



Tarot Insights and my Personal Deck of Cards

by Teri Ekland

Someone once said, “If I’m going to read a book, I’ll write one.” I feel the same way. And to read tarot cards that really mean something to me, I decided to create my own version based on the artwork for the eight adventure novels I’ve penned. My 78 cards feature deities and symbols from ancient Egypt, Mesoamerica, Peru, Tibet, and prehistoric Arizona. Combining artwork with writing novels allowed me to more fully penetrate the past cultures I was exploring through my stories.

In my adventure novels, the lives of modern and ancient protagonists intersect. How do I involve my ancient character with my modern one? Through magical realism, a literary technique that enables extraordinary things to happen. But not by hocus pocus magic without a foundation. Rather, by a kind of spiritual magic consisting of visions and dreams or beliefs in deities and spirits or the powers of totems and amulets. The magic must be realistic. Readers cannot enjoy what seems contrived.

I ended up writing this genre because as a child I loved reading magical adventure stories involving children such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* (this was decades before *Harry Potter*). And when I played, I believed magic was happening all around me. Maybe all children play this

way—it's called make-believe—but I possibly did so more than most to escape from a traumatizing environment.

I don't like to belabor what happened to me during childhood; I do that in other memoirs. In the 1960s when I grew up, parents typically spanked their children on the bare bottoms. My mom made me fetch a switch from a forsythia plant in the backyard and then had me pull down my own pants. To stop me from crying Mom sometimes took me to the bathroom and threw water on me as if taming a wild beast. And I was only five to maybe ten years old. This wasn't the only adversity I suffered as a small child. On a regular basis, my older brother hit me and called me demeaning names. Eventually, I learned to avoid him, disengage, and take care of myself as best I could. Bringing magic and adventure into my life was part of this self-care.

Sometimes I believed in magic so completely that I tried to make it happen for neighborhood kids. On the Christmas I was in the fourth grade my parents gave me three box turtles that I often took to Arbor Lodge Park near our house on North Boston Street. One afternoon, while I was on the swing set and my turtles Red Eye, Pearl, and Glutton were crawling around an old oak tree, a five-year-old boy came up to the swings. I somehow coaxed him into wishing for turtles to appear. I then suggested he look by the oak tree. The boy was so amazed with my magic I asked him to make another wish. He wanted a horse and I ran home to get a toy horse to give him but when I returned, he was gone. Of course, I didn't give the little boy my turtles. I probably took them with me when I retrieved the toy horse.

Twenty years later I started writing adventure stories with magical realism. My novels are in first person present tense because the main characters are part of me and I am part of them, at least we are somehow related. When using first person narrative and present tense I more easily slip into a character's point of view. Perhaps my characters are what psychologists call

“dissociative personalities.” Although I find most psychological labels degrading and often irrelevant, sometimes they help make a point.

Before further discussing my philosophies and beliefs, let me give a brief background about myself, the writer, artist, poet, and reader and maker of these cards. During the past ten years, I’ve been finishing and finessing my eight novels, improving upon what I once drafted with my present-day touch. In other words, I fully lived my stories before I finished them. During this time, I also wrote four memoirs: “The Desert’s Edge,” “Law School High,” and “Islands One Summer,” and this one. In my twenties I wrote my first two memoirs. “The Trouble with Brass” describes my tour in the US Army and “Moonbeams in Asia” covers the three years I lived and worked in the Far East.

After an honorable discharge, I earned a BS in anthropology from Portland State University in my hometown of Portland, Oregon. I selected this major because of my passion for world cultures and past civilizations. An MA in English became my ticket to world travel. My career as a writer primarily began while I was teaching English at universities in China and Thailand. Asia inspired me and complete poems tumbled from my mind as I voyaged the Yangtze River and wandered among the islands of Hong Kong and the paddy fields of Thailand. My two books of poetry from this time are “By the Moon Gate: Poems from China” and “Echoes on a Rippling Pond: Poems from Thailand.”

1000 Seagulls (Yangtze River)

Along the dock at Nanking,
I began to draw one thousand seagulls.
The first had been drawn before.
So, I drew another, a third . . .
But all had been drawn before.

To catch life, I must be quick.
By less than a moment the seagull has changed.

But the gull doesn't stop,
Except to die,
Ah, such is splendid beauty,
To watch a seagull fly.

This Lonely Boat is Passing By (China)

A distant junk,
the Yellow Sea,
through mist and haze,
comes clear to me.

East, they turn
Sails taut –
Winds of such,
the West has not.

One billion crests
Pierce the sky,
this lonely boat
is passing by.

Mynahs on a Fallen Palm (Thailand)

Mynahs on a fallen palm,
Above the lily pads,
Watching –
Making like they know,
Who I am.

Frogs of the marshland,
Guffawing at the monsoon,
Then humming when I pass by.

Sunbirds in the bottlebrush,
Asking, "Where you go?"
(please let me slip by quietly –
and head on unopposed.)

I returned home from Asia, married, and for ten years lived on Night Hawk Way in Phoenix, Arizona. Instead of having a conventional job, I worked in my home office writing more poetry and drafting novels. I also earned a Juris Doctor degree from Arizona State University. During law school, I drafted four novels which I detail in this memoir and in "Law

School High.” These novels are about all I really got from my law school experience. I’ve never practiced law.

In 1998 my first husband and I moved from our suburban home in the Foothills of Phoenix to a ranch in rural Maricopa. I felt driven to immerse myself in the Sonora Desert and live a rural life. However, the ranch became a stressful money-pit and after a year I left my husband of thirteen years. For ten months I traveled the Southern US in a Mallard Trailer with my ranch hand boyfriend and Doberman Pinchers Minnie and Max. I was on a vision quest looking for a divorce settlement investment and a new life.

I landed at the Yacht House B&B in Pensacola and managed to run the hospitality business for two years. When my first husband pulled from the venture, I couldn’t sustain it. At the same time, my heart cried for the Sonora Desert, not Florida. I returned to Arizona a few months before 9-11-2001.



In the early 2000s I gave my mom three of my novel manuscripts to read: “Ten Years Past Cairo,” “And You Learn How to Kill,” and “Dreams along the Upside-Down River.” For the following year or two, I typed my great-grandmother’s diaries in MS Word, drew ancient Egyptian pictures and hieroglyphs, and sought help from the VA. I was going through a drawn-out difficult divorce; one that started on friendly terms but crash landed into harrowing depositions and courtroom battles. I also resided with a partner (my former ranch hand) who has some kind of ADHD affliction that brings about drastic mood swings (a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde syndrome to use my own literary label). As with my childhood trauma, I became reactive, withdrawn, depressed, and at times found it difficult to function.

Fortunately, the VA awarded me compensation by determining that my childhood adversities had caused PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and that my military experience exacerbated this condition. The upheaval of my divorce and my difficult relationship also brought about symptoms of PTSD. And on and on it went. But enough about this period of my life. I describe it more fully in my memoirs “The Trouble with Brass” and “The Desert’s Edge.”

The real problem during this episode of my life was the medications that VA doctors advised me to take. For nearly twelve years these medications inhibited my creative flow. Instead of writing or working on my stories, I read novels by Stephen King, Ann Rice, and crime and legal authors. By and by my mind peered from the fog and I ventured to ask my mom for the three manuscripts. Maybe I had a dream that inspired me to do this. In typical fashion, Mom didn’t even remember them and I couldn’t find any other copies. I more or less surrendered to never fulfilling my ambitions and to always living with adversity.

Then, miraculously, my sister found the manuscripts in her attic. Mom must have felt guilty about losing them and started asking around. Whatever the reason, their return motivated me to stop medicating and start answering the voices of my dreams—to write a bestseller or at least pick myself up and continue writing and finessing my stories. This is my passion, the magic that makes my world more than a tolerable place to live.



I’ve said enough about my rocky road background which I’m sure most people have had to some extent. I now resume the subject of this book, tarot insights and my personal deck of cards.

I began reading tarot cards while working at the University of Kuwait five years before Saddam Hussain's invasion. Many of the expatriated teachers at KU read astrology charts, the I Ching, the Kabbalah, and tarot cards. An interesting lanky man from Minneapolis-Saint Paul named David Rude taught me how to interpret the cards after giving me several readings. One reading that stands out ended on the Hermit card and David suggested that I would somehow end up alone in life.

His interpretation seemed dismal and I took the card's meaning differently. For me, the Hermit indicates my stubborn resolve to manage and take care of myself, often without the help of anyone else because of how I grew up. It's a more positive spin and I like reading the cards in the most constructive way possible. As far as I'm concerned, tarot is a tool to aid the questioner on his/her journey to accomplish a goal. I never dwell on, or create, ugly artwork and if my thoughts turn negative due to stress, I focus on positive images such as the spiritual symbols of the ancient cultures in my novels.



If a tarot reader sees in the cards only “death, destruction, and disaster,” he hasn’t read far enough into the meaning behind the imagery. Although such things do happen in life, doomsday reading is the TV and movie version of fortune telling. A negative reader of tarot probably doesn’t see the human spirit and mind as rising above negative situations and becoming self-aware. I know it’s not easy to find your true self amid the chaos, confusion, and stress of this world. It took me years of meditation and visualization to achieve mental clarity and disown the trauma, abuse, and degrading labels imposed on me since early childhood.

After I left Kuwait and moved to Phoenix, I invested in several decks of tarot cards with themes including ancient Egypt, herbs, Native Americans, and even cats. During the onset of the World Wide Web, my first husband and I formed a website business called Arastar Internet and I became a webmaster. From our initial hosting site, I spawned several website businesses. While at the Yacht House B&B, one of those businesses was “tarotinsights.com” where I gave readings based on visitors questions (see my collection “Poems and Tarot Insights from the Yacht House B&B.”)

Eventually, I gave away my tarot cards and here’s why. Twice during my adult life, I adopted the tenants of religion. Otherwise, my philosophical and spiritual leanings have primarily been Buddhist, Taoist, and even Hindu. The first time I became religious occurred while I was teaching in Thailand and suffering from culture shock (a form of PTSD). Because I’m a direct person who likes to get to the point and Thai people have an indirect way of expressing themselves, I faced a lot of misunderstandings. The missionaries in the small community where I worked became my closest friends and I fell under their sway. But soon after I returned to the US, married, and got on with my life, religion lost its appeal and I once again became much more comfortable following the Asian philosophies of respecting the natural world, having compassion for all beings, and relying on the self to obtain clarity of mind.

The second time I fell into religion, and the time I gave away my cards, occurred during my second marriage. After being together for twelve years, my ranch hand boyfriend and I married and I adopted his religion. Why? He and I have so little in common and I mistakenly thought that we could better relate if I spoke in terms of his religious way of thinking. My conversion lasted a short while. Adhering to his religion didn’t soften any of the misogyny lodged deeply in his brain and supported by his very religion. I didn’t gain his respect or

anything other than becoming his subservient wife, at least from his perspective. Once again, I had to shed my attachment to religion in order to achieve any kind of self-awareness. Religion may be helpful to some people but it caused me cognitive dissonance because I had adopted an ideology that conflicted with my core values and beliefs. This is possibly why my childhood was so chaotic. My inner reality couldn't accept that I was nothing but a "stupid little girl." I value myself too much to believe this negative and irrelevant misinformation imposed upon me.

Unfortunately, it appears that today's world suffers from a lot of cognitive dissonance. People are clinging to their childhood beliefs (indoctrinations). They try to justify inconsistencies and avoid certain facts and evidence to keep their conspiracy theories, religion, or politics relevant. Sadly, at least from my perspective, most people live their entire lives under a cloud of delusion.

What's the difference between illusion and delusion? Siegfried and Roy famously created illusions during their Las Vegas performances. Maybe this is the same thing as magical realism in literature. Illusions inspire awe and are usually creative manipulations. Delusions, on the other hand, cause people to lose their way on the path to self-awareness. Delusions clutter the human mind and create negative emotions such as bigotry, hatred, racism, and misogyny. It's far better for illusions to inspire creativity than for delusions to destroy a person's understanding of the self, others, and the world at large.



One of the biggest delusions people tend to have concerns human intelligence. Many people believe intelligence is strictly based on standardized tests that measure the human mind. A German psychologist first developed the IQ (intelligence quotient) theory over 100 years ago

which makes it a bit antiquated, don't you think? The IQ test attempts to estimate a person's intelligence for job or educational opportunities. Unfortunately, over the years, misguided people have used IQ measurements to substantiate racist and misogynistic beliefs (delusions) without considering the cultural biases on the standardized tests or in the individual's background. Not everyone is born to proactive, nurturing, and educated parents. Some of us had to raise ourselves because of negligence and other adversities which can create disadvantages on standardized tests.

Don't get me wrong. I value and appreciate a lot of people with high IQs. When I have a technical problem and call tech support, I'm overwhelmingly impressed with how the tech guru solves my problem; or when I talk to a medical specialist who addresses my concerns after surgery, I'm blown away by the fluency of his/her expertise. Such people possess a body of knowledge in their given field and this is only one form of intelligence. A tech support guru for my dell laptop most likely can't tell me which pills to take and when after my hip replacement surgery.

In the 1980s and 90s American developmental psychologist Howard Gardner first promoted the notion of multiple human intelligences that aren't measured by standardized tests alone. Intelligence is, after all, the workings of our vast and varied minds that operate and manage all that we do, not exclusively how we think.

Although I am not musically, mathematically, athletically or acrobatically inclined, I fall into a few of Gardner's intelligence categories. I have a penchant for using the written language to express myself and I have intrapersonal intelligence in that I know myself, rely on myself, and am introspective. But mostly, I fall into a category Gardner terms "spatial intelligence" which means that I visualize three dimensional patterns in my mind. I wrote the following poem on a

beach in Thailand while watching the sunset. It's one of my favorite and seems to fit into
Gardner's spatial intelligence.

Patterns in My Mind

Seldom enough do I watch the setting sun.
Today I've arrived
Where the distant sea
Meets a muddy marsh
That stretches to me,
And beyond me—
All around me.
I've arrived in time to view
The glowing yellow sun
Bounce light off minute waves—
Patterns in my mind.

Swallows are black.
They clutter the sky, at times,
Like flying ashes from a
Newspaper bonfire—
Like patterns in my mind.

A sea kite glides in the air,
Majestically,
Unlike the swallows.
I'm not sure
For what he searches—
But he knows
The patterns in my mind.

And cirrus clouds wisp from
A point of sun—
Soft and mellow—
A creamy subtle color.
They are exaggerated
Reflections of the
Minute waves.

The sun takes a while to set
When you arrive at full glow.
But when it does
It goes quickly,
Leaving a fading past.
They go to sleep a while

These patterns in my mind.

The point I really want to make is that by using tarot to visualize, we are intelligently using our minds. Visualization is why the philosophies of Asia and ancient cultures appeal to me. I'll explain more about this through the exploration of my 78 tarot cards, but first let me explain how and why I think in images more than in mere words or mathematical equations.

I don't need to trip on acid to see faces or dancing figures in trees, a stream, on a dirty windshield, or in boulders tumbling down a hillside. I don't need to be a mystic for things to shapeshift before my eyes. When I'm walking in my rural neighborhood, I think I see an eagle or a snake. When I near the object it turns out to be a rock, a piece of cacti wood or even a flapping plastic bag. Or, I see an owl on the roof of my house and then it shapeshifts into my cat. Maybe this isn't the standard definition of shapeshifting but it's mine and I explore it more fully through the ancient story in my novel "The Man from Sacaton."

Over the years I've learned that I possess two traits—synesthesia and pareidolia—that possibly explain why I'm an artist and poet. Pareidolia means that shapes, images, and patterns appear in what I am seeing. As a child I sometimes lay in bed, stared at the spackled popcorn ceiling, and saw cartoon characters, animals, and lots of faces. Synesthesia means that my senses crossover and I smell words, see nouns as shapes and colors, and even taste certain concepts. For example, I've always seen days of the week as round, textured, gray, red, and pink and I view the setting sun as:

A Sherbert flavored sunset
In scoops of hard ice cream
With yellow cotton candy pink
And marmalade between.

I'm not saying that I'm unique; in fact, I wonder if all humans possess some form of synesthesia and pareidolia. I believe these traits were predominant in ancient people especially

before written languages took over the human thought process. At least some of the early writing systems were picture words: Chinese was, in part, although maybe not the wedges of Sumerian cuneiform. Certainly, the hieroglyphs and glyphs of ancient Egypt and the Maya reinforce my idea that ancient people saw concepts in images rather than scrawling words. Since this is how I think, I've especially enjoyed creating hundreds of my own Egyptian and Maya picture words some of which I include in my personal deck of cards. I also believe the petroglyphs around the world come from ancient people who put their notions, observations, and worldviews into picture words.



To sum up this introductory chapter let me say that I wrote this memoir and created my own tarot deck to help me express my philosophical and spiritual views. In turn, I hope my artwork and storylines will inspire others and offer insights that eliminate delusional and negative thoughts.