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Using The 777 Tarot



by

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Background Information

1. The Origin of the Cards

The Original Cards

In my book, The Wrath of Aleister Crowley (Diamond Books, 1996), I described a set of tarot cards that once belonged to my grandmother. They were old, hand painted, and had been in the family for ages. I had always understood that my Grandma was half-gipsy, and she told me the cards had to pass alternately from man to woman and then from woman to man. It was a zigzag line of succession and its purpose was 'to protect the power'.

She could have given them to her own son, but she chose not to. She was a lady of strong opinions, was my Granny, and once she made her mind up she never changed it. According to her, my poor uncle showed no sign of having been "touched", whereas I did. Up to that point in my life, only one person had ever touched me—by a dirty old man in the cinema—but this was something different. If you are going to be able to make proper use of the cards then, in my Grandma's opinion, you should show some sign of having "caught their eye".

The Other World

Who were "they"? I asked, but it was never clearly spelled out; well, not in so many words. Every day of her life, my Granny made many vague references to absent groups that she referred to as "them". It was all highly confusing at times. She said that "they" were stingy with meat in the wartime rations; a different "they" didn't make films like they used to, and yet another "they" would start talking if I didn't change my underwear regularly.

Clearly, none of these were the ones whose eye was worth catching. The Beyond, and all it entailed, was her special "they". "We don't talk about them much", she said, "in the hope that they won't much trouble us". We —the ones who could touch you with a talent for using the Tarot Cards—well, it would not have been right to name them. It was best to leave such matters unspecified. "And besides," she added enigmatically, "Everybody knows them anyway."

How to Suck Eggs

You must have heard the expression: never teach your grandma how to suck eggs. All it means is: old people probably know better than you do. By whatever Byzantine route my Grandma arrived at her conclusion, she not only gave me her tarot cards, but also began at once to train me in using them. She did not deliver formal lessons. That was not her style. Instead, she just used them in front of me. She "did the cards"—that was the expression she used—for me, my mother, relatives and friends—with me at her side. Her name was not Nelly, by the way, but it might just as well have been.

To explain that last remark: I have a set of lessons, called 'Overture and Beginners', that I recorded for people toying with the idea of becoming Occultists. In them, I describe various methods of passing on information, and I explain that in Yorkshire textile mills, the best way of learning new skills was to sit by the side of an old hand who knew her job backwards. The overseers dubbed it 'sitting by Nelly'. Well, my Grandma had worked in mills and knew the method well. I shall use it myself when training a handful of others.

A Strong Spirit

The gift of such precious things astonished me. They were wrapped in a cloth and continued to live in the locked cupboard of the sideboard. Now, though, they let me into the secret of where they kept the key. The cards nestled next to a box of family photographs, insurance policies, the rent book and a bottle of whisky that intended only ever to be used for "funny turns". Strangely enough, I started having "funny turns" whenever I was alone in the house. I was only ten years old, I should point out, and I hid my habit by topping up the bottle with water. The next "funny turn" that my Mother had, she also got an unpleasant surprise. My grandma pointedly remarked: 'He doesn't get that from my side of the family!' But that's another story!

I mention this because the old lady was insistent that if ever you decided to "do the cards" then you needed a clear head. In her day, of course, this mainly meant no whiskey, but it also implied no high emotion, nothing to raise your blood pressure, and no buttons undone. The spirit should be clear. The mind must be clear. Your sensitivity to colour and symbol must not be masked in any way. So, irrespective of current attitudes about the recreational use of drugs, they would interfere with the gift.

2. Form and Substance

Crumbly brittle flaky

When I first received the cards, their condition was already bad. As you might expect, they have become much worse since then. I am no expert on antique documents, but my guess would be that they may be three hundred years old. The colours had faded and the card support was so friable, each card had picked up a deckled edge.

In my twenties, when I was even sillier than I am today, I gave them a coat of varnish. My aim was to preserve them and toughen them up, but I am sorry to say that the results were disastrous. The colours darkened and the texture became brittle. The only benefit was that they were now damp-proof – not that I ever washed them.

Whoever painted the original pictures had done so with a simple eye and a restricted palette. They were more like illustrations from a child's book—simple outline drawings filled with flat colours. To my mind, the style is primitive or naïve, so when my publisher said my own style was similar, it did not altogether flatter my ego. He was right though. I have studied the cards all my life and I once made a forlorn attempt to paint copies. My plan was to safeguard the unique originals and to keep my own copies for everyday use. But I never finished them. To be honest, I never even got halfway. I had little enough patience in those days, and even less now.

The Risks

Traditional tarot cards, such as the famous Marseilles pack, keep costs of production down by making economies in design and cutting corners. The colour range, for example, is as narrow as possible—black plus three primary colours: blue, red and yellow. The court cards are basic while the value of all the other cards, instead of showing designs, display only pips.

With my cards – my grandmother's cards – each one is a distinctive picture and multicoloured. It would be costly to print such a set and their price in the shops would be prohibitively high. Any publisher will tell you that tarot cards do not sell in anything like the same quantities as books. A superior, fine art set like mine was not an attractive business proposition. With great regret, Diamond Books had decided the risks were too great, and that was that.

A Cunning Plan

However, the director of Diamond Books, a friend for many years, had always admired the cards. They intrigued him and the various images pleased his eye. He had once offered to buy them from me, but, as I pointed out, a fa-

mous pop star had once offered more and I had turned him down too. As the years passed though, the condition of the cards grew worse. The point came when I hardly dared touch them in case more bits fell off. It was time to do something drastic.

My mother died, at an advanced aged, in 1999. My publisher attended the funeral and, during the traditional funeral tea, we chatted. I made sure that talk turned once again to my tarot cards. His mouth set firmly, but this time I put a new proposition to him. If he would agree to take the gamble and publish the cards then I would make him a gift of the originals. They would be his to keep. He looked at me for a long time and sighed deeply. It was, he said, quoting an Italian philosopher, an offer he could not refuse.

A Long Process

It took almost three years to get them into the shops. The first part of the procedure was to have the original cards photographed by professionals. We scanned them electronically and then turned them into digital images. It was now obvious that facsimile reproduction was not a sensible option. The colours were too weak. The artwork was too rudimentary. The public would not go for it.

At the same time, restoration would be costly and time-consuming. We just could not take those costs on board as well. It was then that I realised how obscure the meanings of my cards were. I understood them, but only because of my Grandma's patience; strangers, and that meant the public, would despair of being able to interpret them. I was not about to surrender at this stage though, so there was only one thing for it: I would redraft the full set of cards myself.

3. The Cards' Uniqueness

Origins

It took me all of twelve months to paint the new images. I put in six hours a day and, while some took longer than others, each card took an average of three days. I did my best to stay faithful to the originals. I felt that it was right to respect the hand that had originally drafted them. At the same time though, I tried to bring the veiled meanings to the fore.

It is well to remind ourselves how Tarot cards first developed. Like inn-signs, they carried information to the eyes of a population that was largely illiterate. They began as records of pagan teachings that were about to be lost for ever. As Christianity spread through Europe, the church challenged the older spiritual ideas and persecuted them. The new religion tried to convert everyone and did not hesitate to destroy resistance. The Inquisition was established specifically to deal with the Cathars in France and, by the time the job was done, many thousands of people had perished.

Adaptations

The messages sheltered by the cards came from a wide variety of sources. Many of them derived from the mystery religions of Ancient Greece, the last traces of which survived until the sixth century AD. To escape detection, their true origins and meanings had to be camouflaged, so a simple ruse was used to dodge the heretic hunters. Everyone pretended that the cards were a story-telling game and a method of gambling. As such, they spread throughout the whole of Europe.

Today, there are wide differences in the appearance of playing cards. Those that are common in one country seem quaint in another. The colours have reduced and the court cards have simplified over time. I have used livelier colours and more expressive symbols in order to make the meanings more apparent. There were no restrictions on my palette and as a consequence my images are richer. My task throughout has been to design cards that we usable and to incorporate a learning curve. By sticking to the method provided and by referring to the set list of interpretations, anyone should be able to develop these skills gradually. Insight will come with experience.

Aesthetic Sensitivity

To arrive at such a fine level of sensitivity, you must stick to the procedures as I present them. You begin with a patient plod, but those early stages soon pass and, as ease and familiarity grow, so does your fluency. After that point, you may adapt the recommended method to your own personality. Make it yours. Depending on how often

you practice, it should take about six months to become accomplished.

Each person should seek to cultivate a unique rapport with his deck of cards. His method will be individual to him, and his approach will be peculiarly his own. He will be better suited to some clients than others, and his advice will be more telling in certain instances than in others. In short, each person will be a "specialist". This is why one's rapport with the cards has to be protected. Make the cards yours and look after them properly.

Dimensions and Number

The 777 deck is large. This makes for clear images, and it shows that it is not a game. There are more cards too: six suits instead of four, and a few extra trump cards. The word trump is an archaic use of 'triumph'; it sounds better than 'major arcana'. There are one hundred and eleven cards in total, and each bears a unique image.

When you buy them, the cards are in two packs for the sake of convenience. The Alpha Pack has all the familiar cards, but the Beta Pack contains the ones that are unique to the 777 deck. You may use the Alpha Pack straight away, and alter the meanings later. However, you will have to study a while before you can use the Beta Pack. If you are eager to begin, and if you mingle the two packs now, then start learning all the new meanings immediately.

New Baby, Same Name

Do not mix *alpha* cards with *beta* cards unless you change your interpretations too. As I said, I learned everything at my grandmother's side. Young and easily bored, she caught my attention by telling a story for each card. If ever I have time, I will write them down as *'The Tarot Tales'*.

Nowadays, reading the cards is child's play to me. I am not conscious of using any method. The process has become second nature. To help you develop similar facility, I have used a colour language and an iconographic system that will prompt an association of ideas. The images should invoke the most suitable meanings to spring into your mind. To see how I did this, you may like to compare the new cards with the originals as shown in the Appendix.

20 JUDGEMENT



Interpretation

An angel sounds the last trump that summons the dead from their graves.

A reckoning, but in a down to earth sense. Accounts are closed and debts paid. Gather your resources and be a little hard. You cannot afford to be soft or others will take advantage. Do not be too quick to judge. Submit evidence or facts to someone qualified. But keep an eye on things and remember that very few people are scrupulously honest.

You may find that someone has robbed you. Beware of anger and vicious retaliation. Something that was left unfinished, an affair in abeyance, comes to the surface again and demands your attention. There is a resumption .. perhaps of love but perhaps of hostilities. Better to deal with things rather than sweep them under the carpet.

Reversed

A relief. A weight off your mind. A burden off your shoulders. It is likely to be something that you would not wish to talk about. If you are feeling worried about your age, do seek someone who can cheer you up.

Each stage of life has its own beauties and it is silly always to hope for an eternal spring. The last verse of a song is every bit as beautiful as the first, and every symphony has its echoes in our hearts. Do not dabble in spirit séances.

JACK OF ACORNS - PAN



Interpretation

This strange creature has a young man's body but the legs of a goat. He is pouring water from a huge amphora into a stream, and stands amid a beautiful country scene with a fine building in the distance. This is the Greek god Pan, or the Roman Faunus. He is the Lord of Nature and of wild places.

This beautiful image stands for sheer unpredictability, or the way that wildness wriggles free from all restraint. A garden can turn to weeds or a meadow can become heathland again. It speaks of nature running riot and bursting forth in great profusion. It can also mean acts of foolishness or loss of control.

At other times, it refers to the crux, the nub or the central point of an intricate set of circumstances, and therefore it carries the meaning of a something rising to a climax. Success in an examination or test.

Depending on the context, it may also stand for either a younger person, or one who loves the rural life. A gardener or a horticulturist.

Reversed

When next to negative cards, this means stress even to the point of mental illness. Someone who loves the hustle and bustle of the city and the nightlife. An unexpected and unwelcome change in circumstances, though not a catastrophe.

FOUR OF CROWNS - INNARDS



Interpretation

A figure with a bloody dagger stands behind a gaping corpse. From a slash in the abdomen spill bloody entrails. Among the coils we see an imp, his hands thrusting forth a ruby snake.

This card can speak of post mortems, medical examinations or murder. It is more likely to show a marked change in life in the sense of someone being uprooted, moving a great distance, or changing their job just when things looked good. It is like a king abdicating or figurehead resigning. Mighty upheavals and restlessness.

It also speaks of severe nervous or neurological problems or a blow that shatters one's peace of mind. On rare occasions it points to the torture of prisoners or the suffering of young and inarticulate children.

Reversed

Your health, or that of someone dear, will improve. Life begins to take on a much rosier hue and affairs take a turn for the better. Someone may well set out on studies that lead to a career in medicine or some form of healing and therapy. If you need to look for some new form of treatment then it is likely to be helpful.

You could be more sexually active because appetite is about to grow strong. You have, or will soon have, a rewarding affinity that warms your heart.

SQUIRE OF CUPS - CENTURION



Interpretation

A soldier salutes a baby surrounded by serpents. He carries a sword and a white plume. Above is a symbol of divine vision.

Public notices, decrees, statements or announcements. A campaign is begun or an adventure started. This is a healthy indication for financial deals. Someone may wish to join a select body. A hearty welcome is in store. You will have new neighbours or colleagues are you will be made to feel very much at home.

If you are making enquiries or searching for something, you will probably find it. There is a large formal meal at which speeches are made.

+ Seven of Discs: a large sum of money changes hands.

+ King of Swords: very bad news from a court or a lawyer.

Reversed

Grave news for anyone having a connection with boats or the sea. A child is lost. An invalid is worse. Beware of someone who seems to pay lots of care and attention: they have ulterior motives.

Now is not the time to do anything that calls for utmost trust and confidence. You should tread carefully and proceed with caution. Some kind of breakage in the home could prove costly.

SIX OF DISCS - LION



Interpretation

A royal lion, crowned, sits on a red velvet cushion with gold cords and tassels. Its paw is upraised and holds a standard. Six gold coins are spread around.

Bravery, courage, heroism. This is a majestic card that augurs well for battles, soldiers and all things military. It also speaks well of any social campaign or charitable work. It is a positive sign for people working in politics, administration or government, but is a bad sign for anyone who is linked with smuggling or crime of any description. Claimants may win in litigation; competitors in sport are successful. On a smaller scale, some long-lost object is found.

+ Squire of Crowns [Reversed]: a serious assault.
+ Five of Wands: some permission is denied or an application is turned down.
+ Five of Acorns: a meeting in a hotel.

Reversed

Hostility. An attack on your person or on your mental equilibrium. Nervous tension and insomnia. Nightmares. In olden days we would have spoken of malevolent spirits or the evil eye. Draw in your horns, sit tight. Do not be drawn into a battle and do not respond to taunts

QUEEN OF SWORDS - DEMETER



Interpretation

In robes of ancient Greece, a woman holds a sword, that has stabbed a white cockerel. A devotee of the goddess Demeter makes sacrifice at the omphalos, or navel of the world.

Pain makes it hard to sympathise with others. A perfectionist is never satisfied with their work. Sceptics and doubters, they trust few people. They expect to be betrayed.

Infidelity by, or towards, a woman. If you are about to become a partner, hesitate before a final commitment. Costs may be a burden right now, but proceed with caution, and things should ease shortly.

Have you neglected an obligation? It could have been religious duty or a lack of dedication to a training programme or studies. There is catching-up to be done.

Reversed

Someone feels offended or insulted and they are about to be vindictive. It is a good idea to offer your apologies to someone older, or mend your bridges with a loved one.

There is some interesting news on its way that could affect where you choose to settle.

ACE OF WANDS - TALLY



Interpretation

A snake coils round a hand that grasps a baton.

Total creativity and fertility. This could represent a military career or a sports person, but someone with vision and genius. It indicates victory and achievement. But it does not necessarily mean happiness too, and there is a sense of the victory being hollow because of some coincident loss.

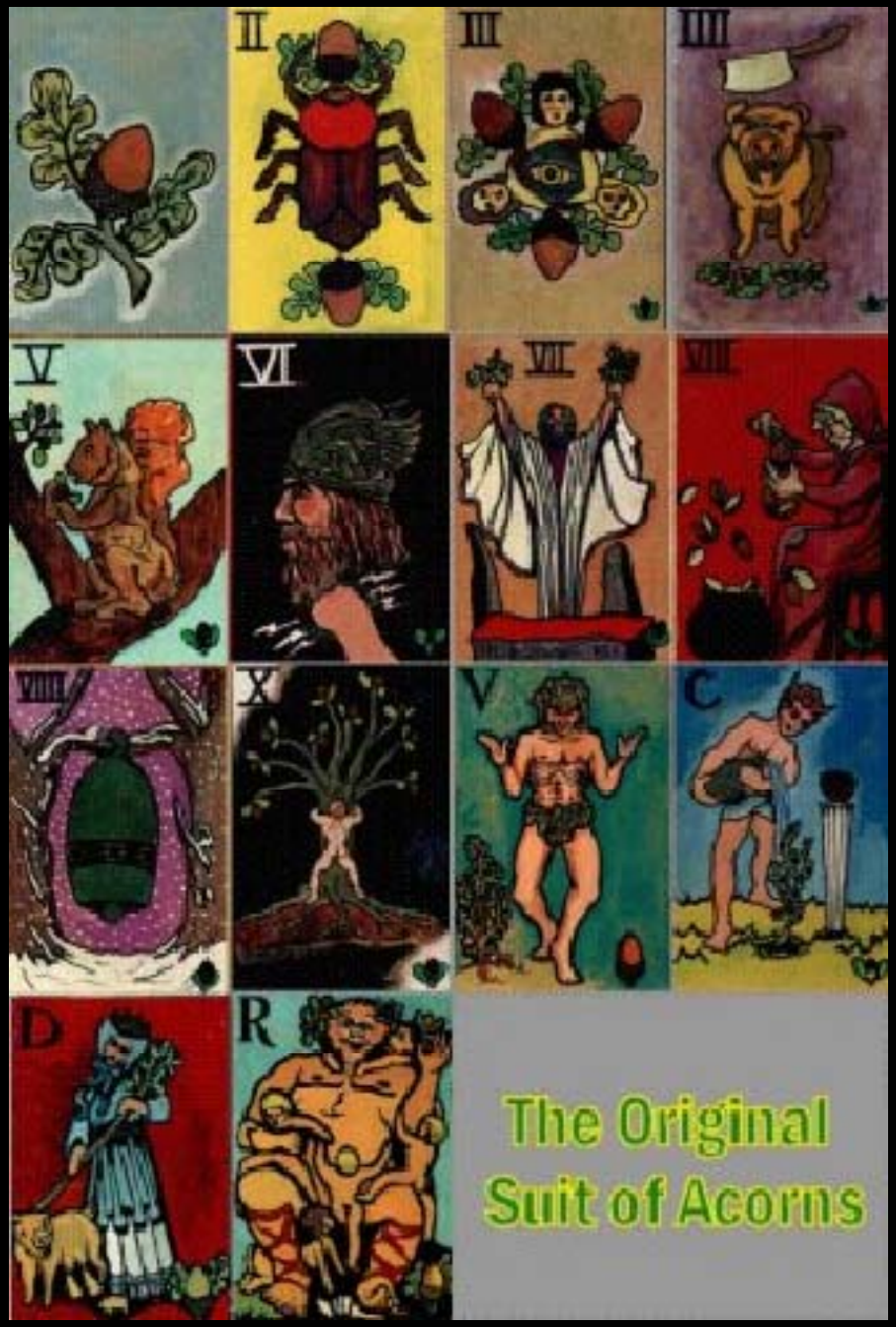
A young man or woman is in love with someone who is scarcely worthy of such devotion. No one wishes to thwart your wishes, but older heads are wiser. Their only concern is to shield their loved one from pain. They fear for you and do not wish to add to your misery.

+ Two of Cups: You fear the anger of your spouse and someone begins to have doubts about your integrity or your personal morals.
+ The Citadel: you are the object of hatred and wickedness of a person who pretends to have noble goals.

Reversed

If you find true love, you can be happy in a garret; but if you find riches and no one to love, you could live in a bejewelled tomb. A superficial lifestyle is not for you. Do not fall for the lures of gold.

This card is a strong sign that you will be happy in the long term, provided you stand up for your principles now.


II
III
IIII
V
VI
VII
VIII
VIIII
X
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C
D
R
The Original
Suit of Acorns