

# Adam McLean's Study Course on the artwork and symbolism of modern tarot

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## Lesson 5 : Tarot with a purpose - Some promotional decks

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A large number of tarots have been produced in order to promote or sell some other item. Though this would have been the intention of the publisher it was not necessarily that of the artist and some really fine tarot designs have been commissioned in this way. The first ever such tarot appears to be that produced by Brown Company of New York in order to promote their Linweave range of paper, which were art papers coloured and with a textured surface. Here is a list of some such promotional tarots.

- 1967 Linweave
- 1968 James Cooper Tarot - *Eye Magazine*
- 1972 Eddy Match Co.
- 1975 *Jackie Magazine* 25 Oct 1975
- 1979 *Annabella* Magie Noire Tarot
- [1970's] Atorel
- 1991 Cher Promo Tarot
- 1996 Gundam Wing - Ugeppa
- 1997 Aura Soma
- 1997 Pete's Wicked Ale tarot
- 1998 *Young & Modern Magazine* – Feb 1998
- 1998 Caring Psychic Family
- 2000 *New Woman Magazine* Tarot
- 2001 *13 Ghosts* Promotional Tarot
- 2002 Elle Tarot (Hong Kong magazine)
- 2002 Ribon Furoku Tarot
- 2002-2003 Escaflowne
- 2003 *Cosmopolitan* 12/2003 Karma-Tarot Karten
- 2003 *Carnivàle*
- 2003 Penny Farthing Press
- 2004 Cartoon Network Tarot
- 2004 *Charmed* Tarot
- 2004 Fullmetal alchemist Tarot
- 2000-2004 Tarot de la Revista *Super Pop* (3 different tarots)
- [2004 ?] Japanese - Manga Tarot from Spanish Magazine *Mas Manga*

2005 *Chinese National Geography Magazine* Gift - Cosplay tarot  
 [2000-2005 ?] Taiwan - Telecom Fairy Promo Tarot Cards  
 [2000-2005 ?] Japanese - Manga Gift Amazing Tarot Part 1  
 [2000-2005 ?] Japanese - Manga Gift Amazing Tarot Part 2  
 [2000-2005 ?] Japanese - Manga Gift Here Tarot  
 [2000-2005 ?] Japanese - Manga Gift O-ra Tarot  
 [2000-2005 ?] Japanese - Manga Gift Original Tarot  
 [2000-2005 ?] Japanese - Manga Gift The Great Love Tarot  
 [2000-2005 ?] Japanese - Manga Gift The Tarot of Wonderland  
 [Unknown date] Tattoo tarot  
 [Unknown date] Ballet West Carl Orff tarot cards

The *Linweave tarot* of 1967 was one of the earliest of the modern tarots. Someone at the Brown Paper company must have liked tarot and had the paper company commission the designs for 42 cards, the majors, court cards and aces, then had these printed on their different papers to distribute as a sample 'swatch' of their Linweave paper. Four artists contributed - David Palladini (who later created the well known *Aquarian Tarot*, 1970 and his *New Palladini*, 1996), Nicolas Sidjakov a Latvian-born American illustrator of picture books for children, and two other illustrators Hy Roth, and Ron Rae. None of these, except Palladini seem to have worked on tarot images subsequent to the Linweave commission.

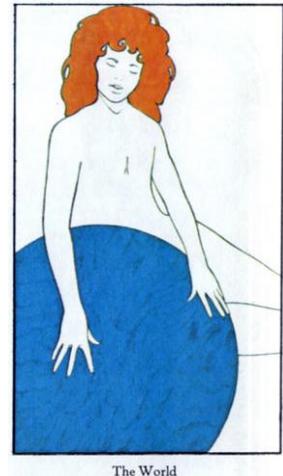


The designs have, of course, a 60's flower power or hippie style to them, particularly those of Ron Rae. Sidjakov takes his inspiration more from traditional woodcut tarots, such as the tarot of Marseilles. Hy Roth has his own rather attractive style with linear forms, modelled with shading and then coloured. Palladini's work is very distinctive but were not directly used when designing his *Aquarian Tarot*. Each artist seems to have been given ten cards to illustrate, with Palladini the extra two, to make the 42. The 'cards' are rather large 8.5 by 5.5 inches (215x140mm). Each has a divinatory meaning printed on the back of the card.

From paper we next move to safety matches. In 1972 the Eddy Match Company of Pembroke, Ontario, Canada issued a series of 22 matchbooks each with a tarot card image. These were apparently designed by D'Arcy Jonathan Dacre Boulton. These were not issued as cards but as small brightly coloured matchbooks.



Pop magazines readily took up the idea of providing tarots as a promotional item. The first to do this may have been the *Eye Magazine* of New York in its October 1968 issue, where it printed a fine series of tarot designs by James Cooper as a poster that could be detached from the magazine. This is a rather early, modern tarot. Being included in this rock music magazine it must have inspired other artists to see tarot as a valid art form. Like the *Linweave*, with which it is contemporary, it has the hippy style artwork, reminiscent of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band* period. The artwork, though in this late 60's style, adheres quite closely to the established tarot imagery.



In the UK, *Jackie*, a magazine aimed at female teenagers, printed a series of tarot designs in its 25th October 1975 issue. These were obviously re-drawn from the *David Sheridan* tarot of 1972 but much more sensitively and subtly coloured (the *Jackie* Magician is shown on the left). They understandably missed out the Devil card and renamed the 'Pope' to 'Jupiter'.



Other tarots were issued with the UK based *New Woman* magazine. *Cosmopolitan* magazine issued at least two decks. One with a 2001 French edition, and the other with the December 2003 German edition. Neither of these are traditional tarots, and both adopt a humorous and sexy style. *Young & Modern Magazine* February 1998, in the UK, produced a tear out tarot, with small (2 inch high) cards. The artwork by the illustrator Elizabeth Lada is surely much too well designed merely to be just given away for free, and these cards are now almost totally unknown even to tarot collectors, so I will show some of them below.



In Spain the magazine *Super Pop* has produced at least three tarots as promotions, free with its issues, and the magazine *Mas Manga* has issued a rather fine manga tarot which unlike many of this genre, actually holds to the tarot structure. A German magazine issued a *Sailor Moon Tarot* which is now well sought after by collectors.

Other media also got into the act of using tarot decks to promote their products. A number of television shows have given away tarots as part of their promotional material at openings etc. The dark and brooding *Carnivàle* series which actually had a tarot theme running through the episodes, issued a full tarot promo deck, which was apparent created extremely quickly by a graphics company. It makes no direct references to scenes in the show or to the opening credits which show an elaborate tableau of tarot imagery. Fans must have been a bit disappointed by the deck, which is instead based on stylized carnival masks. The US *Charmed* television show must be popular in France, as a French publisher was able to issue a 78 card deck. The pips and courts are rather poor and conventional images, but the major arcana contain within a stylized border, photographs of characters from the show. Being published in France it is rather rare in the USA and consequently very collectable by the fans of the show. The artwork is so poor that few tarot collectors will be interested in this deck. The US *Cartoon Network*, which produces a number of major cartoon shows, issues some trading cards to promote and sustain interest in its shows. Among these is a stylized cartoon tarot deck of majors, which is stated to be based on the original series. The artwork is rather busy but surprisingly respects the tarot structure. Like many of these tarots issued as promos with shows, there are many people apart from tarot enthusiasts wanting to collect them so this deck is rather difficult to find and can be expensive. The cards are rather large 5.75 by 3.5 inches (145x88mm) and are printed in muted greens, greys and reds. The children's cartoon show *Fullmetal Alchemist* has spun off a few tarots, some of which may not be authorised. The version initially produced by the company was issued in 2004. Although it is in the form of a 78 card deck with majors and the suits, there seems no discernable tarot imagery on the cards, even on the majors. This is quite common with anime series which issue such 'tarot' decks. These are really just a form of collectable card, each of which bears a scene or character from one of the shows, with little or even no tarot content, even though the deck is called a 'tarot'. The *Gundamwing* cartoon series, on the other hand, has produced at least three tarot decks, two of which are really expressive 22 card decks respecting the tarot structure. The version issued in 1996 with artwork by Ugeppa is a beautifully designed tarot, and the artist only allows 'gundams' or mechanised fighting suits, to intrude into the backgrounds of a few of the cards as a token gesture. Instead we are presented with an almost traditional tarot deck, though the cards use characters from the cartoon.



Another anime series, *The Vision of Escaflowne*, entirely focussed on tarot. The main protagonist is a 15 year old girl called Hitomi who reads tarot. Each episode is prefaced by tarot card and the action reflects something of the symbolic content. When the production company released the series on DVD's they included 22 tarot cards designed by Shouji Kawamori (who uses the name 'Sunrise') and painted by artist Kimitoshi Yamane. One had to collect all the DVDs then send away to the production company to get the full set. For this reason, as well as the fact that these are eagerly sought by anime fans, the deck usually sells at a premium price. Strangely for a Japanese deck they opt for Italian names on the cards rather than the more usual English. The images are entirely traditional and not in an anime style, which must have somewhat disappointed the fans of the series. The line drawn and coloured images are set in an ornate border.

There are a number of other anime and manga promo or gift tarots. Many of these were produced in Taiwan and we will look at some of these in later lessons on Chinese and Taiwanese tarots.

It is not just films and television shows that have used tarot as promotional items. Even the elevated art of ballet has turned to this form. Ballet West, the Salt Lake city ballet company, issued a set of at least five tarot cards as part of a promo for a production of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, composed in 1937 and inspired by medieval music and themes, being based on a collection of love and satirical poems in Latin written about 1230. I am not sure of the date for the production of these cards. Like the *Escaflowne* they are traditional line drawings though they are brightly coloured primarily in red and blue. My own set only includes the High Priestess, the Devil, The Lover, Force and the Wheel of Fortune. I am uncertain as to whether more images were issued. The

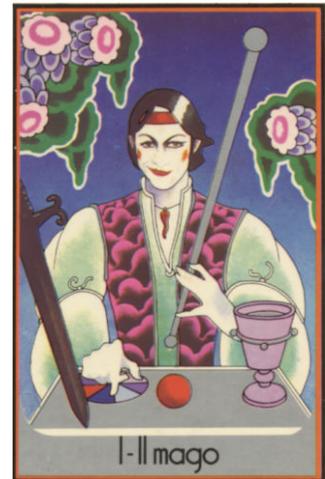


numbers on the cards does not relate to the normal major arcana numbering, for which I have no explanation at all.

Pop musicians have, of course, occasionally turned to the tarot. An early example of this (1991) is Cher's *Love Hurts* CD album, one version of which comes in rather attractive hinged wooden box containing eleven cards, one for each song on the CD, each having the lyrics to the song and the other side bears an emblem, mostly taken from alchemical and other emblematic sources. Though this is in no way a tarot as such, it has been described in this way. A more creditable tarot was produced by the goth rock artist Marilyn Manson in 2000. We will see this described in a later lesson on Gothic themed decks.



Even the perfume company Lancôme has sponsored a tarot deck to promote one of their products, a perfume appropriately called *Magie noire*. This was created in 1979 and amazingly the perfume is still sold. The cards were issued in collaboration with the Italian magazine *Annabella* in their May 1979 issue. The art deco inspired artwork was by illustrator Giancarlo Carloni. It was, of course, a majors only deck. It is beautifully colour printed with an additional silver ink, which is used in the border and



also tastefully in areas of the images themselves. The art deco styled figures on the cards adopt a remote expressionless pose apart from the Magician and the Devil who smirk and seem almost to wink at us in a knowing manner. This is a very stylish deck and well worth collecting. Surprisingly, these turn up quite often, and are not especially rare, so many thousands must have been issued. It is really much too good a deck to have been given away as a promo.

Our final item in this wide ranging list of promotional tarots is one issued with a French patent medicine called *Atorel*, produced by a company called *Eutherapie* at Neuilly. I am not sure of the date of production for these cards but it seems to have been sometime in the 1970's. The cards are very large 10.5 by 6.25 inches (270x160mm). The backs of the cards carry an advert for *Atorel*, which appears to have been primarily aimed at digestive and liverish conditions (a euphemism for over-indulgence in food and wine, one suspects) and was an effervescent tablet perhaps similar to the *Andrews liver salts* in the UK. The 22



cards in the series are beautifully printed. They appear to be a redrawing of the so-called Charles VI tarot from 1392, supposed painted for him by an artist Jacquemin Gringonneur, but now thought to be misnamed and instead these designs are more properly located to Northern Italy in the late 15th century. The early history of tarot is very complicated and difficult to unravel, and it is not the focus of this study group to concern ourselves over much on this. Nevertheless, the Atorel cards are quite astounding designs based on an early tarot deck but sensitively and subtly coloured and modeled. As the cards appear to have been given away with consignments of the Atorel medicine, consequently, one rarely finds a complete set but instead individual cards are sometimes offered for sale by dealers in such ephemera, however some complete sets appear to have been produced in a carton.

We have thus made a wide survey of the promo decks. While some of these are no doubt rather trivial and lightweight, we can see that a number of these designs can be placed among the best of modern tarot art.