

The Myths Vs. The Facts of Tarot

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As you shuffle the deck, a mysterious card lands face up. The skeleton cloaked in black stares back up at you from the surface of the card of death, and your heart drops. Has your fate been sealed for you, or does the ink and paper mean something completely different? Tarot has long been associated with magic, witchcraft, and the unknown. From movies, tv shows, music videos, and even to the nerdy side of Dungeon's & Dragons (D&D), Tarot is often surrounded with a whole lot of misunderstanding. While Tarot is usually portrayed as a supernatural force with dark, mysterious, or even evil powers, it's just a psychological and symbolic tool with meanings shaped by the mind, misunderstandings, and cultural influence.

Tarot cards, or simply called Tarot, is a deck of seventy-eight cards. These cards consist of two types, Major Arcana, and Minor Arcana. The Major Arcana, which is twenty-two of the cards, has some of the cards that are more well known, with the devil, death, the fool, so on and so forth. The Minor Arcana, which makes up the rest of the fifty-six cards, is made up of four suits, cups, wands, swords, and pentacles. According to HowStuffWorks, 2023, Tarot cards were made in the mid 15th century. They were made and drawn to play a game named 'Tarocchi' which is pretty close to bridge. It was originally used as a status symbol because it showed that you could afford an artist to draw you a deck of cards. They eventually became a tool for divination in the late 18th century, when an occultist named Jean-Baptise Aliette used the Tarocchi cards in her practices and published a guide on how to use the cards.



This shift in how Tarot cards were used also helps us understand how belief and the power our minds give things can change our perception. In the video, *The Power of Belief: Its Impact on our Minds*, in section 9 (the mind of the believer), published in 1998, talks about



something called “The Nocebo Effect.” Many people know what the placebo effect is, and the Nocebo effect is very similar. It's the idea of thinking something is going to happen because you took or did something leading to it, and so our brain makes it happen, or thinks it's happening. An example of this is shown in the video, explaining that if someone gives you a Tarot reading and says that your back is going to hurt, or that you're going to get sick, you are more than likely going to notice the symptoms of pain or sickness much easier, because your brain has been primed to expect it. Another example of how this works is something that actually doesn't have anything to do with Tarot. In the same video, it talks about something called “Gulf War Syndrome” where thousands of veterans who served in the gulf war claimed that it caused them to get sick. There was a massive study that happened, and they did have real symptoms, but no doctor could find any virus, bacteria, or anything else that connects all the victims of this syndrome other than serving in the Gulf War. Stossel, the host of the documentary, states this. “All that publicity about poison gas, environmental toxins, and about other soldiers getting sick, that plus the stress of military service can make people sick.” Right after this, he is interviewing a guest, and what they talk about is crucial. Stossel asks the man if the soldiers are really getting sick from them believing that they are going to, and the man responds “Whether something is there or not may be irrelevant. It may just be the belief system at work.”

Just as service members can share symptoms and perceptions, the media may spread incorrect interpretations of topics like tarot. *Supernatural* is a show about two brothers, Sam and Dean Winchester and their journey hunting down and killing monsters inspired from, you guessed it, supernatural sources. A good majority has to do with Christian sources, like ghosts, angels, and demons, but it also includes different cultures. One of the episodes, season 4 episode 12, “Chriss Angel is a douche bag”, which was aired on January 22, 2009, is about magicians and Tarot. According to IMDb (2009):

Sam and Dean travel to Magic Week in Iowa where amateurish and professional magicians are gathered everywhere presenting their abilities. They discover that the veteran and decadent magician Jay has a fantastic show with two other old friends risking his own life; but when Jay succeeds to escape from death, another magician dies the same way. Sooner the Winchester brothers find that one magician of the trio is using black magic. [But the thing is that the magician is using an enchanted Tarot Deck to escape death, while condemning mostly innocent passersby to death].

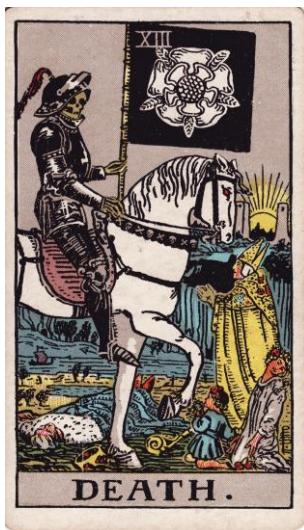
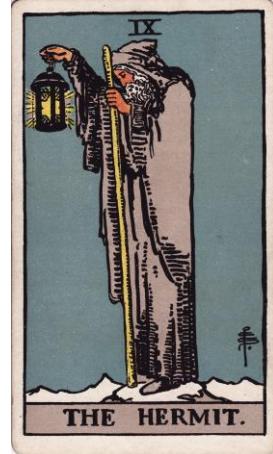


In Shayfer James's *Weight of the World* music video, at 0:45, you can see that they are playing with Tarot cards, and the death Tarot card is on top. Immediately after, at 0:48, you can see the man who has the card has shifty eyes. Many people think that the death card in Tarot is the worst card possible because death is a very taboo subject and is seen as the worst thing that can happen to a person. With my understanding of Tarot, death is not the worst card in the deck. Death in the Tarot deck means "Spiritual transformation, new beginnings, letting go, endings, change, transition, sudden or unexpected upheaval." (Biddy Tarot, 2025). In my opinion, tower is the worst card you can pull, because it means "Chaos, destruction, sudden upheaval, trauma, unexpected change, disaster, loss, tragedy, revelations, confusion, pain, divorce, abuse, violence, bankruptcy, and natural disasters." (Biddy Tarot, 2025). I think that by these two examples, it shows that people place Tarot in a pretty bad light, and in the case of *Supernatural*, it even kills.



Next, I will be talking about what some people think that some Tarot cards mean vs. What they actually mean, more specifically, the major arcana. Some of these will be what I

personally thought that they meant before I researched Tarot. First, Hermit. It's the 9th card in the Major Arcana, and I assumed that it meant that you were going to be all alone. After all, it's the hermit. But according to Biddy Tarot, it means enlightenment, reflection, contemplation, and solitude.



Next, death. It's usually seen as "welp you're going to die." Even seen in Dungeons & Dragons (D&D), with the deck of many things (legacy edition), you can see this pretty clearly. The deck of many things is an item in D&D that is inspired by Tarot and has magical properties. Death, aka "skull" in the deck of many things, has the power to summon an avatar of death. "You summon an avatar of death--a ghostly humanoid skeleton clad in a tattered black robe and carrying a spectral scythe..." In this situation, the player needs to fight this avatar of death alone, until one of them dies. However, death in Tarot means something almost completely different. As I said earlier in this paper, death in Tarot simply means that one thing is going to end and another thing is going to begin. This could be anything from you getting fired to you changing classes and teachers.

Finally, the devil card, and the meaning completely changes based on who you ask. Many people associate the devil card with evil forces, a representation of evil and bad morals. Some interpretations talk about addiction, depression, mental health problems, obsession, and even violence and abuse. This interpretation can make people see this card as an ominous sign that it is about self-destruction. However, sources, like the Tarot book I have at home, highlight the connection to the carnal and physical aspects of life. With this interpretation, the devil is less than an earth-shattering card, but a reflection of our human nature, deep down, about the pull of the desires of earth and the challenges that come with living in this society.



In a similar vein, I would like to now talk about the minor arcana. More specifically, I want to talk about the Pentacle suit. I did a mini interview with one classmate and Professor Chris McCarthy. I simply asked them what they thought that the pentacle suit would mean, and I had them type their answer down, making sure that they wouldn't be able to see the other answer as they typed so they wouldn't be influenced by the other answer. Billy Yang answered, "Based on movies, a pentacle means a symbol of demonic or ritual." Chris McCarthy answered "The word and symbol remind me of a pentagram, which I associate with the occult. So, I automatically think it involves something Satanic, evil, or dark in nature." In actuality, the Pentacle suit mostly refers to wealth, whether its physical or emotional wealth. According to Biddy Tarot, "The Suit of Pentacles Tarot card covers material aspects of life including work, business, trade, property, money, and other material possessions. The positive aspects of the Suit of Pentacles include manifestation, realization, proof, and prosperity."

At the end of the day, Tarot is misinterpreted through media, culture, and symbolism. Personally, I think the real magic isn't in the cards, it's in the way that we see and give meaning to things. To me, it doesn't matter if it's spiritual, emotional, or just a bit of paper with a drawing. I will continue to use tarot, because although I might not put as much faith in them as some others, I still believe that knowledge can come from anywhere, even if it is little pieces of paper. Many people are afraid of the symbols, not the truth behind them, and that says more about us as people than cards ever could.

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