



# EASY GUIDE FOR A RIDER-WAITE BASED **TAROT READING**

*Discovering an ancient  
- yet still current -  
divination method!*





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Written by Paul de Senquisse



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# INTRODUCTION



he Rider-Waite tarot deck, also known as the Rider-Waite-Smith tarot, is by far the most popular and well-known tarot deck in the world (other famous decks include Aleister Crowley's Thoth Tarot, the Deviant Moon tarot deck, and the French Marseille tarot deck). It is usually the first Tarot deck encountered by people living in English-speaking countries.

There are a few differences between the meaning and the illustrations of some of the cards when you compare the Rider-Waite-Smith arcana with those found in earlier decks like the Marseille, but the vast majority of currently produced and designed tarot decks have followed the RWS structure since it was first published in the early 20th century.

This tarot is also known as the Rider tarot, the Waite tarot, the Waite-Coleman-Smith tarot, the Waite-Smith tarot, and other variations.

As a matter of fact, we will use the Rider-Waite-Smith name (or RWS) throughout your initiation; Rider was the publisher, Alexander Edward Waite was the author, and Pamela Coleman Smith was the illustrator.

Pamela Coleman Smith's gorgeous illustrations for this tarot deck (as a work for hire funded by the tarot creator, A.E. Waite) indeed deserve some homage and praise.

While the Rider-Waite-Smith deck was first published in 1910, some academics argue that the history of tarot reading can be traced back to the dawn of time, either to the Sumerians, or Ancient Egypt (see various studies about the Thoth tarot deck).

Using tarot decks for divinatory purposes began a long, long time ago. According to tradition, the Tarot was already in use during the time of the Pharaohs. According to Egyptian myths, it was a gift to humans from the god Thoth through 22 engravings.

Moses, who followed the teachings of the Egyptian high priests, supposedly shared that knowledge with his people during his flight from Egypt as an alphabet of 22 letters.



These letters are the basis of Jewish Kabbalah, esoteric teachings that are meant, through study, to spiritually connect humankind with the Divine.

The word Tarot appeared in the late 16th century, from the Italian "tarocchi". This Italian word might be derived from the Arabic "tariqa", meaning a path of mystical or esoteric knowledge. This term was in turn inspired by the name of the female bodhisattva (or goddess) associated with knowledge and learning in Tibetan Buddhism: Tara!

Historically, the first Tarot decks appeared in their current structure over the course of the 15th century during the Renaissance in northern Italy.

The tarot is an allegorical representation of the secrets of the visible and invisible worlds, a support for learning based on symbols that take into account the spiritual and psychological dimensions of the universe and of humankind.

## A history of the Rider-Waite-Smith tarot deck

The Rider-Waite-Smith tarot deck follows the usual 78-card structure of the tarot, divided into 22 major arcana (another name for the cards) and 56 minor arcana.

What is notable about the illustrations on the cards of the Rider-Waite-Smith deck is that contrary to most of the earlier decks like the Marseille, every single card (major and minor arcana) is illustrated, instead of just the 22 major arcana.

This tarot was first published in November 1909 in London, published by the publisher William Rider & Son. It was designed by Arthur Edward Waite (1857-1942), an American-born occultist who lived most of his life in England.

A.E. Waite was a grandmaster in a secret society called the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, dedicated to magic, mysticism, and esoteric knowledge.

In 1910, A.E. Waite published a guide called "the Key to the Tarot", provided with a deck of cards, and explaining its history by talking about the traditions it was drawn from, providing the required explanations to interpret its arcana.

In 1911 the final revised version of the Rider-Waite-Smith tarot deck was published with "The Pictorial Key to the Tarot" that included black and white versions of the 78 cards.

The explanations you will find in this book are largely drawn from that one.

There were several versions published through the years, including one published in 2009 by US Games System Inc to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of this tarot's initial publication.

In that version of the deck called "Smith-Waite Centennial Tarot Deck", the cards were published using the original colors that the illustrator Pamela Coleman Smith originally chose.



## How to use this simplified version?

The method detailed here will only focus on the interpretation of the 22 major arcana of this tarot deck, even if it is normally based on the use of the entire range of the 78 arcana for this deck.

The major arcana usually represent particularly striking elements or events that will have a powerful impact on your life, where minor arcana provide finer details and provide greater clarity to a generic reading.

There are four suits in the Rider-Waite-Smith tarot deck, and they are all connected to one of the natural elements

- The suit of Swords is connected to Air
- The suit of Pentacles is connected to Earth
- The suit of Cups is connected to Water
- The suit of Wands is connected to Fire

Each suit follows the same 14 card pattern, with numbers from 1 to 10 and four court cards: the Page, Knight, Queen, and King.

The method unveiled in this book will already provide you with a lot of information to guide you with your choices in every domain.

Once you are familiar with this short version, you will then have more than enough time to grow comfortable with using the full Rider-Waite-Smith deck, including the minor arcana.

The author of the Rider-Waite-Smith deck, occultist A.E. Waite, wanted a clear break from earlier, Christian-heavy themed arcana like the Marseille deck, and replaced them with more universal or pagan illustrations.

This is why the Pope became a Hierophant, and the Popess became the High Priestess. Likewise, the House of God was replaced with the Tower.

The symbolism in the deck draws heavily from the teachings of Eliphas Levi, a famous occultist from the 19th century.

There were also slight alterations to the numbering of the arcana, differing from the Marseille. Justice is the eighth arcanum in the Marseille deck but the eleventh one in the Rider-Waite-Smith. Conversely, Strength is number 11 in the Marseille and 8 in the Rider-Waite-Smith.



# CHAPTER I

## RECOMMENDED TAROT SPREADS

There are many ways to use the Rider-Waite-Smith tarot deck in a reading. Here are the three easiest ones for your initiation to this divination tool.

Again, while using reversed card is a common feature among Rider-Waite-Smith users, as a beginner it is recommended to shuffle the cards and only focus on the upright meanings of the arcana for your early interpretations.

### 1- Single card spread

This kind of reading is useful whenever you need an answer for something specific.

Ask your question, shuffle the cards, and then...

- You can either draw a single card from the facedown deck in your hand,
- Or you can spread the cards facedown in front of you on a table, then pick one.
- Interpret the card you have drawn according to your question.

### 2- Past, Present, and Future spread

This is a useful drawing whenever you need a solution to a problem, or need to know



how to achieve something that you want



As your question, shuffle the deck, and then...

- Spread the cards facedown before you on a table, then draw three,
- Put the first one on your left. It represents the past.
- Put the second one in the middle, it will represent the present.
- Put the third one on your right, it will represent the future.
- Interpret the cards you have drawn according to your question.
- The past card will indicate the mistakes that have been made so far, which prevented your finding a solution to the problem or the achievement of your desire.
- The present card will indicate what you need to do in order to solve your problem or satisfy your desire.
- The future card will indicate what will happen once the problem has been solved, or once you have achieved what you wanted.

### 3- The Cross Spread



CARD DRAWN #1



CARD DRAWN #3



CARD DRAWN #2



CARD DRAWN #4



Once you have shuffled the deck, cut it with your left hand and draw a random card after asking yourself "Should I perform a reading now?"

Flip the card you have drawn. If you have a good first impression, proceed with the reading.

If not, consider doing it later.

If you had a positive answer, put your hand back in the deck, hold it in your right hand, and mentally come up with a number between 1 and 22.

Count the cards in the deck until you reach the number you have selected (in the order they have been shuffled in, don't try to look for the arcanum with that number on the card)

Keep it facedown and place it on your left. It represents the consultant or Querent, which means you if you are performing a reading on your own.

Proceed in the same way with a second card, which you will put on the right of the first one. It represents your current environment.

Do it again with a third card, which you will place on top, above the middle of the horizontal line connecting the first two cards. It symbolizes the path that must be taken, or the evolution of your current situation.

Finally, draw a fourth card and place it below the horizontal line between the first two arcana. It indicates the resolution of this situation.

The four cards should now be displayed in a cross shape (see figure above). Now flip the cards over...

You can then start your interpretation according to the meaning of these arcana.



## CHAPTER II

# The Meaning of the Major Arcana

### 0 - *The Fool*

The Fool arcanum represents a young enthusiastic man wearing luxury clothes, standing close to the edge of a cliff, with a dog that can represent our animal nature.

He does not seem bound to the limits of our terrestrial world, and his eyes are looking up to the divine and celestial planes, showing his aspiration to rise up spiritually even when you sometimes need to jump into the unknown.

He is ready for it, because he is supported by his conviction that Divine Providence will help him to improve his human condition.

Clearly numbered 0 in the RWS, this arcanum sometimes has no printed number at all, leading to several divergent interpretations (some tarot scholars put it in a different place in the succession of arcana).

The sun that shines behind him is meant to illuminate the path that should be taken, and protect him as he works towards his goals.

Anyway, the Fool represents the arrival of the irrational in the life of the person who draws this card. In the many common interpretation, the Fool represents wandering, folly, spontaneity, and delirium...

In some drawings, connected to more negative cards, it can also represent incoherence, madness, doubts, and instincts or emotions that are out of control.

In that case, the Fool acts as an amplifier and negative card in every aspect: Love, Work, Health, Money, Luck...

It is then a sign of confusion and indecision that will affect ongoing or upcoming projects. Likewise, the Querent might be full of new ideas that might make it harder to make an informed decision.

Others see the Fool as the ultimate symbol of supreme initiation. With this interpretation he is the true Initiate, reaching for Ultimate knowledge.

With this interpretation, in a reading it might indicate that the subject of the reading is





about to undergo deep spiritual changes, or is standing at the crossroads of something important in their life.

The Fool will bring them into a world of spirituality, where they may find Knowledge out of most people's reach.

With this interpretation, the Fool symbolizes a need for freedom and independence. It indicates a positive evolution on a path of wisdom. The Fool will allow you to achieve both spiritual and material aspirations.



# I – The Magician

The Magician is represented by the silhouette of a young man wearing the robes of a mage, seer, or clairvoyant... He looks like Apollo and is as beautiful as the Greek god.

His head (and mind) is crowned with a floating, rotated 8 symbol that symbolizes infinity, life, and divine will.

The belt he wears around his waist represents a serpent biting its own tail, a common representation of eternity.

The Magician holds a magic wand in his right hand, pointed up towards the Sky, while his left hand is pointing at the Earth. In this, he acts as an intermediary between the celestial and terrestrial worlds, and echoes the famous occult saying, "As above, so below".

With this gesture, the Magician indicates his mission, aiming to share celestial grace with Humankind while helping them keep their feet on the ground.

The Magician symbolizes sharing the powers of Will with Humankind, so that it might achieve its true purpose on earth.

On the table before him you can see the symbols of the four suits that compose the minor arcana of the tarot (the Sword, Cup, Pentacle, and Wand) representing the four natural elements (Air, Water, Earth, and Fire). The Magician can combine them any way he wants to.

The garden of roses and lilies under the table symbolizes the materialization of your ideas and imagination on the terrestrial plane.

The card itself symbolizes the presence of the Divine within you, and how important it is to unite the celestial and the terrestrial within you. It means that you must achieve unity between all the separate parts of your being (physical, psychological, and spiritual).

The Magician is among the positive major arcana. Its presence in a drawing usually forecasts favorable events. It symbolizes new beginnings, initiation, and team spirit. It is the triumph of mind over matter, and a sign of great willpower and skill. An upright Magician will be a positive sign most of the time, in any context.

The Magician is an extremely interesting arcanum because it means that you are under the most favorable conditions to succeed in any new project... provided you ad-





here to a certain mental discipline and think before you act or you might lose focus! The Magician shows you which way to go, but you need to do the walking, and then make the right decisions. The cards won't do it for you.

The Magician opens new opportunities and grants you a certain mastery over the unknown and the unexpected. Since it is, by definition, quite unpredictable, you should do a lot of thinking before you commit to any specific course.



## II – *The High Priestess*

The High Priestess is sitting with a moon crescent at her feet and a crown with two horns and a globe on her head. She is wearing a sun cross around her neck.

The High Priestess holds a scroll in her hands, with the word "Tora", representing the ultimate Great Secret Law, one of the sacred texts of Judaism.

This sacred scroll is partially hidden under the toga worn by the High Priestess, which means that some principles are clear and obvious while others require initiation or personal efforts to be discovered.

The High Priestess is sitting between the two pillars (one black, one white) of the entrance of the Secret Temple of Knowledge. The entrance itself is hidden behind a veil embroidered with pomegranates and palm trees.

The High Priestess wears thin and flowing clothes, symbolizing light and divine grace. The High Priestess is a symbol for the Occult Science you need to acquire in order to be granted access to the Temple of Knowledge, also called the Temple of Isis.

She represents a Spiritual Fiancée and the Divine Mother guarding the door or entrance to the Temple of Knowledge. She is the Queen of Light and the symbol of the Moon, breastfed by the Great Supreme Mother.

The High Priestess is also a symbol of Shekinah, the presence of God among us in Jewish theology.

The High Priestess is a positive arcanum symbolizing the importance of thought during a slow setup for a project.

If you have the High Priestess in your drawing, it will allow you to reach your goals, but it will require more efforts than the Magician arcanum would.

The High Priestess is also a card that stresses the importance of intuition, inspiration, patience, and stability.

In a professional context, it will put any desire for a raise, a promotion, or a different job... on the right track!

The High Priestess asks for a long time spent thinking about any decision before you make it. It also indicates that your ongoing project will be achieved, but not in the short term.

The danger that should be avoided is to isolate yourself to make your decisions, to





be content with your loneliness and live in seclusion.

Do not make any decision on your own. Ask the people involved in your project for input. Do not make every decision for them.



### III – The Empress

The Empress is represented by a majestic and regal looking woman sitting down and wearing luxury clothes representing the daughter of Heaven and Earth.

She wears a crown in the shape of a tiara on her head, a sign of royalty, with twelve star-shaped jewels. The shield on the left side bears the sign of Venus, a circle with an inverted cross, which also represents femininity. She holds a scepter with the globe in her right hand.

You can see a growing cornfield at her feet, and on the right side there is a forest, with a river flowing between the trees.

She symbolizes the Garden of Eden, or Heaven on Earth, but also according to some interpretations; desire, or the Sanctum sanctorum, the holy of holies, in other words: the most sacred part of a temple where only the high priest is allowed to enter.

The Empress card represents being granted access to true knowledge, truth beyond appearances, a path of access to genuine life, coming from the heart.

The Empress is an extremely favorable arcanum. This is a very good sign in every domain: love, finances, health, material comfort, luck, money...

The Empress is a sign of sharp intelligence, creativity, and ambition. It facilitates making your projects and ideas come true.

The Empress indicated that your ideas should finally be realized in the material plane. This is not a time for reflection, but for successful action driven by intelligence. Your mind will be full of original ideas.

The Empress is also a sign of fertility and growth, so in a romantic context, it may indicate the arrival of a long lasting love, a pregnancy, or a favorable period to conceive and have children.

The Empress is the upcoming materialization of your ongoing projects: professional contracts, association with other people, finding a job, intellectual achievements, social recognition, or political success.





## IV - *The Emperor*

The Emperor wears a crown on his head, a symbol of imperial power, holds an ankh cross-shaped scepter in his right hand, and a globe in his left hand. He is sitting upright in a majestic posture.

The backrest and armrests on the throne are decorated with ram's heads. The Emperor incarnates earthly power and symbolizes action and virility.

He is the masculine mirror of the Empress, symbol of feminine power. He is trying to lift the veil of Knowledge, also called the Veil of Isis.

Just like the Empress, the Emperor symbolizes power and the potential for Humankind to rise up. He also represents the importance of strength of character and willpower to achieve your projects.

He symbolizes divine royalty and might. He indicates that Humankind must rise spiritually through their intellectual abilities, set free from their animal side, which means rising above their emotions and mastering their primal instincts.

The Emperor is an arcanum that tells you that you can achieve your projects if you act with authority and leadership. This will provide you with success in any domain; love, finances, health, material comfort, luck, money...

With the Emperor you will achieve your goals if you are confident, realistic, and have a dominant spirit. This arcanum requires a full commitment. The Emperor implies that you need to affirm yourself in your domain and move forward by making a show of inner and outer strength.

The Emperor advises you not to waste much time in making your decisions. Even if you should take other people's advice and opinions into account and avoid any isolation, here the arcanum implies that you need to make your decisions without wasting any time.

Your projects will have a high chance of coming true if you are steadfast, confident, and realistic.

You will have to work hard to achieve your goals, and not give up until you eventually achieve victory in your project.

When you draw the Emperor, you should learn the lessons from past challenges, stop lamenting your situation, and stride boldly towards the future.

To succeed, you will need to move beyond soft, weak, and indecisive people and leave them behind – without crushing them either – for they would only slow you down.





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