

PAMELA COLMAN SMITH'S
RWS
TAROT DECK®



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

Original drawings by Pamela
Colman Smith® under the direction
of Arthur Edward Waite

U.S. GAMES SYSTEMS, INC.

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

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INTRODUCTION

by Stuart R. Kaplan

Honoring Pamela Colman Smith and her groundbreaking tarot art, U.S. Games Systems, Inc. created the Pamela Colman Smith Commemorative Set in 2009 to celebrate the 100 year anniversary of her beloved tarot deck. The Smith-Waite Centennial Tarot Deck faithfully reproduced the original 1909 tarot deck created by Pamela Colman Smith with the subtle colors she herself chose. Customer response to this deck was so enthusiastic that U.S. Games Systems subsequently issued a stand-alone version of the Smith-Waite Centennial Tarot Deck, a mini version of the deck in a tin, as well as a borderless version.

Tarot readers have shared with us how much they enjoy having choices between all the various versions of the Rider-Waite deck. We now present the Pamela Colman Smith's RWS Tarot® Deck, re-colored with a softer, muted palette and ivory parchment borders similar to those of the Smith-Waite Centennial Tarot Deck.



Dr. 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. 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 perhaps 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.

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 upright or reversed (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. 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 artist 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 British stage acting partnership of Ellen 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 par-

ticular Muller's 1JJ 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.

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 RWS Tarot Deck, based upon the authentic reproduction of the original "Rider Pack."

SAMPLE
—Stuart R. Kaplan
Stamford, CT 06902



THE GREATER ARCANA & THEIR DIVINATORY MEANINGS

- 1. THE MAGICIAN**—Skill, diplomacy, address, sickness, pain, loss, disaster, self-confidence, will, the Querent himself (if male). *Reversed:* Physician, Magus, mental illness, disgrace, disquiet.
- 2. THE HIGH PRIESTESS**—Secrets, mystery, the future as yet unrevealed, the woman who interests the Querent (if male); the Querent (if female) silence, tenacity; wisdom, science. *Reversed:* Passion, moral or physical ardor, conceit, surface knowledge.
- 3. THE EMPRESS**—Fruitfulness, initiative, action, long days, clandestine, the unknown, difficulty, doubt, ignorance. *Reversed:* Light, truth, the unraveling of involved matters, public rejoice, also, according to another reading—vacillation.
- 4. THE EMPEROR**—Stability, power, aid, protection, a great person, conviction, reason. *Reversed:* Benevolence, compassion, credit, also confusion to enemies, obstruction, immaturity.
- 5. THE HIEROPHANT**—Marriage alliance, captivity, servitude, mercy and goodness, inspiration, the man to whom the Querent has recourse. *Reversed:* Society, good understanding, concord, over-kindness, weakness.
- 6. THE LOVERS**—Attraction, love, beauty, trials overcome. *Reversed:* Failure, foolish designs.

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