

Medieval Symbolism

Tarot cards reveal hidden thoughts, psychic energies.

You want to know the future, and Sidney Omarr isn't quite working out. What do you do? Wait for the carnival to come to town. And on an August night, when the air is heavy with the scent of summer's decay, you approach the tent.

Madame Apollonia, Tarot reader, knows all, sees all, tells all. You leave the glare of the lights, and your eyes become accustomed to the darkness inside. At her small circular table sits the seeress, a dark woman dressed in flowing robes, a bandana around her hair, her bejeweled fingers arranging the cards. In a heavy European accent she asks your name, your birthdate, your question. As your future unfolds before you, only dimly can you hear the squeal of children from the midway.

Well, forget it. In Eugene, you don't have to wait for the carnival. In fact, it's better if you don't. There are a number of Tarot readers in town, and none keep a crystal ball under the table.

For example, you approach the porch of Diane Chambers' trim South Eugene home; Diane opens the door.

She's in slacks and a sweater that pick up the silver in her thick, curly hair. Searching for some connection with fantasy, you spot a long-haired dusky gray cat lounging before the fireplace. Her witch's familiar?

Not quite.

"Oh, my cat," she sighs. "You want a cat?"

The usual Tarot deck has 78 cards: 22 trumps, or "major arcana," and four suits of 14 cards, the "minor arcana." Arcana is a word related to the "ark" — the place where the secrets are kept. The deck we possess is an amalgamation of several medieval Tarot decks, all presenting imagery of great significance in the 12th and 13th centuries.

No one is really sure of where Tarot first came from, and old theories that it returned from the Far East with the crusaders or that it was developed by Egyptian sorcerers have been abandoned.

Tarot seems to be a product of the Middle Ages, connected to medieval magic, astrology, and numerology. It is a history book of the beliefs of Europe for the last thousand years, and for those who believe in it, one of the best ways we possess of understanding our lives today.

Diane lights a dark blue candle and has her client move the cards around. "Get your hands on them," she says. "Swirl them around counterclockwise, and when you feel you've done that enough, move them back around clockwise."

Diane still won't touch them. "Now cut them three times," she says. "Divide them any way



Photo by John Giustina

you like. Then put them back in any order you like."

That done, she takes the cards and dealing from the top, arranges seven cards in the "star" pattern: one above, one below, two on either side and the seventh card in the center. "Good cards," she says, obviously pleased. After explaining the first seven, she lays out 12 more in a circular pattern,

once again laying the last card in the center.

"The peace sign," she says. "Right on top of the love card. Your relationship will work out well. I see money coming from an unexpected source. It looks like you will have a new opportunity for work, you'll do well. The cards are very good to you."

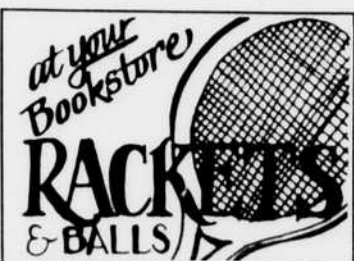
Does it ever happen that the

cards come out bad?

"Oh yes," she says. "Sometimes the cards are devastating, and I don't want to tell the person these things, but I have to. I try to be gentle, though. A lot of times I act as a counselor. We see how the person came to this point and what they can do now."

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