



The  
HALLOWEEN  
TAROT



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To Tom Bagley for his scary inspiration  
To Rick for never *once* telling me to get a day job  
and to all the black cats

—*Kipling*

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For a more complete guide to The Halloween Tarot and the origins and customs of Halloween, look for *The Halloween Tarot*, available from U.S. Games Systems, Inc.

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## Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <i>Welcome to Halloween!</i> . . . . . | 4  |
| The Halloween Tarot . . . . .          | 7  |
| Reading the Cards . . . . .            | 10 |
| The Major Arcana . . . . .             | 17 |
| The Minor Arcana . . . . .             | 22 |
| The Suit of Pumpkins. . . . .          | 24 |
| The Suit of Ghosts . . . . .           | 27 |
| The Suit of Bats . . . . .             | 29 |
| The Suit of Imps. . . . .              | 32 |
| <i>About the Artist</i> . . . . .      | 35 |

# Welcome to Halloween!



One day I came home from seeing Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (for the seventh time), and I said to my long-suffering husband,

"I wanna live in Halloweentown, *too!*" He glanced around at our living room, complete with two squalling black cats, real cobwebs, myriad gargoyles, the stuffed squirrel Frisky, a scary music record collection, a pickled bat, assorted Mexican devils, a turn-of-the-century magic poster, at least twenty creepy masks, toy skeletons, and piles of Halloween collectibles. He patted me gently on the head and said, "Honey, you already do."

Halloween was always my favorite holiday, despite the itchy costumes and practical jokes. The feeling of the season and the odd, disturbing colors like black and orange got me excited and edgy. I also had the feeling that I was getting away with something—for one night, anyway, I could be whatever I wanted and no one told me how weird I was. I know things have

changed, but I'm stuck in an old-fashioned Halloween where creeping sensations came from what was unseen and unsaid...when everything was colors and costumes and rushing about, and tricking my little brother into trading his chocolate bars for those icky licorice jelly beans.

Even longer ago, over 2,000 years, when the Celts in present-day Great Britain were celebrating the earliest of Halloweens, it was the last night of the old year on their calendar. This made sense to me as a kid growing up in New Hampshire. Often it was very cold, and sometimes there was even a bit of snow to trudge through. Halloween was the last night of remembering summer, the end of autumn, just before the dead-gray winter months kicked in. The Celts believed that this new year transition was the time when spirits, good and bad, came back to pay a visit from the dead.

Nowadays Halloween around here seems to be about trick-or-treating, costume parties, and the occasional haunted house, but fortune telling used to be a big part of the festivities. Halloween is a wonderful night for it. Just as the Celts believed, the veils between worlds, between past and future, life and death, are a little thinner that night. It's like the amber light between the red and the green, that brief

moment between two absolutes, the perfect time-between-times to engage in a slightly spooky peek into the future.

So you see, Halloween and the Tarot make a natural pair, and the ancient Tarot symbols of moons, cats, devils, bats, and magic are not so far removed from the spirit of the occasion. Tarot cards have always worked as a sort of psychic flashcard set for me. You look at the imagery to see how it makes you feel. How do the divinatory meanings relate to your life? What comes up? What are you trying *not* to see? This Halloween Tarot deck is just another way to look at yourself, filtered through childhood memories and odd colors.

And remember, the Halloween spirit is an all-year sort of thing. There is always a balance between dark and light. Just because it's July doesn't mean it's all safe and sunny. There are shadows there, and the seeds of Halloween. If you've ever tried to grow pumpkins in a small backyard, you know what I mean. Every day they creep an inch or two closer to the house, and it begins to get scary pretty fast!

So, whatever time of year it is, sit down, have a nice cup of spiced hot cider, and open your Tarot deck. Welcome to Halloween!

—*Kipling West*



## The Halloween Tarot

The Halloween Tarot deck started with the traditional images of the “Rider deck,” designed by A. E. Waite in 1910, and then was twisted, turned, and tweaked to create a festive, if slightly freakish, old-time Halloween world. Since Halloween archetypes are fairly limited, the characters on the cards also emerged from old horror movies and circus images, and from the German-made Vegetable People that were popular Halloween toys and decorations in 1920s America.

Mixed into the deck with spooky images from All Hallows’ Eve are remnants of traditional Tarot symbolism—a blend of ancient Greek, Egyptian, and Hindu mythology, Chaldean astrology, biblical references, images from the Far East and medieval Europe, and more.

No one knows exactly when and where Tarot originated, but some think that Tarot cards were brought to Italy and France by Gypsies as early as the twelfth century. Tarot was a popular game by the 1400s—*tarocchi* in Italian, *les tarots* in French—but was also used as a fortune telling tool from the time of the Middle Ages.

The structure of the Tarot deck hasn't changed much over time. A complete Tarot deck has 78 cards, divided into two sets: 22 pictorial cards called the Major Arcana and 56 cards divided into four suits called the Minor Arcana (the forerunner of modern playing cards). The word *arcana* comes from the Latin word *arcane*, which means secret, hidden in a chest, mysterious, obscure, knowable only to insiders. And it's true; the secrets of the Tarot are anchored in centuries of symbols and images, legends, myths, philosophies, and beliefs from cultures all over the world.

But don't be discouraged by the abundant images and the rich history of the Tarot. Symbols by definition are supposed to make complex ideas easier to understand. Successful Tarot readings are based on what you *do* see, and whatever flashes of insight into your own life the pictures may offer you. In fact, think of yourself as the black cat that appears in

every card of the Halloween deck. He is your touchstone, and travels through the deck with you as your companion. Sometimes he reflects the meaning of the card, but sometimes he's just a casual observer along for the ride.

In the next section you'll find some simple ways to get started with your Halloween Tarot deck. First, however, take out your cards and spend some time looking at them. The more familiar you become with each card and its possible meanings, the more fun and informative your readings will be.

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