

PLAYING
MARSEILLE

By Ryan Edward

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INTRODUCTION

Tarot cards are playing cards. In their original, most authentic form, they were designed for playing games. Created in the early 15th century during the Late Gothic period in Northern Italy, Tarot, Tarocchi, or Tarok was the first time the concept of trumps or trick-taking was introduced to card games. Bridge and all other games that involve a trump suit such as 'Spades' and 'Hearts' are derivatives of Tarot. This fun fact comes in handy during family game night.

Why is this important? Today there seems to be different classifications for how certain decks are meant to be read. Over the years, Tarot has gained so many layers of esoteric and psychological theory that it is considered a breed apart from the classic cartomancy of common playing cards and Lenormand decks. There are numerous different methods for reading cards. Many people have taken to these simple cartomantic decks because they are that, simple. They are free of the psychological, astrological, Kabbalistic, esoteric structure, making them clear and direct. What's important to remember is that these were all playing cards to begin with. We've applied different systems of reading onto them, but those divination systems are not inherent to the decks themselves.

TAROT

Typically a deck of 78 cards, with four suits of 10 pips + four courts each, with an added trump suit of 21 cards plus one Fool. Used for many trick-taking games.

“STANDARD” PLAYING CARDS

A similar deck as above, without the 5th suit of trumps, and only three court cards per suit. 52 cards in total. Used for a nearly endless number of card games.

THE PETIT LENORMAND

A reduced deck of 36 cards primarily used for a game called Jass. Again with four suits, but without numbers 2-5 (or without Ace, 3, 4, 5 in German packs). Also used for many trick-taking games. With added illustrations numbered 1-36, this became yet another game called *Das Spiel der Hoffnung* or “The Game of Hope” where certain good or bad cards and their suits lent to the fortune-telling functions of the cards.

There are some who may love to read playing cards, but shy away from reading the Marseille Tarot because “there’s nothing on the pip cards.” However, once you look at the Tarot as a playing card deck, then it all starts to make sense.

Playing Marseille works to make this correlation a bit

more evident. While not a true “Tarot de Marseille,” this deck *plays* like one. When we think of playing cards we often think of a 52-card deck with the French suits; the red Hearts and Diamonds, and the black Clubs and Spades. Here, these have replaced the familiar Italian Tarot suits (Cups, Coins, Batons, and Swords), and blended with the classic Marseille pattern, which is a bit ironic considering the Marseille has always been a French deck.

This guidebook explains how to read the Tarot through the lens of classic playing card cartomancy. It focuses on straightforward, simple ways to interpret the cards, staying clear of esoteric approaches. You may adopt all of these methods, or choose which work best for you. The great thing about these decks without scenes on the Minor Arcana is that they are agnostic of any specific system. Our system is what we see in front of us; suits, colors, numbers and court cards. We examine lines, rhythms, and patterns. We look to see who's looking at whom. That's the brilliance of simple, basic methods; because they are so baseline, they can apply to many systems and types of cards. Take what you will and leave the rest, but hopefully you'll be able to learn a bit and have some fun in the process.

This is a humble, practical look at a tarot deck. And while you could look to a Lenormand or 52-card deck to provide

simplicity, the Tarot is equally accessible. You just need to simplify the approach. But at the end of the day, this is just another Tarot deck, use it however you wish.

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READING METHOD

The cards alone mean nothing. And any one card could mean a hundred different things. It's only when a series of cards are put in relation to each other, within the context and frame of the question, that a useful meaning surfaces. Think of the cards in action. Pay attention to what the cards are doing together before noting what any one card is. The Fool walks, the Magician tricks, and the Papesse keeps quiet. Series of pip cards can increase or decrease in number, patterns become rhythm, they develop a beat. Different cards with similar elements "rhyme." All together, it becomes melodic.

FIGURE CARDS

Both the trumps and court cards are our agents. They are our personifications of the concepts, themes, and people involved in the question. They act out the scenario in the most literal ways. We're not just interested in what is happening in each individual card, but what stories the cards tell by their position, gaze, and action in proximity and relation to one another.

COURT CARDS

To keep it simple and direct, these are our people in play. Courts of a suit are related by blood or association. Like squires, Pages/Jacks can represent the messages, and thus the thoughts, of the King or Queen of their suit.

TRUMP CARDS

These can also represent people, especially the first 9. But overall, the Trump cards can act out your answer for you. The action of the card may be more important than who that card is, if anyone. Together they become that much more dynamic.

POSITION

Our characters face left, right, or straight forward. Are two cards facing each other, or have their backs to one another? Is the Knight trying to get the Queen's attention with her back to him? If one card looks as if it's ignoring, or choosing another, it's because it is. We tend to think of the left as the past and the right as the future. Are cards dwelling on what

was, or looking forward to what could be?

GAZE

The figure's position guides its gaze. Follow the line of sight. Is one card looking another in the eye, or are they focused on the Diamond instead? Is everybody facing the center? Look Justice in her (third) eye as she cuts to the truth.

ACTION

Cards can move swiftly, stand tall, or sit in waiting. Every card is doing something. Even the most still cards are not without action. The Hanged Man hangs, obviously. But his suspension, waiting to be released, is a far cry from the power of the Emperor, who sits while others do his bidding.

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179 Ludlow Street
Stamford, CT 06902 USA
Phone: 203-353-8400
Order Desk: 800-544-2637
FAX: 203-353-8431