This accessible and easy guide teaches you how to unlock the secrets concealed within the tarot. An outstanding tarot reader for over forty-five years, Sasha Fenton brings her professional expertise to help beginners learn to read tarot for themselves and others. Her no-nonsense guidelines, combined with your own intuition, make reading the cards easy and fun. She provides fresh and modern interpretations of each card, including their positive and negative implications, and what they mean when they are dealt out in reverse. She includes multiple suggestions for spreads—from the simple to the complex—that can be used for general as well as focused readings to provide clarity and to resolve specific questions. Unique to this tarot guide, Fenton discusses how to link card interpretations together to create a full narrative in a reading.

Included are tips and advice for purchasing and handling tarot cards, along with a brief history of their origin. Fenton also includes a discussion of failed readings to help you understand why things sometimes go wrong and what to do about it.

This book gives the novice an ideal introduction to the tarot, and before long you will be ready to explore your inner self and your future, and that of others.
Why a series of pictures on a set of cards should allow a reader to understand the nature of a complete stranger—to see exactly what is going on in his or her life and to accurately predict what is going to happen in the future—is beyond any of us to know and understand. We do not really know who invented tarot cards or how their intricate symbolism came into being. We know tarot cards have been around in some form or another since at least the 15th century AD, but it is hard to pinpoint why or when they were popularized as a form of fortune telling. There are many theories flying around about the tarot, and there are many interpretations for the card symbolism and their meaning. This book is based on my many years of working as a tarot consultant, reading cards for clients. It is a book for beginners who wish to learn to read the cards in order to see what fortunes the future may bring.

The day may come that you find yourself urged by fate, or by some internal need, to seek out a reading, and the chances are that you will find just the right person to provide a reading for you. Once you find a consultant that you are happy with, you will find yourself sitting in the reader’s consulting room. The room may be perfectly quiet or there may be some soft music playing in the background. The reader asks you to shuffle and cut a deck of cards, but she doesn’t focus as much on you as on something that is deep down inside herself. You begin to drift away from the outside world and focus on your own inner thoughts and needs. The ritual of handling and shuffling these strange and beautiful cards puts both you and the reader into a slightly meditative state of mind. This receptivity allows your spiritual guides to communicate with the spiritual guides of the reader. The reader starts to turn over one card after another, laying them out in a strangely mystical pattern. And then she speaks, and before you know it, your story is lifting itself from the cards and your future is being laid out before you.
This book shows you how to read the tarot for yourself and for others in a safe and sensible manner. Within these chapters, you will find the standard meanings of the cards (both Major and Minor Arcana), suggestions for spreads that can be used for a variety of purposes, and also ways of getting over the usual beginner's hurdle of how to link the cards together to make a coherent story out of them. I also include sections on why things sometimes go wrong and what to do when this happens. In short, you will soon discover much that is useful for a beginner, and also useful tips and hints as you travel further along the road to becoming a professional tarot reader.
Part One

TAROT AND FORTUNE TELLING
chapter one

THE HISTORY OF THE TAROT

The truth is nobody knows exactly from where the tarot originated, and there is disagreement among the many tarot experts, some of whom are quite strident in defense of their own theories. Some people tell us that the cards definitely originated in ancient Egypt, while others are equally certain that they came from 10th century China or Korea. What does appear certain is that gypsies used fortune-telling cards as they moved both westward and southeast through Europe and Asia, ahead of the invading Mongol and Turkish armies. It seems likely that the images depicted on the cards were adjusted or changed as they passed through each new culture and country and in each age. Many of the images that meant something to one group of people meant nothing to those in other countries or those who were born a hundred or so years later. This meant that ideas and images must have been abandoned many times in favor of those that made sense to each succeeding generation of clients. For example, if I were to talk to a client about the power struggles between the Emperor and the Hierophant, this would mean nothing to a 21st century client, but someone having a card reading in the 15th century would have known exactly what I was talking about.

Chess and ordinary playing cards are a spin-off from the tarot, with chess being older than the 16th century playing cards. In both cases, the images are of medieval and renaissance kings, queens, and knights, which leads us to suppose that these early cards were not only adapted to make sense to those who used them but that they were also designed to flatter the clientele of the day.
Early card images may have been absorbed from those that originated in any number of locations in Asia and the Orient as well as Greece, Egypt, the Middle East, and the Celtic countries, and the cards that we use today are probably an amalgam of many different spiritual traditions.

It is possible that the original European tarot was created in order to amuse and pacify a king who was fast descending into madness. In February 1392, Charles Poupart, the treasurer for King Charles VI of France, made a payment entry in his books for three gilt decks that were painted for Charles by Jacquemin Gringonneur. Charles went mad in the same year. It is known that other illustrations found their way into decks of tarot-like cards during the 14th and 15th centuries.

The earliest tarot deck of the type that modern tarot readers would recognize is the Visconti-Sforza deck, which was hand painted in the mid-fifteenth century. It is possible to track down copies of this beautiful deck even today. The Visconti-Sforza deck was created at the time of the marriage of Bianca Maria Visconti, daughter of the feared Filippo Maria Visconti, Duke of Milan, to the professional soldier Francesco Sforza in 1441.

The original deck contained 74 cards. It is interesting to note that some of the items pictured on these cards that have long been accepted as spiritual inspiration were actually heraldic emblems that belonged to the Visconti and Sforza families! Imagine such a deck being created for a powerful ruling elite in our own time. Would it depict the Stars and Stripes perhaps? And would this symbol eventually become translated into a truly “spiritual” image five centuries hence?

A 15th-century sermon against the cards talks about the four suits and the Major Arcana as two separate types of card, so these may not have been amalgamated into one deck until later. It appears that some form of playing cards came to Italy via North Africa, but whether these were tarot is not known. Most early tarot decks were Italian, but French ones soon followed. One early deck that is still in use today is the Tarot de Marseilles, which is based on woodblock prints. This has the familiar suits of Rods, Cups, Coins, and Swords depicted upon the cards, in addition to the court cards of the Minor Arcana and the strange trump cards of the Major Arcana. During the 19th century, Eliphas Levi linked
the cards to the Kabbala, and later A. E. Waite and Aleister Crowley linked them to astrology.

There are many other ideas about the origins of the tarot. My view is that there really is no single source to these magical cards and that they are in the process of changing and developing and transforming even now. Who knows what tarot readers will make of the present generation of cards 1,000 years into the future?
GUIDELINES, RITUAL, AND PROCEDURES

For the purposes of this book, I use the term “reader” for the person who does the reading and “client” for the person who receives the reading. The definition of a client is usually understood as a person who pays for a service, but a client in a tarot reading can be a friend or family member. You may not be interested in becoming a professional reader, so your “clients” may never pay you, but for the purposes of this book anybody who receives a reading will be called a client.

While we are on the subject of terminology, I have used “he” and “him” where there is no specific gender requirement, as this makes the text less clumsy. As it happens, while tarot readers may be either sex, their clients are frequently women. It is possibly the more receptive, yin nature of women that opens them up more readily to fortune telling and divination systems in general.

Why Is Tarot So Popular?

Tarot cards are easy to use, which is why tarot is such a popular option, and this is why there are far more tarot readers around than astrologers, numerologists, palmists, Chinese astrologers, or any other type of fortune teller. Some tarot readers are also clairvoyants and mediums, others are not. We all have a fund of intuition within us; learning how to use the tarot will release that intuition so that we can make good use of it. Some people discover that they are so psychic that they only need put down a few cards to create a link between themselves and their
clients, while others need to rely heavily on learning from a book how to interpret the cards. It doesn’t matter—there is no right or wrong and whatever works for you is best. You will also find that what works on one day doesn’t work in the same way on the next.

**Problems That Beginners Face**

In the years that followed the publication of my first book on the tarot, I discovered that most beginners experience problems when trying to link cards together to make a coherent story. The cards in a spread may have nothing in common with each other, and sometimes they seem to contradict each other. I discovered that it is not enough to simply tell a student what the cards mean, suggest a few spreads, and then let him get on with it, so I have addressed this problem with chapter 10, “Linking Cards.”

Sometimes readings just don’t work. There are a number of reasons that a reading falls flat on its face, and it is not usually the reader’s fault. Later in this book, you will find a useful chapter on the reasons for failed readings and how to cope when this happens.

**Buying a Deck of Cards**

There is a superstition that it is unlucky to buy tarot cards for yourself, but this is not true. If you can’t choose the cards you want, how can you expect to be happy with them? There is a huge selection on the market these days and it is also worth checking out the Internet, especially if you can’t locate what you want in the shops. If you already have a deck of cards that you like, they will work well with this book, as long as they are ordinary, standard tarot cards and not some deviation from the norm. Minor differences in terminology don’t matter but if the deck is not really a standard tarot one, you will experience problems. This book is illustrated with cards from the classic Rider-Waite-Smith deck, which is available from U.S. Games Systems, Inc. (www.usgamesinc.com).

I have used standard tarot terminology in this book, but you can swap some of the names around if you find that those in your deck of
cards are not exactly the same as mine. The following is a list of common substitutes, starting with those that I have used in this book, that is, Cups, Wands, Coins, and Swords. I have also included the playing card equivalents, in case you happen to have only a deck of ordinary playing cards at hand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tarot</th>
<th>Playing cards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cups, Chalices</td>
<td>Hearts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wands, Rods, Staves, Sticks</td>
<td>Clubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coins, Pentacles</td>
<td>Diamonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swords</td>
<td>Spades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knights, Princes</td>
<td>Jacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>Queens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kings</td>
<td>Kings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pages, Princesses</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The only differences I have seen in a standard deck for the Major Arcana are the names Transformation for the Death card and Obsession for the Devil card. Another problem with the Major Arcana is that cards number 8 and number 11 (Justice and Strength) are frequently transposed in some tarot decks, but I have kept to Levi's original order, which is number 8 for Justice and number 11 for Strength. The original arrangement was changed by Crowley, who moved them around to fit neatly into the order of planets and signs in astrology.

**Intuition and Psychic Gifts**

Your own intuition is your best friend, so if you feel that a particular card means something other than the description in this or any other book, please allow your own ideas free rein. If a particular story seems to leap out of a spread of cards, go with the flow and tell the story as you see it. If you consider yourself to be as psychic as a brick, you can still read the
fortune telling by tarot cards, but you will need to learn the meaning of each card by heart until your intuition starts to develop.

Energizing a New Deck

The simplest way to energize a new deck of cards is to take them out of their wrapping and hold them in your hands for a while. Imagine a white light coming down from heaven and ask your god or your spiritual guides to bless the cards and to help you put them to good use for the benefit of those you read for. You will then need to shuffle the cards and to handle them in order to take their newness away and to put your own “vibes” or aura on them so as to make them your own.

If you are replacing a worn-out deck, you can lay your old deck out on a table and take each of the new cards and pair it face to face with the same card in your old deck (that is, Fool with Fool, Ace of Wands with Ace of Wands, and so forth).

Do You Need to Wrap Your Cards in Silk?

Common sense dictates that you should keep your cards safe. Many people like to wrap their cards in a silk scarf and they may then leave them loosely wrapped in a safe place. Others prefer to keep their silk-wrapped cards in a velvet bag or a special box. About the only thing that won’t work is keeping the cards in their original packet for long because this soon wears out. Oddly enough, there is no need to wrap cards in silk at all, and I have never done so. I have many decks of tarot cards, and I have collected attractive jewelry or cigarette boxes from all around the world in which to keep them.

The tradition of silk being protective comes from a strange source. Japanese warriors wrapped clean, good quality silk around their bodies before a battle, so that if they were unfortunate enough to be hit by an arrow, it would drive the silk binding into the body. This allowed the arrow to be removed with far less damage than would otherwise have been the case, and the wound was less likely to become infected. Even today, when “action stations” is broadcast on a British warship, the first thing the crew have to do is to put on clean underwear, because this will keep any wounds cleaner and less prone to infection. Working on this
premise, it might make sense to keep one’s cards wrapped in a piece of clean white cotton, but it is always best for the tarot reader to do what feels right. Therefore, if you wish to wrap your cards in a pretty piece of silk, please do so. Whatever you do decide on, keep your cards in a safe place and don’t allow others to fiddle around with these precious tools of your trade.

When I teach tarot, I have decks of cards that I lend to students who don’t have their own cards, but I keep the cards that I use for readings separate and I use them only for that purpose. There is nothing to stop you lending your deck to a trusted friend in an emergency, but this must always be with your permission.

**Bad Vibes**

If you find your cards reacting in a strange way after they have been handled by a client or by any person whom you don’t like, or if you feel that your cards have been contaminated, you can “clean” them by repeating the process that I suggested for energizing a new deck. In the worst-case scenario, you should burn the cards on a bonfire and buy a new deck.

**Where Should You Read the Cards?**

Common sense tells you that you need peace and quiet for a tarot reading, and you also need a table that is large enough for you to lay your cards out on. Professional readers are accustomed to working in noisy conditions in public places and often have to lay cards out on any spare space that comes to hand, but a new reader needs peace and quiet and the right conditions.

Clear dinner plates and other things off your table and give it a wipe or polish so that it is clean. You can use a pretty cloth to lay cards out on and perhaps light a candle before giving your reading. Some people light incense sticks, but not everyone likes the smell of incense, and
some people are actually allergic to it. I know, because I cough nonstop when incense is around.

**Guidelines for Tarot Readers**

Always be careful not to frighten your client. Most people take what is said to them very seriously, even if they put on an outward show of skepticism, so it is unforgivable to frighten or upset someone needlessly. Every professional reader has to take care when giving bad news, so if one of your clients picks out a set of really black cards, it would be worth toning down the interpretation, even to the point of risking your credibility. If you maintain your interest in the tarot, you will soon learn how to judge people and will develop an instinct for giving bad news tactfully. Don’t depress your client.

There are readers who seem keen to view life in a negative or depressing manner and who just can’t allow themselves to give good news or to look for good things in a bad situation. On the other hand, there are readers who underestimate pain, fear, anxiety, or stress that a client may be undergoing and who give an equally unrealistic reading. In short, try to give help and advice that is realistic. Remember that what you say will influence a client’s future actions, so always take a responsible attitude.

**Shuffling and Cutting the Cards**

Ask your client to shuffle the cards and then to put them back in one deck again. Some readers ask their client to cut the cards into two or three piles and choose one pile for the reading, while others ask the client to cut the cards and then put the lower pile back on the top.

If you like to see your cards well stirred, and if you use cards in both the upright and reversed positions, ask your client to stir them around on the table and then put them back into a pack once again. If you use reversed cards, please ensure that the cards are given to you with the edge that was facing the client turned so that it faces you.
Some old-style readers actually ask the client to spread the cards out on the table, and then to choose seven, ten, eleven, thirteen, or fifteen cards for the reading, depending upon the type of spread they use. This is fine too.

Others like their clients to use their left hand to cut the cards, and then to move the “cut” to the left. All this is a matter of discovering the method that feels right for you.

**Can You Read the Cards for Yourself?**

I have heard it said that it is unlucky to read the cards for yourself, but this is not true; however, it is usually difficult to give yourself a reading because you are too close to your own problems to be objective. Much the same goes for giving readings to those whom you know well. If you do give yourself a reading, take a sheet of paper and write the date on it, then make a note of the cards you draw and make a note of what you think each card is saying. This means that you can check your reading and the interpretation that you gave each card later to see if it matches up to what you made of it at the time. Another idea is to record your reading on tape. Most professionals make a recording of their reading to give to their clients, so this is good practice for you. If you do this, call each card by its name or state which cards are where in the layout, and then make your interpretation. You can then replay your reading a few months later to judge how your interpretation held up, whether the cards told the real story and your interpretation was correct.

**Upright and Reversed Cards**

Most tarot readers prefer to use the cards in the upright position but some use both upright and reversed cards. Some readers habitually use the cards in the upright position but take note if a card accidentally happens to turn up in a reversed position. In this book, I give both the upright and reversed meanings so that you can use them as you wish. Court cards are especially interesting if they land the wrong way up, as
that tells you that the person represented by that card is not particularly helpful to the client.

**Tip:** If a card falls out of the deck while the client is shuffling, take a look at it, as it may well be significant.

### Asking Questions

I recently watched a television program on the subject of astrology. After going into some of the ins and outs of the subject, the program showed two reporters being sent for readings with two different readers. One of these was a top astrologer and another was a psychologist specializing in career advice, but for the purposes of the program, the psychologist was passed off as an astrologer. The guinea pigs reported that both “astrologers” gave them accurate character assessments. However, I noticed that the psychologist asked the clients one question after another. If this man had tried his hand at being an astrologer or anything else in real life, he would not have got away with this. Occasionally you may have to ask a question in order to clarify a point, but experience will teach you how to phrase this without appearing to fish for information.

Some readers tell their clients to ask three questions for a set fee, while others ask clients to tell them what they want the reading to concentrate on (for example, money, relationships, health). This tells the reader what the client is worried about, thus cutting down the need for any real skill, and in my opinion such readers are lucky to get away with such cheating.