREE

READING PRACTICE WITHOUT A QUERENT

o what do you do when you want to practice your reading skills but have no one for whom to read? Good question, and as usual, there is more than one answer.

The Ramble

Many years of teaching have taught me that when students are learning to read they typically do many things: Study their cards, meditate on them, read accompanying books, take a class, study with a mentor, create a Tarot journal, join e-lists, and so on. Some beginners do a few of these things, others do most.

I would like to suggest another option for beginners and intermediate readers seeking to hone their skills in private before jumping out there to read for others: the “rambling reading.” It is a great tool for stretching your “reader muscles” and gaining confidence in reading for others before having to actually do so.

I have seen some newbies attempt to do an instant synthesis and wrap-up of a reading, trying to tie it into a

nice neat intellectual package based on all they have learned. It is as if they are reading for a “grade.” I have seen some valiant efforts, some of which were on the mark, more of which weren’t, and almost all of which left so much out. What was often left out was them and their own spirit, intelligence, and intuition.

Something to try: Lay out a reading and then ramble on in a free-flow manner. Include everything you notice about the cards and the way they interact. I recommend practicing this first in the privacy of your own room. Cats and stuffed animals seem to love it, and make great captive audiences. You will be surprised at what you start to ramble about that you hadn’t even realized you had seen. You will point things out to yourself! No, this is not insanity. How can you ever be comfortable talking to someone else if you can’t even be comfortable talking to yourself?

You will be your only critic for this sort of reading, and the beauty of it is that in “ramble-mode” the inner critic turns off temporarily and allows intuition to trickle in in its place. Forget what you have learned! It is still there and it will make itself felt as you read, but it will not elbow out intuition for the sake of weighty pronouncements and pithy oracular enunciations.

As you get better at this, it will become second nature.

I have read for thirty years. What kind of reading do I do? A modified, slightly shortened, and hopefully more professional version of the “ramble.” And I involve my client in the ramble as I progress. Generally, we both enjoy and learn from the trip.

Pick and Choose

Think of your question. It can be any kind of question.

Now think of which card you would *like* to draw as an answer to this question. How would that card answer that question in a way that you would like? Think about this.

Now, shuffle the deck of your choice while concentrating on that same question. Pick a card at random. How can this card answer your

question? Is this a better answer, or does it fit in with the card you chose mentally?

Think about the pairing of the two cards and you will have your answer.

You will be stunned at how many times your randomly chosen card answers the question more satisfactorily than the card that you chose mentally does, or how often the cards work together to give you a great answer.

Three Boxes

Long ago in my classes I realized that there were *never* enough querents/clients for all of the questions my eager students desired to ask of the cards. You can use yourself, but that can be tough, and it also gets boring. Students can read for each other, but that also gets tiresome after awhile. So where do you go from there?

I came up with a system for providing endless interesting reading scenarios. My students named this system "Three Boxes."

For this you will need to assemble three boxes, containers, or bags. Depending on your style they can be anything from empty tissue boxes or paper bags to fancy ornate wooden boxes. It is all a matter of what is comfortable and practical for you.

You will also need several sheets of paper for writing out your names, spreads, and questions. Write them out and cut them into fortune-cookie size pieces.

Box Number One

This will contain slips of paper on which are the names of all kinds of people and characters for whom it is ethical to read. This would include fictional characters, famous people, living and dead, stereotypical personalities, and so on.

There are some very real ethical issues about reading for people without their permission. There are two schools of thought on this: (1) If they are breathing, it is unethical to read for them without their

express permission, and (2) if they are voluntarily in the public eye, they are fair game for a private reading for no profit. Though many people insist on number one, I feel that it is permissible to read for celebrities, politicians, and so on. These people are voluntarily in the public eye, and I feel they would be amused by an ethical refusal to perform a harmless reading in private or in a small, respectful group. I do this type of reading with respect and with no intent to harm any of the people for whom I read. I am not cruel, nor do I relentlessly pursue my subjects like the crazed paparazzi. I am far more respectful than the late-night talk show hosts, and I am not earning money from the reading.

On the other hand, I will *not* read for absent partners of clients, nor for their neighbors, bosses, roommates, or others. These people are no more or less real than the former group, but by being involved with my client such a reading would be an unethical intrusion and a violation of privacy. These people could be offended by such prying, rather than amused, and they would have every right to be.

Fictional characters would be, for example, Scarlett O'Hara, Captain Kirk, even Mickey Mouse. Famous people are obvious. Some choices might be Madonna, William Clinton, Jimmy Hoffa, or Albert Einstein. Some stereotypical characters would be "that one-eyed pirate" or "the '70s lounge lizard."

Box Number Two

This will contain pieces of paper on which are written the names of every conceivable spread you can do (and most find it necessary to list spread positions here as well). Don't be afraid to list every single version of the one- and three-card spread you can think of. You may also include other spreads with which you are familiar. Very experienced readers will find that they have quite a selection of spreads from which to choose. Intermediate readers will have fewer, but will amaze themselves when they write out just how many spreads they have at their command.

Box Number Three

Questions. Have fun with this one. Stay away from “yes/no” questions and be creative. In addition to the usual types of questions, give your mind free rein and ask things that are magical, fantastical, or whimsical, such as: “What are the energies surrounding the purchase of my yacht?” “What do I need to know about my move to Winnemucca?” “How will my neighbors react to the moat I am building?” (With apologies to anyone who is contemplating either a yacht purchase, a move to Winnemucca, or the construction of a private moat.)

You will find that you produce readings that are both intelligent and humorous. An early master of this sort of reading, though not done via the Three-Box system, is dt king, an Internet Tarot pioneer. James Ricklef also has an excellent book out now on three-card readings for fictional and historical characters called *Knighthawk's Tarot Readings*.

Not Just Answers, But Questions

Most people use the Tarot cards for answers of some kind. Whether they are seeking personal enlightenment, clarification, future directions, or even a specific concrete answer, it is these answers that people commonly associate with Tarot.

One of my most profound Tarot moments was spent at a workshop where Rachel Pollack was speaking. She showed us how to use the cards for the questions as well as the answers. Ms. Pollack is a master of this method. This style of reading requires a good bit of intuition as well as knowledge. You must be comfortable with the cards and able to “listen.”

Since I experienced that first moment of enlightenment during Ms. Pollack's workshop, she has gone on to write the fabulous book *The Forest of Souls*, in which she elaborates on this style of working with the Tarot, naming readings done in this fashion “Wisdom Readings.” Via Wisdom Readings the reader is able to go a step further and translate

that which is universally spiritual to a uniquely personal level. I can't recommend this book highly enough. You can take Tarot into a whole new and fascinating realm, because instead of asking merely about one's love relationship, you are free to ask, "What is love?" The Tarot will astound you with its answers.

So, let's ask that question: "What is love?" I draw a card from Ellen Lorenzi Prince's *Tarot of the Crone*. It is the Ace of Cups. What a profound answer! Ellen subtitles this Ace "Grace," and I couldn't have come up with a wiser answer for this wisdom question.

In most decks I interpret this Ace as the beginning of love, a new love, spiritual love, faith, and belief. For me, this Ace often marks that poignant moment where belief is suspended in time before it becomes belief itself. It can be the moment you fall in love, but just before your brain acknowledges what your heart already knows. It can be that eternal moment of birth, just before the baby cries.

With this deck it is the love described in all of those other decks and, appropriately enough for our question, more. This is love that is bigger than one, more than the personal. This is the search not just for love but for the Beloved. This is the absolute knowledge and belief that before one can love another, one must love All and oneself. In order to know love, one must understand love.

A Deck of Questions

There is another fun way to come up with original questions when you just can't decide what to ask or when you want to practice your general reading skills privately, and that is by creating a special deck made up of questions. I stumbled across this idea in an article written by Donald Michael Kraig from an issue of *The Tarot Journal* (no longer in publication).

Kraig advocated compiling a list of questions that could be used in lieu of spread positions in a reading. He suggested possibly writing the questions down on small slips of paper and then drawing them from

a hat, but I became so intrigued by the idea I had to create an actual deck of cards, each one of which had a Tarot question or idea on it. Once I got started I found that the toughest part of this task was actually knowing when to quit. I had so many questions written down I had to pare it back to a number I thought was perfect: seventy-eight.

I used business-card-size card stock, and using a template I printed up the deck by running the card stock through my printer. I then separated the cards and hand laminated them by placing them one at a time in a separate laminate luggage tag and running them through a small laminator. I ended up with a small deck of question cards that has become a valuable part of my Tarot tool kit.

FOUR

INTERACTIVE READINGS

Not long ago a Tarot friend of mine sent me an e-mail requesting a reading. She had been laid off from her job with no warning. Though still in shock, she sensed there may be a hidden blessing in the layoff. She was scared, but strangely excited. She said, "I have absolutely no idea what I want to do now. Can you help me? I feel like I'm at a point where I might really change something fundamental in my life."

I also felt that her issue was bigger and more complex than the single aspect of her recent layoff. Almost immediately I had the visualization of an unexpected turn of a Wheel that had been inexorably turning anyway. Convinced that what needed to be examined were life cycles and progressions, I got to work on creating the right spread to read for such an important and all-encompassing question.

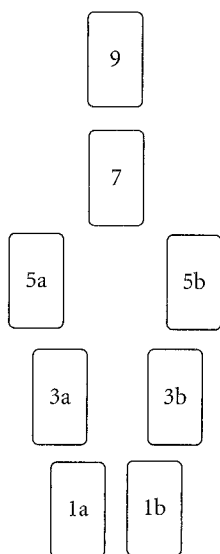
Because of the idea of natural progressions, I had no problem creating a numerological framework for the spread, but felt like something was missing. Not a spread position, but more of a process. I was going to be reading for someone who was an expert reader herself. Although generally able to do insightful readings for herself and

others, this time she found herself too close to the issue to know where to begin. This is fairly common, and under such circumstances, it is best to seek the services of another reader. Yet this particular issue was so important I felt she needed to take more than the usual passive role of client to get the most from the reading. Suddenly and intuitively I knew what I had to do! I would read for her, but I would involve her in the process.

Although I am familiar with and enjoy using Mary K. Greer's "Breakthrough Process," which she describes in her book *Tarot Mirrors: Reflections of Personal Meaning* (Greer 1997, 57), this was the first time I had ever come up with or tried a *completely interactive* style of reading, with both reader and querent actually drawing and interpreting cards, and it was so successful and empowering for my client/friend that I will definitely work with this spread and the exciting new process itself in the future.

An ordinary client may not be able to expertly interpret his or her own cards as well as my friend is able to, but just drawing them and coming up with his or her own intuitive interpretations would empower any client immensely in the process. It worked even via the Internet.

Here is the Interactive Life Cycles Spread that my friend and I created together. The reading is being used with her permission, although she asked to remain anonymous. In the reading that follows I will refer to her as Sue. The deck I used was *The Animal-Wise Tarot* by Ted Andrews.



The Interactive Life Cycles Spread

Card 1a: *Rock or block from the past; something to learn from, then bury.* Eight of Four-Leggeds (Pentacles)—Squirrel: Preparing for the Future.

Valerie: The first thing that came to my mind here is that you may have been caught up in doing the practical thing, the “right” thing, the smart thing, for so long you have lost part of your dream. Squirrel is concerned with zealously gathering nuts for the winter (saving money?). Could it be that in your “industry” you have forgotten how to let go and enjoy yourself? Have you been building on a false security? You have established your skill and expertise . . . now move on.

Card 1b: *Stepping-stone to the future (put this one in your pocket and take it with you).* Four of Four-Leggeds (Pentacles)—Badger: Self-Reliance and Practical Pursuits.

Valerie: More Earth at the base. You are a practical person, but Badger teaches a lesson about what to cling to and what to let go of. Be

tenacious in your best interests. Grant yourself permission to go after what you want, but know what is important and what has been weighing you down. Badger says that you have learned what is necessary to live on your own and that you should not be afraid to assert yourself along those lines. He signifies a time to establish new plans (Andrews 1999, 84).

Card 3a: *Lesson already learned; what you should be moving away from or letting go of.* King of Four-Leggeds (Pentacles)—Gorilla: Strength, Nobility, Generosity.

Valerie: This is you, Sue, or rather the old you. Here is the gentle master of noble strength and groundedness. This speaks of your innate primal strength, but perhaps this gentle giant has been too nice? Gorillas are very territorial. It could be that the “other gorillas” perceived you as a threat when you were not. I sense dominance/leadership issues here stemming from those people at your former job. An abuse of authority may have occurred, but you have the strength to move beyond it.

Card 3b: *Lesson yet to be learned; what you should be moving toward or embracing.* Justice—Elephant: Ancient Powers of Justice at Work.

Valerie: The spiritual forces of Justice are always working in life. Justice will be played out in this situation, and it will be fair. As you move forward you will see this more and more and will relearn to trust again. Elephant has lousy vision, but a marvelous sense of smell (Andrews 1999, 40). Learn to trust in what “smells right.” Don’t worry about not being able to “see” everything now. Trust your “nose.” Own your own power.

Card 5a: *Turning point; more information regarding the event that changed things.* Page of Shapeshifters (Cups)—Caterpillar: Good Luck and New Birth.

Valerie: Sue, I was so glad to see this card. Caterpillar signifies a surprise or gift about to be received, one that can be beneficial to the

future if it is accepted and taken advantage of. Caterpillars come in a rainbow of different colors and in many different sizes and shapes (many options), and they shed their skin on the average of four times a year, reminding us that new growth cannot occur unless the old skin is shed. Someone or something was blocking your growth. You have now “molted” beyond these blockages.

Card 5b: *Future challenge that will lead to vision and new understanding.* Judgment—Whale: New Depths of Creativity.

Valerie: The Whale symbolizes rebirth and resurrection. His appearance heralds a time to learn to “create through sound” or use a whale song (Andrews 1999, 58). Quite possibly songs of past achievements and experiences will lead the way to future directions and/or accomplishments. Whale promises great depths of creative inspiration, but warns you not to apply this to old processes and life formulas that need to pass away. Are you afraid to let your creativity out? Are you afraid to plumb the depths?

Card 7: *Synchronistic signal; the bugle call; accessing internal wisdom to create magic.* Nine of Four-Leggeds (Pentacles)—Beaver: Working for Our Dreams.

Valerie: This is a definite bugle call echoing Judgment. It is a harsh sound because it must get your attention! Have you been neglecting or denying your dreams? Beaver builds on the gift being announced by Caterpillar. He takes your innate practicality and tells you firmly to build and work toward your dreams. Beavers live about twelve months in the wild (Andrews 1999, 94). They create amazing things in their short lives. This is a message to use the next twelve months wisely and to build steadily and surely to manifest your vision.

Card 9: *The hidden (hard won) treasure; a solution/direction previously not glimpsed.* Page of Four-Leggeds (Pentacles)—Deer: Lure to New Studies and Pursuits.

Valerie: You were working so hard that this message might have been missed had not the universe given you a shove. Another Page! Are you still doubting the promising beginning described here? Deer is one of the most adaptable animals alive, and species of deer can be found all over the world. They are survivors. Deer's appearance indicates "new studies or pursuits on the horizon" (Andrews 1999, 98). Changes may seem difficult at first, but they will be for the best. This being a Court, you could receive good news from someone who will invite you to make a significant change.

Deer's antlers symbolize higher perceptions. Beaver indicated that there would be a year of flurried activity, but Deer indicates that changes may take up to five years before all of their effects can be integrated (antlers take five years to grow). Deer also points back to the primal wisdom of the ancient teachings, back to the parts of ourselves we may have forgotten or neglected. Protect your Inner Child, but give her room to reconnect and grow (Andrews 1999, 98).

These cards paint a vivid picture of someone who is noble, strong, fair, and very grounded. Perhaps too much so? You are definitely experiencing a necessary and inexorable cycle wherein the universe has set you free to *sing your whale song*. You have been judged and not found wanting. What transpires will be fair, even if it is not easy. *Carpe diem!*

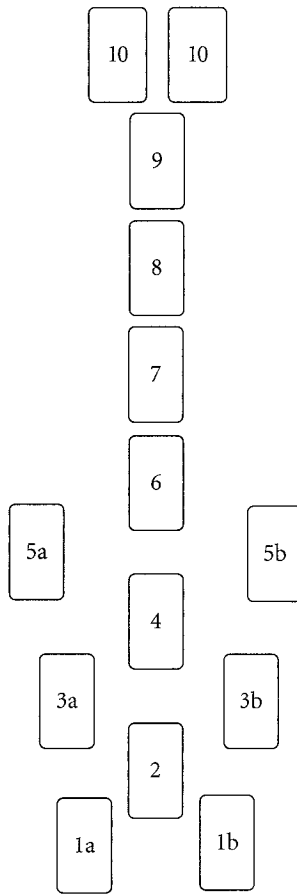
Now I need you to draw four cards and place them as follows among mine, and interpret them for yourself, as described and illustrated below:

Card 2: *What or who has been a silent partner to help me?*

Card 4: *What strong foundation have I built that will make challenges easier now?*

Card 6: *With what am I content? What satisfies and balances me?*

Card 8: *In letting go of the past, what do I most want to claim now? What do I want? (Sky is the limit here! Reach!)*



Alternate Interactive Life Cycles Spread

These even-numbered spread positions represent your heart line and the center holding you together now as you move forward on your new path.

I will draw a tenth card to “feather the arrow” and complete it. I would like to ask you to do the same. (I will share my card with you at the conclusion of this reading.) This is the glimpse of wholeness, of the new beginning based on what has been planted, nurtured, and

envisioned. What are the cards saying about a new direction? The Wheel has turned (10) and it all comes back to the power of the Magician (1). I know how hard it is to read for yourself when you have been broadsided, but I am hoping that you can read with me to aid you in your journey.

Sue responded quickly and enthusiastically to say she was ready to participate in the reading partnership. She liked the energy of *The Animal-Wise* deck, but didn't have it, so she chose to draw her cards from the Crowley *Thoth* deck. Here are her cards and interpretations.

Card 2: *What/who has been a silent partner to help me?*

Sue: Emperor. This is the God working with me. This also speaks to me of my relationship with my father. I've told him that I admire him. I admire his willingness to sacrifice everything for his art. I only wished he hadn't had to do so. The universe never insists that we give up anything we need, so his story is tragic. I want to express my own creativity in a much healthier way, but I also want to foster his tenacity in pursuing art.

Card 4: *What strong foundation have I built that will make challenges easier?*

Sue: Princess of Wands. Fire! I was feeling that here I am with no idea about what to pursue, but really I do have ideas. I've established that I want to pursue what I find joy in, and I've had at least one experience recently of doing something that gave me joy. It's a beginning.

Card 6: *With what am I content? What satisfies and balances me?*

Sue: Two of Cups. In the past couple of years, I've really developed some loving relationships with my partner and with some of our friends. This has been a great source of comfort and balance for me.

Card 8: *In letting go of the past, what do I most want to claim now? What do I want?*

Sue: While I was drawing this, I was thinking of this character in a story I'm reading that really struck me. He symbolizes something I feel I need to work toward: freedom, openness to joy, drive to have what you love, the freedom to really dance as if no one is watching . . . I drew the Knight of Wands!

Card 10: *The glimpse of wholeness, of the new beginning based on what has been planted, nurtured, and envisioned.*

Sue: Nine of Cups! Happiness. This is so wonderful! I can't wait to hear what you drew for 10.

And that brought us to one of those "incredible Tarot moments" as I related my final draw to her.

Valerie: I almost never drop a card during a shuffle, but it occurred when I was drawing card number 10 while waiting for your response. It was the Nine of Shapeshifters (Cups). When I read your post I almost fell off my chair! I did go ahead and "draw" a card as well and got the Nine of Winged-Ones (Swords). As you know, both must be allowed to speak.

Nine of Shapeshifters. Ladybug: Wish Fulfilled. As in many other decks this is the wish card. Specifically, Ladybug is a time of luck and protection during which wishes begin to be fulfilled. The time frame here, based on the life of a ladybug, is nine to eighteen months (Andrews 1999, 154). If Ladybug appears to you, which is entirely possible after this reading, count her spots, as this is often the number of gifts or wishes to be fulfilled in the future. She says to make sure you are protecting your dreams, and not to let anyone dissuade you from pursuing them. (You are right that this reading shows a karmic connection to your father.)

Nine of Winged Ones. Loon: Answers and Hope in Dreams. The message here is not to ignore the messages in your dreams. Loon tells you to stop hanging on to past troubles, despairs, and limitations. Your imagination and dream states will become very powerful now.

Lucid dreaming is a possibility. Some dreams may be painful, but they will help you to “cut through the garbage” that has bound you in order for you to move forward unhindered.

I don’t need to tell you how powerful the appearance of three Nines is, especially when you consider the odds of both of us drawing the same one, the Nine of Cups! These three Nines signify a distinct connection between nighttime dreams and hopes and dreams here. Open up to the connection. Listen! Start a dream journal if you don’t already have one, and write in it faithfully before getting out of bed.

Sue and I were both amazed and encouraged by my accurate recital of her foundation in Earth, followed by her empathetically encouraged ability to find her own Fire and use it to illuminate the path ahead. We both felt that this type of reading has great potential for Tarot. Since this reading I have used several different variations of the interactive reading style with my clients, with terrific results.

Update: Sue is extremely happy in her new career as a licensed bodyworker. The Four-Leggeds (Pentacles = Earth/body) could not have been more apropos, the Pages were right, and Sue is indeed loving her new career (Nine of Cups).

FIVE

ELEMENTAL DIGNITIES

What are Elemental Dignities and why use them? I have had many students ask me this question. Elemental Dignities (EDs), as part of a Tarot lexicon, deal with the interpretation of the meaning of a group of cards by means of elemental interaction and analysis. Although it is always an erroneous oversimplification to say that one card is “better” or “worse,” “stronger” or “weaker” than another, by the use of Elemental Dignities you can determine which card in a group is most effective energetically, thus carrying the most weight in the overall meaning. A thorough grounding in EDs allows the reader to read without any spread whatsoever. A pair, group, or sequence of cards can be read in this fashion.

The concept of EDs was practiced and documented by members of the Golden Dawn (GD). Readings that were performed by both Annie Horniman and W. B. Yeats can be found. Various passages within the GD writings discuss the interaction of the elements using GD rules. These discussions and modern writings can be quite complex to follow, but it all boils down to the four

elements: Fire, Water, Air, and Earth—their individual characteristics and their interaction.

In this chapter I will not seek to teach the ins and outs of a complete mastery of the use of EDs, but rather will give you an overview of the concept and some additional ways to use EDs. This should enable you to get a feel for using dignities and will serve as a launching pad for further in-depth work with them.

Simplistic Elemental Overview

As has already been stated, the four elements are Fire, Water, Air, and Earth. All seventy-eight cards in the Tarot deck can be corresponded to the elements. The GD Associations, the ones I first learned and am comfortable with, are as follows:

Minors

All Wands: Fire

All Cups: Water

All Swords: Air

All Pentacles: Earth

Court Cards

(The Courts listed below are as they appear in the *Thoth* deck. For the Rider-Waite deck, correspond them in this order: King, Queen, Knight, Page.)

Understanding the elemental correspondence of the Courts and the Majors is fairly easy if you already have some knowledge of astrology. If not, a little simple memorization will do the trick.

Knight Wands: Fire of Fire (Aries)

Queen Wands: Water of Fire (Sagittarius)

Prince Wands: Air of Fire (Leo)

Princess Wands: Earth of Fire

Knight Cups: Fire of Water (Cancer)

Queen Cups: Water of Water (Pisces)

Prince Cups: Air of Water (Scorpio)

Princess Cups: Earth of Water

Knight Swords: Fire of Air (Libra)

Queen Swords: Water of Air (Gemini)

Prince Swords: Air of Air (Aquarius)

Princess Swords: Earth of Air

Knight Disks: Fire of Earth (Capricorn)

Queen Disks: Water of Earth (Virgo)

Prince Disks: Air of Earth (Taurus)

Princess Disks: Earth of Earth

You may find the Princesses (Pages) confusing at first because of their lack of astrological correspondence, but when you realize that all Knights/Kings relate to Fire, that all Queens relate to Water, that all Princes/Knights relate to Air, and that all Princesses/Pages relate to Earth, it will begin to make more sense.

Majors

Fool: Air (Uranus, ruler of Aquarius)

Magician: Air (Mercury, ruler of Gemini)

High Priestess: Water (Moon, ruler of Cancer)

Empress: Earth (Venus, ruler of Taurus)

Emperor: Fire (Mars, ruler of Aries)

Hierophant: Earth (Taurus)

Lovers: Air (Gemini)

Chariot: Water (Cancer)

Strength/Lust: Fire (Leo)

Hermit: Earth (Virgo)

Fortune: Fire (Jupiter, ruler of Sagittarius)

Justice: Air (Libra)

Hanged Man: Water (Neptune, ruler of Pisces)

Death: Water (Scorpio)

Art/Temperance: Fire (Sagittarius)

Devil: Earth (Capricorn)

Tower: Fire (Mars, ruler of Aries)

Star: Air (Aquarius)

Moon: Water (Pisces)

Sun: Fire (Sun)

Aeon/Judgment: Fire (Pluto)

Universe/World: Earth (Saturn)

The Basic ED Rules

The basic ED rules are very straightforward and simple:

1. Fire and Water are enemies; they debilitate each other.
2. Air and Earth are enemies; they debilitate each other.
3. Other combinations are friendly; they strengthen each other.
4. Fire and Air are active (yang).
5. Water and Earth are passive (yin).

EDs are analyzed in combinations or permutations. Pairing was important in GD analysis wherein outer cards in a sequence were paired and further pairs were made working inward toward the center. I have had

success with that technique, particularly with the Opening of the Key spread, but have found that spread to be unnecessarily cumbersome; I personally prefer triplets and quads alone, or within spreads, for elemental analysis.

Rule of Thumb

Minor cards reference everyday life events—events within the control of the individual.

Major cards reference more momentous or “karmic” events—events that are beyond the immediate control of the individual.

The Court cards can variously (sometimes even simultaneously) be another person, the querent, a type of message, or a particular style of communication.

Simple Example: Pairs

A woman tells me that something is going on at work that she can't quite put her finger on. She really likes her job and is immensely proud of the work she does, but wants to find out what kind of hidden energy is operating behind the scenes to make her feel uneasy lately. I shuffle the *Thoth* deck and draw the Ace of Wands and the Knight of Cups.

Ace of Wands (Fire)

Knight of Cups (Water)

Of course the situation is uncomfortable! Energetically, this duo represents a pair of “enemies.” It does not necessarily mean that we have two people who are enemies, but we definitely have conflicting energies resulting in a tense situation.

After having listened to the woman and her passion for her job, I feel that the Ace is representative of her energy, her initiative, her enjoyment of her job, her passion to excel and succeed. The reason she feels tension is because there is a man in her office (the Knight of

Cups) who is very imaginative, sensitive, and probably very emotional, even if he doesn't wear his heart on his sleeve (but I think to myself, "I'll bet he often does!"). Likely, he is more of a dreamer than a doer, more of a visionary than an initiator.

Ironically, since this Knight is Fire of Water, he can relate to her passion, but cannot express it as easily as she (the Ace) can, being the root of Fire itself. This has probably resulted in professional jealousy (Fire and Water creating steam). It is no doubt exacerbated by the fact that the woman is expressing yang or male energy while this Knight's energy is yin or feminine energy. This might make him feel a bit overpowered or emasculated, so the vibration she feels is very tense, probably deeply resentful.

What advice do I offer the woman? Try to soft-pedal that enthusiasm just a little bit around this man. By no means stifle your own passion, but learn to keep the flames under control, at least visibly! Remember to ask this man for his input often. Honor the Fire that smolders within him and let him know that his ideas are indeed valuable, for he *does* have vision that you may burn too brightly to see. Although not a comfortable pairing, these two can learn from each other. It is often the lessons we have to work at that are most valuable in the long run.

Three-Card Reading

Remember, all three cards are "equal" here; what is important is the elemental interaction between them. Using my Three-Boxes model (see page 57), I did a reading for a celebrity who is widely known for her enterprise in the domestic arts such as cooking and gardening. She asked: "What does the public really think of me?"

Using the *Thoth* deck:

Five of Wands (Fire; strife)

Four of Swords (Air; truce)

The Empress (Earth; pleasure; success)

If you consider the question to involve Air—"What does the public *think* of me?"—you could consider this to be on an Air base, therefore:

Air/Fire

Air

Earth

Water is missing, and we have three active elements, so we know that this combination will be mostly active. Earth will be weakest since it is an enemy of Air, and Fire will in general be strongest, as it is friendly with Air. The lack of Water shows a possible absence of compassion, comfort, and emotional response. (I say "possible" because with three cards at least one element will always be missing.)

The modifiers are friendly to each other, providing a solid base for the thoughts represented by Air. Unfortunately, Earth acts like a lead weight, while Fire urges action on Air. Her thinking process will be viewed as utilitarian and functional, possibly harsh, and her actions may be interpreted as lacking in consideration of the feelings and needs of others.

So, the energy continues to bounce from extreme to extreme (strife to peace), probably keeping her from any major emotional satisfaction in her success. This celebrity continues to talk Empress without being widely perceived as realizing her role. She has lots of energy! The money rolls in but there is little of abundance or satisfaction. Her career skyrockets, then experiences "strife" or "battle." Manifestation and action are observed, compassion and emotion are not. And as a friend pointed out, "There is more yang/male energy here than female."

Note: This reading was done in the autumn of 2000 and was archived in the Comparative Tarot e-list files at that time. It was done long before this particular celebrity found herself with legal issues that were aired publicly. Since that time I have often thought of her when interpreting a reversed or, as in this case, an undignified Empress.

ED Strings

You can use EDs in long strings of cards. They are not limited to pairs, triplets, and quads. As stated previously, they work brilliantly without any sort of spread whatsoever, and can illicit tremendous meaning from a simple linear layout. For the sake of time and space, I will use only five cards, but you can literally use as many cards as you feel are appropriate or as determined by a larger spread such as the Opening of the Key.

Let's try a wisdom question with EDs. I will ask: "What is the purpose of life?" The cards I draw after shuffling my *Thoth* deck are as follows:

Nine of Disks (Earth; gain)

Eight of Swords (Air; interference)

Three of Wands (Fire; virtue)

The Tower (Fire)

Knight of Disks (Earth)

As you can see, we start off immediately with a conflict: Earth and Air are enemies. What do we see as our initial challenge? That of Gain meeting Interference. We are born onto this Earth and from that moment on we struggle with the interferences of everyday life. Our initial struggle is indeed with Air, as the first thing a babe must do is breathe. Later we struggle against cold, pain, hunger, ignorance, poverty, and so many other things in our physical, mental, and emotional reality on this planet.

The next card is comfortable with the one preceding it (Air and Fire are friendly), and it is Virtue. How appropriate! Virtue does indeed help us in going about life. By means of virtue, or being true to ourselves and what we know to be right, our path is made easier and our lessons less painful.

The Tower greets us in the next card, and again I have to smile at the wisdom of the Tarot. Life is full of towers! The Tower represents

that sudden event that knocks us off balance, drops us unexpectedly to our knees, and has us scrambling to rebuild. But is this “bad?” No! The Tower interfaces smoothly with Virtue (Fire and Fire). Virtue enables us to withstand and see the necessity of each Tower. Rather than being destroyed by such experiences, we are forged in that purifying Fire and brought to a new level of understanding. We see that whatever structure or system is built after each Tower occurrence will be stronger and better than the edifice that previously stood there.

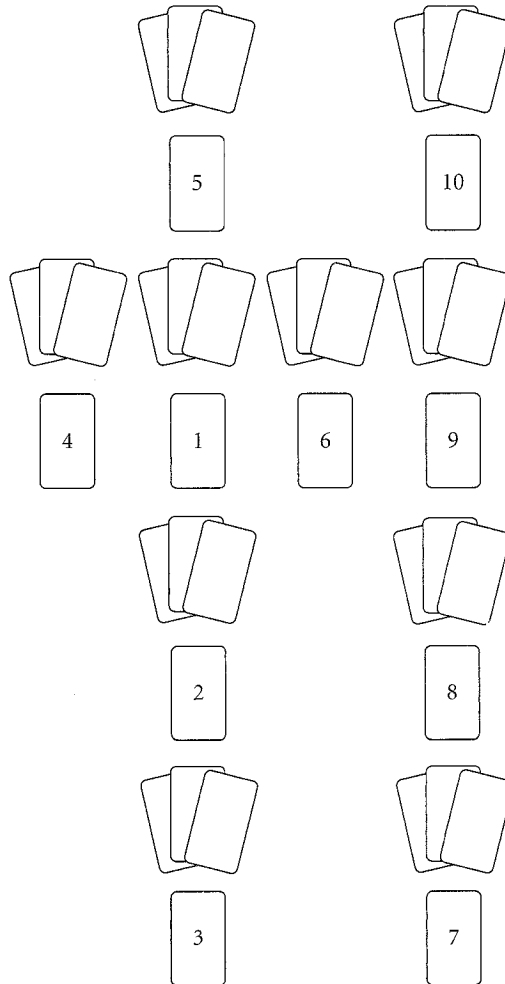
So what is the ultimate lesson? Back to Earth with the Knight of Disks. Anyone else get a chill with the realization that we come from the Earth and return there when our life comes to an end? And our ending is easier than was the beginning. Here we have a Fire card followed by a card of Earth (Fire and Earth are neutrally friendly). Hopefully by the end of our journey we will have realized that it was indeed the journey itself that was important, that the lessons along the way were the purpose of our life, that it was these lessons that were important, not whatever destination motivated us. And this card isn’t just Earth, but Fire of Earth! This steady, stable, wise knight is the perfect follow to the Fire of the previous card, and I think this wisdom question has been well answered.

Using EDs with Spreads

As already stated, EDs do not require spreads per se. All you need are two or more sequential cards in order to use EDs. That having been said, many of the spreads I create are consciously designed with an eye to using specific groups of cards in ED analysis as part of my interpretation. I am not “anti-spread,” but rather find the use of EDs to add extra depth to the spreads I enjoy. In addition, I have modified several older spreads to allow for use with EDs where the spread does not lend itself to such analysis.

Modification of an Existing Spread: EDs with the Celtic Cross

Deal three cards in every position. Analyze the triplets individually. Further comparisons can be analyzed between groups 3 and 5, 4 and 6, and 5 and 10.



EDs with the Celtic Cross

**The Use of EDs in an Original Spread:
EDs with Victoria's Chalice**

Refer to page 90 for the diagram and overall description of the spread.

- Read cards 1, 2, 3, and 4 together for the situation itself.
- Read cards 5, 6, and 7 together for the background/past of the situation.
- Read cards 1, 2, 8, and 9 together for one path/solution.
- Read cards 1, 2, 10, and 11 together for another path/solution.

Using EDs is like playing chess. The rules of the game are fairly simple, but a mastery of that game can lead to a depth and richness in your readings that will amaze and reward you. Whether you find that you like all stages and the card counting involved in the Opening of the Key spread, or prefer smaller sequences in one of the ways mentioned above, I heartily recommend learning this process.

SIX

ORIGINAL SPREADS

Almost every Tarot book on the market includes some original spreads. Most of the methods discussed in the rest of this book are innovative. The spreads that follow do not necessarily represent new methods, but rather present new spreads, many of which incorporate new means of interpretation such as numerology, stones, dignities, and so on. Whether we are beginners or teachers, almost all of us Tarotists “collect” spreads, and both spread collection and spread creation can become habit forming.

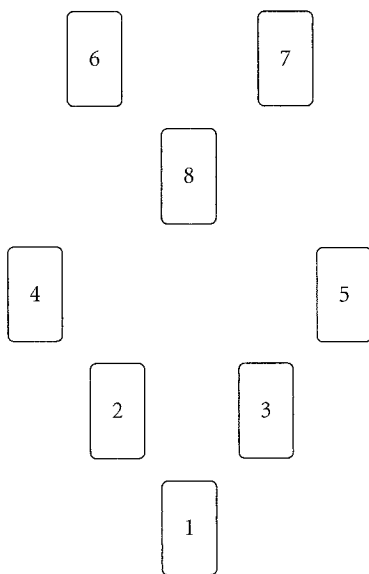
So, does one need to be a Tarot master before he or she can create and learn from spreads? No way! But spread creation is also a good way to stretch those Tarot muscles and learn. Sort of that “no pain, no gain” idea.

I heartily recommend this process to my students, and several of them have taken this to heart and come up with incredible spreads at a beginning level of study.

Student Spreads

Leah's Love Spread

My friend and coworker, Leah Pugh, suddenly announced one day during lunch, "I want to design a spread! Will you help me?" Leah did not yet have a familiar and comfortable working relationship with all seventy-eight cards when she approached me about spread creation. Here is Leah's Love Spread, with a little assistance from her proud mentor.



Leah's Love Spread

Card 1: The first spark of what will be love. The initial meeting or initial attraction.

Card 2: What he's looking for in a relationship, in a "significant other."

Card 3: What she's looking for in a relationship, in a "significant other."

Card 4: What he needs from the relationship; what will nourish him.

Card 5: What she needs from the relationship; what will nourish her.

Card 6: What he gives to the relationship; something he brings to it that will help to build it.

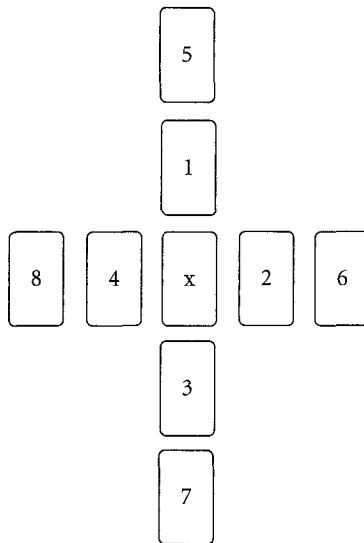
Card 7: What she gives to the relationship; something she brings to it that will help to build it.

Card 8: The constant flame; the strong love that has been built by both.

We consciously built in the yang (him) and yin (her) sides of the heart. I think her spread is great!

Multiple Facades Spread

Gavin Pugh is another one of my favorite students. He and Leah eagerly collaborated to come up with another excellent spread.



Multiple Facades Spread

Lay out the cards in the order shown, with all cards face down. Cards 1 and 5 depict your Conscious Self, cards 2, 6, 3, and 7, your Unconscious Self, and cards 4, 8, and X, your Shadow Self.

Card 1: The side of you that you are actively showing.

Card 5: What is the goal of this side?

Card 2: The side of you that you hope someone is noticing.

Card 6: How can I use this side to inspire others?

Card 3: The side of you that you don't know is showing.

Card 7: How does this side alter the image I wish to project?

Card 4: The side of you that you are interested in hiding.

Card 8: How may I grow from acknowledging this side?

Card X: The X is for a "bias" card. This would be interpreted as, "What bias am I bringing into this self-reading that I need to release in order to see the overall picture?"

Method of Interpretation

Turn over cards 1 through 4 first. When you have sufficiently analyzed/interpreted them, reveal cards 5 through 8. When you have gotten an overall picture, reveal the bias card.

Variation One

1. Separate the Court cards, shuffle, and use them for positions 1 through 4.
2. Shuffle the rest of the pack and use for positions 5 through 8.

Variation Two

1. Separate the Court cards for two decks.
2. Shuffle separately.
3. Use one for positions 1 through 4, and the other for 5 through 8.

Variation Three

1. Use two separate decks, one for positions 1 through 4, and one for 5 through 8.

If they can do it, you can do it! Neither of these enthusiastic students had over a year's worth of study behind them at the time they collaborated on this spread.

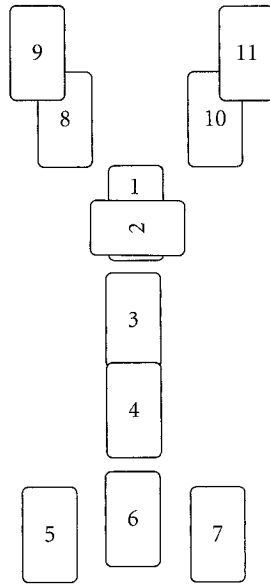
My Spreads

Victoria's Chalice Spread

(A spread designed for the *Victoria Regina Tarot*.) When Sarah Ovenall and I first talked about my creating a spread for the *Victoria Regina* deck I immediately envisioned a spread that would involve both emotions and nostalgia. The *Victoria Regina* deck is a sepia-tinted glimpse of another time, yet contains messages for all times to come. My perception of Queen Victoria as a young Queen of Cups, very much in love with her Prince, who evolved into a Queen of Swords, the strong stoic widow who guided a nation, only reinforced this feeling. As I gazed at the immensely evocative cards, I knew that this spread would have to be in the shape of a cup. But not just any cup. The layout is in the shape of a long-stemmed goblet or chalice with a shallow bowl, similar to a champagne glass. For matron of Cups, or not, Victoria was always every inch a Queen, and no ordinary cup could ever suffice.

Continued work with this spread has reinforced its value in lending insights to questions of an emotional nature. This spread encompasses the innocence and joie de vivre of young Victoria, resonates with the passion of the youthful queen-wife, and whispers of the painfully gained wisdom of the aging and widowed Queen Mother.

Thoughtful use of this spread can aid in dusting cobwebs from memories and will also help to identify emotional baggage for what it is. It culminates with not one, but two possible perceptions/paths—paths that are not mutually exclusive, but can be integrated into the emotional whole.



Victoria's Chalice Spread

The basic layout of the spread is as follows:

First, cards 1 and 2 are in the beginning positions of the Celtic Cross, with card 2 “crossing” card 1.

Card 1: The general situation or climate surrounding the question now. This is a snapshot of the emotional nature of the querent right now, and sets the stage for the entire reading. This is literally the heart of the reading. Where is this person emotionally at the present? What emotional background or bias is he or she bringing to the table?

Card 2: That which influences or accentuates the situation. This can be an amplification, further details, or a conflict inherent to the situation. Although a complement to the first card, this card tends to be more visionary. As the first card is the heart itself, this one frequently hints at what that heart wants to know.

Stem: Cards 3 and 4 (card 4 slightly overlaps card 3). The roots of the situation; background; that from which the situation grew. These two cards are analyzed as a pair. They are a partial history, foundation, or basis of the situation. This can be something known to the querent or something the person had found it hard to recognize or confront previously. These cards can hint at a subconscious or shadow aspect of the emotional nature. It is a good idea to look at them, see them as they are, and move on. They are cards of the past and are important only because they have led to present circumstances. Shadows are real, but they don't exist in direct light.

Base: Cards 5 through 7 all have roots in the past. They are memories, nostalgia, and baggage.

Card 5: What you need to let go of. That connection to the past that you should cease to allow to limit or hinder you. This is truly *baggage*. It is usually an emotional tie that is crippling future emotional development and happiness. It may be something that was precious at the time, but now it needs to be "released." What are you hanging on to that it would be to your benefit to release? What can you turn loose of here that will allow you to better grasp and deal with emotional growth in the future?

Card 6: What you may have missed. Perhaps you have been holding as sacred the wrong things/memories from the past. Here is a hint of something that you missed. Caught up in the issue(s) surrounding the previous card, this may have been totally overlooked. Look at it now and see how this energy can be applied to a positive future. What was it that you let slip into infinity unrecognized? It is still there. It is still available. See it anew and decide if it can be helpful now. If not, let it slip back into the forgotten time from which it came.

Card 7: What you should build upon. This card is something from the past that can aid you in manifesting a better future. This is a positive nostalgic message, and one that will be healthy to incorporate.

Sometimes we dwell on the impossible; other times we miss possibilities that can be used to manifest our chosen reality. Take a deeper look here also. See what you can incorporate within yourself or as a cornerstone to future happiness.

Cards 8 and 9: A possible direction/path for the future based on the synthesis of cards 5 through 7. Something you can gain from these insights. A positive step to a desired outcome or achievement of that outcome itself.

Cards 10 and 11: Another possible direction/path for the future based on the above. Note: This is not an either/or situation. It is possible to learn, integrate, and benefit from a synthesis of both directions/paths.

Sample Reading for the Victoria's Chalice Spread

Roberta, herself a professional Tarot reader, approached me for a general reading about her mind-set and current emotional state just prior to going on a trip to Italy. She knew she should have been ecstatic about the upcoming trip, but for some reason she felt down and blue. She asked for insights on these feelings.

The cards drawn for her reading were:

Card 1: Ace of Coins

Card 2: Strength

Card 3: The World

Card 4: Wheel of Fortune

Card 5: Prince of Coins

Card 6: Nine of Cups

Card 7: The Devil

Card 8: Nine of Coins

Card 9: The Star

Card 10: The Chariot**Card 11: Queen of Coins**

Valerie: Card 1 is the general situation or climate surrounding the question now. Here we have the Ace of Coins. The general situation amounts to a dissatisfaction over sustenance of the family unit/relationship (he had his time; where is mine?). Money/security is indeed the root (Ace) here. Card 2 is that which influences or accentuates the situation. This can be an amplification, further details, or a conflict to the situation. And for this position we have Strength. You have been so strong, a quiet strength. This has been a presence that has been for the most part undemanding, a rock, a foundation. All have become accustomed to this underlying strength. All have taken it for granted. Even you.

Roberta: I was just thinking this today! What is both the joy and the sorrow of the Queen of Coins? It is her competence. Accomplishment, making things happen—this is her gift and her expression and her fulfillment. And yet it is her burden as well when it encourages dependence in others. I've been noticing recently how my husband Roger and our daughter Debbie use my abilities so casually. They won't look up a word because that takes longer than asking me how to spell it. They won't look for their own keys because either I'll know where they are or they can borrow mine. Not all their fault, of course, for I've allowed this to happen. I've got to start retraining us all.

Valerie: Retraining is a good way of putting it. What has taken many years to become patterns of behavior would indeed need to be trained into other, more beneficial directions. Cards 3 and 4 represent the roots of the situation, its background, that from which the situation grew. These two cards are analyzed as a pair. They are a partial history of the situation. Card 3 is the World and Card 4 is the Wheel of Fortune. It appears that your world has been geared to use your personal strength to handle life's ups and downs. You have been the stabilizer. You have been the rudder. The few times you yanked that rudder, how quickly did the family unit rock? Think about this.

Roberta: Hah! Now really, Valerie, you've got to quit looking into my soul here. I haven't tidied up the place. I've got to take a few deep breaths now.

Valerie: I know *that* feeling! Cards 5 through 7 all have roots in the past. They are memories, nostalgia, baggage. Card 5 is what you need to let go of. That connection to the past that you should cease to allow to limit or hinder you. This is usually an emotional tie that is crippling future emotional development or happiness. Now it needs to be "released." The card in this position is the Prince of Coins. This is Roger. Drawing this card here does *not* mean having to let go of Roger personally, but it does mean that you have to relinquish that part of you that is or that feeds the novice Court energy in the suit of Coins. Your significator is the Queen of this suit (as we will see later on in this reading). You know what needs to be done. Act the Queen. Demand a respect for the knowledge you have and they *know* that you have. It is *not* okay to play dumb and give into a lesser energy. Remember that Strength card: Be strong but fair, be implacable but loving. Tough love comes to mind.

Roberta: Guess what else I did just today? This refers back to the Ace as well. I proposed to Roger that we develop a different financial arrangement, with each contributing equally to a common fund for common expenses (house, autos, Debbie), then whatever is left over is our own. The hook to get him to agree was the motorcycle he dearly wants, but that I don't want to spend our money on. This means I cannot expect to have "my turn," but I was coming to that conclusion anyway. I'll make my own turn. And I will have my own money. I believe this will be real good for Roger, too.

Valerie: I can see how that would fit here beautifully. Card 6 is what you may have missed. Perhaps you have been holding as sacred the wrong things/memories from the past? Here is a hint of something that you missed. Caught up in the issue(s) surrounding the previous card, this may have been totally overlooked. And the card here is the Nine of Cups. Aaahh! Hold on to this image. This is the true happi-

ness you have had in the past with this relationship. And this is the true happiness you can have *again* if you dare to restore the balance and right the wrongs that have been allowed to establish themselves.

Roberta: [smiling broadly]

Valerie: Card 7 is what you should build upon. This card is something from the past that can aid you in manifesting a better future. This is a positive nostalgic message, one that will be healthy to incorporate. And here we find the Devil. Okay, I can't resist saying something here, because this message was so strong: You need to be *more* selfish. You have given, and given, and given. You are in bondage to your own selflessness. I am not saying you should be a selfish dictator, but I am saying it is time to consider your own needs. Have you ever read any of Ayn Rand's books?

Roberta: In high school. Yes. This goes right along with the Hermit card that I've been seeing a lot of lately. It's withdrawing my energy from being out there (Is everything okay? Is everybody happy?) to being in here with me.

Valerie: Yes. That makes sense. Cards 8 and 9 describe a possible direction/path for the future based on the synthesis of cards 5 through 7. In position 8 we have the Nine of Coins and in position 9 we find the Star. Follow your hopes and dreams and be all that you can be. This is not a path to material wealth, but rather one to soul wealth and contentment. This would involve listening to your own hopes and dreams for a while. Can you give yourself permission to do that?

Roberta: That I'll do! After all, I am a Virgo through and through, and I know I will never starve.

Valerie: How true! And what a lot of positive affirmation there is in that statement! Cards 10 and 11 address another possible direction/path for the future. Card 10 is the Chariot and Card 11 is the Queen of Coins. How perfect! This is where you come appropriately into the picture. You, as the Queen, will have the final say here. It is up to you. Stay in the driver's seat. Know where you are headed. Remain the Queen that you have been (with no change) and you will stay on course, the scenery

will remain the same, and the road will be a familiar one. But synthesizing the two paths, you could consciously choose to hand the reins to another (firmly!) and let him or her do the driving for a while. Perhaps that person would also be empowered with new and heady responsibility while you had a chance to pursue your own dreams?

Roberta: Well, I'm ready for something new. And for someone else to be in charge for a while. I've got places to go and visions to meet.

Valerie: Wonderfully said! Now let's do a little synthesis of what we have seen. Six out of eleven of these cards are Majors. Although we are all masters of our own destiny, sometimes the universe offers us a chance to learn and grow. Choices and decisions are always ours, but sometimes we get that *deja vu* feeling that says "Take note. This is important." (Pssst: It may be a repeat lesson.) Do you know what I mean?

Roberta: Yes. This I am sure of. I have felt a calling to go to Italy for fourteen years. My desire to go there was the catalyst behind Roger and I selling our belongings years ago and going to live in Europe. Only we never got to Italy. We only got as far as the island of Aegina, about an hour and a half outside of Athens, Greece.

Valerie: Very interesting. Seems this is the final saga of a story begun long ago. And look! What we see in this reading is *exactly* two Courts, the Prince of Coins (Pentacles), at a young mastery of his suit, and the Queen of Coins, at an advanced mastery of the same suit. Two good souls, but souls on a different level of evolution. I feel strongly that the Prince is definitely Lloyd and that you are the Queen, Roberta. We are talking "Coins" here, so let's address practicality and money. When it comes to earning, responsibility, and groundedness, *she* is far ahead of *he*. Not a judgment, just an observation based on the way the cards have fallen.

Roberta: Whose voice is this? Is Valerie talking here? Or is it that inner voice of mine I haven't been paying enough attention to? Sounds just like it!

Valerie: And we have only three Minors—an Ace, same suit as both Courts, and two Nines. What are we really talking about as an underlying frustration here? The root of it all: money, security, and practicality. Don't flinch from this, this is not shameful; it is life on the Earth plane, and a necessity of physical "beingness."

Roberta: Now this *is* the voice of the Oracle. Oh yes. He is a conscientious, loyal, hard working guy. I love him. And yet there's something that from my perspective feels like unreliability in these areas. Oh yes. He does not know how to manifest reality, or control his manifestation of reality, on as steady a basis as I do. He can be a rogue magician.

Valerie: All but one of the Minor cards are Coins, the other Minor being a Cup. This reading is about yin energy—energy that is internal and passive as opposed to aggressive. This is not about outward expression, but rather about internalized feelings. The predominance of Coins tells us that the central issue is likely to center around practicality, stability, money, and other material concerns. And last but not least we have two Nines: Positive use of "nine" energy involves attainment, fulfillment, and conclusion, while negative use of this energy can result in delusion, denial, and rejection. The road has been tough, but you are near your goal. The time is at hand for integration of all that has gone before. Don't give up now!

Roberta: Okay! I'm listening, and I'm more than ready. You have given me a lot to think about. Thank you!

"If Only" Spread, with Mark Filipas

Mark Filipas lives in Portland, Oregon, and works as a freelance graphic designer. His interest in the Tarot began in 1973, when he was "hooked" at a young age by occult writings on the Trumps. His website, The Pasteboard Masquerade, features detailed reviews of unusual decks in his collection as well as some of the philosophical considerations that make the study of Tarot so intriguing.

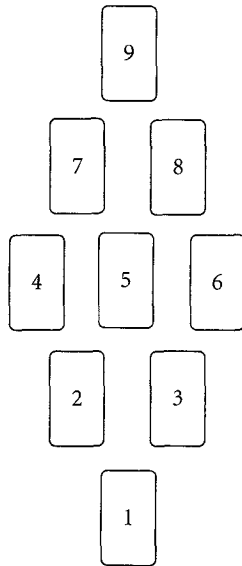
This spread helps you to look at that "if only," "should have been," or "not quite" that some of us continue to chew on and agonize over.

This would be that event or memory that you drag out for a little self-torture when your thoughts would be much more productive elsewhere. This is what you cling to as an excuse for further stumbling, stopping, or stalling. “If only this had happened,” you whine, “I could have done . . .” You reason that if only such-and-such had occurred early on, “life would be different!”

How is dwelling on these ideas/memories beneficial? How is this painful rehashing building your future? Now look at this differently. “If only” is an event that *would* have made things different. It is something that would have put you somewhere other than your present circumstances. But how many blessings that you can currently count would you have missed if this “if only” had come to pass? How many people, or opportunities, would you have missed out on if this had been the road taken?

And, more importantly, what sort of disservice are you doing yourself now when you indulge in this “backward-think”? You are not just chewing on yesterday, you are waxing negatively on tomorrow.

This layout offers a numerological work-through for that old issue, and a positive new forward path:



"If Only" Spread

Card 1: Ace position. *Potential; first cause; promise.* This is the path we did not take, the realities that will not manifest, the alternate (potential) realities that we are unresolved about (and that we have to let go of). Acknowledge this and move on.

Card 2: Two. *Duality; choice; decisions.* Here are all the issues that played a part in our decision-making process, the environment at the time of our choice, our consideration of the pros and cons, the quandary itself.

Card 3: Three. *Synthesis; growth; natural repercussions.* This is the choice that we actually made, and its implications. Although you think you know all about the issue, perhaps you will still find something in this card that you had missed in your previous preoccupation.

Card 4: Four. *Foundations; stability; solidity.* Here is the foundation on which you build anew. Study this card and see a hint of something

you can use positively as you move forward. This can hint at a structure you have been missing, an organization you need, or a person that can help to guide you.

Card 5: Five. *Change; progress; adjustments; challenges.* Here you get a glimpse of some necessary change or struggle that you will need to experience in order to move on to the next level. This might be a new challenge or it might be an “Oh no, not again.” Either way, it is positive in that it is necessary for further growth.

Note: Position 5 sits right in the middle of this spread. One of the most traditional meanings, we think, of the number five is the concept of the quintessence, or “inspiration.” So many of the occult writings attribute this idea to the five—that it is the fifth element, the spiritual essence, entering into the form (the four previous elements). This is the meaning of the Hierophant, and in fact *inspiration* is the occult term given to Trump V by several authors, especially the French occultists. We believe that this is the (often glossed over) reason that the fifth card of each suit is so often seen as a difficult card—it is, in reality, the bestowing of the breath of life to each element, but the static, lifeless four (the still, lifeless element) does not like to be disturbed! The concept of “motion” is strongly given (by many authors) to the number five as well, largely because this influx of spirit is the first point where the elements are animated, the point where they are given consciousness.

So take special note of this card and this number! By being in the middle of the entire spread, it is the heart of the matter, the quintessential force, or lesson, that can resolve the entire issue or move it onward.

Card 6: Six. *Balance; harmony; relaxation; equilibrium.* Now you have permission to pause. Stop and smell the roses. Let this card hint at a way you might pause to refresh. Is this a vacation? A new spiritual practice? Something you can do to make your life a little easier as you move forward? Don't miss this peak experience.

Card 7: Seven. *Spirituality; wisdom; magic; multiple options.* This is a new direction. Multiple options are presented after the previous pause. This is where you “make or miss the magic!” From a point of inner work and spirituality, you now choose to move on. Which direction is best indicated here?

Card 8: Eight. *Regenerating; rebirth; reevaluating.* This has to do with the priorities on your new path/direction. Use this card to help you reevaluate and prioritize your next move, for movement is clearly indicated with this card. Feel the correct vibration. Use that energy wisely to continue forward.

Card 9: Nine. *Conclusion; integration; attainment.* You are glimpsing completion, conclusion, fulfillment. What do you see here? How can you perform a final integration to manifest attainment? Into what can you rebuild those previous doubts and hindrances?

Being My Own Magician Spread

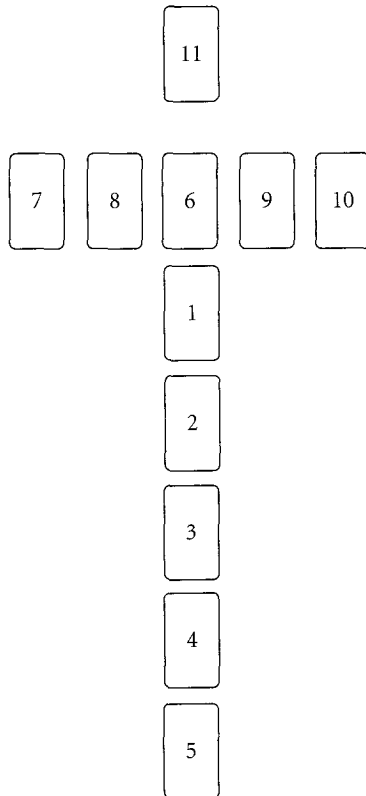
(Based on the work of Angeles Arrien. Adapted and used with permission.) I created this spread based almost entirely on Angeles Arrien’s Magician Constellation as described in her book *The Tarot Handbook*. Ms. Arrien has graciously granted her permission for this use and has given my spread her enthusiastic “thumbs up.”

The Aces can be described variously as: the root of the four elements, the basis from which all of the rest of the numbered cards stem, the seed, the beginning. The Magician is also a beginning and a root: the beginning of communication and the root of creativity. Ms. Arrien says, “The external manifestation of the Magician is communication creatively expressed.” She says further, “In order to communicate clearly and effectively, we must use all of the Magician’s tools, the four Aces” (Arrien 1997, 218).

For those of you who don’t own *The Tarot Handbook*, and I highly recommend it, Ms. Arrien’s Magician Constellation is in the shape of a cross, the borders of which form a diamond shaped layout. The cards in this constellation are the four Aces, the four Tens ($1 + 0 = 1$),

the Magician (card 1 in the Majors), the Wheel of Fortune (card 10 in the Majors), and the Sun (card 19 in the Majors, $1 + 9 = 10 = 1$).

For this spread you will use two decks, but we will not be using the Comparative Method. Choose your favorite deck for meditation and choose a favorite reading deck. If they absolutely “must be” one and the same, I hope you have two copies, or, better yet, jump out there and try something new.



Being My Own Magician Spread

Part one: Using your favorite deck for meditation, lay out the cards named for each position, as detailed below. Part two: As you move to each successive step of this part, contemplate each card from the meditation deck and what it means before proceeding to draw the cards from your reading deck, which will be placed over the first cards to form the meanings for this reading.

Opening Meditation

1. Magician. What is my inner Magician telling me about transforming the difficult communication that I am experiencing lately with (*name*), and how might I begin to creatively manifest a new and better beginning?

Using the Magician's Tools

2. Ace of Swords. Clarity of mind: How can I best express myself through clear thinking?
3. Ace of Cups. Clarity of heart: How can I work within my emotional nature to communicate my feelings clearly?
4. Ace of Wands. Clarity of vision: How can I work within my own spiritual nature to communicate my personal truth?
5. Ace of Disks. Clarity of action: How can I align my inner and outer communication to ensure that there is no double meaning in the communication that ensues?

Overcoming Obstacles to My Communication and Creativity

6. The Wheel of Fortune. Realizing that life is a cyclic learning process, how can I proactively use my communication and creativity to move my life in a more positive direction?

Challenges

7. Ten of Swords. How do I obstruct my own progress by an irrational fear of ruin or failure?
8. Ten of Wands. In what way do I allow myself to feel oppressed or overwhelmed?

Resources

9. Ten of Disks. How can I enhance my communication skills by using my healing gifts or the many assets I possess?
10. Ten of Cups. How can I trust that what my heart says is correct for this situation?

By expressing the power of the Magician, by using his tools, and by understanding and working with the cycles of the Wheel of Fortune, we are able to achieve our full vitality as personified by the Sun.

Closing Meditation

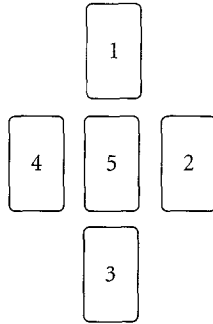
11. The Sun. What will be one immediate positive outcome of my improved communication skills? "I deeply honor and value the unlimited resources of skilled communication that are within my nature" (Arrien 1997, 28). "The universal shape, or archetypal matrix, associated with the Magician Constellation is the diamond; the diamond represents a cross-cultural level, multi-faceted clarity and precision; in Buddhist terms 'diamond consciousness' is clarity in action (creativity) and in work (communication)" (Arrien 1997, 218).

Elemental Energies Spread

After an already restless night, I was awakened at 4 a.m. when my hyperactive cat knocked my box of crystals and stones off the headboard of my bed to land very near my head. Rocks flew everywhere, in all directions: North, South, East, West.

I moaned and turned on the light, started scraping rocks up off the bed, and noticed that some of them were on the floor as well. Of course I stepped on a couple. Ouch! Most had fallen right alongside the bed, but a few seemed to have propelled themselves into the far perimeters of the room. As I squinted in the light to which my eyes had not yet adjusted, it suddenly occurred to me that (a) maybe this wasn't a random "rockslide," and (b) I must be utterly wacko to consider it to be anything else!

I poked silent fun of myself for such early morning vagaries and tried to go back to sleep. Of course, I couldn't. So here is the Earth-centered, rock-inspired spread I came up with.



Elemental Energies Spread

Following are the spread positions. (Note that these are my own personal elemental correspondences, heavily influenced by where I live geographically, that is, to my west is the Pacific Ocean.)

Card 1: North: How to walk in wisdom. North = Air. The North Star was a guide for migratory peoples. This is the gateway to the Otherworld.

Card 2: East: Healing abilities. East = Fire. Where something comes from is often thought to be its home. The sun, a large ball of fire, arises from the east. Therefore, the East is associated with Fire. This direction represents healing abilities.

Card 3: South: The "Inner Child." South = Pentacles. Within the South we find the warm and fertile soil of birth. Therefore, the South is associated with Earth and the Inner Child.

Card 4: West: That which is sacred, intuitive, empathetic. The sun descends and is extinguished in the west. The West is the direction of passing, and is where the endless ocean lies.

Card 5: Into the Spiral: Synthesis of all four directional energies; the manifestation now made possible; the ultimate transformation/culmination/synthesis.

Rock/Crystal Guides

Before drawing any cards, you need to reach into whatever treasure trove contains your rocks and crystals, and draw five with your eyes closed. The first one goes in the North position, the second in the East position, on around in a clockwise direction. (This would also work with feathers, god and goddess amulets, or other sacred objects. I will only be giving you a few quickie meanings for some more common rocks/crystals to get you started. If you wish to take this into another direction/association, you will have to come up with your own meanings.)

Moonstone: Balance, introspection, cycles (like the lunar moon cycles), reflection.

Carnelian: Grounding, stabilization, and protection from envy, fear, and rage; boost to physical energy and personal power.

Lapis: Objectivity, clarity, awareness, mental elucidation, and endurance.

Malachite: Transformation; a stone that balances and equalizes, and stimulates instinctive and intuitive reasoning.

Bloodstone: A stone that stimulates both healing and courage, centers and grounds heart energy; a stone of Earth, practicality, "now."

Amethyst: Amethyst promotes spiritual balancing, can transform lower energies into higher ones, connects the Earth plane and the astral planes.

Jade: Used to release emotions via the dream process; it is a stone of fidelity, bringing realization to one's potential and one's purpose.

Turquoise: Strengthens and aligns all chakras, meridians, and subtle bodies; can bring any and all energies to a higher level.

Fluorite: A stone of knowledge and discernment, increases ability to concentrate, and helps one to see both reality and the truth behind illusion.

Topaz: A stone of true love and success; a crystal of potency for visualization, meditation, and projection.

Sodalite: Helps to minimize confusion; a good stone for working in groups, as it provides for fellowship, solidarity, and commonality of goal and purpose.

I could go on and on, as there are hundreds and hundreds of rocks and gemstones available, but for the purpose of the spread this is enough to give you an idea of how it works with a few of the more common stones. Use the ones you have and that you are comfortable with for best results.

Note: When I realized that so many of the stones that had landed in the far corners were healing stones, I got an idea to use them as healing *guides* in a spread. Everything in life is there to be *read*; some things are just easier and more comfortable to work with. I think the cards will always be my mainstay, but when a rock, a feather, or an animal suddenly inserts itself into my path, I always take note.

A memorable incident related to this occurred one day when I was going to the bank to withdraw some money to go shopping for some new clothes. A little gray squirrel raced me to the door of the bank where he sat and chitter-chatted away at me. I kept trying to turn away and go in, but this little guy wouldn't give up! I finally smiled, shrugged, and walked back to my car. I have never been told more firmly by the universe that my money (nuts) should remain in the bank for harder times (a tough winter).

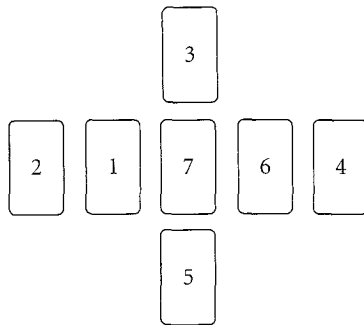
I got home, did a combination reading with Medicine Cards and a Tarot deck, and guess who popped up again? You got it: Mr. Squirrel. When the universe speaks, *listen!*

Healing Dance Spread

Sometimes I set out to create a spread. Other times I simply have no choice. A friend of mine asked me to do a health/healing spread for a relative who was facing surgery. I grabbed my books and started looking for a suitable spread . . . and kept looking.

A general review of all the spreads I have pertaining to health and healing convinced me that none of them were adequate for the kind of reading that I wanted to do. Now I am sure there are plenty of good ones out there, I just don't happen to have any in my collection. I see healing as a completely holistic process, a process over which we have considerable power and control. I won't get into dis-ease as it leads to disease, but I will say that I think the only solution to any ailment/illness/injury is a holistic one.

I had no choice but to create a special spread for my friend.



Healing Dance Spread

Card 1: Path to ailment/illness/injury, and how a study of this path can lead to a healing in the future.

Card 2: How can I help heal myself intellectually?

Card 3: How can I help heal myself emotionally?

Card 4: How can I help heal myself spiritually?

Card 5: How can I help heal myself physically?

Card 6: A stepping-stone on the path to total healing.

Card 7: Coming into your center. Doing the “dance” of life and health.

Positions 2 through 5 are the beginnings of the healing process on all levels. Positions 1 and 6 are stepping-stones on the path culminating in position 7, the central and centered point from which the healthy dance can occur.

Sample Reading with This Spread

I chose to use the *Dance of Life* cards because I feel that they adequately address health, happiness, and holistic healing. In fact, it occurred to me that I must use this deck as I came up with the idea of dancing into the center of the holistic circle of health.

Card 1: Path to ailment, illness, and injury, and how a study of this path can lead to a healing in the future.

“Fulfillment” (Ten of Wands). In the past, the querent felt overloaded, overburdened, and had become discouraged. She had always felt that the weight of the world was upon her shoulders. I suggested she release that weight. The way to healing is by the savoring of one happiness, victory, or fulfillment at a time. She needn’t forge onward blindly carrying her burden, but should put it down at each crossroads, at each resting place, or whenever she was too tired. I advised her to stop and smell the roses, plant a few, and press several for her keepsake album. I told her to ask herself, “What do I savor?”

Card 2: How can I help heal myself intellectually?

“Death” (Death). This is her struggle with change. That struggle needs to die. She needed to free herself psychologically and realize that there can be no life without little deaths. Change is good. I suggested she ask herself, “What ‘unknown’ am I afraid of?”

Card 3: How can I help heal myself emotionally?

“Ring of Life” (Wheel of Fortune). The querent needs to gain the courage to listen to her inner guides. The Wheel of Life always turns. She shouldn’t bank on any individual turn, but understand that cycles are a part of life, and realize that emotional/relationship losses may lead to deeper and richer connections with new companions. I suggested that she ask herself, “Where am I on this Wheel of Life? What is ending for me now, and what is beginning?”

Card 4: How can I help heal myself spiritually?

“Goddess Harmonia” (Temperance). When asking about spiritual health it is hard to imagine getting a more positive card than this one! This is the emergence after the death the querent so feared earlier! This presages the beginning of a new and improved dance with life. This tells the querent to seek creative discovery and balance and create a new dance out of the best of the old. And never stop dancing. This card suggests that she ask herself, “How am I creating a stronger and more balanced self?”

Card 5: How can I help heal myself physically?

“The Dancer of Life” (Empress). This is the realm of the passionate feminine, symbolizing passion, emotion, sexuality, and sensuality. The querent needed to make sure that she was not repressing emotion and/or suppressing desires. Physical healing will come through restoring passion to her life. She should approach life through feeling and

pleasure rather than thought. A question to ask, “How well and appropriately do I express my emotions?”

Card 6: A stepping-stone on the path to total healing.

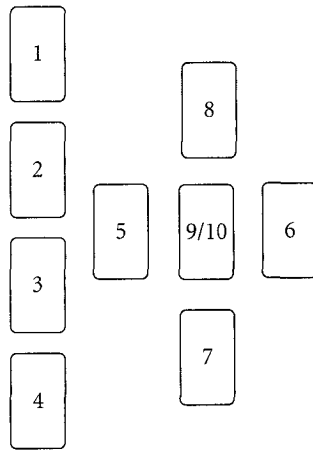
“Pain” (Eight of Swords). Pain comes into a life for a reason; something is amiss. When pain sends a message, *listen!* (And at this point the querent should be able to listen on all levels.) The querent will be able to step free from the pain once she listens. She needs to ask herself, “What message am I receiving?”

Card 7: Additional advice/synthesis; the “dance” of life and health.

“Lover/Loving” (Queen of Cups). If she truly loves herself, she will love all others. The client needs to learn to love herself, and learn this lesson well. Dedicated self-love and honesty will lead her to the kind of health that she had never dreamed of. All four aspects (elements) of the self are compatible here. This is empathy; this is acceptance of positive and negative love; this is the feeling woman. Question to ask, “How do I love?”

Past-Life Spread

The past-life spread on the following page takes the idea of regression seriously. Here we attempt to move backward in order to get an overview of the lessons of the last incarnation. You will not discover you were Nefertiti or Napoleon. No specific dates will be defined. What you will come up with is what you learned in the most previous incarnation, what you failed to learn, and thus, what you need to work on in this lifetime.



Past-Life Spread

Does this spread look familiar? If so, this is because it is roughly a Celtic Cross turned inside out. Not an accident. This is reversing the Spiral, going back the other way. I have looked at many past-life spreads and decided they were generally approaching it backward. Why were they showing progression when we are talking about regression?

Here is how I see it:

Card 1: What you have brought forward to work on. Primary lesson of this life.

Card 2: Something that will aid or hinder working on this lesson.

Card 3: How others saw you in the most recent past life.

Card 4: Your own self-image in that lifetime.

Card 5: The roots of the main lesson; how it got left unfinished.

Card 6: A contributory event in this lesson. A person or event that came into play.

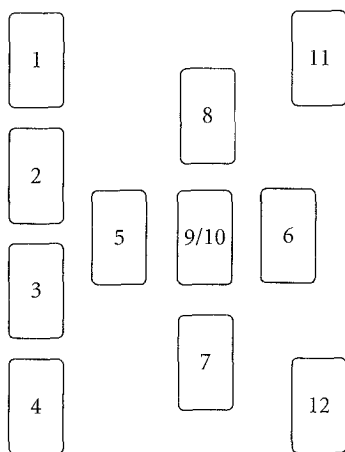
Card 7: Roots of that lesson; what made it necessary; how it began.

Card 8: Another resolution (or aid to resolution) that might have worked, but was not chosen.

Card 9: A glimpse of this previous incarnation.

Card 10: Another view and/or reinforcing glimpse of that soul.

And if you wish, you can make this a combination reading by adding the following cards (11 and 12) drawn from a Majors only deck (or a deck from which the Majors have been separated).



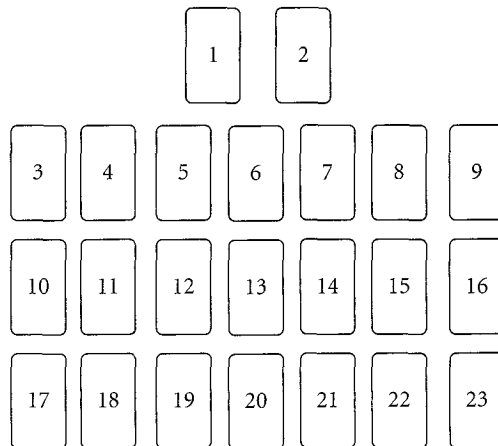
Alternate Past-Life Spread

Card 11: “Identity” of this soul.

Card 12: “Identity” of this soul’s partner.

Visual Paths Spread

Decide which Court card is your significator and remove it from the deck. Separate the Majors from the deck as well. Shuffle these twenty-three cards thoroughly, cut, and deal as follows so that 1 and 2 are by themselves, then three rows of seven cards are centered beneath the top two.



Visual Paths Spread

Find your significator. The eight cards surrounding it are teachers for special lessons you need to work on currently, or archetypes that have special meaning for you right now (for example, if your significator is card 12, your teacher cards are 4, 5, 6, 11, 13, 18, 19, and 20).

Consider this layout to be spherical in all directions, so:

Significator = 10: Your teacher cards are 9, 3, 4, 16, 11, 23, 17, and 18.

Significator = 8: Your teacher cards are 21, 22, 23, 7, 9, 14, 15, and 16.

In that special case where your significator is 1, your teachers are 2, 3, 10, 17, 9, 16, 23, and 6. When the significator is 2, your teachers are 1, 3, 10, 17, 9, 16, 23, and 20.

Are you with me so far? If so, interpret the lessons these teachers have for you.

After thoroughly analyzing these eight cards as they relate to you individually, look at their relationships to each other:

Say your significator is 14, the following will hold true:

Cards 6, 7, and 8: Dreams and goals.

Cards 20, 21, and 22: Frame of reference; mind-set.

Cards 6, 13, and 20: Most active in the past.

Cards 8, 15, and 22: Most active in the future.

Also, analyze what it means to be *between* 6 and 22 (spiritual lessons you have learned from another) and between 8 and 20 (spiritual gifts you may pass on to others).

You can also walk the paths. For example, your significator is card 11 and Temperance is card 15. You want to know what you need to work through/apply to fully achieve the essence of Temperance. Which archetypes do you pass through/learn from to get there?

If you want to have more fun (or go totally crazy!) you can shuffle the remaining fifty-five cards and lay one over each of your eight teachers as keys/steps/messages for working with those teachers. Then check the following:

1. How do the suits break down in this analysis? (Are your "dreams and goals" all Cups?)
2. How does the numerology unfold? (Does your past contain two or even three Fives?)
3. What about the Court cards? (Are both of your spiritual lessons Court cards?)

This is not the kind of spread you dash off in ten minutes. This is the kind of in-depth exercise that you might want to record/diagram and work with off and on over the course of a couple of days.

This spread would also work well with Elemental Dignities, but it is quite complex, even without their usage.

SEVEN

CREATIVE WRITING WITH THE TAROT

This is a great way to learn Tarot and to have fun at the same time. How can storytelling benefit you? It is a no-pressure way to learn to look at the cards closely, to see details that you might be inclined to overlook when first learning to read for someone else. Admittedly, learning to “read” the cards does depend on a certain amount of study and memorization, but storytelling provides a way to get a rich feel for the stories within each card in a nearly effortless manner. It also serves to enrich those meanings you already know from reading Tarot books, taking classes, or personal study.

With storytelling people tend to loosen up and get into each card without expectations. It is a familiar and comfortable process. It is something we have all done since we were children, beginning with our own childish drawings and then via the illustrations in books and magazines. Storytelling also teaches the Tarot student how to learn to weave the cards together naturally, to see the possible threads that run between various cards—to learn to “spin” a tale with nothing other than a few cards and one’s own fertile imagination.

Children do this effortlessly. They are natural storytellers. If you want to watch how easily and enthusiastically this can be done, have a child help you! No, I am not kidding, but please, if the child isn't your own, be sure and get a parent's permission for this activity. Not all parents are willing to have their child work with the Tarot. Grab a deck of *Inner Child Cards*, the *Children's Tarot*, the *Whimsical Tarot*, or any other colorful deck that is appropriate for a child's viewing, pick a few cards or have the child select a few by himself or herself, and sit back and enjoy the process.

The reason children do this well is because they are uninhibited and their imaginations are boundless. As adults we get caught up in learned baggage consisting of boundaries, limits, and expectations. It is a sad fact of life for most of us that as we age we tend to stifle our creativity in favor of other traits that society deems more practical or necessary for life in the "real world." Storytelling with the Tarot is a way to refresh that innate creative ability while simultaneously learning a lot about the cards.

In case you don't have a child handy for inspiration, or if you'd rather let your inner child be your guide, you can start telling stories with the Tarot by means of the following simple example and exercise.

How to Begin Weaving a Story

Take out a deck that has artwork you like and illustrations you find interesting. I recommend for this exercise that you steer clear of decks in the *Marseilles* pattern, as the unillustrated Minor cards are a bit less likely to inspire spontaneous creativity.

For this example I am using the *Buckland Romani Tarot*, a deck with colorful illustrations and symbolism from the Romani Gypsy culture. Although Tarot did not begin with the Gypsies, as some people like to believe, this deck works extremely well for storytelling. You can purposely select your cards faceup, but I prefer to shuffle and draw, and begin my story with the cards that appear. The first card I drew was the Star.

This card shows a beautiful dark-haired girl in a yellow dress standing in a pond and pouring water out of two small jugs, one in each hand. The jug in her right hand is pouring its contents into the pond, while the jug in her left hand empties onto the ground beside the water. Rather than referencing any textbook meaning for the card, to get into the storytelling process you need only look at the picture and start the story in whatever way the card inspires you to begin. I look at the card for several minutes, getting the “feel” of it. This young girl seems so sad. She stands with a beautiful night sky behind her, but doesn’t see it. Why does she look so forlorn?

Estrella is sad. She is sixteen and feels like her dreams will never come true. She dreams of a young man who will stir her heart and bring some excitement into her life. The elders of her group tell colorful stories of their travels and youthful adventures, but her life has been anything but adventurous, consisting mostly of dusty travels from one poor village to another, each containing the same kind of unexciting scenes and people. She longs for passion, for romance, for anything but the same dreary chores in the daytime and sputtering campfires at night. She is tired, but it is more the ache of boredom than of exhaustion. Soon she will return to her vardo, the wagon in which her family travels as they peddle their wares from town to town, and sleep will bring closure to another uneventful day.

I could probably go on for a while with this card, but I felt it was time to draw another card for further inspiration. My next card was the Four of Koshes (Wands or Staves).

Estrella has been asleep for hours. She is restless and has been tossing and turning, but then she begins to dream. In her dream she sees a clearing in a wheat field ringed by many vardos. There are more wagons here than she can ever remember seeing before, and they are large, heavy, and well-decorated. In front of the vardos four young girls are dancing. Their zest for life is obvious. They are dressed in colorful costumes and their faces are glowing as they dance in the sunlight. She knows immediately that these girls are professional entertainers, part of a group of Rom that travel throughout the countryside putting on shows for all who are willing to pay for the entertainment. She can feel

their excitement and the joy of the dance. How she wishes that she could live a life like this rather than the one she is living. Why can't she?

I draw another card, the Nine of Chivs (Knives).

Because of her father. Her father is no ordinary peddler, he is a master of the blade. He takes his work seriously. Always there is another knife to grind, another blade to hone. And people depend on him. His craftsmanship is respected even among those villagers who tend to whisper among themselves about the Rom. Not for him the life of the dancing, carefree Gypsy! He and his band, the only family Estrella has ever known, travel from town to town and make a living from supplying blades to townspeople, from sharpening people's knives, and from peddling other wares. She has heard references to another lifestyle that her father used to live, to secrets in his past, but he doesn't talk much, and for the most part the mysteries of his past remain exactly that—mysteries.

The story will continue to evolve as additional cards are drawn. With only three cards I already have a feeling for my characters—Estrella's youthful frustrations, her father's haunted past. The first card is generally the hardest, but if you let your imagination have free rein, you will find that it gets easier and easier with each card drawn, and that each time you do the exercise you will find the process more spontaneous. I feel you nodding, but wondering, "What's the point? So what does it accomplish?"

The beauty of this exercise is that it is a way to let Tarot insinuate itself into your consciousness painlessly. All I did was ramble on intuitively over three cards drawn randomly, and not once did I come up with a keyword or phrase for a card that was textbook perfect, yet each time I danced into a nuance of meaning that is inherent in each card drawn. Let me illustrate how this happened without conscious effort.

Card One: The Star

Although my spin was not an uplifting one, it still relates to most traditional interpretations of this card, which generally have to do with hopes, dreams, inspirations, faith, spiritual guidance, and so on. Estrella

was sad because she felt that her *dreams* would never be realized. She was *dispirited* because she had lost *hope*. With the immediacy and intensity of youth she had lost *faith* in life. This is actually a very good example of what the Star card can mean when it is reversed or undignified in a reading. Some people have trouble understanding how the Star can ever represent a challenge or present a problem. It is one of many people's favorite cards. It is seen as a "good" card. But as stated earlier, no card is innately bad or good! It is how cards come up in answer to a question and in relation to each other that matters! This storytelling exercise might have proved invaluable for a reader who had previously been unable to visualize a "challenged Star card."

Card Two: Four of Koshes (Wands)

Estrella sees only dancing, happy, young women, but that vision is quite close to the key theme of this card, which is celebration, haven, harmony. She is thirsting for excitement and deeper meaning in her life. A Four is a good answer for that, as it brings stability, and this Four, in particular, signifies an appreciation for the stability that leads to the good things in life and communal celebration thereof.

Card Three: Nine of Chivs (Swords)

This is one of those cards traditionally labeled "bad." Have you gathered yet that I hate such labels? Some Tarot authors refer to this as the "nightmare card," and it is often depicted and described as nighttime agony, the inability to sleep, anguish, insomnia, depression, and so on. Viewed as the haunted past of Estrella's father, we elucidate another nuance, that of guilt and the restrictive inability to forgive oneself. This Nine can refer to burdens we carry unnecessarily. Often people laboring under the influence of this card are unable to move on. They are agonizing over something that it would be far better to release. I wonder what happened to Estrella's father to make this card applicable? Kind of makes you want to draw another card, doesn't it?

The point is that via storytelling you can flesh out rote keywords for each card and teach yourself meanings that would otherwise take hundreds of readings to arrive at. It is a right-brain way to learn more about the many meanings of each card.

Storytelling with More Than One Deck

“So,” you ask, “do I need to stick to one deck when storytelling?” I think you can predict my answer: “Of course not!” I do think that unless you are already experienced with storytelling via images, it is easier to use one deck at the outset for continuity, but feel free to draw from numerous decks as soon as you feel that you can do so and keep spinning your tales. If you think that more than one deck will work for you, I tend to think you are right. If you feel you are ready, *go for it!*

Storytelling with More Than One Person

Now here is where it can really get interesting! Some of the best storytelling experiences I have ever had are those I have participated in during a class or in some other group setting. When more than one person is involved, with or without multiple decks, the whole process becomes limitless and totally unpredictable. If you are doing this by yourself you will feel with each card that the story must flow in such-and-such an obvious direction, or perhaps in a couple of different possible directions, but within a group scenario, toss out the idea that said directions are even remotely limited. When more than one person gets involved and everyone unleashes his or her creative process, the possibilities multiply in a way that is beyond mere exponentials. Three people means not three plus three (six), but at the very least, three times three (nine). The more people involved, the more likely that math will turn to chaos, and it is that very chaotic factor that makes such group stories so exciting.

Included in appendix A, and by permission of its various authors, is a story that was created collaboratively on my e-mail list, Comparative Tarot. Since this story, the list has gone on to do several other collaborative ventures, and each one has gone in directions no single author could have anticipated. For their part of this particular story, each participant had the option of using any deck he or she desired, and the option of drawing a card at random or purposely selecting a card.

Poetry and Tarot

Poetry and the Tarot can be combined in numerous ways. As with the prose storytelling example related earlier, poetry can be used to deepen understanding of Tarot archetypes and teachings. Also, as explained previously, it is necessary to let creativity come to the fore as the principal teacher. Under no circumstances should a book be consulted during this creative process, as it will only restrict creativity.

Tarot Haikus

Tarot cards can be used as inspiration for poetry as well as prose, and poetry inspired by the cards can lead to new depths of understanding. One of the easiest forms of poetry to write is the *haiku*. I find that even beginners and those phobic about writing longer poems can write this type of poetry.

In the English language, we consider a haiku to be correct if it has three lines of five, seven, and five syllables, respectively.

You can write a haiku about one card or about several. As an exercise, it works very well to use either three cards (one card per line) or four cards, wherein the middle line is suggested by the two center cards in either order, with the option of dropping one—poetic license!

Here are a few examples I wrote using the *Universal Waite* deck as a reference.

Four of Wands/Seven of Wands/Queen of Pents/Three of Wands

I rejoice now
 My convictions support me
 With vision, I await.

Ten of Pents/Judgment/Emperor/Star

Ultimate success
 within a structure, reborn,
 gives back from the heart.

Five of Cups/Six of Pents/Two of Wands/Magician

Previous setbacks
 become future mentors for
 magical results.

Seven of Pents/Temperance/Two of Pents/Fool

Fruits of my labors
 I synthesize and balance
 to set my spirit free again.

Tarot Limericks

Another simple poetic form is the *limerick*. Limericks are written in a way that lines one, two, and five share a rhymed end, as do lines three and four. Here is an example based on the Fool card written by Tracy Hite, Treasurer of the American Tarot Association.

The Fool seeks adventure and fun
 While he dances and sings in the sun.
 He refuses to see
 Just how high he may be,
 His life's journey has barely begun!

There are endless other ways you can use Tarot in creative writing. I encourage you to experiment and let the Tarot inspire you in any and every way possible. Right-brained creativity can and will reinforce left-brain memorization. Allowing both halves of the brain to share in the Tarot journey results in the most balanced learning.

EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Hou have now been introduced to a variety of methods and techniques that will take your Tarot studies and readings to the next level. I hope you have enjoyed the new spreads as well as your exploration with the Comparative Method, combination readings, interactive readings, several techniques for formulating questions and doing practice readings, and the use of Elemental Dignities in readings.

If you have gotten nothing else from this book, I hope you now understand how important it is never to stop looking at ways to get “out of the box” with your cards. The oracle exists to teach you, and your own imagination is the only limiting factor. The more you push the envelope, the more you will learn!

May your journey be a happy one!

APPENDIX A

COLLABORATIVE STORY

What follows is a collaborative story penned by the Comparative Tarot e-list.

On the Royal Road

Diane Wilkes

Pennsylvania, USA

<http://tarotpassages.com>

Storyteller Tarot and Blue Rose Tarot: the Chariot

Sometimes we want to run away from our past. So we set out to do just that. And find that, until we confront it in a hundred different ways, we meet it in a thousand different guises. It shadows us, calls our name in howls and whispers, dogs our heels, and whistles in the wind.

We can lie to ourselves, of course—and we do, daily. It's the beauty of the beckoning future that keeps our eyes fixed forward. We aren't hiding from or avoiding anything, we simply know what we want and where we have to go in order to get it. The road ahead shines and sparkles, shooting up magical balloons that sing, "Up, up, and away," a siren song sung by a celestial version of the Fifth Dimension. We want the magical promise of the future.

And what of the present? Jeff Gordon took a swig of instant coffee and clicked the icon to bring up Adobe Illustrator on his computer. He didn't have to turn his computer on.

It was always on.

He knew his latest creation would be met with the response all of his work received: mad acclaim. But he thought it was more mad than acclaim—the creation in his mind's eye was so much more perfect than the final product.

But it was final. He had contracted to create ten designs by September. It was August 31; there was no more time.

But was it also just product, mere product?

He remembered what it was like when he first began. He felt like a king, creating something beautiful, something unique from nothing. He was untouchable. A god.

He gulped the rest of his coffee, looking balefully at his creation. Where was the sense of wonder? Had it all just become a well-paying trap?

He looked again at the image on his computer, and realized with one minor change, he could utterly transform this last design into something so daring, so innovative, it would not only make his name famous forever, it would rock the very foundations of the world as he knew it.

He continued to stare at the computer screen, transfixed. It could have been minutes; it could have been hours. Did he have the courage, the desire, the strength to deal with the repercussions, not only for himself, but the world?

Winter Wren

Illinois, USA

Cosmic Tarot: Queen of Pentacles

She sat there, waiting, gazing at his last piece of artwork, the only one remaining from his previous series. What would he bring this time? Gordon's artwork had put her gallery on the map in terms of fine

graphic art. But he did have a way of taxing her nerves in terms of making her wait until the last moment of a deadline.

Alana picked up the ringing phone only to hear his voice. "I may be a touch late arriving in the city with this set, but trust me, it is gonna be worth all the pacing you can do in two hours' time."

"How late? I have people rattling the door already."

"An hour, maybe two. But it is worth it. I promise."

"It better be." She dumped the phone on the cradle.

A touch more than two hours later, he slipped into the back door of her gallery with the original prints under his arm. "Are you ready for this? This is revolutionary. I mean it! I really did it this time."

She took the work from him and began putting the works out on the board. She could not believe what she saw before her. She did not know what to say. Jeff Gordon stood there, waiting for her response, but she had no words.

Geraldine Amaral

Virginia, USA

Hudes Deck: Strength

She truly had no words. The silence between them was palpable. It seemed to stretch on for an eternity. She felt that awful tightness in her chest and felt herself becoming light-headed. Her mouth was dry and she could feel her sweat soaking her armpits.

Why today of all days does Jeff have to pull this shit? First he comes flying in here at the last minute, by the seat of his pants, as always, and then, as proud as you please, preening himself like a little peacock, he brings me this, this!

The jangling of the phone startled both Jeff and Alana; its bell seemed especially cacophonous. But frankly, Alana welcomed the chance to step away from Jeff and collect herself.

"Eight Lions Art Gallery, this is Alana."

"Mom, it's me. I think something's wrong with Magic. He's just laying there, breathing kinda funny, and he has kitty litter all over his

face. I tried petting him, nice and easy. I wiped the kitty litter off his nose and mouth as best I could, but I'm scared for him. Can you come home right away?"

"Oh, Sweetie, I am on my way. Try not to do anything that will rile him up. Just keep stroking him nice and easy and I'll be there in five minutes."

Oh, jeez, just what I need now, a sick cat, an hysterical child, and an insane genius who appears to have slipped over the edge.

"Sorry, Jeff, minor emergency at home, gotta run. Hold these pieces back here and we'll talk when I get back . . . please do not bring them out to the showroom just yet," Alana announced as she strode out the back door.

Pablo Lambardi

Argentina

The Celtic Tarot: Six of Spades (Reversed)

After a second's reflection, Alana popped her head back in. "Would you come along, Anita?" She was sure Jeff could manage by himself for a few minutes. Hot coffee in the back. She struggled to keep her voice steady. "Did you see that?" She was at a loss for words.

Anita nervously fumbled for her lighter. She saw it coming, but had already given up the fight.

"I thought they were . . . mind-boggling, cool, I mean."

"Anita, we are talking business here, not Jeff's backside."

Why does she keep bringing it up? wondered Alana. She had never thought of Jeff sexually.

"Mr. Schliess will be at the gallery at five."

"Don't panic, Alana. He may like them."

"*Like* them? He will be back out in the street at five past—this is not what he was expecting."

"It is certainly not what *you* were expecting," thought the girl. The old man is not as formal as she makes him to be. Anita would swear she had caught an odd glint in his eye when Alana was playing her

Marchand part. Kevin used to mock his wife gently, but after they split, there was nobody left to tone down Alana's sulking.

When the cab finally stopped in front of Alana's apartment, her thoughts were already turned on the cat. So very typical of Kevin to give it to Jane with his mixture of sweet Daddy and Hugh Grant's sexy look. Alana had no way out of it at the moment. Now, of course, it was she who had to handle this mess.

Alana gave the driver his tip and got out of the cab. She made a mental note not to give in to Jeff's attempt to run the show.

Gav

Wales

The William Blake Tarot: The Empress

When Alana opened the door there was silence. It answered her calls.

She dropped her bag; her first reaction was to pick up its contents, but her feet were already moving, her hands pushing doors at random.

Alana's anger was replaced by pleading.

Still looking around, she found bits of cat litter around the litter tray. She searched the kitchen counter for a note.

The answering machine was off. It was always off when either she or Jane was at home.

The house was empty.

Alana and Jane had moved here when her husband, Jane's father, was promoted. They got the cat when they moved in, or at least it had found them "just like magic," or that was what Kevin had said when he gave him to Jane.

Alana picked up the phone and stared at it: Who should she call? It was then that she remembered that the door was unlocked and Jane's keys were still on the counter.

The phone rang as Alana came into the kitchen.

Back at the gallery, Jeff was standing in the showroom, hands in his pockets, dismissing finer and more expensive works of art, trying to find the perfect spots for his pieces.

Eva Yaa Asantewaa

New York, USA

Tarot of the Cat People: King of Wands

He tried to fill the pristine, maddening silence in Alana's gallery by talking to himself. But his mind was troubled, his conscience guilty. He could barely concentrate on the task before him. He kept moving prints from place to place, dissatisfied with every possible choice. Finally, he slumped to the floor in frustration.

"Damn that cat! And damn me too!"

And now that he could no longer fight it, the memory flooded him.

(A little flashback music, please!)

There was Magic, staring up at him with his pool-like green eyes, as he sat in Alana's home office in front of her computer. He had never cared for cats, and this particular one really gave him the willies. He didn't like the way he seemed to watch everything he did in Alana's apartment and follow him here and there, as if the cat were some furry security guard—and one who needed to be fed, watered, and litter-scooped to boot. He definitely drew the line at petting and cuddling. Apartment-sitting could be rough!

Sweet Jesus! How long was it supposed to be before Alana and Jane got back from New Mexico? Would he survive? Would he be able to get any work done with Mr. Kitty always on his case?

And what did Alana think he was, anyway, a starving, homeless artist? He didn't need to be here. (So, why had he agreed to watch the place and the cat? Why? Why, indeed . . . ?) He had a good mind to go home and leave Mr. Hairball to fend for himself. He was thinking he might just do it when, to his horror, the weird Maine Coon fuzz-ball leaped onto Alana's desk! Right in front of his face!

Jeff yelped and jumped away from the chair. When he recovered himself, wiping tail hair off his lips and nose, he could not believe what he was seeing.

Magic had positioned himself on the chair, and one paw was firmly tapping the computer's mouse. Jeff had no way of knowing it, but Magic had had lots of experience pressuring mice.

"Now, kitty? Nice kitty? What are you doing?"

Magic looked straight ahead at the monitor and slid the mouse around its pad.

"Kitty get down! Right now! You hear me?"

Heedless, and with a series of swift, deft manipulations, Magic pulled up a file and opened it. Jeff's mind reeled at what he was witnessing.

The art that unfolded in front of him drew him in powerfully. He gasped and sputtered. His heart beat like a conga drum.

"What the . . . what the hell is this? What the hell? Who made these?"

Magic tapped the mouse repeatedly, and image after image appeared, each more mind-blowing than the last. Finally, as the twenty-second image came up, Magic relaxed back upon the chair and calmly turned his head to fix Jeff with a look that was both friendly and conspiratorial.

Jeff looked from the cat to the twenty-second image. A thought began to fight its way into his deeply shaken brain, but he thrust it aside.

"Get down from there, you . . . you . . . salmon-breathed wretch! Get away from that computer!"

Jeff made a move to shoo Magic away, but Magic, much offended but with the dignity only a cat can muster, stepped down from the chair on his own. He gave one look behind him as he walked out the door, and that look spoke volumes.

In fact, it probably spoke volumes in any of four different languages, since Magic was a sophisticated cat.

But what it said, basically, was, "Mister, I am *ten times* the artist that you are."

His meaning was unmistakable, and Jeff was stung. But not stung enough to stop him from beginning to calculate. He put one and one together and came up with twenty-two. He didn't know just how he did it, but he did.

He was going to sit his butt back down and take another look at those images. He'd tweak them just enough . . . just enough . . . and right before Alana and Jane got back from Taos, he'd put them on a zip disk to take home. Then, yeah . . . yeah . . . Mister Magic Man, we'll see who rules!

Sysliene

Minnesota, USA

The World Spirit Tarot: Judgment

The tinkle of the bells over the gallery door brought Jeff back to the present. The scent of Brut preceded the man into the gallery. It was Mr. Schliess. He was dressed in an Armani suit, gray in color, with a Garcia tie in bright colors and guitars strewn across it. On the lapel of the suit jacket was a pin; on closer examination, it showed to be a feather. It looked like the kind of feather found in the hand of Anubis, as seen on the walls of the pharaohs' tombs. He had the air of a man just come from the barber, with his cheeks smooth from the razor.

Jeff strode forward with his hand outstretched.

"Mr. Schliess, so glad that you could come. I believe you'll find this latest set of prints to be . . ."

Mr. Schliess looked at Jeff's outstretched hand, then raised his eyes to look at Jeff.

"I'll be the judge of what I like or don't like, Gordon."

Jeff dropped his hand, surreptitiously wiping his hand on his pants. Something was different. Suddenly he wasn't so sure about this last set of prints. Would Schliess see the same thing in the prints as Jeff did? Jeff thought about the phone call regarding the cat. Could that have anything to do with Schliess' sudden change?

Mark McElroy
Mississippi, USA
www.madebymark.com

Tarot of the Saints: Knight of Cups (St. John)

Jeff motioned to the wall at the rear of the gallery. "Be my guest."

Schliess sauntered in the general direction of Jeff's work, pausing occasionally to touch a sculpture or evaluate a framed print. He circled a delicate figurine several times, bending forward to admire the detail.

"Tell me about this piece."

Jeff shifted his weight from foot to foot. "It's not mine. If you'll just keep going back, you'll see several of my latest works, in a style I've never explored."

Schliess blinked. "Please . . . the figurine. Indulge me."

Jeff made his way across the gallery to stand beside the older man. "Looks like Jesus."

Schliess shook his head. "It is St. John the Divine. See the cup he holds? The serpent coiled within? Legend has it an emperor ordered him to drink from a poisoned cup. The poison coalesced into a serpent, which crawled away, enabling John to drink unscathed." Schliess almost smiled. "Patron saint of writers, booksellers . . . and art dealers."

Jeff shrugged. "You charge for these lectures?"

Schliess widened his smile, but did not allow the expression to touch his eyes. "To impress me, an artist must possess a certain depth, else his work lacks texture."

Jeff folded his arms across his chest. "My work speaks for itself."

"We shall see," Schliess said. He turned and walked to the rear of the gallery.

Five paintings hung on the wall, bathed in soft cones of halogen light. Dark, organic smudges dominated the background of each. Violent streaks of color—chartreuse, vermilion, and dandelion—slashed their way across the canvasses. "These begin as digital prints," Jeff explained. "I design them on the computer, then transfer them to canvas."

Schliess shook his head. "What you call radical, I call an imitation—and a poor one—of Pollock." He turned to go. "This is why an artist needs depth, Mr. Gordon: so he will not confuse repetition with innovation."

Jeff smirked. "Keep looking."

Schliess sighed and turned again to the canvasses. Seconds passed.

Slowly, Schliess leaned forward, staring intently at the first painting. He turned his head from side to side . . . and gasped.

Jeff nodded. "You see them."

Schliess swallowed hard. "I thought it a trick of the light." He stepped forward, visibly excited. "In the first, almost obscured by the background—a man, a table, four objects. In the second—a woman? Seated? I can just make her out. She has a book of some kind in her lap. No, a scroll!"

"Go on."

Schliess paused before the third painting. "Another woman. Pregnant. I can barely make her out. Surrounded by flowers. Where do I know this from? Is it—ah!" He turned to Jeff and nodded approvingly. "A Major Arcana. Arcana, meaning 'mystery' or 'obscured knowledge' . . . and rendered somehow in a style that obscures the image, unless the viewer is willing to explore it." Schliess pulled out a palmtop computer, flipped open its clam-shell case, and tapped the keys. "This series—is it complete?"

"All twenty-two."

Schliess' fingers worked, entering data. "Price each?"

Jeff hesitated. "This process takes time. I haven't really . . ."

"An estimate. Five thousand? Seven thousand each?"

Jeff swallowed. "That would do it."

Schliess beamed, snapping the palmtop shut. "Excellent. I hereby commission the next series."

Jeff's face fell. "The next series?"

"I do not purchase art I do not commission. Nonetheless, these twenty-two paintings are clearly the beginning of something exciting.

Now that these images have honed your sensitivities, I wish to purchase the next twenty-two. I want them in exactly this style . . . but based on the *Marseilles* decks, I think, not the Rider-Waite." Schliess strode toward the door, speaking over his shoulder. "Drop me an e-mail with an estimate of when the first four in the new series can be complete. Meanwhile, I'll drop you a check for the first half of the commission fee."

Jeff scrambled to follow the older man. "I'm not sure I'm interested in simply repeating what I've done here . . ."

Schliess silenced him with a gesture. "The same genius that created these images can create them again, yes?"

Jeff chewed his lower lip. "Of course I can."

Schliess offered a genuine smile. "See to it, then." With that, he stepped into the glare of the late afternoon sun, slamming the door behind him.

Vic

California, USA

Osho Zen Tarot: [X] Change

The strong light of the sun obscured his vision when Jeff went to answer the insistent knock on the door a few minutes later. He squinted outward and thought he recognized Mr. Schliess behind the blinding glare. Suddenly his head began to spin; he couldn't tell which way was up, which way was down. North, South, East, West. It all spun in a blur as the ground came up to meet him. When he awoke, his head was throbbing and it was dark out. He had a lump on his head and he felt nauseated. There was a baseball bat next to his head.

"What the . . .?"

Feeling his way indoors, he made his way to the showroom. The artwork was gone. Gone!

He began to laugh hysterically. He thought of his ex-wife and the fact that she had always nagged him mercilessly about his lack of mindfulness. "One day you'll be conked on the head and someone will

make off with your entire life's work," is what she'd said. Why hadn't he checked to see who was at the door? Earlier today he'd had the potential for wealth; he had been ready to harvest the riches from all his hard work. Now? A lump on the head, and painful memories of his ex!

Just then the phone rang. It was Schliess.

"Do you mind if I come by to take another look at your work in the morning?" he asked.

"I've been robbed," Jeff said. "Right after you left. Did you come back and knock on the door?"

Schliess said he had not returned, but that he had seen someone approach as he turned the corner. In fact, he said, the appearance of another person had given him the idea to call and ask if he could come by again. He thought that he had competition for the purchase of the artwork.

"What did he look like?" Jeff asked.

"Well, I'm not sure if it was a man or a woman. Whatever . . . it was a very, *very* old person, older than time it seemed. I don't know exactly how it is that I got that impression, but this person was definitely older than time."

A violent chill went down Jeff's spine. Oh, no! Suddenly he remembered!

Batia

Israel

The Spiral Tarot: High Priestess

Of course, the shadow. It was creeping behind him all day long, covering the whitewashed wall and his desk . . . disappearing when he was watching it.

His head was bursting; he sat down and tried to calm himself. "Concentrate . . . concentrate, Jeff," he told himself again and again, but his mind was practically swinging inside his head like a Ping-Pong ball.

Restlessly walking around and watching the bare walls proved too much for him. He decided to get out. He moved swiftly toward the door but then he saw it again, the shadow; it was creeping along the west wall, slowly expanding. This time it didn't seem to mind his presence at all.

Terrified, Jeff watched the shadow change color, turning the white wall into a dark-green shade.

And then there was this sound. He wasn't sure if it came from inside his head or from somewhere in the room. It was getting louder and louder. Panicked, all he wanted to do was to run away . . . but he could not move an inch. He was nailed to the floor.

Wind. It was the sound of a wildly blowing wind that made him look up again at the west wall, "Oh my God, I am losing my mind, probably the blow on the head, concussion, must be," he told himself, trying to get reasonable, yet trembling all over.

The west wall was changing in front of his eyes, the dark-green color turned purple, and reluctantly he had to concentrate. The image . . . it wasn't clear . . . was it a crone? Wrapped in layers of rotten cloths, she was sitting on a swing . . . *swish, swish* . . . cutting the air, staring right at him. Her face, it looked strangely familiar. "Oh my God . . . my . . ."

Janet

Pennsylvania, USA

Halloween Tarot: High Priestess

Meanwhile, back in Alana's apartment . . .

Alana started when the phone rang. As she picked up the phone, she wandered out of the kitchen again, still looking for Jane and Magic.

"Hello?"

"Hello! How are you this evening?"

"Who is this?" Alana wasn't very polite, but then, she was worried about Jane and Magic, not to mention Jeff, left to his own devices back at the gallery. "Don't worry, this is *not* a sales call! It's a special offer just for . . ."

Alana slammed the phone down. Damn telemarketers, always calling at the most inopportune moments.

Anita came back in the kitchen again, and gestured impatiently. “Alana, you need to see this!”

“Are they okay?”

“They’re fine, just come look!”

Anita led the way into Alana’s office. A serene room, it was decorated in deep blues with accents of silver. The centerpiece of her desk was, of course, her computer monitor. It sat smack in the middle, right between the alternating columns of the deep-blue and white draperies. And smack on the top of the monitor sat Magic; all of Alana’s attention was focused on Jane. Jane sat at the keyboard; the look on her face was a little stunned.

Hearing her mother’s footsteps, Jane turned.

“Mom, thank the Gods you’re here!”

“Jane, what happened? Magic looks fine now!”

“Mom, I just don’t know! I was sitting there, petting him gently, just like you said. And I was kind of daydreaming, wondering about what Jeff would be showing you today . . . you know, I’ve always felt a little weird about him since he house-sat for us that one time. And then, my hand started to feel all tingly—and I looked down at Magic, and all his hair was standing up on end, and, well, you won’t believe me . . .”

“What, honey?”

“He almost looked like he was glowing! And then he jumped up and ran in here. He kept looking over his shoulder, like he wanted to make sure I was following, like he wanted to show me something. And he jumped up there, and it was like he pointed to the computer . . . and Mom, I swear, I haven’t had it on all day!”

All three of them looked at the monitor. Someone had been typing a document, a strange document. Twenty-two times, twenty-two lines, the same word.

Beware!

As one, they all looked up at Magic. He looked calm, and in the way of cats, infinitely wise, and infinitely inscrutable; the guardian of secrets not guessed at.

Sally Anne

Ohio, USA

Transformational Tarot: Prince of Swords

Just then the familiar roar of a 302 Boss engine broke the silence.

Jane squealed with a wide-eyed girlish glee, “Daddy!” and went scrambling out of the room to the front door.

Alana pulled the drapes to one side and peered out the window just in time to get a glimpse of Kevin unfolding those long, lean, faded denim legs out of the driver’s seat of that blasted ’69 Mustang. If only he would have paid as much attention to her as he did to that car, things might have turned out a bit differently. “Oh right, who am I fooling *now*?” she said aloud.

Anita looked at her quizzically. “Never mind!” brusqued Alana as she motioned toward the computer monitor. “Whatever this means can’t possibly be as frightening as what’s about to walk through the door.”

She reached over to click off the monitor, scooped Magic up into her arms, and turned to go out into the living room. Casting a backward glance at Anita, who was still frozen in her tracks and staring at the darkened computer screen, she shrugged her shoulders and went on to face her most viable opponent in the battle for her daughter’s affection.

She quickly collected her senses as she moved down the hallway. She heard Jane’s giggles and then his voice—that voice of inevitable persuasion. How well she knew his words could both melt her heart and then cut her down in one fell swoop. She *had* to be strong.

Alana rounded the corner into the room. She felt her resolve slipping away the moment she saw him. He was tall, dark, and so damn handsome . . . for a vagabond, that is. Magic squirmed from her

clutches and leaped to the ground. The cat strode over to Kevin and brushed up against his leg in greeting.

“Hey there, Magic Cat, have you been keeping an eye on my two favorite ladies?” Kevin bent down on one knee to playfully ruffle up the cat’s fur and give him a few well-placed scratches behind the ear.

Jane blurted, “Dad, you’ll never guess what Magic did!”

Alana cut her daughter off, “Jane honey, why don’t you go check on Anita. I need to talk to your father for just a minute. You can have him all to yourself then, I promise.”

Jane shot her mother one of those patented preadolescent looks of indignant resignation and took off down the hall toward the office.

“What in the hell are you doing here, Kevin?” Alana glared.

“Whoa, I’m not armed for battle so go easy on me. I stopped by Eight Lions first, but the place was shut up tighter than a drum. I was worried something might be wrong. I mean, it’s not like you to leave clients waiting out on the street,” he countered.

Alana’s fuse was lit. “You mean Schliess was outside waiting?! Where in the hell was Jeff?! I should have known better than to trust that flake to wait things out—I have to get back there, and *now!*”

Kevin grabbed her arm as she was reaching for the phone, “Wait a minute, dear, it wasn’t Victor that I ran into outside the gallery. I’ve never seen this . . . ummm . . . person before. Rather a strange sort really; even gave *me* the willies. I figured you had snagged yourself another fabulously wealthy eccentric to unload some of that pathetic “art” onto. Did you say Gordon was there? You aren’t still hanging on to that tarnished star, are you?”

“Let’s not get into this, Kevin. I simply must get to the gallery to check on things. You can stay here and visit with Jane. Can I borrow your car?”

Kevin let out a laugh. “You really *have* gone over the edge, haven’t you?” He reached into his pocket and drew out his keys, shaking his head in disbelief as he tossed them through the air toward his ex-wife.

Sara

Ontario, Canada

Universal Waite: Emperor

Jeff woke to find Alana shaking him vigorously.

“Wake up! Come on, Jeff!”

There was pain, and when he opened his eyes, he saw that Alana seemed to be clothed in some sort of blurry haze. He sat up slowly and, although it hurt to do so, shook his head to clear it. Slowly, she came into focus.

“What’s this bat doing here?” she asked. “Where . . . where are the paintings?”

She went pale as a ghost.

“We were robbed, I guess,” said Jeff. “I don’t . . . don’t remember.”

“What do you mean, you don’t remember? Think!” Alana was fuming. She could honestly say that she had never had a day like this one.

First, this half-lunatic artist shows her some mind-boggling Tarot-inspired paintings, then her cat is sick, then she fears for the lives of her supposedly missing daughter and said cat, then her ex-husband shows up at her house, and now this. Add to this a cat who seemed to be a throwback to her Egyptian forbearers, and this was one spooky day!

“Think,” she said to him, getting him some water from the bathroom. “Think. Try to tell me everything you remember—after I left.”

“Well,” said Jeff, “Schliess came in and looked at my work. He liked it. He commissioned a second series based on the *Marseilles* deck.”

She couldn’t believe it. He had liked the work. Wow!

“Then,” he continued, “Schliess left and there was a knock on the door. I must have opened it—but this part is foggy—and then the guy must have conked me with the bat.” He flinched as a pulse of pain shot through his head. “Ooooooh!” he groaned.

“Anything else?” she asked.

He thought for a moment. Should he tell her about the strange apparition? Well, he had seen it, and he had to say something.

“You’ll think I’m crazy,” he said, “but something else did happen. I was awake before you came and I saw that wall,” pointing to the now normal-looking west wall. “It began to change colors. I saw a crone—a swing. I don’t know.”

“You are crazy,” she said. She decided to say nothing about Magic’s little escapade with the computer, because it was beyond all logic. How could that Maine Coon of hers—that lovable, fluffy, attention-craving (when it suited him, of course), purring machine—be so intelligent? She did not understand it. Moreover, she did not want to understand it.

“Jeff,” she said. “You should go to a hospital, and then we’ve got to go to the police. Someone stole those paintings, and I want to find out who.”

She helped him to his feet, and together they walked out the door. Locking up, Alana went to Kevin’s car. Jeff followed her, rather unsteadily, and got in.

As they drove away, a dark figure came out of the alley between the Eight Lions and the dry-cleaners next door. Under its arm was a large roll of canvases.

Ellen Lorenzi-Prince

California, USA

www.croneways.com

Alchemical Tarot: Ten of Coins

Victor Schliess returned to his own senses once he had delivered the goods. He stared at the roll of canvases, now set at the foot of a throne and dais. He wondered if he were more afraid to remember what his body had just done, or to raise his eyes to see for whom he had done it.

“Ex-cell-ent!” A silky voice purred above him. Victor dared to look up as far as the figure’s elegant hands and sharp, red nails, tickling a smug-looking feline under the chin. Victor hated cats, and he was sure that this one knew it. His fear edged up a notch. The voice continued, more to itself or the cat than to him.

“Yes, I know . . . perhaps a touch more glamour than absolutely necessary, but we couldn’t have that young man telling any coherent tales now, could we? The world will know the truth about us soon enough.”

It wasn’t like Victor to be afraid or manipulated, and he could not bear it. He was a successful businessman! A catered-to connoisseur! The judge of all things right and good in life! He squared his shoulders and raised his eyes. And then fell to his knees.

“My Goddess!” Victor cried. “Forgive me! I’ll do whatever you ask of me!”

“Yes,” the lady purred. “You will.”

Meanwhile, back in Alana’s apartment, neither Jane nor Kevin, busy having high tea with the queen and all her ladies, had noticed Magic was gone.

Kath

Australia

Universal Waite: the Moon

“Ooh, please stop the car, I’m going to be sick!”

Alana came to a screeching halt on the side of the road, just in time for Jeff to push open the door.

“You may have a concussion; we should get to the hospital.”

“No, I don’t want to go. My head is fine, it’s your driving style that’s upset my stomach.” Jeff did not want to be poked and prodded by some snotty-nosed intern. His head was spinning with the events of the past few hours. That figure, where have I seen it? The question was driving him insane.

“Can you just please take me home?”

“Are you sure you’re okay? You look so pale. You should go to a doctor.” But Alana knew Jeff’s stubbornness, and also knew that arguing was no use, so she popped the car into first gear and headed for Jeff’s place.

Within fifteen minutes, Jeff was lying on his bed. Alana had helped him up the stairs, and now she was leaving him to rest. Her mind was frazzled too. Missing paintings, attacked artist, a sick cat, and a smooth-talking ex-husband suddenly back in her life. She hurried home, leaving Jeff in peace, or so she thought.

His imagination was running rampant. Half awake and half asleep, his dreams were strange and scary. The mystery figure was chasing him through dark woods, always just behind him. Running, frightened, tree branches reaching out, snatching at his clothes, his hair. The scene changed, and Jeff was suddenly standing on the roof of a huge tower. Far below him was a stream, and wild animals were roaming the land. "They are waiting for me to fall so they can feast on me," Jeff thought. He turned and saw the menacing figure behind him. Jeff couldn't see its face, but he could see a long, dark cloak and hood, and its glowing yellow eyes. Those eyes! Jeff searched for an escape, but there was no way out. Those eyes, so familiar yet so alien. Terrified, Jeff let out a scream.

His eyes snapped open. He was safe in his bed. Jeff's body was covered in sweat; the sheets were damp under him. For an instant he saw those awful yellow eyes, and like a lightning bolt it hit him: Magic.

That damned cat was haunting his dreams now. Had he made a huge mistake in using those computer images for his own art? Was his subconscious reprimanding him now? Was it just the concussion? Slowly, parts of the robbery came back to him—the figure, short and squat. A ring! There was a ring on its hand, gold, unusual, very distinctive design, with the brightest ruby he had ever seen. Why did it seem so familiar to him, yet so unknown? Had he seen it before, and if so, where? As an artist he would remember such an unusual object.

Jeff felt like his sanity was slipping away. He got up, nearly fell back down, and slowly made his way to the kitchen for a drink.

Teresa

Washington, USA

World Spirit Tarot: Ace of Wands

When Alana got home, she saw that Jane and Kevin were out in the backyard, firing up the barbecue and chatting about something. “Goddess, how long has it been since we did that around here?” wondered Alana. Not wanting to get involved, she retreated to her study where she found Anita. “Oh my goddess, Anita, I completely forgot you were here in all the rush! What have you been doing all this time?”

“I hope you don’t think I’ve been snooping,” Anita said sheepishly, “but look what I found on the computer—after you left I just couldn’t help thinking about that “Beware” message, and I wanted to see if there was anything else to it. When I turned the screen back on, it was still there, and when I closed that file, well, just look.”

Filling the screen were images of artwork superimposed on one another, all opened in Adobe Illustrator. Alana didn’t even realize she had this program on her computer—maybe Jeff had installed it when he was housesitting.

Anita waited for Alana to see it. “Anita, these are Jeff’s paintings. I wonder what they’re doing on my computer? Do you think it’s possible he created these while he was staying here, and only just now decided to sell them? I guess it wouldn’t surprise me, given how unusual they are. Maybe he was afraid to take a chance until he’d sold a few others. But no, I’m sure he said he had just finished them—he made me wait long enough!”

“I don’t know, Alana, but look at the bottom right-hand corners—there’s a signature of some kind. It’s on all the paintings.” Alana looked, and sure enough, there was . . . a magic wand with a tip of fire and a cat’s paw underneath. “Anita, I don’t remember seeing that on Jeff’s paintings, and it sure doesn’t look like anything he would use. I don’t get it, what is going on here?” They looked at each other in bewilderment, and decided there was only one way to find out.

Jeff poured himself another drink, but it made his head spin and he set it down again. Maybe he didn't need anything more to add to this confusing day. Swinging crones, ruby rings, golden cat eyes. All of these things seemed so familiar, yet he was sure he hadn't seen them in "real" life—well, maybe the cat eyes.

Blast it! So close, and yet so far. The luck of having a collector like Mr. Schliess actually like his paintings, and then to have them stolen! Now he didn't even have the originals to attempt the commission Mr. Schliess was offering. He wondered what the *Marseilles* deck was and whether he had any hope of reproducing the style on his own—Tarot cards really not being his forte. Suddenly he sat up with a bolt of inspiration—as the pain of the concussion and the alcohol lanced through his head—the Tarot cards! That's it! That's where he had seen that ruby ring before, on the Emperor. And the Crone, she was actually the Hermit! But what were they doing in the gallery, and why were they haunting his dreams?

Ccili

Oregon, USA

Thoth: Fortune

Jeff set his drink aside and made his way into the kitchen. Coffee would clear his head. He needed to put this together, find some sanity. As he reached for the jar of instant he spotted the green, red, and gold can of Meglia d'oro, a can left from his grandmother Fortuna's last visit.

Real coffee. It had been awhile since he had a cup of real coffee; in fact, it had been awhile since there had been much of anything real in his life.

He had not thought of "nonna" for many moons. He remembered being mesmerized as he watched her tatting lace hour after hour, weaving beautiful, delicate patterns. She called this the story of her life. Light and shadow woven in harmony, both necessary to create.

"Nonna, you can buy the lace. It is easier."

“Yes, little one, but then it is not my story but someone else’s. It is important to know our own story; if not, we keep running in circles looking for what is already inside of us.”

She had repeated this same thought shortly before she died last fall.

“Jeff, you are lost because you keep trying to find answers everywhere but in your own heart. You are like a charioteer who lets his horses struggle against one another, going the way of the strongest.”

He did feel like he had been here a million times, the same place over and over again. Was he caught in some karmic web? Is that why it all seemed so familiar?

At that moment a crystal-clear image presented itself in his mind. He was standing in a long hall. Oils hung along the length of both sides. At the end of the hall a family crest hung—a large cat, rising up with a flaming wand between its paws. In front of the crest stood two men. One was tall and dark, boyishly handsome, wearing a large ruby ring that was flashing, reflecting some light he could not see, and the other was stout, intense. They were obviously anxious about the fate of the pictures hung in the corridor.

Wait. The ring. Jeff remembered this ring. It was the one Kevin had worn the day of his wedding to Alana. Where was that ring now? The paintings? Could they be . . . ?

Azraelstar Cat

Iowa, USA

Robin Wood: Five of Swords (Reversed)

Jeff strained to hear the two men in front of the large crest whispering. Even if this was a vision, somehow he knew it was important. “How could you . . . let that thief get his hands on . . .” Don’t worry . . . has it under control.”

The vision faded.

Thief? Take what? What had been hanging on those walls? Was it something important? And why does that ruby ring of Kevin’s keep

appearing? Does it mean something, and above all, why me, why now, and what have I done to deserve such a headache?

All I want is for my paintings to be found, so I can do the commission for Schliess in the *Marseilles* style, whatever the hell that means. Internet? Could I be so lucky, could I actually find what I need there? As he runs to his office for the computer.

Valerie Sim

California, USA

Animal-Wise Tarot: The High Priestess

Jeff's computer searches were interrupted by a prickling sensation at the back of his neck. He had never fully understood that expression about one's "hair standing on end," but he understood it now.

He had been engrossed by the Internet, but now suddenly he came back to his immediate physical environment. He also became aware of how cold it was. When had the temperature begun to drop in the room, and more importantly, *why* was it dropping? And that *silence!* It was palpable, nearly alive! It hung over the office like a tangible entity. Everything was cold, still, silent . . . yet, strangely, alive.

With great effort, he forced himself to turn and look behind him.

In front of his eyes, a giant spiderweb appeared as if from nowhere. It hung there, gossamer strands glittering in the fading light, hauntingly beautiful, yet somehow chilling.

The air was pulsating, and with every pulse the web glittered and shook. It looked like it was covered with beads of water like tiny crystals glimmering in the light. From a distance, he watched the small spider spin a tangle of precious silk and float . . . drift on . . . to another part of the web. As she created, she moved, and so she began to spin anew. She was ageless, she was immortal, she was weaving herself forward and spinning her own personal dreams. It was her gift.

Then as he watched the web began to change. It didn't look like a spiderweb anymore. It looked more like lace, tatted lace, and that spider . . . it didn't really look like a spider. He could almost swear that spider had a face. Whaaaat?

"No!" screamed Jeff in horror, and then in the very small voice of the child he used to be, he whispered hoarsely, "Nonna?!"

Don Davies

Massachusetts, USA

The Edible Tarot: Ten of Wands

The phone rang shrill and sharp in the darkness. Jeff was huddled in his bed, still shaking from the horrible vision of the spider. He had slept poorly and nearly knocked the phone to the floor as he fumbled for the receiver. "H-h-h-ello?"

"Jeff, is that you? It's Alana. I just wanted you to know that there is still no sign of your artwork. The police are doing everything they can, but it seems that Schliess has disappeared. Jeff, you're awfully quiet, are you okay?"

"Uh, yeah," Jeff replied, "I just didn't sleep well last night."

"Look, I have an idea. We have both been through hell the past couple of days and Jane is spending the weekend with Kevin. Why don't you come over and we can have a nice, quiet dinner? Maybe we can come up with some new ideas for future pieces."

Jeff could feel himself smile. It had been days since he had eaten anything more than beanie-weenies and potato chips. "Alana, I would really love that. Thank you."

"Great, I'll see you at seven."

Alana puckered her lips lasciviously in the mirror as she finished putting on her lipstick. Red velvet caressed her body, her dress hanging in elegant and tantalizing folds. She had waited too long for this night. And oddly, the events of the past few days had only heightened her anticipation. Tonight, Jeff Gordon was going to relax.

Alana couldn't help humming to herself as she put on her Barry Manilow CD and lit the candles, admiring the ruby ring on her finger. She could smell the garlic breadsticks, which would accompany the olive spaghetti, baking in the oven. She could still remember helping

her Nonna make these breadsticks when she was a little girl. Nonna had also given her the ring, although she could only wear it as a thumb ring because it was so large.

The doorbell rang and Alana had to command herself to walk, not run, to answer it. She opened the door and saw a disheveled and haunted-looking Jeff. "Jeff, come on in and sit down. I'll get you something to drink. Is wine okay?"

Numbly, he nodded and wandered to the couch without really seeing it. As he sat down on the couch he burst into tears. Alana quickly poured the wine and immediately ran over to sit next to him. She had never expected to see him in such a state.

Gently, she put her arm around him and let him rest his head on her shoulder. The tears would no doubt ruin the velvet, but that was the least of her concerns now. He sobbed and kept stammering words and phrases she could barely make out—"crone," "not his fault," "cat," "scary spider lady." After a few minutes he was able to sit up, and Alana handed him some wine. At least it brought some color back to his cheeks.

"Alana, I am so sorry," he began, gripping both of her hands. "There's something I have to tell you."

"Jeff, I'm sorry, but I think my landscapers are spraying my lawn! But they don't work nights! Look!"

Jeff turned around and saw a thick purple fog pouring in through the front windows of the house. The fog began to swirl and solidify, revealing a beautiful, muscular woman with jet-black hair dressed in red battle gear half-hidden beneath a black cloak. She held a cat close to her body and gently scratched its head. "Magic!" Alana and Jeff shouted together.

Next to this mysterious woman appeared a short man, holding several rolled canvases that hid his face. And behind her stood a kindly old woman whose body seemed to waver and flicker in the air like an image on a screen. "Nonna?" Alana and Jeff said together. They turned and faced one another, faces pale with shock. Jeff started crying again.

Alana was furious! Who *was* this woman and how *dare* she invade her home! Alana stormed up to confront her.

"Wait, Alana," the woman said, raising her right hand. As she did so, the Barry Manilow CD flew out of the stereo, striking the far wall. "Now all will be explained, and prices . . ." she smiled turning toward Jeff, "will be paid. Schliess?"

The short man lowered the canvases and bowed to the woman. Slowly he began unrolling the canvases, revealing the exquisite pieces Jeff had first brought to the gallery only a few days before.

When Schliess was done, he returned to his place next to the woman. "You may call me Morrigan," the woman said. "I am as old as time and Jeff has seen several of my aspects over the past few days. I shift and change according to need and season, and today I am here to see justice done."

Alana sat down, groping for the wine bottle. She gulped down about half of what was left and handed it to Jeff to finish.

"Many, many centuries ago there was a priest of the Egyptian cat goddess Bast, whose job it was to create murals for her temple and paint the tomb walls of the Egyptian royalty who served her. In his pride, he claimed that none could rival his skill as an artist, and that even Bast herself could do no more than cat scratches in comparison to his work." Magic began to squirm in Morrigan's arms, but she held him tighter and continued. "In her fury, Bast transformed this priest into a cat and declared that he would remain in this form until he could create in vivid detail the images she sent him in dreams. These images, once created and arranged in a special sequence, would return him to his human form and allow him to finish living his human life."

Suddenly it was becoming clear to Alana—the images on her computer, Jeff's work—she could feel the rage building. Jeff had stolen her cat's work!

"Thanks to the technology of this age, these images were nearly complete when the set was stolen by Jeff. And even then, another coveted these beautiful images," Morrigan said, turning toward Schliess,

“so that I felt I had no choice but to intervene. Fortunately, Alana still had the ring that Nonna had given her. The ring acts as a homing beacon for aspects of the Goddess when Magic is in danger or the images are complete.”

“But, if Jeff and I have the *same* Nonna,” Alana began.

“Yes, Alana, that is correct. You and Jeff are cousins; your mothers were sisters. When your mother’s days as an international supermodel ended she and your father decided to retire to Liechtenstein to raise you. You were just a little girl, and they would bring you to visit Nonna during the holidays while Jeff was away visiting his father’s relatives, so you two never met.”

“Oh, my gosh,” Alana said, jumping up quickly, “the breadsticks!”

“Alana, stop!” Morrigan ordered, and then she smiled. “The breadsticks are perfect.” Behind her Nonna nodded and smiled, then disappeared. Alana collapsed back into her chair. She and Jeff were cousins?

“Now the prices will be paid. Schliess, print the remaining files from Alana’s computer and arrange them with the canvases on the floor in the order we discussed.” Morrigan pointed to the computer. Schliess immediately ran from the room.

“Now, Jeff,” Morrigan turned on her heel, fixing him with her fiery, dark eyes. He felt like he was going to cry again. “Because you refused to look within for the images and knowledge on which to base your own fame, and *instead* stole images from a helpless feline, I have decided that you will share Magic’s curse and serve as a cat until you can reproduce your own inner images.” And as Morrigan’s words died away, Jeff’s body began to shrink and change, until in his place on the sofa sat a matted orange tabby cat. The tabby immediately began mewling and hid its face under its paws.

“First, a new name. From now on you will be called Scamp. And tomorrow we begin your new life by cutting the mats out of your fur.” A wicked gleam appeared in Morrigan’s eyes. “Ah, Schliess.” Schliess bowed deeply to Morrigan and began to arrange the printed pages in his hands with the canvases spread out on the floor. Sweeping the

floor with her cloak, Morrigan walked to the arrangement and placed Magic in the center. No sooner did her hand leave him than Magic began to grow in size, his limbs lengthening, his chest broadening, until a very tall, handsome, dark-haired man stood smiling in the middle of Alana's living room.

"Alana, this is Ramo. Ramo will need your help in his new form. I trust that you can provide it?"

Alana barely managed a weak nod; she could not take her eyes off this man!

"Schliess, our work here is done. Scamp?" As Morrigan held out her arms, Scamp jumped into them. The purple fog returned, and within minutes Alana and Ramo stood alone in her living room, surrounded by beautiful works of art.

"You must be starved!" Alana said, regretting now every time she had made Magic, er . . . Ramo, wait for his kitty chow or had forgotten to fill the bowl. "Wait right here and I'll get you the best spaghetti dinner you've ever had!"

As the kitchen door closed behind Alana, Ramo smiled. "Meow," he said, and licked the back of his hand.

APPENDIX B

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING

Recommended Tarot Reading

First, let me point out that the following list is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is a short list of Tarot books that I have come to recommend after several decades of reading and teaching the cards. I'm certain there are good books I have left out. Likewise, there are no doubt books I have included that other Tarot writers and teachers will scoff at. What follows is my opinion, and should be taken with the proverbial grain of salt.

Books for Beginners

I tell my beginning students that if they can only get two Tarot books when first starting out, to make them *Learning the Tarot: A Tarot Book for Beginners*, by Joan Bunning, and *Tarot for Your Self: A Workbook for Personal Transformation*, by Mary K. Greer. These two books encompass a beginner's study plan that will satisfy both sides of the thirsty Tarot brain.

Left Brain

Ms. Bunning's book is an excellent methodical introduction to Tarot basics and to each card individually. She has a superb section on how to interpret the Celtic Cross spread. Although I do not start my own students out with the Celtic Cross, I grew up using this spread. Ms. Bunning's approach to working with and interpreting this spread is incomparable. In the main body of the book, Ms. Bunning discusses each card's symbolism and imagery as well as each card's keywords and meanings. It is illustrated with the *Universal Waite Tarot Deck*.

Right Brain

Mary K. Greer's classic *Tarot for Your Self* teaches a student how to become comfortable with the cards via an intuitive and meditative approach. Students will find that they can learn much from the cards by using the exercises in Ms. Greer's book long before they have finished memorizing all the basic card meanings. Critics point out the historical errors in the book, but it was published in 1984, long before any of us, including her few critics, knew what we do today about Tarot history. Ms. Greer is now extremely well-informed on Tarot history, and in addition to her other two excellent Tarot books, *Tarot Constellations: Patterns of Personal Destiny* and *Tarot Mirrors: Reflections of Personal Meaning*, she has written a fascinating, well-researched and documented book called *Women of the Golden Dawn*. This book tells the story of four fascinating women: Maud Gonne, Moina Bergson Mathers, Annie Horniman, and Florence Farr, who were practicing magi in the Golden Dawn in the early 1900s.

For Tarot history at the beginning level, I would recommend *The Tarot: History, Mystery and Lore*, by Cynthia Giles. This book presents Tarot history in an up-to-date objective manner. Unlike many other books on Tarot history, it is easy to read. Ms. Giles manages to present difficult concepts without losing or talking down to her readers.

Also recommended for beginners are the following books:

General Focus

- Banzhaf, Hajo. *The Tarot Handbook*. Stamford, CT: U.S. Games Systems, Inc., 1993.
- Bunning, Joan. *Learning the Tarot*. York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1998.
- Echols, Signe E., Robert Mueller, and Sandra A. Thomson. *Spiritual Tarot: Seventy-Eight Paths to Personal Development*. New York: Avon Books, 1996.
- Greer, Mary K. *Tarot For Your Self: A Workbook for Personal Transformation*. North Hollywood, CA: Newcastle Publishing, 1984.
- Louis, Anthony. *Tarot: Plain and Simple*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1996.
- Masino, Marcia. *Easy Tarot Guide*. San Diego, CA: Acs Publications, 1987.
- Pollack, Rachel. *Seventy-Eight Degrees of Wisdom*. New York: Harper Collins, 1997.

Psychological Focus

- Fairfield, Gail. *Choice Centered Tarot*. York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1997.
- Rosengarten, Arthur. *Tarot and Psychology: Spectrums of Possibility*. New York: Paragon House, 2000.

Qabalistic Focus

- Kliegman, Isabel Radow. *Tarot and the Tree of Life*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, Theosophical Publishing House, 1997.

Ritual Focus

- Amaral, Geraldine, and Nancy Brady Cunningham. *Tarot Celebrations: Honoring the Inner Voice*. York Beach, ME: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1997.

Meditative Focus

Sterling, Stephen Walter. *Tarot Awareness: Exploring the Spiritual Path*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2001.

Reading Focus

Ricklef, James. *Tarot Tells the Tale: Explore Three-Card Readings Through Familiar Stories*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2003.

Advice Focus

Banzhaf, Hajo. *The Crowley Tarot: The Handbook to the Cards by Aleister Crowley and Lady Frieda Harris*. Stamford, CT: U.S. Games Systems, Inc., 1999.

Jayanti, Amber. *Living the Tarot*. North Hollywood, CA: Newcastle Publishing, 1988.

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Nichols, Sallie. *Jung and Tarot: An Archetypal Journey*. York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1980.

Renée, Janina. *Tarot: Your Everyday Guide*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2000.

Intermediate-Level Books

In this category, I have one hands-down favorite, *Seventy-Eight Degrees of Wisdom: A Book of Tarot*, by Rachel Pollack (National Book Network, 1997). Some fabulous readers began with this book. I can't say enough about it, but see it more as an intermediate-level book or one for the advanced beginner. Ms. Pollack is not just a fabulous Tarot teacher, she is a consummate storyteller. She presents multiple layers

of Tarot knowledge in an effortless manner that is both easy to read and immensely satisfying. If you are a serious Tarotist you will own and love this book. Other intermediate recommendations:

Banzhaf, Hajo. *The Crowley Tarot: The Handbook to the Cards by Aleister Crowley and Lady Frieda Harris*. Stamford, CT: U.S. Games Systems, Inc., 1999.

Jayanti, Amber. *Living the Tarot*. North Hollywood, CA: Newcastle Publishing, 1988.

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Nichols, Sallie. *Jung and Tarot: An Archetypal Journey*. York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1980.

Wang, Robert. *An Introduction to The Golden Dawn Tarot: Including the Original Documents on Tarot from the Order of the Golden Dawn with Explanatory Notes*. Stamford, CT: U.S. Games Systems, Inc., 1992.

Advanced-Level Books

Case, Paul Foster. *The Tarot: A Key to the Wisdom of the Ages*. Los Angeles, CA: Builders of Adytum Ltd., 1947.

Crowley, Aleister. *The Book of Thoth*. York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1969.

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- Eakins, Pamela. *Tarot of the Spirit*. York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1992.
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- Noble, Vicki. *Motherpeace: A Way to the Goddess Through Myth, Art, and Tarot*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994.
- Turk, Julia. *Navigators Tarot of the Mystic Sea*. Stamford, CT: U.S. Games Systems, Inc., 2003.
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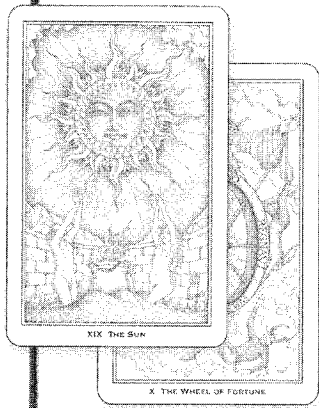
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