

Tarot or Not Tarot?

BY WALTER I. ZEICHNER

A tarot reading tells a story. Each card in its placement within the reading is part of the story. It's a story of influences and energies. Sometimes tarot readings refer to specific things or events in the world, other times the wisdom is shared in the form of amorphous, less specific references. Always, though, the energy of the reading, the direction of the story, can be interpreted through one's lens or worldview, or one can take different perspectives, opening the mind to more possibilities.

When I first looked at The Brotherhood Tarot I focused on how the imagery related with the symbolism of the cards. The deck is a Faerie deck. Most cards include human figures, all of them male, garbed in a variety of styles from leather to toga to nude. The settings are beautiful. Some of the images are manipulated digitally so that there are special effects like sparkling crystals, people and objects flying or floating; it's about magic, so mundane rules don't apply.

The images didn't all seem to relate literally to the traditional meaning of the cards, and some cards didn't contain the number that the card represents in the deck. The eight of Pentacles, for instance, does not have eight pentacles on it, but the image resonates with the numerological meaning of the number eight. I wondered how

this would affect reading with the cards.

I've worked with other tarot decks, mostly the Crowley deck and the Barrett Egyptian deck. Besides the traditional meanings of the cards, I've learned to trance with each card, to go into the image on the card and see what connections present themselves. That spontaneous part of reading Tarot is also informed by the aspects of symbolism which remain more or less constant with each card no matter what



deck you're working with.

The first time I consulted The Brotherhood deck, I did one of the more traditional layouts with the questioner at the center, covered by two cards, surrounded by four cards, with a line of four more cards on the right, two more cards and any Major Arcana from the bottom five cards of the deck. I laid it out, worked with it a bit, then put it aside, returning to it a day later for further contemplation.

Tarot isn't necessarily about "fortune telling" in the

**The Brotherhood Tarot
A Gay-Spirited Deck
Created by
Patric "Pipa" Stillman
Oak Grove Oracle
www.OakGroveOracle.com
January, 2005**

way of going to a card reader who tells you when you'll meet your soul mate or when you'll strike it rich. There is another esoteric branch of Tarot that works with card reading as an oracle: a portal into the transpersonal, the collective unconscious, deep inner know-

The spontaneous part of reading Tarot is also informed by the aspects of symbolism which remain more or less constant no matter what deck you're working with.

ing, work between the worlds. This practice is personal, introspective, a tool for exploring.

In my reading, the questioner, me, was covered by the Sun card and the Strength card reversed: "compromised strength as an obstacle." What does that mean to me? Sometimes one must use different kinds of strength. As I write this I am in the middle of moving out of my house while experiencing a pinched nerve in my neck. My physical strength is compromised, so I'm doing things more slowly, asking for help, recognizing a limitation

rather than pushing my way through it. That's a rather obvious interpretation given my circumstances, and it sure fits!

The presence of the Sun card as we are about to enter my sun sign Aries was a reminder of the energetic activation I feel at this time of year, a resource that's available to me. As this tree (me) is in middle age, the springtime is not so much a time of new growth of major limbs as it is of strengthening the existing limbs. I specifically need to be aware of these things with my body considering old injuries, arthritis, the aforementioned pinched nerve, etc.

A good deck of Tarot is one in which I can work with the images and the meanings of the cards to see part of the story. The deck should not distract from the reading. The

reading "felt like a check-in rather than a forecast" said Bev. I agreed. The placement of the cards, the symbolism, worked just as with any deck, but we also discussed the difference she felt with all male images. We'd both been exposed to Karen Vogel and Vicki Noble's Motherpeace deck, which is all hand drawn images of women, children, and nature.

Bev commented on how the male images gave her a kind of distance from the reading. She explained that with images of women she would probably have felt more pulled in, more of a charge, more identification. But, Bev said, "I can work with these images by acknowledging the butch part of me."

The second reading was with a gay-identified man, we'll call him Shep. I drew seven cards, then one Major Arcana from the top of the deck towards the end of the reading. This reading was also a check-in. It addressed a number of challenges Shep is working with, but also showed beautifully how he consciously contains all this. The first and seventh cards so much seemed to be Shep, with the inside cards representing influences he is working with, and the last card drawn showing his faith and connection with his guides. I asked Shep how the images on the cards worked for him and his response was an enthusiastic, "Well of course I like them!"

I like The Brotherhood Deck. I will continue to work with it. Anyone interested in Tarot, Faeries, genderfuck, or just expanding horizons, could find this a useful tool. ▼

Walter Zeichner is a therapist, radio show host, witch, farmer, and activist currently on his way West.

Brotherhood Deck embodies these qualities. It's not flashy or pretentious, though it has a few slightly campy moments, like the Empress card.

I did a couple of readings with other people using The Brotherhood deck. I wanted to see how it worked ... take the deck for a test drive out in the world, as it were. The first reading was with a self-identified butch dyke, let's call her Bev. She shuffled and cut the deck, I drew four cards, then two from the bottom of the deck, and she drew one from the middle. The