

# THE UNIVERSAL WAITE® TAROT DECK



Based upon the original and only  
authorized edition of the famous  
78-card Rider-Waite® Tarot Deck

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Original drawings by Pamela Colman Smith®  
under the direction of Arthur Edward Waite  
Recolored by Mary Hanson-Roberts

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Instructions excerpted from  
THE KEY TO THE TAROT  
by Arthur Edward Waite

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## INTRODUCTION

by Stuart R. Kaplan

**D**r. Arthur Edward Waite (1857–1942) was a genuine scholar of occultism whose published works include *The Holy Kabbalah* and *The Key to the Tarot* first issued in England in 1910. Waite utilized symbolism as the key to the Tarot pack. In *The Key to the Tarot* he writes: “The true tarot is symbolism; it speaks no other language and offers no other signs.” What are the Tarot cards about which Waite so skillfully writes? What is the message of each card and when and where did these fascinating cardboard symbols first originate?

The precise origin of Tarot cards in antiquity remains obscure. Court de Gebelin writing in *Le Monde Primitif* in 1781 advances the theory that Tarot cards derived from an ancient Egyptian book, *The Book of Thoth*. Thoth was the Egyptian Mercury, said to be one of the early Kings and the inventor of the hieroglyphic system. Gebelin asserts that it is from the Egyptians and Gypsies that Tarot cards were dispersed throughout Europe.

The emergence of Tarot cards in Europe predates by over five centuries the work of Waite. A German monk, Johannes, describes a game called *Ludas Cartarum* played in the year 1377. Covelluzzo, a fifteenth-century chronicler, relates the introduction into Viterbo of the game of cards in the year

1379. In the year 1369 playing cards are *not* mentioned in a decree issued by Charles VI of France against various forms of gambling; however, 28 years later, the Prevot of Paris, in an ordinance dated January 22, 1397, forbids working people from playing tennis, ball, *cards*, or ninepins excepting only on holidays. It is generally accepted that playing cards emerged in Europe in the latter half of the fourteenth century, probably first in Italy as a complete 78-card deck—or some inventive genius subsequently combined the common 56 cards known as the Minor Arcana with the 22 esoteric and emblematic Tarot cards known as the Major Arcana to form the 78-card pack.

During the fifteenth century Tarot cards were generally drawn or hand painted for the princely houses of Northern Italy and France. Subsequently, the card packs became more numerous because they were reproduced by techniques using woodcuts, stencils and copper engraving. By the sixteenth century a modified Tarot pack called the Tarot of Marseilles gained popularity.

There exists today, in the archives of the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, 17 Major Arcana cards generally believed, probably erroneously, to have been hand painted about the year 1392 by Jacquemin Gringonneur for Charles VI of France. These cards are likely of later Venetian origin, possibly mid-fifteenth-century Tarocchi of Venice cards.

The Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City

possesses 35 cards from a 78-card Tarot deck dating from circa 1484 and believed to be the work of either Bonifacio Bembo or Antonio Cicognara. This deck apparently belonged to Cardinal Ascanio Maria Sforza (1445–1505) or to his mother Bianca Visconti Sforza and was probably not intended for actual play but, instead, may have been merely a pictorial representation of the times.

Other early European cards related to the Tarot pack include:

- Tarocchi of Mantegna deck comprising of 50 instructive cards in five series of ten cards each;
- Tarocchi of Venice or Lombardi deck comprising of 78 cards including 22 Major Arcana and 56 Lesser Arcana cards;
- Tarocchino of Bologna deck comprising of 62 cards, believed to have been invented by Francois Fibbia, Prince of Pisa, and containing 22 Major Arcana and only 40 numeral suit cards;
- Minchiate of Florence deck similar to the regular 78-card Tarot deck but enlarged to 97 cards by the addition of the signs of the zodiac, the four elements and three cardinal virtues.

Tarot fortune-telling readings generally take into account not only the individual divinatory meaning of a card but also the proximity between two or more cards and whether the card is upside down (which weakens, delays and even reverses the meaning). The brief descriptive title on each of the 22 Major Arcana cards serves as a catalyst

toward a broader and deeper meaning which the diviner seeks to express.

Tarot decks contain 78 cards divided into two major groups:

- 22 Major Arcana Cards
- 56 Lesser Arcana Cards

The 22 Major Arcana or emblematic cards comprise of 21 cards numbered from XXI to I (21 to 1) plus an unnumbered card known as The Fool (*Le Mat* and *Le Fou* in French). The 22 Major Arcana are also referred to as trumps (*atouts* in French, *atutti* or *trionfi* in Italian) signifying “above all.”

The 56 Lesser Arcana cards contain four suits including the usual court cards; King, Queen, Jack (Valet, Page) plus a fourth card, the Cavalier (Knight, Knave) which is placed between the Queen and the Jack. The suits are generally swords (spades), batons or wands (clubs), cups (hearts), and coins or pentacles (diamonds). Suit origins are believed to represent the four estates of life during medieval times: nobility or persons who held their rank by military service were symbolized by swords; peasants or working class people by clubs; clergymen and statesmen by cups; and tradesmen and the industrial class by coins.

Today’s ordinary decks of playing cards seemingly descend from the medieval Tarot decks. As card playing increased in popularity the Major Arcana cards were dropped (except for The Fool which was retained as the Joker) and the Cavalier and Page were

combined into today's Jack, thus giving us the standard deck of fifty-two cards plus Joker.

During the past two centuries various important works have appeared on different aspects of Tarot cards authored by Gebelin (1781), Etteilla (1783), Levi (1854), Vaillant (1857), Mathers (1888), Papus (1889), Falconnier (1896), Wirth, Waite (1910), Thierens, Case, Crowley (1944), Gray (1960), Knight (1965), Moakley (1966), Doane (1967), and Kaplan (1970).

Under the initiative and supervision of Waite, a unique 78-card Tarot pack known as "Rider Deck" was drawn by Miss Pamela Colman Smith, an American girl who was a fellow member of The Order of the Golden Dawn.

Miss Smith was brought up in Jamaica and during her early teens traveled with the stage acting partnership of Terry and Henry Irving. By the age of twenty-one Miss Smith was established in England as a theatrical designer and illustrator. Her interest in the theatre led to her collaboration with William Butler Yeats on stage designs. Subsequently, she worked with his brother Jack Yeats on the illustration and publication of a small magazine entitled *The Broad Sheet* before bringing out her own *The Green Sheaf*, which was filled with ballads, pictures, folk tales, and verses.

The outstanding feature of the Rider Deck is that all of the cards, including the forty pip cards (numeral cards Ace to 10 in each of four suits) are

presented in emblematic designs, which are readily suitable for divination. This is in contrast to the rigid forms of swords, batons, cups, and coins previously used in Tarot decks. Waite also believed that The Fool, being unnumbered and representing 0, should not be placed between cards 20 and 21, and that its more natural sequence fell in front of The Magician in attribution to the first letter of the Hebrew Alphabet, *Aleph*.

Waite transposed the numbers of two Major Arcana cards: Strength (Force, Fortitude) more frequently shown in other Tarot decks—in particular Muller's IJJ deck and Grimaud's Tarot of Marseilles version—as XI, is instead shown in the Rider Deck as VIII. Justice, more generally shown as VIII, is designated by Waite as bearing number XI.

There is currently a phenomenal interest in Tarot fortune-telling cards. The serious investigator seeks to employ the cards as a means of placing the past into more meaningful perspective, understanding the present, and revealing the alternatives that exist in the future. Those less acquainted with Tarot cards are content to use them as a game and to indulge in readings at parties or in small private groups. From the collector's standpoint, Tarot cards are both colorful and interesting.

Tarot decks are currently sought by teenagers, students, homemakers, businessmen, professional people, collectors—indeed, persons from all walks of life. Newspapers, magazines, radio, and televi-

sion frequently comment on the Tarot vogue. Teenagers enjoy Tarot parties. Adults attend Tarot luncheons, charitable benefits, and Tarot picnics at which card readings are performed. Hollywood has even indulged in the growing trend with “popular” Tarot readers being present at parties to service the well-known guests.

One of the fascinating aspects about Tarot cards is their personal affect upon the individual who uses them. Waite successfully presents a new dimension to their meaning in *The Key to the Tarot*. Any Tarot reader, be they a serious scholar or a person dabbling in the occult, will benefit from Waite’s insight and keen perception.

U.S. Games Systems, Inc. is pleased to publish the Universal Waite Pocket Tarot Deck, based upon the authentic reproduction of the original “Rider Pack”.

— Stuart R. Kaplan  
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