



by

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Foreword by Stuart R. Kaplan

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**An Introduction to the
Golden Dawn Tarot**

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FOREWORD

Rarely has a tarot deck created more pre-publication interest than the long-awaited Golden Dawn Tarot pack by Dr. Robert Wang, a devoted scholar and researcher of the Secret Order of the Golden Dawn.

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn counted among its members some of the foremost occultists and writers of its time and, as part of their sacred oath, they were sworn to secrecy. Based upon the esoteric notebooks of some of its members, and with the skillful and perceptive guidance of Dr. Israel Regardie, probably the leading author/scholar in the occult field today, Dr. Robert Wang has faithfully rendered in authentic detail each card of the Golden Dawn Tarot pack.

U. S. Games Systems, Inc. is pleased to publish the Golden Dawn Tarot, thus revealing for the first time many truths and secrets of the Order and its interpretation of the tarot. Today there is a large variety of tarot packs available to occultists, collectors, researchers and art students. The early Visconti-Sforza tarot cards, Tarot of Marseilles deck, Etteilla tarot, 1JJ Swiss tarot and Tarot Classic packs each pre-date the Golden Dawn Tarot. Since the turn of the century, many new tarot packs have been designed and published, each containing their own special refinements and interpretation of the allegorical symbols on the 22 Major Arcana cards.

With the publication of the Golden Dawn Tarot, an important "missing link" in the de-

velopment of tarot now comes to light. Importantly, the Golden Dawn Tarot can be studied with other popular packs designed and executed by former members of the Golden Dawn. These packs include the Rider-Waite tarot deck painted by Pamela Colman Smith under the direction of Arthur Edward Waite, the Builders of the Adytum (BOTA) tarot deck issued under the direction of Paul Foster Case, and the Crowley Thoth tarot deck painted by Lady Frieda Harris under the guidance of Aleister Crowley.

An avid tarot collector may own as many as twenty or more different tarot decks. Each pack has its own special features and the imagery on the cards is like the pages of a finely illustrated book to be studied and savored a little bit at a time; at each sitting, one sees and understands a little more of the meaning and significance of each card. We believe the Golden Dawn Tarot deck is an important "rare book" in the field of tarot and we are pleased to make it available to the scholar and student of tarot.

A partial list of additional tarot decks and important tarot books is cited at the back of this booklet for the convenience of the reader.

Stuart R. Kaplan

New York, N.Y.

NOTES ON THE GOLDEN DAWN TAROT

by

Robert Wang

The Golden Dawn Tarot is the only truly esoteric deck ever to be published. It is also the only deck to reach public view which was designed for the exclusive use of a powerful secret fraternity, and which includes the accurate tarot symbolism kept shrouded in mystery for hundreds of years by the Western Esoteric Tradition. The members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn swore death oaths never to reveal the images of this deck or the very fact that such a deck even existed. In other published Tarot decks there is some purposeful confusion involving the order of the cards, the attribution of the Hebrew letters to the trumps, or the symbols themselves. Those who issued the most popular exoteric decks in use today, i.e., Waite, Case and Crowley, were members of the Order of the Golden Dawn, and took their membership oaths very seriously. Of those who wrote on the tarot and the occult, only Crowley released some of the Order's actual secrets. He referred to the cards both in 777 and in his extraordinary, though short-lived magazine, *The Equinox*.

The Golden Dawn Tarot is of particular importance in that it is the deck from which some of the greatest esoteric writers of our age developed their ideas about the tarot. *This is the deck used by MacGregor Mathers, A. E.*

Waite, Dion Fortune, Paul Foster Case, William Butler Yeats and Aleister Crowley.

Israel Regardie published the actual documents of the Order, including their lectures on tarot, in *The Golden Dawn* (1937-40). And it is Israel Regardie who today, forty years after beginning the project of publishing the Order's teaching, has seen fit to release the last great secret of the Order, the Golden Dawn Tarot.

The basic design of the cards, following the symbolic framework of the Inner Tradition, was formulated by S. L. MacGregor Mathers. Mathers was also responsible for writing most of the Order's rituals, many of which related to this Tarot deck. It would appear that the original cards were painted by Mrs. Mathers, an accomplished artist, although they were never printed. The original deck was lent to members of the Inner Order. After experiencing the profound and beautiful ritual of initiation into the grade of *Adeptus Minor*, one of their tasks was to hand-paint a copy of the esoteric tarot deck. Members of the Outer Order were given some cryptic and obtuse information about Tarot in general, and were instructed to experiment with simple methods of divination, using whatever exoteric decks were at hand.

The essential purpose of the tarot is to teach. The deck of seventy-eight cards is actually a book of symbols expressing concepts about the nature of the universe, and man's relationship to that universe. The study of this book may appear complex and often frustrating, but it is vastly rewarding, because to learn about the Tarot is to learn a useful new language.

Sadly, for several decades the tarot has been the object of ridicule by both advocates of scientific "rationality," and by those stalwartly religious persons who sincerely believe that anything called "occult" must involve the black arts. But it is, in fact, unusual to find such criticism among either scientists or churchmen who have taken the trouble to explore objectively, and in depth, the system which underlies the Tarot.

In principle, the tarot is seventy-eight pictures which are worth more than seventy-eight thousand words. They illustrate the energies of the *Qabalah*, that body of sacred knowledge which originated with esoteric Judaism. Today, the *Qabalah*, viewed in Christian terms by some, in Jewish terms by others, and without reference to any organized religion by many, is often called the "Yoga of the West." And those who would seriously pursue the meaning of the Tarot must anticipate a lifetime of work, not unlike that which would be expected of a dedicated scholar in any discipline.

All of the sacred books of mankind may be related, by correspondence, to the *Qabalah* and its wordless meditation symbols, the Tarot. But there is one very ancient work which is a key to this study. That work is the *Sepher Yetzirah*, or "*Book of Formation*." Herein each of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet are described as divine symbols: as each letter is ascribed to one of the Tarot trumps, so the *Sepher Yetzirah* also describes the divine symbolism of the Tarot.

The *Tree of Life*, as illustrated in full-color with the deck, is the primary symbolic diagram of the Qabalah, and the cards are traditionally related to various aspects of it. The more one works with this symbol (or *glyph*, as it is called), the more the significance of the tarot becomes clear. But this is an intensive spiritual and intellectual pursuit which cannot be adequately described in an introductory pamphlet. More detailed information will be found in *An Introduction to the Golden Dawn Tarot* by Robert Wang, (1978), with which this deck is intended to be used. This new book includes all of the materials on Tarot issued to members of the Order of the Golden Dawn.

The use of the cards for divination provides a good introduction to the visual patterns and subtle energies of the Tarot. Moreover, the cards and the information provided in these notes is all that is required to begin.

The Order of the Golden Dawn used an intricate system of tarot divination (one which could take hours for a complete reading), and did not involve *reversed* cards; instead the system depended upon neighboring cards in a spread for accurate interpretation. We present here, for those who may find the Golden Dawn method too involved, a simple fifteen card spread. This method is quite consistent with the instructions of the Order.

The interpretations of the cards, given in this pamphlet, were written by Mathers for the use of the Order's initiates. We publish them, extracted from the philosophical discussions with which they originally appeared, and in the se-

quence of the suits, for the first time. (No correction of his occasional grammatical inconsistencies has been attempted). The cards may be either "well-dignified," or "ill-dignified." This suggests the influence of the cards which fall at either side of the card in question. This also suggests the meaning of the card "reversed," (i.e. ill-dignified).

The Order of the Golden Dawn considered the use of the cards for divination valid, but a function which operated at a relatively low level. The true worth of repeated use of the cards for 'answering questions' is that this tends to stimulate the unconscious and help the psychic faculties to develop. Moreover, as the cards and their divinatory meanings are increasingly inculcated into the individual system, the universal meanings of the same cards become more and more apparent. The keynote of the Tarot is, as in all aspects of the Mystery Tradition, *As Above, So Below*.

Tarot and cartomancy products available at most book and gift stores include:

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Books by Stuart R. Kaplan: "The Encyclopedia of Tarot," Volumes I, II & III • "Tarot Classic" • "Tarot Cards for Fun and Fortune-Telling"

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