

introduction

TAROT IS A SELF-HELP TOOL. A WAY OF ORGANIZING YOUR THOUGHTS and finding solutions to your personal or professional problems. If that sounds mundane, it kind of is.

As far as I'm concerned, there's nothing magical in this deck of cards, and you don't need a deeply spiritual side to understand them. These cards cannot tell the future or tell you what to do. Rather, they're intended to help you figure these things out for yourself.

That's a beautiful thing. That's what fascinates me about Tarot. What you're looking at, when you're looking at a Tarot cards, is something totally meaningless and random. Like the static between stations on the radio, or the hum of a waterfall.

And yet, we can make something meaningful out of this.

I'm fascinated by our ability as otherwise rational human beings to see what we want to see, or, hopefully, what we need to see, in the random noise that is our lives. And in the random noise that is a Tarot reading. We're not always going to have clearly defined life lessons to learn from, so each of us needs to be able to find those lessons using only the jumbled stimuli around us. Or to find what we need by looking at nothing at all. It's kind of the same thing.

I've chosen a very minimalist art style here, because I think it's important to remember that there's nothing here but what we choose to put here. It was inspired by the diagrams you get from smashing things together in particle accelerators. When I was little, I equated those funny spirals and criss-crossing lines with learning. With making sense of the unknown.

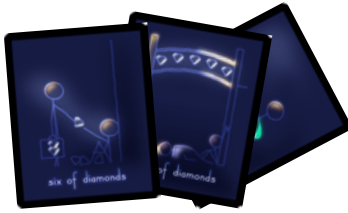
To me, there's no difference between science and self-improvement. They're both about experimenting, and careful observation, and most importantly, a willingness to step back from whatever you're working on and see it from a new point of view.

So I encourage you to have a look at these meaningless sequences of images, and see if you can find something worthwhile in there. Because, in the end, meaning isn't found. It's made.



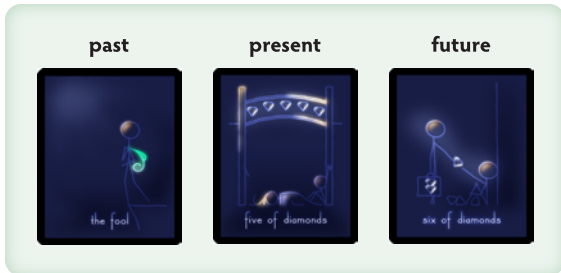
the basic idea

TAROT CARDS ARE JUST PIECES OF PAPER WITH PICTURES ON THEM.



They really don't mean anything by themselves. They're just disconnected pictures, without any kind of meaningful structure.

With a little organization, we can make something like a story.



Here, the cards are neatly arranged and each image has been given a specific, unique context in which to interpret it, as if this were a timeline. Sometime in the past, there was this guy who wasn't paying attention to where he was going and he walked off a cliff. Now, he's homeless, living under a bridge. Sometime in the future, a stranger will help him.

This is a very literal interpretation of the images. With Tarot cards, we want a more generic approach: someone made a mistake because they were absent minded, and wound up feeling abandoned and depressed. Or maybe the person in the past and present is the standing figure in the future, helping others. There's no right answer.

making it personal

TO GET THE MOST OUT OF TAROT, TRY TO SEE THESE PICTURES AS A STORY based on your own life. Look at the Past card. Have you done something in the past that felt like you were stupidly walking off a cliff? Keep that in mind. It's part of this story now. Look at the Present. Is there something happening now, something related to the past event you picked, that's left you lonely or low on resources, wishing you had more? That's part of this story too.

The last card, the Future, is something that might happen. Maybe you should keep an eye out for people who can help. Or maybe the solution to the present problem is to help another person.

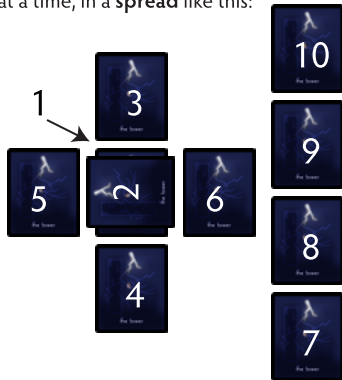
This process of thinking about how the cards relate to you is called getting a **reading**. The purpose of the reading is to get you to learn from past experiences that you might have forgotten about, notice things in the present that you may be overlooking, and see possible outcomes and



this card is not about falling off of buildings during thunderstorms.

readings

A TYPICAL TAROT READING CONSISTS OF TWO PEOPLE: A **READER** AND A **querent**. The querent begins by thinking of a problem they're having, that they would like help with. The reader shuffles the cards and sets them out, one at a time, in a **spread** like this:



Before each card is revealed, the reader describes the context in which the upcoming card should be seen. They then reveal the next card and briefly describe its meaning. Each card represents a worry, hope, event, or person in the querent's life.

The querent then takes a moment to match up the image and meaning of the card to the context described, and tries to figure out how that might relate to the problem they're thinking of.

1: the present

The querent's current situation in concrete terms, or the querent's current mindset.

2: an obstacle

The querent's stated problem, or another barrier to their well-being that they may want to consider.

3: short-term goal

That which the querent wants, or should be working for.

4: point of view

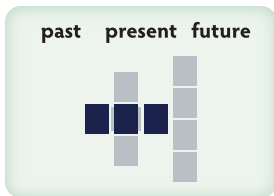
The assumptions the querent is making and the mindset from which they're operating.

5: the past

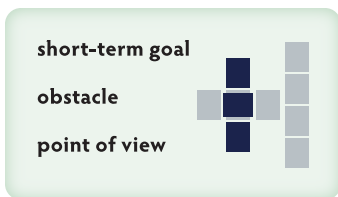
Something that influenced the development of the current situation.

6: the future

Something the querent will do, a person they will meet, or something to avoid.



the three horizontal, upright cards in the cross form a linear narrative.



the three vertical cards in the cross describe the querent's present situation in more detail.

7: description

The querent, from the point of view of other people. This could be from the point of view of friends, colleagues, or a neutral party.

8: identity

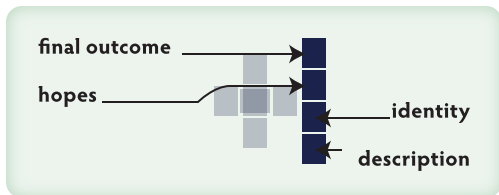
How the querent sees themselves.

9: hopes

Unlike the short term goal card, this card broadly suggests the motivation for the querent in a variety of situations.

10: final outcome

The long-term resolution the querent's stated problem, or a general description of the querent's future.



the four vertical cards on the side describe the querent in general terms that are independent of the present problem the querent is experiencing.

the cards

TAROT CARDS ARE DIVIDED INTO TWO GROUPS: **MINOR ARCANA**, FOR ordinary things, and **Major Arcana**, which are more dramatic issues.

minor arcana

THE MINOR ARCANA ARE THE 56 CARDS THAT THAT MENTION A **SUIT** IN THE title. Each suit contains 14 cards that explore similar issues:

Hearts represent desire, love, or compassion.

Diamonds represent money or material things.

Quills represent hard work and action.

Brushes represent creativity and passion.

These symbols are used to describe the feelings of the people in the cards. For example, in the images



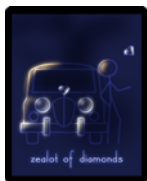
to the left and right, someone is deperately trying to hold on to two objects. But the person on the left might be having trouble with finances, and the person on the right might be juggling priorities, such as work and a social life.



The Ace always represents an abundance of something, and the nine other numbered cards represent events or feelings.



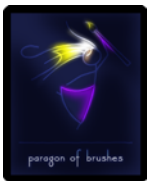
The four other cards in each suit are **court cards**. There are 16 court cards total, each representing a person with a different personality.



The suit of a court card represents someone's values: which suit they think about the most. A pragmatic person might be in the quills, while a more free spirited one might be in the hearts or brushes.

Suppose you have some work that's overdue. If you are a diamonds person, you might buy new tools to help you work faster. If you value brushes, you might look for a creative way to boost your efficiency. And if your suit is quills, you'd just work long hours until you were finished.

In addition to having different values, different people solve problems in different ways. They may use **instinct**, feeling their way around problems and using past experiences as a guide. Or, they may favor **reason**, carefully doing research and analyzing the results of their actions.



And lastly, everyone deals with others in a different way. A person may either **embody** their suit, humbly working hard; or they may **project** it, inspiring others.



The four kinds of court cards deal with various combinations of these ways of thinking.

	embody	project
instinct	The dreamer is quiet and playful. They enjoy doing work for it's own sake, even when their results do not turn out well.	The zealot is passionate, but they have trouble finding practical solutions to problems. Their idealism, however, can inspire others.
reason	The paragon lives by their values, serving as a role model for others. They are eager to accept challenges, and shy away from publicity.	The mentor is a good teacher. They can easily spot the strengths and weaknesses in the works of others, and offer useful guidance.

major arcana

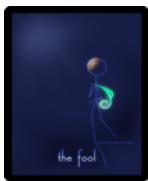
WHILE THE MINOR ARCANA FOCUSES ON SPECIFIC types of issues, the Major Arcana more broadly describes dramatic events or intense feelings.

Some of the cards depict people, who may be people the querent knows, someone the querent might become, or a more intangible emotional issue.



'strength' here could mean physical or emotional strength, or even a strong financial base.

major arcana reference



the fool

The Fool is starting a long journey, either physical or emotional. It could be a new job, a new school, or a new relationship. He's excited and optimistic, but he is paying too little attention to the details of the path he is taking. If he does not start approaching things from a more practical point of view, he is likely to get into trouble.



the magician

Bursting with knowledge, the Magician is a master of his environment. He has a deep understanding of the behavior of different people and the properties of different materials, and can get them to do nearly anything he wants. His tools are extensions of his body; his subordinates are extensions of his will.

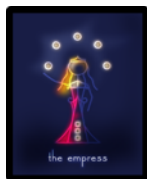
the high priestess

The High Priestess is a master of coordination. Calm and calculating, she can take any complex system and make it manageable. She can turn destructive forces into productive ones. She uses everything around her to her advantage and sees relationships between unrelated things that others do not.



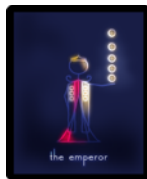
the empress

The Empress is a symbol of fertility and prosperity. She can represent parenting or being nurturing in general: allowing things to grow organically, lending them support, and letting them develop in their own way. She also represents a simple sensuality: taking joy in the smell of food, or the warmth of another person.



the emperor

The Emperor is a symbol of control, order and authority. He could be a strict parent who demands discipline and accountability from his children, for whom he provides a sense of security. He can also represent order and structure in general: laws, rules or procedures that must be followed.





the hierophant

The Hierophant dictates institutional values. He is not someone you'd know personally, but he sets protocol for a large group, giving rewards for good behavior and punishing those who don't adhere to the norm.

He could be a priest, a politician, or the head of a school. He could also represent tradition as a concept, rather than an actual person.



the lovers

The Lovers is about overcoming insurmountable obstacles to be with the people you love or do something you're passionate about. It may represent a romantic relationship, though this is not necessarily the case. The card broadly speaks of courage, dedication and hope when success seems impossible.



the chariot

Frequently, we think that having more cutting edge tools or exceptional skills will help us reach our goals. And while these things are useful, greatness comes from the precise application of the abilities

we already possess. The Chariot represents this sort of precision: raw power, harnessed for maximum effect.

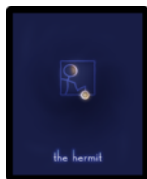
strength

Strength can mean physical strength, but more frequently, this card speaks of emotional strength: the courage to defend your beliefs, the will to keep fighting, or the patience to work through a long and frustrating problem. Strength is sometimes a quiet, humble thing, that may be hard to see.



the hermit

Sometimes, we all need to look at our problems with a quiet mind. The Hermit represents this kind of introspective solitude -- either the presence of it or the need for it. This need not be something so drastic as withdrawing from society; it may simply represent a short pause to clear your mind.



the wheel of fortune

People's lives can often change suddenly because of unpredictable events. The Wheel of Fortune may represent such a change in the past. It is also a reminder that luck affects much of what we do or fail to do. Thriving ventures can crumble, and the poorest people can discover wealth in unlikely places.





justice

The Justice card represents fairness and equality; justice as an ideal. If you have been wronged somehow, this card may be an indication that things will be corrected. If you have done something that hurt another person, it may be time to take responsibility for it and take it upon yourself to make the world a more just place.



the hanged man

The Hanged Man is a card about solving problems by doing nothing. By relaxing, by just hanging around near a problem rather than frantically trying to solve it, we may see it in a new way. It's also a card of detachment: sometimes, we need to be dispassionate about a problem if we want to find its solution.

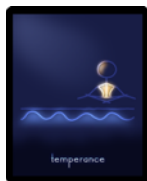


death

Death is a somewhat oddly named card. While to some extent it represents death in a literal sense, it is fundamentally a positive card. It primarily represents the sort of rebirth that a metaphorical death can bring: we can recycle old materials, learn from past disasters, and reinvent ourselves when we seem empty and lifeless.

temperance

Temperance is about finding balance. It's doing work at a steady pace that won't leave you burnt out, and having regularly scheduled fun that isn't too self-indulgent. It can also represent the need for compromise in general: in a relationship, with conflicting desires, or helping two other people work together.



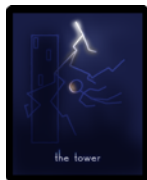
the devil

The Devil is a symbol of deception. It may represent a dishonest person or a situation that is not what it seems. It could also mean that you're deceiving yourself, willfully ignoring an uncomfortable truth. In any case, this card is a suggestion to seek out the truth.



the tower

The Tower represents some kind of catastrophic event. It could be anything: a project gone horribly wrong, or a romance that's about to end badly. It's the most worrisome card in the Tarot, and if it shows up anywhere in a reading, it's a warning to be very careful about what you're doing, and to pay close attention to your surroundings.





the star

The Star represents a quiet, calm, amorphous sort of hope. It's not about resolving desperate situations or finding concrete solutions to problems. It's simply wondering if things could be better, even if they are good; dreaming about future events that are unlikely to happen; or being inspired by something larger than oneself.



the moon

The Moon represents imagination and dreams. These can be good, but they can also be deceptive: to imagine a strange, wonderful thing happening, a person does not need to be able to contemplate its plausibility or possible negative side effects. As inspiring as they are illusory, certain dreams require caution.



the sun

The Sun is a symbol for knowledge: literally, shedding light on things. It's about realizing something you never knew, and understanding something so completely that it becomes a part of you. It may represent insight you already have, a chance to apply your expertise, or a discovery you're about to make.

judgement

The Judgement card represents your whole worth as a person. Your entire history, your mindset, your every action. It may represent an event in the past where somebody was evaluating you, or it may suggest that you need to step back and see how your life as a whole is doing, because it needs changing.



the world

The World represents a great accomplishment, perhaps finishing something you've been meaning to do all your life. It's about feeling like you have everything you ever wanted, at least for a while. Things may change, of course, but the World itself is a card of genuine happiness and fulfillment.



hearts reference

hearts



HEARTS ARE THE SUIT OF LOVE, passion, and desire: that which should be experienced, not analyzed; seen, but not judged. The ace represents a feeling of perfect fulfillment and happiness: strong relationships or work that is going well. It is not about achieving specific goals; rather, it speaks of a more subdued, but long-term sense of contentment.

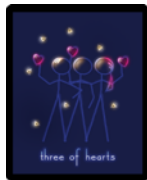
two of hearts

The two of hearts represents a healthy, happy relationship. There is mutual understanding, compassion and respect here, and at least for the moment, things are going well.



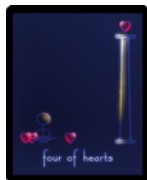
three of hearts

The three of hearts represents friendship.



four of hearts

The four of hearts represents being discontent with what you have, even when what you have is good.





five of hearts

The five of hearts is about loss -- wrecking a good relationship or losing a fulfilling job.



six of hearts

This card represents happy childhood memories.

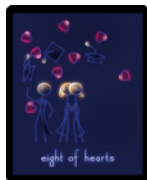


seven of hearts

The seven of hearts is a card of dreams and wishes.

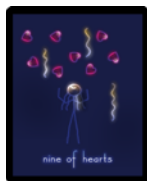
eight of hearts

The eight of hearts is a card of graduation. It may be graduation from school, but it could also represent a promotion or the completion of any large task.



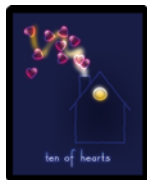
nine of hearts

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ten of hearts

The ten of hearts represents a happy home, a happy family.





dreamer of hearts

Dreamers of hearts are the sorts of people who are always smiling or humming to themselves, always ready with a joke or a compliment. They are relaxed and easy going, content to spend all of their time hanging out with friends. While they do very little that would be considered productive on their own, they are always available to help others.



zealot of hearts

The zealot of hearts is a free spirit, a fickle radical who bounces back and forth between causes. They may be a human rights activist for a couple years, and abruptly decide that environmental issues are more important to them. They are perpetually having personal epiphanies, working hard to find the perfect place for themselves.

paragon of hearts

The seven of hearts is a card of dreams and wishes.



mentor of hearts

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