



TAROT FOR

# Storytellers

A HOW-TO BOOK BY  
MONICA VALENTINELLI



**Tarot for Storytellers** teaches you how to develop new characters, plots, and setting using a deck of tarot cards.

Inspired by Monica Valentinelli's popular workshop, this how-to book is beginner-friendly and can be used by authors or game masters. It includes:

- 10 writing exercises
- Brief history of tarot
- Tarot card meanings
- Shapes of narratives
- Additional uses for games
- Recommended resources
- ...and more!



Visit the author's [website at booksofm.com](http://booksofm.com).



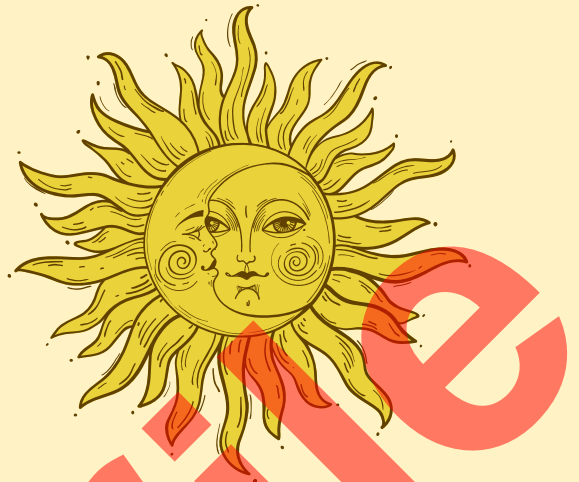
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## Statement about AI

The cover and contents of this book were not intentionally produced or edited with generative AI (gen AI) features in Canva Pro or other applications. Additionally, the exercises in this book are taught to help creators and are not intended to be used with gen AI.

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# Introduction

Tarot is great for creative inspiration due to its narrative nature, gorgeous advances in card printing, beautifully-illustrated artwork, and unlimited variety of themes and genres. For the past couple of years, I've been teaching a writing workshop for storytellers using this tool. I had the great fortune to present *Tarot for Storytellers* to sold-out audiences in the Gen Con Writer's Symposium and online through the Rambo Academy for Wayward Writers and Clarion West. Now, I'm pleased to offer you a book that expands on the material presented in my workshop to help you draw inspiration from tarot to draft scenes and stories, sessions and campaigns.

What makes tarot unique? For centuries, tarot was collected and played as a game. Now, tarot cards are often read to impart wisdom about the human condition. Like fairy tales, the story present in each card relays a valuable life lesson. Sometimes, it's clear from the art what the card's message means. Other times, a guidebook helps flesh out the card's nuanced meanings.

Do you need an excuse to buy your first deck of tarot cards? Are you a collector and want more?

If the answer is "Yes!" then you are in excellent company.

The writing exercises in this book are designed for people who love the art of tarot and storytelling. As you use the exercises and guidance in this book, you'll learn how to rely on your intuition and author's instincts. To accommodate your needs, I've included a history of tarot, an abbreviated overview of the Major Arcana, and a run-down of all four suits found in the Minor Arcana along with ten writing exercises. You'll also find additional references for your personal use should you wish to explore tarot in more depth and a section to use tarot in your games.

Ultimately, I designed *Tarot for Storytellers* to bridge the gap between tarot and storytelling by emphasizing the cards' narrative aspects. No matter *my* intent, however, let me be clear: there is no "true way" to use tarot in your writing or game design process. It's up to you, the storyteller, to discover what works for you and what doesn't. Whether you're an author or a gamemaster, I believe in your ability to tell wonderful stories.



# History of Tarot



Image (above):  
"The Traitor" card from the  
Visconti-Sforza Tarot deck.  
Circa 1450.

Tarot originated as a medieval Italian game that was commissioned and played by wealthy families. Amongst the Italian elite, 15th century nobles played a trick-taking card game like bridge called "tarocchini." Notably, the Visconti-Sforza tarot deck, with its vibrant, hand-painted pictures, included suits that modern tarot card enthusiasts recognize in today's decks: batons (or clubs), coins, cups, and swords.

By the beginning of the 16th century, an updated version of tarocchini, called the Minchiate tarot, was popularized in Florence, Italy. This deck of 97 cards expanded on its predecessor to include additional trump cards. The Minchiate tarot contains much of the major and minor arcana familiar to tarot readers today. The additional cards incorporate astrology symbols, virtues, and the elements.

Tarot was predominantly used as a game, rather than a tool for divination, until the early 19th century. In the late 18th century, French occultists speculated on the nature of tarot, adding a mystical attribute that did not previously exist. Jean-Baptiste Alliette, writing as Etteilla, assigned divinatory meanings for all 78 cards found in the Tarot de Marseille, a bright, bold deck printed with woodblocks by Nicolas Conver around 1760. Our modern understanding of tarot, which includes esoteric meanings and erroneous claims, date back to this period. For example, a Protestant pastor named Antoine Court, writing as Antoine Court de Gébelin, falsely attributed the origin of tarot to "ancient Egyptian wisdom" in *Le Monde primitif, analysé et comparé avec le monde moderne* (1774).

Following this new, theoretical usage of tarot, its shift from a game to a divinatory tool was ultimately propelled by Marie Anne Lenormand. A famous French bookseller and self-proclaimed necromancer, Lenormand popularized cartomancy during the Napoleonic Era and used a deck of playing cards illustrated with unique symbols that, following her death, was named after her. Though the Lenormand divination system is not the same as tarot's, it is her efforts that bridged the gap between theoretical cartomancy and its popularized practice that continues to this day.



Images (left):  
Mlle. Lenormand's  
fortune-telling cards,  
with a depiction of the  
card back. Circa 19<sup>th</sup>  
century.



## History of Tarot (Cont'd)

The two decks of tarot cards that are the most popular, however, originate in England. As Western occultism spread throughout Europe in the 19th century, two members of the Order of the Golden Dawn designed their own sets of tarot cards: A.E. Waite collaborated with Pamela Coleman Smith to design the world's most popular deck, the Rider-Waite-Smith tarot, and Aleister Crowley worked with Lady Frieda Harris to develop a tarot card deck, called the Thoth Tarot, drawing from his interpretation of the Kabbalah and other Western occult systems.

Since the Rider-Waite-Smith (RWS) tarot first debuted in 1909, there have been hundreds, if not thousands, of iterations that are structurally similar, if not identical, to the classic RWS deck. Most modern decks, however, aren't just used for divination. In contemporary circles, tarot cards have emerged as collectible pieces of art that employ multiple uses. A deck of tarot cards can be used to showcase an artist's talent, add mystery and nuance, reveal advice and spiritual guidance, play games, or inspire creators with their detailed descriptions, sequential designs, and varied themes.

In *Tarot for Storytellers*, you'll be using a deck of tarot cards to help you write characters and plots for your stories and, if you're a game master, your characters, scenes, sessions, or campaign.

If you don't own a deck of tarot cards, don't worry. You can draw cards for free online. The writing exercises included in this book are effective regardless of which tarot deck you use, but the results will vary depending on your deck's theme and its art.



*Images (left): Three cards from the Rider-Waite-Smith tarot deck circa 1909. The deck has been referred to as the Rider-Smith deck, Rider-Waite, and Rider-Waite-Smith.*

*The title's variations reflect different ways of crediting the original creators. The names refer to the original publisher, William Rider & Sons, the deck's designer, A.E. Waite, and the artist, Pamela Coleman Smith.*

# Materials

The writing exercises draw on the imagery of your tarot cards and the narrative arcs found within each set. You can perform the exercises with any deck of tarot cards, but you'll get different results depending on the theme and the art depicted. If you're tight on funds, I've included some websites in the Resources section (pg. 44) where you can draw tarot cards for free.

If you need to develop or flesh out a lot of characters, choose a deck that has several depictions of characters or people. If, however, you're focused on using the cards to help you develop only a handful of characters, you can use a deck that isn't fully illustrated. Sometimes, the first ten cards of each suit in the Minor Arcana doesn't contain any character art; they're simply drawn with a specific number of wands, disks, swords, and cups.

In addition to a deck of tarot cards, grab whatever you normally use to write. The timed exercises are short and typically last for five minutes. Some exercises also include options to roll dice—a d20, d10, and d4—to add variability and gamify the results.



*Images (above):  
The cards depicted are from The Gilded Tarot, designed by digital artist  
Ciro Marchetti. The Gilded Tarot is a RWS-based tarot deck first  
published in 2009.*

