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In memory of Kathleen Valentine, fellow writer, artist, friend, and one of the most talented people I've ever known



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Introduction

RECORDING YOUR MAGICKAL JOURNEY

You probably wouldn't be reading this book if you weren't already curious about the tarot. Many turn to this most elegant oracle because they've reached a crossroads in their lives, or they're in the midst of a crisis and need help. Others are drawn to the tarot initially because of its fascinating artwork. If you're exploring a magickal path as a witch, you've probably stumbled upon the tarot already and want to learn more.

The tarot shows you what lies beneath the surface of situations and what's really going on in those shadowy realms beyond your ordinary range of vision. It lets you gaze into the future and see what's likely to happen. It shines light on murky matters—including your own subconscious motivations. It gives you a broader perspective so you can make better decisions. In short, it's your magick mirror, your wise counselor, a scout who goes ahead to check out the lay of the land, and your brutally honest best friend.

MAGICK AND THE TAROT

You can't separate the tarot from the practice of magick and witchcraft—they're entwined. Look at the card called The Magician—he's card number one in what's known as the Major Arcana. Right there on the

table before him lie the four main tools in a witch's "toolbox": the wand, chalice, pentagram, and sword/athame. Look a little further and you'll realize the four suits of the tarot's Minor Arcana symbolize the four elements (earth, air, fire, and water) that witches and other magicians work with in rituals and spellcraft. For more on all this, consult my books The Modern Guide to Witchcraft, The Modern Witchcraft Spell Book, and The Modern Witchcraft Grimoire.

The images that illustrate this book were created by two noted magick workers, Arthur Edward Waite and Pamela Colman Smith, both members of an influential mystical order known as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Consequently, the symbols, colors, numbers, and other features on the cards convey magickal information. Although many people start their exploration into the tarot with this popular pack of cards, you can use any deck that appeals to you—and there are thousands from which to choose. Many decks also incorporate astrology, the Kabbalah, shamanism, and other magickal systems familiar to witches.

Choose the Right Deck

Choosing a tarot deck is a highly personal matter. You'll find a number of decks designed with witches in mind, including the Witches Tarot, Tarot of the Witches, Everyday Witch Tarot, and Green Witch Tarot. You might also like the Sacred Circle Tarot and the Faery Wicca Tarot.

THE TAROT'S HISTORY AND MYSTERY

The tarot's roots go back at least to the fifteenth century, and perhaps a lot farther. Many researchers believe it started out as a card game in Renaissance Europe, although other theories abound. In Chapter 2, you can read about some of the ways people in those days used cards both for entertainment and for telling fortunes. The tarot's history is rich, complex, and a bit murky. It will probably always remain a mystery—and that's part of its appeal.

If you want to learn more about the tarot's origins and evolution, you'll find lots of interesting material online and in the many books that have been written about this enigmatic oracle, in addition to what I touch on here. If you don't care, you can skip right over that chapter.

You don't need to know anything about where the tarot came from or how it evolved in order to use it. The whole point of this book is to jump right in. Still, you might enjoy discovering the who, what, when, where, and why behind this amazing oracle that's held us in its thrall all these centuries.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Getting a tarot reading from a professional cartomancer can be a most educational and enlightening experience. However, you can do readings for yourself—in fact, many people learn the meanings of the cards by experimenting on themselves. It isn't necessary for every practicing witch to be able to do tarot readings, but it's a very useful skill that will help you in other aspects of your craft.

In writing this book, I've tried to make an esoteric and intricate mystical system accessible to those of you who are just starting out on this journey. To that end, I've explained in Part II each of the seventy-eight cards of a typical tarot deck in what I hope is a user-friendly way, combining commonly accepted interpretations with what I've gleaned from my many years of experience. Until you become proficient at doing readings, you can look up these general meanings. With practice, you'll become adept at interpretation and come to your own, unique understanding of the tarot.

In Part III, I've included some of my favorite tarot "spreads"—patterns that put the individual cards into a context during a reading. In Part IV, I share lots of spells from my personal grimoire that use tarot cards in magickal ways.

In time, you may decide to purchase more than one tarot pack. I recommend using one for readings and another for magick work. If you decide to do readings for other people, I suggest using one deck for yourself and another when you read for other people. That means you may eventually become the proud owner of at least three tarot packs. Over the years, I've owned about 200 different decks—yes, they can get addicting. Many people collect tarot packs for the artwork alone, and some rare, famous decks now reside in museums or the private collections of wealthy individuals.

DOES THE TAROT WORK?

Regardless of the beauty, wonder, and mystery of the tarot, it probably wouldn't have stood the test of time if it didn't work—as an oracle, a tool for self-discovery, a meditation aid, a guide for personal growth, and an adjunct to magickal practice. Although our ancestors may have dabbled in it as a mere amusement, that's not why most of us turn to the tarot today.

Perhaps you're still asking: Can the tarot really predict the future and reveal hidden information? Can it give me insight into the past and how I might handle the present? Can it help me solve problems in my life, improve my relationships with others, and fulfill my potential?

The best way to find out is to try it yourself.



Chapter 1

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT ORACLES

What will tomorrow bring? Since ancient times, people throughout the world have sought answers to this question by consulting oracles. As a witch, you may already be familiar with oracles and even use them yourself. Do you gaze into a treasured crystal ball or a magick mirror to see beyond your ordinary realm of vision? Watch smoke waft away from a ritual fire or stare into the flickering flame of a candle to gain insight? Have you cast runes, consulted the *I Ching*, or dowsed with a pendulum in search of answers? Or perhaps asked a psychic or shaman for advice?

The most famous oracle of all in the ancient world was the Oracle at Delphi. Thousands of years ago, the Greeks trekked to Mount Parnassus (about 75 miles from Athens) to petition this famous priestess for advice. While in a trance, she tuned in to the divine realm and allowed a deity to speak through her. Meanwhile in China, court astrologers of the Zhou dynasty interpreted upcoming events in the stars, clouds, rain, and wind. The rulers of ancient Sumeria and Babylonia looked to diviner priests to reveal the future. In today's confusing world, we can still turn to oracles for insight and guidance—sometimes oracles are the only reliable road maps.

WHAT IS AN ORACLE ANYWAY?

Divination is the art of predicting the future. The word literally means "the practice of letting the divine realm manifest." An oracle may be a person with special abilities to see beyond the limits of the visible world. Physical tools such as tarot cards and runes are also called oracles.

Oracles give you access to information you can't perceive through ordinary means. They connect you with your subconscious or inner knowing. They also serve as a link to divine wisdom or higher mind. When you ask an oracle for advice, some part of you may already know the answer to your question—the oracle enables you to access that knowledge hidden deep within and bring it into the open so you can use it. Through the use of oracles you can even tap into cosmic knowledge contained in what's sometimes called the Akashic Record.

"The whole world is an omen and a sign. Why look so wistfully in a corner?... The voice of divination resounds everywhere and runs to waste unheard, unregarded, as the mountains echo with the bleatings of cattle."

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Everyday Oracles

You've already used oracles, even if you didn't know it. Every time you toss a coin and call "heads" or "tails" before making a decision, you're consulting an oracle. When you look at a woolly caterpillar's coloring to determine whether the coming winter will be harsh or mild, you're divining the future. Remember those daisy petals you plucked when you were a kid to find out if the person you had a crush on loved you? That flower was an oracle too.

Predictive signs exist around you all the time, everywhere, if you choose to see them. When I find coins on the ground, for instance, I know I'll soon receive money. Many of us see visions or images in dreams that foretell upcoming situations. Some people randomly open a favorite book or religious text and consider the first passage they read as guidance. Others turn on the radio and listen for meaning in the first song that plays. The appearance of certain animals and birds may also hold significance. Anything can be an oracle. The tarot, in my opinion, is

one of the most elegant and intricate of all—which is why it's remained so popular all these years.

Frithirs

Celtic oracles known as *frithirs* served as prognosticators for the Scots. Four times a year, on the first Monday of each quarter, the frithir would fast, then step outside blindfolded just before sunrise. Upon removing her blindfold, she opened her eyes and interpreted the meaning of the first thing she saw.

Using Oracles

Oracles operate on the principle that symbols trigger intuition. (We'll talk more about symbols in Chapter 3.) When you lay out tarot cards, cast runes, or scry with a crystal ball, you open yourself to receive information from your higher mind and the spirit world. As witches, we continually seek guidance and input from the higher realms, as well as from our own inner wisdom. We hone our intuition through meditation, dreamwork, ritual, spellcasting, and other practices. We know we're integrally connected with our own beautiful planet and with the cosmos. We realize we can benefit—and help others—if we establish better connections between our conscious awareness and those other wondrous, mysterious loci of wisdom that exist within and around us. That's why we turn to oracles, because they serve as conduits between heaven and earth and let us see situations from a broader perspective.

Your willingness to receive guidance from a source other than your everyday, rational thinking will enable you to gain clear, meaningful insights from the tarot and other oracles. If you're skeptical about the possibility of seeing into the future or doubt the validity of the answers you receive, you'll block the flow of information. Try to keep an open mind. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose.

POPULAR ORACLES

Lots of divination devices and systems can help you gain insight into your past, present, and future. You may already be familiar with some of them—or at least you're curious about them. Some are complex and

require time to master. Astrology and tarot fall into this category, but don't let that deter you from studying either—the benefits will be worth the effort. Others, such as the Ouija board, can be used successfully by novices. Anything can serve as an oracle.

Divining from Seashells

In *Ocean Oracle*, Michelle "Shelley" Hanson considers 200 seashells as tools for divination. According to Hanson, "When you are attracted to—or bothered by—a particular shell, messages can surface from the wisdom attached to that shell. Similar to a tarot reading, the shells can reveal valuable information and facilitate positive growth."

Divination Devices

Beautifully illustrated tarot cards are the most popular oracle—you can choose from literally thousands of decks on the market. In addition to the tarot, you might like to try some of the following popular divination devices. These tools let you discover more about yourself and give you a glimpse of what's likely to happen in the future. They can also alert you to aspects of situations you might not be aware of or reveal things about people—and yourself—that you didn't realize before.

- Runes—The word *rune* means "secret" or "mystery." Most people think of the early Norse alphabet when they hear the word *runes*. (If you're a fan of J.R.R. Tolkien's books, you've already heard about runes and perhaps used them.) The most popular alphabet contains twenty-four letters, and each letter is named for an animal, object, condition, or deity. If you have Celtic blood running in your veins, you might enjoy consulting Ogham runes, based on trees.
- Pendulum—A pendulum usually consists of a small weight, such as a crystal, hung from a short chain or cord. You hold the chain, letting the pendulum "bob" dangle at the end of it, while you ask a simple question. The pendulum's movement—back and forth, side to side, around and around—has meaning and answers your question.
- I Ching—For three thousand years, the I Ching (pronounced eeching), or Book of Changes, has been used in China and the East.

This ancient oracle, which deals with the relationships between individuals, society, and the Divine, is thought to have been created by Confucius. It contains sixty-four patterns called hexagrams, each made up of six lines. Each hexagram and each line within it has a meaning.

• Crystals—When you think of a fortuneteller, does the image of a woman in a turban gazing into a crystal ball come to mind? You really can look into a crystal and see beyond your normal range of vision. A genuine crystal ball or large piece of quartz crystal contains all sorts of natural irregularities that help spark your imagination. Turn it in different directions and you'll see different scenarios. This is called scrying. You can also scry with other reflective surfaces, such as dark mirrors or pools of water.

Nostradamus's Scrying

The famous sixteenth-century seer Nostradamus gazed into a bowl of water for hours at a time, watching visions of the future appear before him. Scrying in this manner enabled him to predict events that would occur centuries later.

Divination Systems

The tarot is both a device and a system for gaining insight, guidance, and answers to life's questions. In the chapters that follow, we'll delve into the secrets of this magickal oracle. As you pursue your path of wisdom, you might also enjoy learning more about other predictive systems that witches have studied and turned to since ancient times, including:

• Astrology—You probably know your sun sign, but that's just the tip of the iceberg. If you consult with a professional astrologer, he or she will calculate a birth chart for you that shows the positions of not only the sun at the moment of your birth but also the moon and planets (and other things too), as well as their relationships to each other and to the earth. Each heavenly body has its own energies that impact human beings, social and political situations, weather patterns, and earth changes. As you work with the tarot, you'll discover many connections between it and astrology. The four suits of the

tarot's Minor Arcana, for instance, correspond to the four elements fundamental to astrology: earth, air, fire, and water.

"The four elements . . . are the basic building blocks of all material structures and organic wholes. Each element represents a basic kind of energy and consciousness that operates within each of us."

—Stephen Arroyo, Astrology, Psychology,

And the Four Elements

• Numerology—Why are some years filled with activity and adventure, whereas others seem uneventful or calm? The answer lies in the predictive side of numerology. Each number has a distinctive resonance that corresponds to certain situations, feelings, or actions. One, for example, is the number of beginnings; five the number of change. By examining the numbers in a date, you can get a good idea of what might happen then. (We'll talk about number symbolism in Chapter 4. My book *The Everything® Wicca and Witchcraft Book* discusses other aspects of numerology and explains how to use it.) Numerology is an integral part of the tarot, as you'll soon see. The numbers on the cards hold secret meanings, and we'll talk about those in later chapters of this book.

The twenty-first century confronts us with unprecedented opportunities and challenges, many of which have no easy answers. The tarot and other divination aids serve as beacons, shining light into the darkness to help us see where we're going. Once you learn the symbolic language of the cards, you'll be able to access the hidden wisdom of the tarot and the magick behind it. In Part IV of this book, you'll even discover ways to use the cards in spellwork.

Explore. Engage your curiosity. Use your imagination. Keep an open mind and an open heart. Your future really is in the cards!

Chapter 2

THE ORIGINS OF THE TAROT

For hundreds of years, people like you have turned to this beautiful oracle for advice, guidance, and answers to important questions. Many theories exist about the tarot's beginnings. One says the cards date back more than 2,000 years to ancient Egypt and the great library in Alexandria. Another story tells us the Crusaders brought the tarot back with them from the Middle East. Yet another credits the Romani people with introducing the cards into Europe.

"R.J. Stewart suggests that the tarot had its origins in 'the storytelling traditions and images preserved by travelling entertainers, originally the bards or filid of Celtic culture.' He points out that the images of the tarot have clear connections with images described in the Vita Merlini, a text that pre-dates the earliest known tarot deck by three centuries. It clearly describes The Empress, The Hanged Man, the Wheel of Fortune, The Fool, and so on, which are derived from the bardic Celtic tradition of preserving images of the gods, goddesses, and cosmology."

—Anna Franklin, The Sacred Circle Tarot

RENAISSANCE CARDS GAMES OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS

We may never know if these theories hold truth. However, we do know there's a link between the tarot and Renaissance playing cards. You can see similarities in our modern-day poker decks as well.

Italy's Tarocchi

Beginning in the 1400s, Italian aristocrats used cards called *trionfi* (triumphs) to play a game known as *Il Trionfos*.

Wealthy people commissioned artists to create the cards, which were hand-painted or printed with carved woodblocks. These weren't mere gambling games, though—they were exercises in creativity. Players took the themes shown on the cards and used them as springboards for composing poems about each other. The earliest deck that still exists today is also one of the most beautiful: the Visconti Tarot, commissioned by the Duke of Milan in the mid-1400s. Many of the original cards from this deck, painted on gold and silver foil, are now housed in New York's Morgan Library & Museum.

Islamic Card Games

Playing card games became popular in the Arab world too, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—especially among the wealthy classes and high-ranking members of the military. One handsome deck, known as the Mamluk pack, had an important influence on the tarot as we know it. This deck contained four suits—coins, cups, swords, and polo sticks—as well as ten numbered cards and four court cards per suit, similar to what we see in the Minor Arcana today. We can assume the cards were used for telling fortunes as well as for gaming because they feature prognosticating rhymes such as:

As for the present that rejoices, thy heart will soon open up.

O thou who hast possessions, remain happy and thou shalt have a pleasant life. With the sword of happiness I shall redeem a beloved who will afterwards take my life.

What remains of the original deck now resides in Istanbul's Topkapi Museum, but you can see pictures of it on the website the World of Playing Cards at www.wopc.co.uk.

The Spanish Card Game of Love

The Spanish nobility in the fifteenth century played a game called *Juego de Naypes* with forty-nine colorful cards. These cards were used to tell fortunes and reveal secrets, particularly in matters of love. Divided into four suits based on women—maidens, wives, widows, and nuns—the

cards showed what someone loved or desired most. Each card had a verse written on it, composed of the same number of lines as the card's number.

By the seventeenth century, professional "cartomancers" (fortune-tellers who saw the future in the cards) were plying their trade in Spain. These card readers laid out cards in patterns much like the tarot spreads we use today.

"[In the nineteenth century] a French occultist who called himself Eliphas Lévi linked the cards to the large and complex body of Jewish mysticism and theosophy known as Kabbalah. The historic basis for such a connection is questionable; the thousands of pages of Kabbalistic texts make no mention of cards or paintings. And yet, the idea remains compelling. The Kabbalah structures itself around the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet; the Major Arcana consists of twenty-two trumps. The Kabbalah speaks of four worlds of existence and ten stations on the tree of life; the Tarot contains four suits, each with ten numbered cards and four court cards."

—RACHEL POLLACK, SALVADOR DALI'S TAROT

TAROT IN THE MODERN ERA

Many early tarot decks featured beautiful designs but lacked the storytelling imagery we're familiar with today. This made them more challenging to read. Along with an interest in Spiritualism and ritual magick at the turn of the twentieth century came a renewed enthusiasm for the tarot—and a new way of relating to it.

The Tarot's Two Books

The tarot decks we use today are made up of two "books": the Major Arcana and the Minor Arcana. The word *arcana* means "mysteries or secrets." The Minor Arcana in a typical deck contains fifty-six cards: four suits with ten numbered cards and four court cards in each. It resembles the early playing cards from the Renaissance as well as our present-day poker decks (except, of course, poker decks contain only three court cards per suit). The Major Arcana consists of twenty-two cards, which also bear numbers from zero (The Fool) to twenty-one (The World).

The Minor Arcana cards describe mundane, everyday events and experiences. Those in the Major Arcana show cosmic, spiritual, or divine forces—destiny or fate, if you like—at work.

"The Major Arcana cards deal directly with facets of our soul: the light, the dark, our dreams, fears, wishes, and determinations."

—Jane Stern, Confessions of a Tarot Reader

The Rider-Waite-Smith Deck

In 1909, the tarot underwent a significant change in its long and colorful history. Arthur Edward Waite, one of the most noted occultists of the modern era, commissioned Pamela Colman Smith, an artist and theatrical designer, to create a unique tarot deck. Both individuals were members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an influential mystical society of which Waite became the Grand Master—that's why the cards in this pack contain magickal symbols associated with the Golden Dawn. Under Waite's guidance, Smith produced seventy-eight paintings, which became the cards of the tarot deck. The London company, William Rider & Son, published the deck in 1910.

The most notable feature of this deck was that all the cards, not only the Major Arcana, depicted "storytelling" scenes that conveyed their meanings. Now you could look at a card and get a sense of what it was all about. The pictures let you read the cards intuitively. Glance at the Ten of Swords, which shows a man lying on the ground with ten swords sticking in his back, and you immediately think of treachery, deception, and pain. The joyful young women dancing on the Three of Cups clearly speak of revelry, happy times, and friendship.

Since the deck's initial publication, a number of variations have evolved. Many other tarot decks have also been based on Smith's simple yet powerful designs. More than a hundred years after its creation, the Rider-Waite-Smith tarot remains the most popular and influential deck today.

The Thoth Tarot

People tend to love or hate the Thoth Tarot, another of the most important decks of the twentieth century. Painted by Lady Frieda Harris under the direction of the infamous English occultist and "bad boy" magician, Aleister Crowley, between 1938 and 1943, its striking images and brilliant colors appeal to some tarotists and disturb others—which isn't surprising considering the controversial man behind the deck's creation. It wasn't published until 1969, however, after both Crowley and Harris had died, and has never been out of print since.

The Thoth Tarot's imagery draws on many different esoteric, scientific, spiritual, and philosophical systems including alchemy, astrology, and magick. (Thoth, by the way, was an important deity and scribe to the gods in Egyptian mythology.) The names Crowley gave to the Major Arcana cards in his pack differ somewhat from those in the Rider-Waite-Smith deck—for example, he called card number fourteen Art instead of Temperance. Crowley also chose different names for some of the court cards, which readers may find confusing.

"The Tarot is a pictorial representation of the Forces of Nature as conceived by the Ancients according to a conventional symbolism. At first sight one would suppose this arrangement to be arbitrary, but it is not. It is necessitated by the structure of the universe, and in particular of the Solar System, as symbolized by the Holy Qabalah."

—Aleister Crowley, The Book of Thoth

Tarot Innovations

Today, tens of thousands of tarot decks exist, and artists are designing more all the time. Whether you're of Celtic, Japanese, or Native American heritage, enjoy gardening or baseball, have a fondness for cats or unicorns, you'll find a deck that speaks to you. Vampires, zombies, and even gummy bears have found their way into the tarot.

Nearly all tarot cards are rectangular, although one notable deck—the Motherpeace Tarot—features round cards. It hit the marketplace in the 1970s along with the rise of feminism, and celebrates 30,000 years of women's culture. Some decks have oversized cards, such as those in the Renaissance packs; others are made up of miniature cards that fit easily into your pocket or purse. Some contain more than the usual seventy-eight cards, perhaps even a few blank ones so you can create your own. Some tarot decks come packaged with companion books that interpret the cards according to their designers' philosophy or focus.

Many original decks that have not been printed can be viewed online. Blog sites and Facebook groups provide lively forums for tarot enthusiasts to share ideas. You can even get free, instant tarot readings online. As technology continues developing, we'll undoubtedly see more exciting innovations, for the tarot continues to be a living, evolving medium.

MAGICK, WITCHCRAFT, AND THE TAROT

Maybe you've been walking the path of the witch for years and have recently developed an interest in the tarot. Or, after reading tarot cards for a while, you've found your way—perhaps by following the oracle's guidance—into the witches' world. However you got here, whatever inspired you to tread this path, welcome!

"Witches have had a special relationship with the tarot cards for centuries. Their lives have always been steeped in magic and mystery. Witches are natural clairvoyants and ideal psychic readers because they do not separate the spiritual from the mundane in their daily lives . . . Witches know that it is not enough to simply be psychic and see the future. We have a magical responsibility to share the power with our clients, helping them to avoid problems and reach life's fullest potential."

---WWW.SALEMTAROT.COM

Not all witches work with the tarot, but many do. As mentioned in the introduction, the tarot and witchcraft have many connections. When you look at The Magician, you'll instantly recognize on the card four tools witches use in magick work: the wand, chalice, pentagram, and sword/athame. The magus depicted here raises one hand toward the sky and points the other at the ground, representing the axiom "as above, so below" and the union of heaven and earth. In some decks, these four tools also appear on the card called The World. The four suits of the Minor Arcana are named for these tools and symbolize the four elements—fire, water, earth, and air respectively—that witches recognize as the energetic forces operating in our world.