

EPHEMERIS THREAD

What the *Cards* Know



A PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION
TO TAROT

WRITTEN BY

Isla Hart



CHAPTER ONE

Welcome

I Was 27 the First Time I Used Tarot

A friend had a deck. She handed it over as something to do while we talked, not as a serious thing, just to have something in my hands. I don't think either of us expected me to go quiet over it. I sat with three cards for a long time, and something about putting words to what I was carrying made it easier to carry.

I kept pulling cards after that. Not every day, and not because I thought they were magic. More because they had this way of naming things I'd been circling around but couldn't quite say out loud. That felt useful. I wanted more of it.

A few years in, I got curious about astrology. Not the column kind, but the real mechanics of it. Then the Mayan calendar, which I came across almost by accident. These systems don't always point in the same direction, and I've come to think that's part of what makes them worth using. You're looking at the same situation from different angles, and sometimes one angle shows you something the others miss.

I started Ephemeris Thread because I wanted these tools to be genuinely accessible. Not wrapped in mysticism that keeps people at a distance. Not behind a paywall. Just here, for anyone who wants them.

"I've never thought of these as fortune-telling. They're more like asking someone to hold a mirror while you work out what you actually think."

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

What This Guide Is For

This guide will give you enough to actually use tarot without memorizing an entire dictionary of card meanings first. It covers all 22 Major Arcana cards, five useful spreads, and a way of approaching readings that relies more on your own instincts than on a textbook.

It won't teach you to predict the future. Not because I'm being modest about what tarot can do, but because that's genuinely not what it's for. The best readings I've ever given, and the best ones I've received, weren't about what would happen next. They were about seeing more clearly what was already happening.

You don't need any experience to start here. Read through, try the pulls, see what resonates, and leave the rest.



CHAPTER TWO

How Tarot Actually Works

THE BIG MISCONCEPTION

It's Not About Predicting Anything

Most people come to tarot because they want answers. They're facing a decision or a hard period and they want something to tell them what to do next. I understand that impulse completely. I've pulled cards in exactly that state of mind, hoping for a verdict.

But the problem with using tarot as a prediction tool is that it stops you from thinking. You're not looking for insight, you're looking for permission. When you find a card that says what you want to hear, you call it confirmation. When it says something you don't like, you shuffle again and try for a different result.

The cards are more useful than that, but only if you approach them differently.

A DIFFERENT FRAME

Tarot as a Mirror

Here's how I think about it: a tarot card is an image with a meaning, and when you pull one for a situation, you're holding a specific lens up to that situation. The card doesn't tell you what will happen. It prompts you to look at what's already there from a particular angle.

The reason this works is that most of us already know more about our situations than we're admitting. We know the relationship isn't right, or the job isn't fulfilling, or the decision we keep circling back to is the right one. We just haven't let ourselves say it plainly. A card gives you something to react to, and your reaction is the actual information.

This is why I don't worry much about which deck you use, or whether you shuffle a specific way, or any of the rituals that accumulate around card reading. The card is a prompt. Your response to it is the reading.

GETTING STARTED

You Don't Need to Memorize Anything

There are 78 cards in a full tarot deck. Each one has an upright meaning and a reversed meaning, keywords, associated symbols, numerological significance, ties to astrological signs. The complete system is genuinely deep, and some people spend years in it.

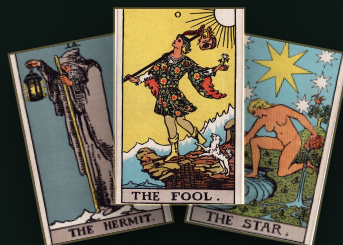
You don't need any of that to start.

This guide covers the 22 Major Arcana, which are the cards that carry the most weight in a reading. These are the cards of big themes: the recurring patterns in a life, the forces at play beneath the surface. Learning them gives you a working foundation without requiring you to memorize a library.

And even with these 22, treat the meanings here as starting points rather than definitions. The way a card lands for you in a specific moment is part of the reading too.



THE DECK IS JUST PAPER. WHAT YOU BRING TO IT IS THE READING.



CHAPTER THREE

The Major Arcana



The Fool

UPRIGHT beginnings, leap of faith, open road, trust in the unknown

REVERSED recklessness, fear of starting, waiting until you feel ready

Most people assume the Fool is naive. He isn't. He knows exactly what's at the edge of that cliff. He just decides to step off anyway, with nothing but a small bag and a dog keeping him company. There's something brave in that kind of not-knowing.

When this card shows up, it's usually about something you keep postponing until conditions improve. They won't. The Fool says go anyway.

GUT CHECK

What would you do if you stopped waiting to feel ready first?



The Magician

UPRIGHT will, skill, action, using what you already have

REVERSED wasted potential, scattered energy, manipulation

The Magician has everything he needs already laid out on the table in front of him. He's not waiting for more tools or better conditions. The question this card asks is whether you're actually using what you already have.

People pull this card expecting it to be about acquiring power. It's really about recognizing the power that's already there.

GUT CHECK

What resource or skill have you been underestimating lately?



The High Priestess

UPRIGHT intuition, inner knowing, patience, mystery

REVERSED ignoring your gut, surface-level understanding, hidden things

She sits between two pillars and says nothing. That's the point. The High Priestess represents the part of you that knows before you know why. The feeling in your chest before you've reasoned it through.

She often shows up when you're trying to logic your way through something your instincts already have an answer to.

GUT CHECK

What do you already know but haven't let yourself admit yet?



The Empress

UPRIGHT abundance, creativity, nurture, pleasure

REVERSED creative block, neglect, over-dependence, scarcity thinking

The Empress isn't subtle about pleasure. She sits surrounded by it. When she shows up in a reading, she's often pointing at something you've been denying yourself: creativity, rest, genuine comfort. Not everything is supposed to be earned before you allow yourself to have it.

GUT CHECK

What have you been withholding from yourself?



The Emperor

UPRIGHT structure, authority, stability, chosen discipline

REVERSED rigidity, control issues, chaos from lack of structure

He's not warm, but he's reliable. The Emperor represents the part of life that benefits from a framework. Not rules imposed on you, but the kind you've chosen for yourself because they actually free you up to move. Without structure, nothing gets built.

Reversed, he's usually about one of two things: you're being too controlling, or you have no structure at all and the chaos is starting to cost you.

GUT CHECK

Where does your life need more structure right now, and where does it need less?



The Hierophant

UPRIGHT tradition, guidance, shared belief, belonging

REVERSED dogma, blind conformity, questioning what you've inherited

The Hierophant is the most misread card I know. People treat him as rigid and outdated. But sometimes you genuinely need a guide. Sometimes tradition holds something real that accumulated over centuries for a reason.

This card is asking you to look at what you've inherited and decide consciously what to keep. Not reject everything, not accept everything either. Just look at it honestly.

GUT CHECK

What belief have you been carrying that was handed to you, not chosen by you?



The Devil

UPRIGHT bondage, addiction, shadow self, willing participation in stuckness

REVERSED releasing chains, beginning to break free, recognizing a pattern

The chains around the figures in this card are loose enough to slip off. That detail is always there and always gets overlooked. The Devil isn't about external forces trapping you. It's about the ways you participate in your own stuckness.

This is uncomfortable to sit with. It's also one of the most useful things this card can show you, because you can't change what you won't acknowledge.

GUT CHECK

What habit or belief are you pretending you can't change?



The Tower

UPRIGHT sudden collapse, forced change, a wake-up call

REVERSED avoiding the inevitable, fear of disruption, slow-building tension

Nobody wants to pull the Tower. But almost everyone I've talked to says the same thing afterward: it named something they already knew was coming. This card isn't punishment. It's demolition before rebuilding. Something is being cleared to make room.

GUT CHECK

What have you been holding onto that you already know isn't working?



The Moon

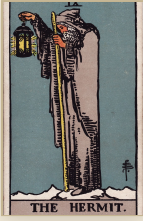
UPRIGHT fear, illusion, the unconscious, distorted perception

REVERSED confusion lifting, facing what was hidden, feelings surfacing

The Moon doesn't illuminate clearly. It distorts. When this card comes up, something isn't what it seems, and often you're the one doing the distorting. It's the card of anxiety, of projecting, of letting fear shape what you see before you've had a chance to actually look.

GUT CHECK

What are you afraid of that you haven't been willing to look at directly?



The Hermit

UPRIGHT solitude, inner search, stepping back, guiding yourself

REVERSED isolation, loneliness, refusing guidance, stuck in your own head

The Hermit has walked to the top of a mountain alone and he's holding his lantern out, not to light the whole world, just the next few steps ahead. This card often comes up when someone's been drowning out their own thoughts with noise. It's a call to get quiet.

Not total withdrawal from everything. Just enough silence to hear what you actually think.

GUT CHECK

When did you last spend real time alone with your own thoughts, not distracted, not productive, just sitting?



The Hanged Man

UPRIGHT pause, suspension, surrender, seeing from a different angle

REVERSED stalling, resistance, refusing to change your view

He looks uncomfortable. He is. But look at his face: there's calm there, not panic. The Hanged Man chose to stop. He's giving up the illusion of control long enough to see something from a different angle. Some things can only be understood from upside down.

GUT CHECK

What would you see if you stopped trying to fix this and just stayed with it for a while?

Turning Points



Wheel of Fortune

UPRIGHT change, cycles, luck, being in a turning point

REVERSED resistance to change, clinging to what was, bad timing

The Wheel moves whether you're holding on or not. The figures at the top will come down. The ones at the bottom will rise again. This card rarely means anything you did wrong. It means things are shifting, and you happen to be in that shift right now.

GUT CHECK

What would it feel like to stop fighting the direction things are already moving?



Death

UPRIGHT endings, transformation, a necessary closing

REVERSED resistance to change, inability to let go, stagnation

Death almost never means death. I've pulled this card dozens of times for people who were bracing for the worst and ended up hearing something they actually needed. It means something is over. A chapter, a version of yourself, a relationship that's run its course. That's not the same as loss. Sometimes it's a relief.

GUT CHECK

What are you still holding onto that you know has already ended?



Judgement

UPRIGHT awakening, a call you can no longer ignore, reckoning

REVERSED refusing the call, self-doubt, avoiding a necessary accounting

This card has a sound: a horn cutting through everything quiet. Judgement is the moment you can no longer pretend you didn't hear it. Something in you has woken up and is asking to be lived more fully. The only question is whether you're going to answer.

GUT CHECK

What part of yourself have you been quieting because living it fully feels too big?



The Lovers

UPRIGHT choice, values, alignment, connection

REVERSED misalignment, self-conflict, choices against your values

Despite what most people assume, the Lovers isn't primarily about romance. It's about choice. It's about the moment where you have to decide what you actually value, not what you're supposed to value, and whether your choices reflect that. The relationship might be with another person. Or it might be with yourself.

GUT CHECK

Are you making choices based on what you want, or based on who you think you're supposed to be?



The Chariot

UPRIGHT willpower, direction, victory through focus, control

REVERSED aggression, lack of direction, losing control

The Chariot is driven by two sphinxes pulling in opposite directions, and the charioteer holds no reins. He controls them through focused intention alone. This is one of the more demanding cards in the deck, because it's not about brute force. It's about holding opposing parts of yourself together and moving forward anyway.

GUT CHECK

What opposing forces inside you are you trying to reconcile right now?



Strength

UPRIGHT inner strength, patience, compassion, quiet courage

REVERSED self-doubt, fear, aggression as a mask for weakness

The figure in this card isn't wrestling the lion into submission. She's gentling it.

Strength, this card says, is rarely loud. It shows up as endurance. As choosing kindness when anger would be easier. As holding steady when nothing is going the way it was supposed to.

GUT CHECK

Where in your life are you confusing hardness with strength?



Justice

UPRIGHT fairness, truth, cause and effect, accountability

REVERSED injustice, dishonesty, avoiding consequences

Justice is cold in a way that feels uncomfortable if you've been hoping for a break. She doesn't weight things in your favor because you've had a hard time. She weighs them accurately. This card is a reminder that choices compound. The situation you're in now is connected to what you've been choosing before now.

GUT CHECK

What truth are you avoiding because looking at it means taking responsibility for something?



Temperance

UPRIGHT patience, balance, integration, the unglamorous middle work

REVERSED imbalance, excess, all-or-nothing thinking, rushing

The angel in this card is pouring water between two cups, and it flows in both directions. That's deliberate. Temperance is about the long, unglamorous work of integration: taking the opposites in your life and finding the way they can coexist without one consuming the other. This card usually turns up when someone has been running at one extreme for too long.

GUT CHECK

What are you doing too much of, and what have you been abandoning entirely?



The Star

UPRIGHT hope, renewal, calm after the storm, restored faith

REVERSED hopelessness, disconnection, doubt after doubt

The Star comes right after the Tower in the deck's order. That placement isn't accidental. After the collapse, there's this: a woman kneeling at the water's edge, pouring freely, under a clear sky. Nothing strategic about it. She's just replenishing what's there. This card is the deep breath after the hard part.

GUT CHECK

What would it look like to let yourself rest and trust the process right now?



The Sun

UPRIGHT joy, clarity, success, vitality, things actually going well

REVERSED temporary setback, delayed joy, excessive optimism

The Sun is simple in a way that more complex cards can't match. It means things are genuinely okay. Not "about to be okay" or "okay if you do this right." Just okay, right now, today. People sometimes distrust this card because good news feels suspicious after a hard stretch. Try to let it land.

GUT CHECK

Are you letting yourself actually enjoy what's going well, or waiting for something to go wrong?



The World

UPRIGHT completion, wholeness, coming full circle, achievement

REVERSED incomplete endings, stuck at the finish line, loose threads

The World is the end of the journey that started with the Fool's first step. But it's not a retirement. The figure in the card is still dancing, still moving. Completion isn't an ending so much as a threshold. You've done this cycle. Now there's another one.

GUT CHECK

What chapter in your life is actually finished, whether or not you've acknowledged it yet?



CHAPTER FOUR

Reading Without Memorizing

The First Feeling

When you pull a card, most people immediately reach for the guidebook. This is understandable and also the thing most likely to cut you off from the most useful part of the reading.

Before you look anything up, stop. Look at the card for thirty seconds. What do you see happening in it? What's the mood? If this were a scene from a film, what would happen next? And more importantly: how do you feel looking at it? Relieved? Uneasy? Something in between?

That reaction is data. Your body has already started connecting the image to your situation before your reasoning brain has caught up. The keywords in a guidebook are a starting point. Your first response to the image is what personalizes the reading to your actual moment.

Reading the Image, Not the Keyword

Every tarot card tells a small story through its imagery. There are figures doing things, backgrounds with weather and context, symbols layered throughout. Try narrating what you see before you try to interpret it.

The Hermit is an old man standing alone at the top of a mountain, holding a lantern. He looks like he's been walking a long time. He's not lost. He's the one with the light. What does that image suggest about your situation right now? That's your reading, not the keyword version.

You can then cross-check with the traditional meaning, and often they'll line up. When they don't, trust what the image said to you first.

ABOUT REVERSALS

Reversed Cards Without Dread

A reversed card gets a lot of mystique and a lot of anxiety. People brace when they flip one over. You don't need to.

Reversals don't negate the card's meaning. They usually mean one of a few things: the energy is present but blocked, it's turned inward rather than outward, or it's something you're resisting. The Wheel of Fortune reversed doesn't mean the Wheel has stopped. It means you're probably fighting the change rather than moving with it.

Some readers don't use reversals at all, especially when starting out. That's a completely valid approach. If you find reversals confusing more than useful, leave them for now and come back when you're more comfortable with the upright meanings. Nothing about your reading will be less accurate for it.



CHAPTER FIVE

Spreads for Real Situations

The Daily Pull

ONE CARD · FOR ORIENTATION, NOT PREDICTION

The simplest pull, and often the most useful. One card. One question: what do I need to hold in mind today?

The key is how you ask. "What will happen today?" is a forecast question and you won't get much out of it. "What should I pay attention to?" gets you something you can actually use.

Shuffle while sitting with your morning. Don't force a specific question. Pull when it feels right, put the card somewhere you'll see it, and come back to it at the end of the day to see what it meant by then.



TODAY'S
FOCUS

JOURNAL PROMPTS

- What did you notice first about the card?
 - How does the image connect to anything already on your mind?
 - Did the card confirm something or push back against something?
-

Past / Present / Future

THREE CARDS · FOR SEEING WHERE YOU ARE IN A STORY

Three cards in a row. The first shows what's been shaping the current situation. The second shows where things actually are right now. The third shows the direction things are heading, not as a fixed outcome, but as a likely path given where you currently are.

If the third card feels unwelcome, don't dismiss the spread. Ask what it's pointing at that you haven't considered.

- I What has been shaping this situation
- II Where things actually are right now
- III The direction this is heading



PAST

PRESENT

FUTURE

JOURNAL PROMPTS

- Does the past card feel accurate? Does it point to something you've been carrying?
- What does the present card reveal about where you actually are versus where you think you are?
- If you changed one thing about your current situation, would the future card change?

The Crossroads

THREE CARDS · FOR WHEN YOU'RE STUCK BETWEEN TWO PATHS

This spread is for decisions. Not to tell you which path to take, but to show you what you're not seeing about each one.

- I Where you actually are right now
- II What you're not seeing about Option A
- III What you're not seeing about Option B



Most people who do this spread already know which path they want. What they don't know is whether they're seeing it clearly.

JOURNAL PROMPTS

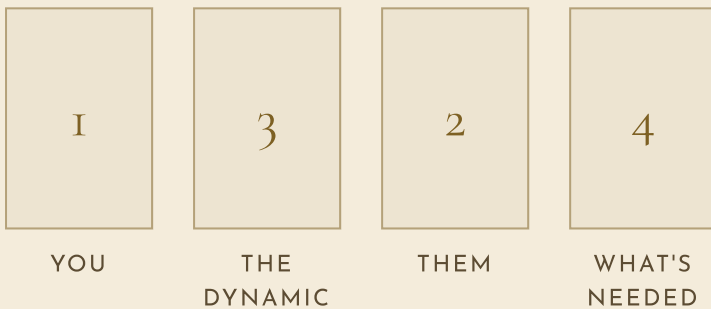
- Which card surprised you the most?
- Does one card feel like relief and one feel like a warning?
- After sitting with all three, which path feels more honest?

The Relationship Spread

FOUR CARDS · FOR ANY CONNECTION THAT FEELS COMPLICATED

This works for romantic relationships, close friendships, or any dynamic that's feeling strained. Card 2 represents your sense of what the other person is bringing, not a literal window into their experience.

- I What you're bringing to this relationship right now
- II What you sense the other person is bringing
- III What the dynamic between you looks like currently
- IV What this relationship needs to move forward



JOURNAL PROMPTS

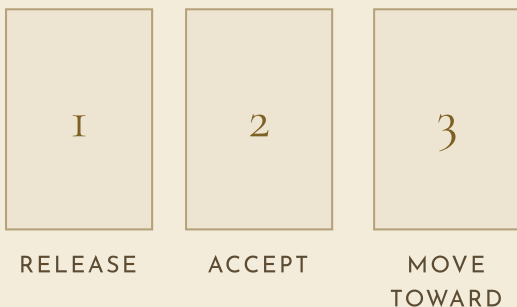
- What did card 1 show you about yourself that you hadn't been acknowledging?
- How does card 3 relate to what both people are bringing?
- Does card 4 ask something of you specifically, or of both of you?

What Do I Need Right Now

THREE CARDS · FOR WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE A SPECIFIC QUESTION

Sometimes you sit down to pull cards without a clear question. This spread is for those moments. No agenda, no particular situation. Just where you are.

- I What you need to release
- II What you need to accept
- III What you need to move toward



Shuffle slowly. Don't force a question. Just sit with where you actually are. Pull when it feels right.

JOURNAL PROMPTS

- Which card felt most accurate?
- Was anything here surprising, or did all three feel familiar?
- Of the three things suggested, which one do you most want to avoid? Start there.



CHAPTER SIX

Building Your Practice

How Often to Pull Cards

How often you pull cards matters less than whether it's sustainable. Some people pull every morning before coffee. Some pull once a week. I go through periods where I pull daily and periods where I barely touch my deck for a month. Neither is wrong.

There's one thing I'd suggest: try not to pull cards for the same question three days running, looking for a different answer. You won't get one. Or if you do, it won't help. What you're doing there is looking for permission, and that's not what tarot is for.

Trusting Your Own Read

The textbook meaning of a card is a starting point. Your gut response to an image is data too. I've pulled Death and felt relief. I've pulled the Sun and felt unsettled. The card and your reaction to it together are the reading.

Tarot is most useful when you use it to slow down your thinking, not to outsource it. The cards don't know your situation better than you do. They give you something to look at while you figure out what you actually think.

Over time, you'll develop your own relationship with individual cards. There will be ones that keep showing up for you, ones that reliably mean something specific given your history with them. Pay attention to those patterns. That's your personal vocabulary developing, and it's worth more than any keyword list.



A LAST WORD

I hope what's here gives you a way in. Come back to the sections that feel relevant and leave the rest. These cards will mean different things to you at different points in your life, and that's exactly as it should be.

Take good care.

Isla Hart

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