

## Introduction

Welcome to the Tarot Muertos. This book explores ways to use this particular deck for your divinity needs, allowing you to more fully develop your possibilities and potential. The Tarot Muertos has been organized around the classic Tarot principles established by the Rider-Waite-Smith deck. The images of the Tarot Muertos are based on traditional Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebrations, with added zodiac and elemental concepts. These fine art images are heavily rooted by a strong, female influence.

A classic Tarot deck consists of 2 sets of cards: the Major Arcana and the Minor Arcana. The Majors represent the overarching concepts and turning points of life, such as The World, Justice, Judgement, and Death. There are 22 Major cards. The Minors grant more reflection and detail when used alongside the Majors. The Minors are comprised of four suits of 14 cards each, equaling 56 cards. The Minors are the basis for the common playing card deck (court cards and number cards). Used together, the Major Arcana and Minor Arcana make up a 78 card Tarot deck.

In the Tarot Muertos, the four suits are Pentacles (resources/money), Swords (intellect/intuition), Scepters (inspiration/spark of life) and Grails (spiritual love/purity of emotion). For each suit, there are four court cards: King (father), Queen (mother), Warrior (Knight/son), and Daughter (young female), as well as the number (also known as pip) cards (Ace-10). The suits use the four Elements (earth, air, fire, and water) as well as color association (Pentacles/green, Swords/white, Scepters/red, Grails/blue) in their conceptual imagery.

The Tarot Muertos uses various concepts and imagery from Día de los Muertos celebrations to put new interpretations onto the classic Tarot. Día de los Muertos is a Mexican holiday derived from spiritual commemoration of one's ancestors. This holiday has spread to much of Central and South America, as well as the southwestern United States. Día de los Muertos is often confused with Halloween, since both holidays are around the same time of the year and based in the spirits of the dead. However, Día de los Muertos is a colorful, more complex, and ancient multi-day celebration with connections to Aztec, Mayan, and Toltec civilizations.

The Tarot Muertos was created as a collaboration between artist/illustrator, Laurel Thorndike, and Rich Roth, a technical developer with an interest in art and the arcane. The deck interprets Día de los Muertos celebrations to focus on the gathering of friends and family to pray for and remember family and friends who have died and to support their spiritual journey. The wide audience this imagery speaks to and the spiritual potency of the images (connecting life and death, love and loss, the passage of time and spiritual growth) make the Tarot Muertos a unique and engaging addition for the beginner and experienced Tarot reader alike.

## What is Tarot ?

Tarot is a specific deck of cards used to gain insight into the past, current and future situations by posing questions to the cards, i.e. cartomancy. Reading tarot is about interpretation and keeping an open mind. Sometimes the cards can take you in a different direction from what you expect, or they help you solve a problem in a way you hadn't considered. In this way, tarot can bring you to better understanding of self.

Tarot decks date back to the 15th century. The most well known modern deck is the Rider-Waite deck, more properly known as Waite-Smith. It was developed by the mystic, A. E. Waite, with illustrations by Pamela Colman Smith and published by the Rider Company in 1910. This popular deck is divided into two sections: the Major Arcana and the Minor Arcana. The Major Arcana includes the named cards of Sun, Moon, Death, the well-known Hanged Man, etc. The Majors are the historically older of the two Arcana and each card holds a deep spiritual meaning.

The Minor Arcana has 14 cards in each of 4 suits. The classic Rider-Waite-Smith deck uses the suits of Wands, Cups, Pentacles, and Swords. Each suit has Ace-10, Page, Knight, Queen, and King. The Minor Arcana is the basis for modern day playing card deck, though playing cards traditionally use the suits of Clubs, Hearts, Diamonds, and Spades, combining the Page and Knight to become Jack. The Tarot Muertos deck uses the suits of Specters, Grails, Pentacles and Swords and the cards in each suit are Ace-10, Daughter, Knight, Queen, and King.

Using the deck for âdivinationâ can take many forms. Each card has various meanings, both regular and inverted. The arrangements (or spreads) of the laid-out cards have many interpretations and styles of reading. Later, we will provide an introduction of some basic spreads and possible ways to read them. Cards readings can be done using just a single card, the Major Arcana, or the full 78 card set.

## What is Día de los Muertos ?

### \*\*3. What is Día de los Muertos?\*

Day of the Dead (Spanish: \*Día de los Muertos\*) is a Mexican holiday celebrated throughout Mexico, in particular the Central and Southern regions, and acknowledged around the world in other cultures. This holiday focuses on the gathering of family and friends to pray for and remember deceased friends and family members and help support their spiritual journey. Prior to Spanish colonization in the 16th century, the celebration took place at the beginning of Summer. It was moved to October 31st, November 1st, and November 2nd to coincide with All Saints' Eve, All Saints' Day, and All Souls' Day. Traditionally, private altars called \*ofrendas\* are built which honor the deceased using sugar skulls, marigolds, and the favorite foods and beverages of the departed, and family and friends visit the graves of their departed with these items as gifts. Visitors also leave possessions of the deceased at the graves.

Scholars trace the origins of this modern Mexican holiday to indigenous observances dating back hundreds of years, including an Aztec festival dedicated to the goddess, Mictecacihuatl. La Calavera Catrina, Lady of the Dead, or Mictecacihuatl, was keeper of the bones in the underworld, and she presided over the ancient month-long Aztec festivals honoring the dead. Día de los Muertos has spread throughout the world, being absorbed within other traditions for honoring the dead. This celebration of the dead is, in ways, similar to observances in other cultures, including the Spanish tradition in which festivals and parades are held and people gather at cemeteries and pray for their deceased loved ones at the end of the day.

On October 31st, All Hallows' Eve, children make a children's altar to invite the angelicas (spirits of dead children) to come back for a visit. November 1st, All Saints' Day, adult spirits will come to visit. November 2nd, All Souls' Day, families go to the cemetery to decorate the graves and tombs of their relatives. This 3-day fiesta is filled with marigolds, the flowers of the dead; \*Pan de muerto\* (the bread of the dead); sugar skulls; cardboard skeletons; tissue paper decorations; \*Papel picado\*; fruit and nuts; incense, and other traditional foods and decorations.

\*Pan de muerto\* (Spanish for bread of the dead), also called \*pan de los muertos\* (dead bread) in Mexico, is a type of sweet roll traditionally baked in Mexico during the weeks leading up to Día de los Muertos. It is a sweetened, soft bread shaped like a bun, often decorated with bone-shaped phalange pieces. Pan de muerto is eaten on Día de los Muertos at the gravesite, or alternatively, at a tribute (\*ofrenda\*.) In some regions, it is eaten for months before the official celebration of Día de los Muertos. In Oaxaca, pan de muerto is the same bread that is usually baked, with the addition of decorations. As part of the celebration, loved ones eat pan de muerto as well as the relative's favorite foods. The bones are representative of the deceased one (\*difuntos\* or \*difuntas\*) and usually the shape of a tear drop is baked onto the bread to represent goddess Chimalma's tears for the living. The bones are represented in a circle to portray the circle of life. The bread is then topped with sugar.

Another part of the offering is \*Papel picado\* ("perforated paper" or "pecked paper"). Papel picado is the Mexican folk art and decorative craft made out of paper, cut into beautiful and elaborate designs. The designs are commonly cut from colored tissue paper using a template and small chisels or by folding tissue paper and using small, sharp scissors. Common themes include birds, floral designs, and skeletons. They are commonly displayed for both secular and religious occasions, such as Easter, Christmas, the Day of the Dead, as well as during weddings, quinceañeras, baptisms, and christenings.

A common symbol of the holiday is the skull (Spanish: \*calavera\*). Celebrants wear masks, called \*calacas\* (colloquial term for skeleton), and sugar skulls (alfeñiques) or chocolate skulls, decorated with colored foil, icing, beads, and/or feathers and inscribed with the name of the recipient on the forehead, are displayed. Sugar skulls are given as gifts both to the living and the dead. Families decorate their loved ones' ofrendas with both large and small handmade sugar skulls. Children who have died are represented by small sugar skulls, and the larger sugar skulls represent the adults. It is believed that the departed return home to enjoy the offerings on the altar.

Ofrendas can be made up of 2, 3, or 7 levels. Two levels represent the division between the earth and the sky. Three levels represent the sky, the earth, and the underworld. Seven levels are the most common and reference the 7 levels of a soul's journey before reaching its destination. Seven can also reference the 7 deadly sins.

## About Tarot Muertos

### \*\*4. The Tarot Muertos\*\*

The Tarot Muertos builds on the classic Rider-Waite-Smith Tarot deck, using classic icons and similar concepts for ease of use and recognition. The addition of Dia de los Muertos symbolism adds a depth of spirit and powerful connection to the realm of family and the deceased, allowing even more layers of interpretation. The court & pip cards as well include zodiac symbols, bringing deeper meaning to the cards. To note, the Tarot Muertos has a decidedly female representation for many images, tapping into the power of the feminine in spirituality.

#### The Major Arcana:

The traditional imagery of Dia de los Muertos stands out in the Tarot Muertos: skulls, flower, and bones. The skulls and skeletons represent the connections between life and death as well as the journey beyond life, whether that be past, present, or future journeys. Some images in the Tarot Muertos deck make use of concepts from Mexican and Aztec culture, such as The Shaman (in place of The Hierophant from classic Rider-Waite-Smith tarot) and an Aztec styled Emperor (in place of the traditional Medieval Emperor card.) Also, there is a strong Catholic influence in modern Mexican culture that appears in some cards, such as The Magician holding a set of rosary beads.

#### Example:

Classics: [IMAGES: Death, Hanged Woman],

Mexican cultural: [Images: Shaman, Emperor]

#### The Minor Arcana:

The Tarot Muertos deck uses the 4 suits of Pentacles, Swords, Scepters and Grails. The classic Rider-Waite-Smith deck uses Pentacles, Swords, Wands, and Cups. The Tarot Muertos made two changes to the classic deck suits for good reason. The first, rather than Cups, Grails felt more ancient and ritual based, which is more in line with the Dia de los Muertos and Mexican traditions that are deeply rooted and religious in nature. The second difference is rather than Wands, Scepters feels more connected to the Aztec (Mexican) warrior. Stronger, with more male tones, and possessing a fighter's passion, the Scepter is a good match for this fire element suit of this deck.

Each suit consists of 10 pip cards, Ace-10, and 4 court cards: Daughter, Knight, Queen, and King. There are subtle variations from the Rider-Waite-Smith deck. Rider-Waite-Smith uses King, Queen, Knight, and Paige. Since Dia de los Muertos celebrates the family and family members & friends who have passed, in Tarot Muertos deck, the Queen is the Mother figure, and the King is the Father aspect. The Knight becomes the Warrior as a young male or a son. As the Paige represents someone who is young or inexperienced, immature, or not fully realized spiritually. In the Tarot Muertos realm of family, the Paige becomes the Daughter.

Example: The Aces show the symbol for each suit clearly.

[IMAGES: Ace/Grail, Ace/Swords, Ace/Scepters, Ace/Pentacles.]

#### Zodiac:

Since tarot is a tool of magic & spirit, the Tarot Muertos deck includes elemental clues and colors as well as the zodiac symbols to all the suit cards. This helps the reader easily identify which suit of cards they have pulled and are working with. This additional symbolism makes a more intuitive and powerful deck. The zodiac symbols are commonly known, though it is not necessary for people to learn astrology to use the deck.

Table by suit - (full found in odt - chap4-table)

Suit	Symbol	Gift	Color	Zodiac
<u>Grails/Cups</u>	blue skull shaped Grail	purity of emotion, spiritual love meant to guide us	Blue Element of Water	Pisces, Scorpio, Cancer – attributes: emotional/ creative.
Scepters/Wands	Aztec/Mayan styled red Scepter	Gift is bestowed by human hands, the beginning of everything- the spark of life. Gift of will, inspiration, action, passion & courage.	Red Element of Fire	Aries, Leo, Sagittarius – attributes: <u>firey</u> & passionate
Pentacles	Green Pentacle	Resources. Money, raw materials or time.	Green Element of Earth,	Virgo, Capricorn, Taurus - attributes: practical down to earth
Swords	Mexican/Mayan style dagger (sword)	intellect, the rational mind. Powerful & dangerous	White Element of Air	Gemini, Libra, Aquarius - attributes: intellectual, logical

\*(ED: text from table above for formatting)\*

Grails/Cups = blue skull shaped Grail

Gift of purity of emotion, spiritual love meant to guide us

Color Blue, Element of Water

Zodiac: Pisces, Scorpio, Cancer attributes: emotional/ creative.

Scepters/Wands = Aztec/Mayan styled red Scepter

Gift is bestowed by human hands, the beginning of everything- the spark of life. Gift of will, inspiration, action, passion & courage.

Color Red, Element of Fire

Zodiac: Aries, Leo, Sagittarius attributes: firey & passionate

Pentacles = Green Pentacle

Gift of resources. Money, raw materials or time.

Color Green, Element of Earth,

Zodiac: Virgo, Capricorn, Taurus - attributes: practical down to earth

Swords = Mexican/Mayan style dagger (sword)

Gift of intellect, the rational mind. Powerful & dangerous

Color White, Element of Air

Zodiac: Gemini, Libra, Aquarius - attributes: intellectual, logical

## From the Artist

When I was approached by Rich Roth, an independent tech entrepreneur, with the idea of creating and illustrating a tarot deck of any theme or genre of my choosing, a business investment for him and a creative challenge for me, I was immediately interested. Though at the time I was not very familiar with the tarot and knew it would take some research and study, I found the project intriguing. Upon some initial research, I realized that a full deck would mean extensive research and illustrating 78 images! I found the project a bit daunting to say the least. Could I really sit at my drafting table everyday and paint 78 paintings/illustrations that were consistent and stay within the theme? After weighting it all out, I knew it would take discipline and perseverance, and those were something I felt I had plenty of. It became a very personal challenge for me.

While I did do some research and educate myself as to the basic principles of tarot, I wanted to rely on my intuition of how the cards would look to me, based on my interpretation of the meaning. Quickly I decided to stay within the Rider-Waite principles, as it is arguably the most recognizable and widely followed. Then I thought about the theme. I decided to go with the Mexican Day of the Dead or Dia de los Muertos. Death is a natural part of life, and so it seemed natural to me to incorporate the Dia de los Muertos images into the tarot which is so representative of the stages of life and our spiritual growth. I was drawn to "Dia de los Muertos" as a stunning celebration of life and death with all it's symbology. The altars are resplendent with color: bright marigolds, traditional foods and symbolic objects. It has inspired me to want to create a body of work that honors and celebrates this amazing event. I do so with humility and a huge respect for Mexico's history and culture. Of death and dying, "where do those souls go?" so full of life. And if we listen very closely can we hear them? The never ending cycle of things: this was a subject that I was genuinely interested in and was surprised to find not many decks with this type of subject matter.

To the minor Arcana and court cards you will also see I've added repetition of natural and bold geometric shapes and patterns, which I love, echoing the cycles of life and death and the never ending circle. I enjoyed exploration of the elements, earth, air, fire & water, and using color, Zodiac images, and the natural shapes of plants, insects and animals.

My hope was to design an easy to use tarot deck, full of meaningful and thought provoking imagery, and through my art, bring you closer to your own experience and to the mysteries of the universe.

Bright Blessings & Enjoy! Laurel