



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,  
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

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Volume 36 | Number 2 | Issue 132, Spring/Summer

Article 24

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4-15-2018

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## Recommended Citation

Auger, Emily E. (2018) "An Annotated List of Fantasy Novels Incorporating Tarot (1968-1989) [Notes]," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 36 : No. 2 , Article 24.  
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol36/iss2/24>

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# An Annotated List of Fantasy Novels Incorporating Tarot (1968-1989)

## [Notes]

### **Abstract**

This selective list includes abstracts of each novel or series and how the author incorporates the Tarot or Tarot imagery.

### **Additional Keywords**

Tarot in literature; Fantasy literature—Bibliography

# NOTES

## AN ANNOTATED LIST OF FANTASY NOVELS INCORPORATING TAROT (1968–1989)

EMILY E. AUGER

THE TAROT DECK IS ESSENTIALLY A REGULAR PLAYING DECK with a set of trumps added to diversify the games it can be used for. The earliest extant Tarot cards are unique painted works of art created for fifteenth-century aristocratic patrons; the popularity of Tarot games led to the availability of cheap printed decks for use by the less affluent public and the printing process led to design conventionalization. The conventionalized designs associated with what came to be called the “Marseilles” type—which has many minor and major variations—is still readily available today. (The “Grimaud” edition is considered something of a modern classic.)

The history of the expansion of Tarot deck uses to include magic and cartomancy is a subject of interest and debate for Tarotists; indeed, it is easier to imagine Tarot cartomancy on the roster of fifteenth-century divination techniques than its absence, and there are indications that the usefulness of the Devil card in invocations not sanctioned by Christianity was recognized by at least a few of the more desperately lovelorn of the day.<sup>1</sup> However, the historical shift away from gaming as the predominant use of Tarot and the unambiguous appropriation of the deck into esoteric contexts and identification with fortune- or future-telling practices dates to the later eighteenth century. Other milestones include the publication of the *Rider-Waite Tarot* and guidebook by Golden Dawn members Arthur E. Waite and artist Pamela Colman Smith in 1909 and the *Thoth Tarot* by Aleister Crowley and artist Frieda Lady Harris in 1944. As Tarot cartomancy became increasingly popular, more new designs for both trumps and suits proliferated in published and unpublished forms. Many of these decks conform and others deviate from Tarot convention in number of cards, number

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<sup>1</sup> See Mary K. Greer’s Tarot Blog January 27, 2018. < <https://marykgreer.com/2018/01/27/what-happened-to-the-visconti-devil-cards/>>.

of suits and trumps, and imagery, but are still often identified as “Tarot,” or sometimes as meditation decks, oracles, fortune-telling cards, etc. Tarot and cartomancy decks have also made an increasing number of appearances in fiction and film since c. 1971, the publication date of the U.S. Games edition of the *Rider-Waite* deck.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the fantasy novels incorporating Tarot or Tarot-like cards and decks identified here are taken from the more expansive list compiled by Nina Lee Braden, who began her search for books incorporating Tarot in May of 1992 with a website call for assistance locating titles. The resulting list (2002; 2008) incorporates markers indicating whether or not she has actually read the book, if it is one of her favorites, and whether or not the Tarot references are “fleeting” or more significant. Otherwise, it is not annotated and does not include publishing information, genre identifications, or plot summaries. I sorted through these titles, especially the fantasy and science-fiction, looking for those most likely to be of interest to readers of mythopoeia. This process was challenging insofar as many books published before 1990 remain undigitized, lack online descriptions, and are unavailable in libraries, and many did not fulfill my hopes regarding content. However, I did find a few additional relevant books, including the third book in Elizabeth Lynn’s *The Chronicles of Tornor Trilogy: The Northern Girl* (1979), Tim Powers’s *The Drawing of the Dark* (1979), Kate Elliot’s *The Labyrinth Gate* (1988), Barbara Hambly’s *The Silent Tower* (1986) and *The Silicon Mage* (1988) of the Windrose Chronicles, and the second and third books in Doris Egan’s trilogy *The Complete Ivory: Two-Bit Heroes* (1992) and *Guilt-Edged Ivory* (1992). I intended to limit this list to books written for adults and first published in English, and did so, with the exception of Jeanne Hyvrard’s *Waterweed in the Wash-Houses* (1977; Eng. Trans 1996), which is of such relevance here that I just could not bring myself to delete it. As in the instance of Egan’s trilogy, I included post-1989 titles if they were part of a series begun before that date.

## CHRONOLOGICAL LIST

An asterisk indicates a novel in which Tarot is a minor or briefly used motif; however, the distinction between a minor motif and a major one is not always easily made.

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<sup>2</sup> I have previously published lists and discussions of films incorporating Tarot and cartomancy: *Cartomancy and Tarot in Film 1940-2010* (Intellect 2016) and *A Filmography of Cartomancy and Tarot 1940-2010* (Valleyhome Books 2016). I discussed the relationship between the historical development of Tarot and that of the novel in *Tarot and Other Meditation Decks* (McFarland 2004).

- 1968 Delany, Samuel R. *Nova*.
- \*1969 Herbert, Frank. From the Dune series: *Dune Messiah* (1969) and *Children of Dune* (1976).
- 1970 Zelazny, Roger. Amber series. The Corwin Books: *Nine Princes of Amber* (1970), *The Guns of Avalon* (1972), *Sign of the Unicorn* (1975), *The Hand of Oberon*. (1976), and *The Courts of Chaos* (1979).  
The Merlin Books: *Triumphs of Doom* (1985), *Blood of Amber* (1986), *Sign of Chaos* (1987), *The Knight of Shadows* (1989), and *Prince of Chaos* (1991).
- 1973 Laubenthal, Sanders Anne. *Excalibur*.
- 1975 Cooper, Louise. *The Book of Paradox*. With Tarot illus. by Barbara Nessim.
- 1977 Anthony, Piers. The Tarot trilogy in story order: *God of Tarot* (1979), *Vision of Tarot* (1980), and *Faith of Tarot* (1980).  
Cluster Series (expansions of the Tarot trilogy universe and time frame): *Cluster* (also called *Vicinity Cluster*) (1977), *Chaining the Lady* (1978), *Kirlian Quest* (1978), *Thousandstar* (1980) [no Tarot], and *Viscous Circle* (1982).
- 1977 Bayley, Barrington J. *The Grand Wheel*.
- 1977 Hyvrard, Jeanne. *Waterweed in the Wash-Houses*. English trans. Elsa Copeland. 1996.
- 1978 Sherrell, Carl. *Arcane*.
- 1979 Lynn, Elizabeth. *The Chronicles of Tornor Trilogy* (1979): *Watchtower*, *The Dancers of Arun* [no Tarot], and *The Northern Girl*.
- \*1979 Powers, Tim. *The Drawing of the Dark*.
- 1981 Crowley, John. *Little, Big*.
- 1982 Gotlieb, Phyllis. Starcats Trilogy in story order: *A Judgment of Dragons* (1980) [no Tarot], *Emperor, Swords, Pentacles* (1982), and *The Kingdom of the Cats* (1985) [No Tarot].
- 1982 King, Stephen. Dark Tower series: *The Gunslinger: The Dark Tower I* (1982), *The Drawing of the Three: The Dark Tower II* (1987), *The Waste Lands: The Dark Tower III* (1991), *Wizard and Glass The Dark Tower IV* (1997), *Wolves of the Calla: The Dark Tower V* (2003), *The Song of Susannah: The Dark Tower VI* (2004), and *The Dark Tower: The Dark Tower VII* (2004).
- 1983 Kurtz, Katherine. *Lammas Night*.
- 1983 Pratchett, Terry. *Mort: A Discworld Novel, The Light Fantastic* (1986), and *Lords and Ladies* (1992).
- \*1984 De Lint, Charles. *Moonheart*.
- \*1984 King, Stephen. *The Eyes of the Dragon*. 1987 edition with Illus. by David Palladini.
- 1984 Yolen, Jane. *Cards of Grief*.

- \*1985 Bischoff, David. The Gaming Magi Trilogy in story order: *The Destiny Dice: Book I of the Gaming Magi Trilogy*, *Wraith Board: Book II of the Gaming Magi Trilogy* (1985), and *The Unicorn Gambit: Book III of the Gaming Magi Trilogy* (1986).
- 1985 Finch, Sheila. *Infinity's Web*.
- 1986 Hambly, Barbara. The Windrose Chronicles: *The Silent Tower*, *The Silicon Mage* (1988), and *Dog Wizard* (1992).
- 1987 Emerson, Ru. *The Princess of Flames*.
- 1988 Elliot, Kate [pseudonym for Alis A. Rasmussen]. *The Labyrinth Gate*.
- \*1989 Fortune, Dion, and Gareth Knight. *The Sea Priestess*.
- 1989 Lee, Tanith. *A Heroine of the World*.
- 1989 Dillard, J.M. *Star Trek: The Lost Years*.
- 1989 Egan, Doris. *The Complete Ivory*, which includes: *The Gate of Ivory* (1989), *Two Bit Heroes* (1992), and *Guilt-Edged Ivory* (1992).

#### ALPHABETICAL BY AUTHOR

**Anthony, Piers [Piers Anthony Dillingham Jacob]**. The Tarot trilogy: *God of Tarot* (Jove Publications 1979), *Vision of Tarot* (Berkeley Books 1980), and *Faith of Tarot* (Berkeley Books 1980).

The Cluster Series: *Cluster* (also called *Vicinity Cluster*) (1977; Open Road Integrated Media 2014), *Chaining the Lady* (1978; Open Road Integrated Media 2014), *Kirlian Quest* (1978; Open Road Integrated Media 2014), *Thousandstar* (1980; Open Road Integrated Media 2014) [No Tarot], and *Viscous Circle* (1982; Open Road Integrated Media 2014) [Brief mention of Tarot].

Brother Paul, a member of the Holy Order of Vision who has lost many of his memories about his youth, is sent on a mission to discover the true god of the planet Tarot. He survives numerous "animations" derived from his unconscious, most of which are Tarot-based. After choosing Aleister Crowley and the *Thoth Tarot* as his guide, Brother Paul relives many historical events which also fill in the gaps in his personal memory and tell the "true" story of the origins of Tarot as a means of communication for the beleaguered Waldensians of medieval Europe. These experiences become the inspiration for his invention of the Cluster Tarot, which is an essential part of the inter-galactic future of the Cluster series. The chapter titles of each book in the Tarot trilogy refer to Tarot trumps and all three are filled with references to theories about Tarot history, specific cards and decks, and discussions about Tarot in relation to religion and belief systems.

In *Cluster*, Flint, a young "stone age" man with an extraordinarily high Kirlian field or aura, is conscripted to save his galaxy. An alien has "transferred" into a prepared host body and has offered this transfer technology in exchange for an alliance against invaders from the Andromeda Galaxy. Flint's adventures on this mission include a number of transfers into alien bodies, sexual encounters in those

bodies, and an accidental visit to a Tarotist Temple, as well as a final encounter with his nemesis in which they decide to stay together in alien forms and have a child named Melody rather than share such dangerous technology.

Flint's visit to the Tarotist Temple includes several readings which involve "animations" or holographic images that are derived partly from the cards and partly from his own unconscious. Most of the cards that are described roughly coincide with the *Rider-Waite* deck, with suits of solids (coins), gas (swords), energy (wands or staves), and liquid (cups), as well as numerous readily identifiable trump cards.



*The Golden Dawn Tarot. 1890s. Original designs by Moina & S.L. MacGregor Mathers. This edition (n.d.) by Robert Folkin and William Wynn Westcott. Public domain. For more information about the history of the lovers card, see Mary K. Greer's "An Iconographic History of the Lovers Card," Tarot in Culture Volume II (2014) 459-596.*

The heroine/hero of *Chaining the Lady* is Melody, an aging Mintaken descendant of Flint's who is a student of Tarot and has the highest known kirlian aura. Her card of the day in chapter one is the Queen of Energy, or the 13 of Wands, a card described in such a way that it must be more or less identical with the Lovers card of the *Golden Dawn Tarot* (1890s), which illustrates the myth of Andromeda and Perseus. The card shows a nude young woman tied to a cliff about to be devoured by a sea monster and also about to be rescued by a sword and shield bearing hero from the sky. The "chained lady" is a metaphor well-used throughout the novel; it becomes the card of the Andromeda galaxy and is also referenced in *Kirlian Quest*. Shortly after drawing this card, Melody is called upon to help identify and route the Andromedans who are invading the Milky Way galaxy by transferring into the bodies of unwilling hosts. Mintakens remain female until they mate, at which point they become male. Melody has never mated, but she is raped while in an alien body near the end. When she has dealt with the final crisis by using "Ancient" technology to will the reversal of the hostage dominance relationship so that the person of the host body is always able to take control, she adapts to her new gender as ideally suited to her relationship with two other aura-soulmates.

As in *Cluster*, references to Tarot are not infrequent and Brother Paul is the acknowledged inventor of the Cluster Tarot, but the deck is most prominent when Melody tries to use it to identify Andromedan transfers by the inconsistencies between their interpretations of the cards and what those of their hosts should have been.

Herald the Healer, the high kirlian-aura hero of *Kirlian Quest*, is an expert in heraldry and healing who often uses Tarot when working with those he is called to aid. When several galaxies are threatened by the returning Ancients, he and a few companions are all that stand in the way of total annihilation. At one point, when he and his host are trapped underground and his host nearly killed, he hallucinates a long Tarot animation complete with Brother Paul and a Tarot reading. He eventually saves the day by convincing the Ancients that their plans involve murdering many auran-sapiants simply because they had failed to recognize them as such. He also wins a unique high-aura mate that only interspecies transfer and the very concept of aura makes possible.

*Thousandstar* and *Viscous Circle* are set in the Cluster universe and have the series emphasis on interspecies romance, sexual relationships, "transfer," and warfare, but there are no references to Tarot in *Thousandstar* and only a brief mention of it in *Viscous Circle*.

**Bailey, Barrington J.** *The Grand Wheel* (1977; Gollanz Orion Publishing Group, 2011).

Gambler Cheyne Scarne is recruited by the Grand Wheel syndicate to play on a team in a high stakes game against their counterparts from an alien universe. Too late, they all realize that the game is one they are not going to win, but Scarne manages to walk away with enough luck clinging to him to set up his life again.

Tarot cards are mentioned frequently because they are of considerable importance to the syndicate's games and because of the significance of the Wheel as a symbol connected with the Wheel of Fortune card.

**Bischoff, David.** *The Gaming Magi Trilogy: The Destiny Dice: Book I of the Gaming Magi Trilogy* (1985; Mystique Press, 2014), *Wraith Board: Book II of the Gaming Magi Trilogy* (1985; Mystique Press, 2014), and *The Unicorn Gambit: Book III of the Gaming Magi Trilogy* (1986; Mystique Press, 2014) [no Tarot].

Ian Farthing, the misshapen adopted son of a cobbler and his wife, lives in a (comic) medieval world in which many events are the result of magical gaming moves by magi. The antics of magi Crowley Nilrem's cat disrupt an important throw of the dice causing Ian to become involved in a nearly catastrophic sequence of accidents. Farthing ends up joining a group of questing knights who help Crowley (and his mother) set the world right, restores himself to his proper (and very handsome) form, falls in and out of infatuation with the princess they rescue, and realizes that the loyal Hillary is more than just a friend to him.



The divinatory uses of Tarot are referred to several times in books one and two and the cards occasional serve as models for locations of action. More significantly, Crowley chooses a deck with Egyptian pyramids on the back—just one of many decks he keeps in a trunk—as a means of escaping the villain at the end of book one. He throws down card after card and uses them as stair steps; when he comes to the card representing the person he wants to reach then he arrives at that person's location. In book two, he escapes a magical entrapment by way of a spell that brings his mother's card, the Queen of Wands, to him. When he grabs hold of it and concentrates, he finds himself near her current home in New York. Crowley's mother is a far more powerful magician than he is and is instrumental in Crowley's success at righting the wrongs set in motion by his cat.

**Cooper, Louise.** *The Book of Paradox*. Illus. Barbara Nessim (Futura Publications, 1975).

Varka is wrongly condemned to death for murdering his beloved Aloethe. He suffers a long slow death in a dark pit until he is led by an image of Aloethe to Darxes, Lord of the Underworld. Darxes says that if he can make his way to Limbo he will find Aloethe there. Darxes also gives him the *Book of Paradox* to aid him on what proves to be a long and convoluted quest. Eventually, as the Fool, Varka seems to arrive back at the beginning, but in the role of Darxes and without his memories of Aloethe.

The chapters are titled consecutively for the Tarot trumps, from the Magician through the World and Fool. Some are designated reversed. Each chapter opens with a square illustration of the card by Barbara Nessim and a brief explanation of its meaning. These exceptional Tarot drawings all incorporate a checkerboard design, Roman and Arabic numerals, zodiac symbols, and Hebrew letters.

**Crowley, John.** *Little, Big* (1981; HarperCollins, 2012). Winner of the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award 1982.

*Little, Big* is about the family of architect John Drinkwater and theosophist Violet Bramble, most of whom live in and around the marvelous house John builds at Edgewood. Eventually John and Violet's descendants successfully fulfill the novel's "Tale" by migrating into the fairy world within this world so the fairies in turn can move on to another inner world. Crowley describes this universe as an infundibulum, except that it is bigger in the inner worlds than in the outer. The migration occurs when John and Violet's great-grand-children are adults.

Crowley's main Edgewood protagonists—including Daily Alice and her Tarot-reading sister Sophie—are keenly aware of the forgetting process that occurs as they move from childhood through adulthood. Sophie also suffers from an inability to stay awake. She learned cartomancy from her great-aunt, who, in turn, learned it from Violet, and she becomes frustrated by her certainty that the Tarot cards in the family deck really tell only one story; that is, the entire mythic cycle that it is the destiny of the Drinkwaters to fulfill. She finds herself unable to properly read

that story because she is constantly distracted by all the immediate details of life shown by the cards, yet, like the other cartomancers in the family, she remains justifiably confident that the advice the cards offer about seemingly mundane things promotes the likelihood of the positive fulfilment of the Tale.

**Delany, Samuel R.** *Nova* (Doubleday, 1968).

Captain Lorq Von Ray is on an expedition to collect Illyrion from the center of a nova; Illyrion is a power source that will change the political and economic order of the universe. Mouse, one of the crew members, is of gypsy descent, suffers from a faulty larynx, and plays the syrinx, an instrument that can be used to create images, sounds, and smells of just about anything the player can imagine. Other crew members include Katin, who is planning to write a novel, and the tarot-reader Tyÿ and her partner Sebastian. Both Tyÿ and Lorq's aunt Cyana perform readings for Lorq using a *Rider-Waite* deck adapted to the *Nova* universe. Although the deck's use is connected primarily to Lorq's interests, it is also of great importance to Mouse, who comes-of-age as he realizes that the insights it provides are real. Specifically, he recovers a lost memory about his adoptive gypsy mother using the cards, not for a scam, but to help her band members before they separated to avoid persecution.

**\*De Lint, Charles.** *Moonheart* (1984; Smashwords edition, 2013). Shortlisted for the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award, 1985.

Sara Kendell opens a box from a Welsh man's estate in the back room of her uncle's antique shop and discovers a painting, a ring, and a flat bone disc. She is soon having bizarre dreams about the painting that bring her into contact with an alternate reality occupied by mythical creatures, magic, a very attractive bard, and . . . evil. Her massive home, known as Tamson house, is a nexus between these worlds, and when it and its occupants, including the wizard Kieran Foy, are physically transported into the other realm, unravelling the mystery of the contents of the box becomes imperative to the survival of many.

Tarot is mentioned only briefly. The disc in the box Sara opens belongs to a set of Weirdin, a Scottish oracle that figures prominently in the story and is described as similar to the "Egyptian Tarot or Chinese Book of Changes." De Lint does incorporate Tarot into some of his later novels that include the Tarot-reader Cassie, notably *The Dreaming Place* (1990).

**Dillard, J.M.** *Star Trek: The Lost Years* (Pocket Books, 1989).

The *Enterprise* returns to Earth after completing its five-year mission. Kirk, Spock, and McCoy go off to pursue their careers separately and all discover love interests. McCoy is befriended by Keridwen Llewellyn, an esper-blind (meaning she has no telepathic ability whatsoever) Tarot-reading anthropologist who also has a knack for knowing when people she meets are about to die. She reads her cards for Spock (ch. 6), and is particularly shocked by the appearance of Death. The card prediction resonates throughout the novel, along with the concepts and practice of substitution

and sacrifice that are generally associated with the Hanged Man, a card that is neither mentioned directly nor drawn. Keridwen's ultimate role is that of substitute and her self-sacrifice ensures Spock's survival. While the identification of the 5 of Swords as the Lord of Defeat suggests the *Thoth Tarot* variant, the other card descriptions indicate that the author's primary model was Juliet Sharman-Burke and Liz Greene's *The Mythic Tarot*.

**Egan, Doris.** *The Complete Ivory* (Daw Books, 2001): *The Gate of Ivory* (1989), *Two Bit Heroes* (1992), and *Guilt-Edged Ivory* (1992).

Theodora left her home planet of Pyrene to study on Athena, eventually taking up the study of folktales, but when she is accidentally stranded on the planet Ivory she is obliged to become a Tarot reader in the Market Square to make her living. Ivory is a planet where magic is real and when sorcerer Ran Cormallon offers her a much better paying job as his card reader, she accepts, hoping to earn her passage back to Athena more quickly. However, she quickly discovers that Ran needs someone else to read his cards because his own Grandmother cursed him so he cannot read his own deck and because his previous reader was murdered. Theodora also learns that her new position makes her the next target of those seeking to undermine Ran's status as primary heir to his House.

In *Two-Bit Heroes*, Theodora and Ran accept a job that requires a visit to the provinces, where they are kidnapped by rebels and Ran's face goes up on a poster identified as the leader of the rebels. The background story includes Ran and Theo getting married by observing the appropriate rituals during the months of their association with the rebels. Although the curse that prevents Ran from reading his deck has lifted, he still thinks that Theo handles it better than he does. This novel includes three card readings—the warning that Ran stay away from heights is notable, as is the description of the Wheel of Fortune as showing a torture device—and one use of a card for magic: Ran tears the card for Careful Endeavor in half, keeps part and gives Theo the other to promote a disguise spell that allows her to get out of danger and summon aid.

In *Guilt-Edged Ivory*, Ran's brother-in-law is pressured to take a second wife by the eldest son of one of the six leading families on Ivory. This eldest son is murdered and Ran is asked to investigate. The background story includes Ran and Theo dealing with family pressure for an heir as soon as possible. The cards are mentioned a number of times: Theo says that she "ran the cards" on the job offer and they showed likely success, and refers to the deck several times casually. She performs only one significant reading while she is evidently worrying about her fear of dying by way of pregnancy: she paints a skull on the reverse side of a mirror and lays the cards on it. They show her a vision of herself as a statue bleeding profusely all over Ran.

The Tarot Theodora uses in the Market in the first book is never described in detail, but it is evidently an "ordinary" one and, although she delivers what her clients expect, she knows perfectly well that she is a fake. By contrast, she can read

Ran's magical cards—which are unique to the Ivory universe—and their frequent transformations with ease. At a low point in her and Ran's fortunes in the first book, she discovers that some of the techniques she learns while apprenticing as a healer also enhance the communications from the cards such that she feels herself to be inside the situations they show her. In the last book, she employs magic to enhance a reading about herself; otherwise, Ran's Tarot is used primarily in relation to his business as a sorcerer-for-hire or their safety when they are in dangerous situations.

**Elliot, Kate [pseudonym for Alis A. Rasmussen].** *The Labyrinth Gate* (1988; Open Road Integrated Media, 2013).

Newlyweds Chryse and Sanjay drop one of their wedding gifts—a Tarot deck—in an elevator and find themselves in an alternate world; only Madame Sosotris can help them and she can only help them if they bring her the “Treasure of the Queen of the Underworld,” which is sealed behind the Labyrinth Gate. The young couple is soon off on an expedition to an ancient city that is the locus of a fecundity ritual that bestows great power on the principal female participant and where they hope to recover the deck.

The “Gates” Tarot, which is detailed in an appendix, plays an important role in the novel: it provides the means by which the main characters are transported to and from the magical realm and the cards underscore the belief system of that realm. It is also the object of the treasure hunt that drives the plot and it is used on several occasions for fortune-telling purposes. Madame Sosotris is, of course, a character name taken from T.S. Eliot's “The Waste Land” (1922), which develops themes drawn from fertility rites and the Fisher King narrative, as does *The Labyrinth Gate*.

**Emerson, Ru.** *The Princess of Flames* (Unwin Paperbacks, 1987).

Alster, the wise old king of Darion, and his “bastard” daughter Elfrid are banished following a coup by Alster's sons, particularly Sedry. Darion royalty have varying abilities and characteristics: truth perception, control of flame, healing, charisma, and so forth. In spite of these assets, Alster's sons find they must call on Gesptry, an honorable and respected mercenary, for aid controlling their people after the coup. Gesptry accepts, but is secretly already allied with Elfrid. With the help of his Reader and his mistress Fialla, they carry off a ruse in which Elfrid, already well-practiced in passing herself off as a man, pretends to be Gesptry and successfully rights the great wrong done to her father and to herself.

Gesptry's unnamed Tarot “Reader” sees a complex pattern in the cards showing the restoration of a more prosperous order to the land if he chooses to support Alster's younger and more fair-minded son Rolend as king, rather than the power-hungry Sedry. Her Tarot deck has 25 major arcana and 35 minor cards with five suits: Blades, Sheaves, Water, Fire, and Earth. Elfrid is represented by the Princess of Flames. The Reader uses this deck to follow the evolution of the pattern and passes messages to Fialla and Elfrid by means of a Tarot-based code, notably

“kill Hyrcan” (180; ch. 23) and news that Rolend is riding to take the capital (246; ch. 30). She also reads the cards to divert the soldiers and on one occasion combines them with her powers of “inner vision” to punctuate a particular interpretation of a card in Sedry’s mind. She cannot, however, ever lie in a reading without risking the loss of her ability to interpret the cards (276; ch. 34).

**Finch, Sheila.** *Infinity’s Web* (1985: Wildside Press, 2012).

Ann/Val/Tasha/Stacey are the same person, but not the same person, living in simultaneously existing worlds. Ann is a painter and mother who is married to a doctor, and as her portraits begin to lose cohesion, she also begins losing segments of time as she unwittingly crosses into her alternative selves, each of which represents the results of choices and actions different from those she made. Val is an academic in a world where the Nazis won World War II. Tasha is a powerful psychic witch who reads Tarot with a computer program. Stacey is a coke-using hippie weaver with a son named Michael and a Tarot deck. All of these women find themselves involved with those seeking power by observing and manipulating the alternative worlds. Ann is the opening and ending character, but it is Tasha who finally recognizes the wisdom of her first gypsy mentor and, fearing the consequences of her Fool “self” exploring what she calls the “mirrors” or the “funhouse,” calls on the Tarot’s Magus for aid. A mentor thus comes to Ann and teaches her that the universe is not a thing, that it exists only as the observer believes it to exist, and that when one of the selves learns, all of the others benefit. This observer is described as “shuffling through an infinite deck of cards representing quantum probabilities, spreading them out in random configurations, and reading their meanings. To this Cosmic Gypsy we owe whatever truth there is in our lives. All the versions of our lives” (Part Two).

**\*Fortune, Dion, and Gareth Knight.** *The Sea Priestess* (1989; Digital edition 2016 by Anna Ruggieri).

The narrator is stricken by asthma, which is treated with drugs, which combine to give him a unique and metaphysical communion with the Moon, as well as visions of a Sea Priestess and Sea Priest. His real estate business subsequently brings him into association with the apparently ageless Vivian Le Fay Morgan. The two increasingly share dream realities and take on the personas of the Priestess and Priest. The narrator believes he is destined to be sacrificed to the Priestess, a belief that is underscored by a Tarot prediction based on two cards: the Hanged Man and another bearing the likeness of the Morgan Le Fay of one of his visions: “I crossed the old dame’s palm with silver, and she told me that there was a woman in my life who would sacrifice me for her own ends” (ch. XXIX). In the end, however, this enigmatic woman arranges for her own passage to other realms and leaves him to build a new life with a new love.

**Gotlieb, Phyllis.** *Starcats Trilogy. A Judgment of Dragons* (1980) [no Tarot], *Emperor, Swords, Pentacles* (Ace Books, 1982), and *The Kingdom of the Cats* (1985) [No Tarot]

Government employee Kinnear is drawn into a complicated interplanetary intrigue by the ESP-adept known as the “Locksmith,” who is worried about the planet Qsaprinel, which is close to his homeworld. Eventually, they discover that Thorndecker, Kinnear’s new boss, is part of a conspiracy to force Qsaprinel into a trade deal that would effectively make them subject to “harvesting.” Kinnear involves his friend Renny, an “impervious” who cannot be read by ESP. She helps the Qsaprinel Emperor, who refuses to sign the deal, escape his homeworld. Her mother, the Tarot reading Anika, helps to hide him and also supports Emerald and Roanung, two of the big red cats featured throughout the *Starcats* trilogy, whom Kinnear also summons for aid in their attempts—eventually successful—to unravel the reasons for Thorndecker’s actions and to protect planet Qsaprinel.

The first letters of the Tarot card identifiers chosen for the title spell ESP, a key theme throughout the novel. Renny’s Tarot reading is mentioned numerous times, but seems relatively unimportant to the narrative. Of greater interest is Gotlieb’s effective use of Tarot card titles as headings throughout the novel which, toward the end, suggest that Anika’s role as layer of cards definitive of the novel’s characters and actions has been far more important than they have appeared.

**Hambly, Barbara.** *The Windrose Chronicles: The Silent Tower* (1986; Open Road Integrated Media, 2011), *The Silicon Mage* (1988; Open Road Integrated Media, 2011), and the *Dog Wizard* (1992; Open Road Integrated Media, 2011).

Joanna is a computer programmer who is taken through the Void into an alternate universe where a magus named Suraklin, who was supposedly executed for his crimes but has been hopping between bodies, is planning to download his consciousness into a computer that draws power from both Joanna’s world and his own. The opening of the Void enables the arrival of “abominations” from other universes that threaten, maim, and kill. Joanna finds herself allied with a sasenna warrior named Caris and his grandfather, the Archmage Salteris, and at first believes that the long-imprisoned magus Amtryg is responsible for her misadventures. Eventually, and somewhat belatedly she realizes that he is not and falls in love with him, but, doubting her own perceptions, turns him over to the mages to imprison once again. Back home (see *The Silicon Mage*), she realizes her error, and summons the courage to save him so that he can save both their worlds. The pair live in Joanna’s world (see *Dog Wizard*), until Joanna is kidnapped and Amtryg is obliged to return to his world to save her, where he suffers the loss of his powers by Council sanction, but is eventually magically selected as the next archmage.

In Amtryg’s world, respectable mages abide by the Council edict against most forms of magic. Some of the less respectable, however, make their living as “dog wizards;” that is by selling potions and telling fortunes by cards and tea leaves. A

pool once used for divining is also mentioned (*Silicon Mage* ch. 13). Amtryg, a Council mage at odds with the Council's legal judgements, practices divination and even attempts to teach it to Caris (*Silicon Mage* ch. 14). The popularity of such activities is such that even the archmage Salteris is asked to read the cards for the daughters of the owner of a villa where he and Caris stop for the night (*Silent Tower* ch. 3). Tarot cards are mentioned in passing twice in *Dog Wizard* (ch. 1), but the only developed Tarot reading occurs in *The Silent Tower* (ch. 12): Amtryg lays the cards—at least some of which are based on *Rider-Waite* variants—twice in a row. They show circumstances and events that subsequently unfold, including a marriage central to the plot developments (ch. 15). Perhaps more significant is the card identifying the “Dead God”: Suraklin sees himself as the living embodiment of this deity. The figure is also brought to life in *The Silicon Mage* in the form of a desperate “abomination,” who has been taken hostage and forced to live on human beings to avoid starvation. This creature, which is nicknamed the “Dead God,” is rescued by Amtryg and it subsequently returns the favor by helping Amtryg out of one of his frequent life-threatening situations.

**\*Herbert, Frank.** Dune series: *Dune* (1965) [No Tarot], *Dune Messiah* (1969; Berkley, 1975), *Children of Dune* (1976; Berkley, 1977), and so forth.

Frank Herbert's Dune series is about the fall and subsequent future of the Atreides family after they are sent to the sand planet Arrakas, better known as Dune, where the spice that makes space travel possible is made by giant worms and mined for marketing. The villains seek to prevent Paul Atreides, one of the twins who are the legitimate heirs to the throne, from claiming his birthright. Among these villains is Reverend Mohiam, who uses her Tarot cards specifically to monitor the progress of her plans.

The spice makes it possible for the twins to see into the future, a practice that is frequently mentioned and plays an important role in the series. However, it is likely Mohiam who is responsible for the Tarot decks that suddenly proliferate after the vendors near the temple begin selling them. The cards frustrate Paul's efforts to see the future, something that he previously did quite easily: “It was the time of the tarot which he'd forecast in an early vision. The damnable tarot! It muddied the waters of Time until the prescient strained to detect moments but an hour off” (*Dune Messiah* 78; see also *Children of Dune* 40).

**Hyvrard, Jeanne.** *Waterweed in the Wash-Houses*. 1977. English trans. Elsa Copeland. Edinburgh UP, 1996.

The narrator's adventure is prefaced by a re-envisioned bible-based creation myth and evolves in feminist terms emphasizing separation and fusion as critical moments in creative transformation. Always speaking in a stream-of-consciousness style and frequently repeating how she is exhorted to “have another child,” which she knows will kill her, she—evidently the Fool—meets the Tarot trump card characters in consecutive order, and as she does so experiences a series of alchemical deaths. The

deaths preceding the Chariot, for example, include lead—resignation, pewter—submission, and iron—oppression. She speaks frequently of her severed fingers, which are associated with figs and the Tree of Death. This Tree, the third in Eden, with those of Knowledge and Life, is further associated with writing and memory. Arriving at the last meeting, which is the last Tarot trump card, the World, she says that she can never know this final alchemical death, because the World always lives on. Although she never calls herself Lilith or refers to Adam and Eve by name, she implies that she is, in fact, the first woman, which adds special resonance to her claim that Jeanne Hyvrard is one of her daughters. As Lilith, the narrator can never fully enter into the structures of the second beginning marked by the creation of Eve from Adam; she is destined to be the “mad woman,” the force driving creativity and creativity itself, but always harnessed and contained.

**King, Stephen.** Dark Tower series: *The Gunslinger: The Dark Tower I* (1982; Penguin Books, 1989; revised edition Scribner, 2003); *The Drawing of the Three: The Dark Tower II* (Penguin Books, 1987); *The Waste Lands: The Dark Tower III* (Penguin Books, 1991); *Wizard and Glass: The Dark Tower IV* (Penguin Books, 1997); *Wolves of the Calla: The Dark Tower V* (Donald M. Grant, 2003); *The Song of Susannah: The Dark Tower VI* (Donald M. Grant, 2004); *The Dark Tower: The Dark Tower VII* (Scribner, 2004).

The Dark Tower series tells the tale of Roland Deschain’s quest to find and save the Tower, a kind of nexus holding all universes and worlds together. A seven-card Tarot reading performed by one of the villains, the man in black, in the first book identifies the companions Roland gathers to aid him: the boy Jake, Eddie Dean, a heroin addict; and Susannah Dean, a cripple suffering from split personality. The other four cards likely refer to Roland and his fate: the Hanged Man, the Tower, and Death and the Sun. In the last book, Roland makes his final approach to the Tower alone, enters and climbs it, only to be returned to the beginning of his quest, without clear memories of having pursued it once, and perhaps many times before.

*The Eyes of the Dragon* (1984; Signet, 1987). Illus. by David Palladini.

The 1984 limited edition publication of this novel by King’s own Philtrum Press was illustrated by Kenneth R. Linkhauser. Of greater interest here is the 1987 Signet edition which is illustrated by David Palladini. Palladini is the artist of the well-known *Aquarian Tarot*, which was first published in 1970 by Morgan Press and then by US Games, and revised and republished as the *New Palladini Tarot* in 1996 by US Games.

Tarot is mentioned in passing in this novel twice. First, the sorcerer villain of the piece, Flagg, who returns every so often to drive the kingdom to blood and ruin, is said to have used a Tarot deck to make prognostications for Lita, Queen and mother of the future King Roland, but Lita only wanted to know about who would take such and such a lover and that sort of thing, not “dark cabals and murderous plans” (ch. 18). Second, it is mentioned in relation to Peter, the young heir apparent



to his father Roland's kingdom, whose freedom and life are threatened by Flagg because he threatens Flaggs' plans for death and destruction. The young Peter kept his "treasures—a Tarot deck with a few cards missing, a bag of marbles, a lucky coin, a braided bit of hair from Peony's mane" in a not-so-secret compartment (ch. 33). Framed for poisoning his father, he spends five years imprisoned in the tower called "the Needle," before escaping, with a little help from his friends, and claiming the throne.

There are a few tenuous crossovers of motifs, character names, and locations between this novel and the Dark Tower novels, of which the Tarot deck and emphasis on the image of the tower is one of the more substantial.



*David Palladini. Aquarian Tarot. Morgan Press and U.S. Games, 1970.*

**Kurtz, Katherine.** *Lammas Night* (1983; Open Road Integrated Media, 2016).

A coven with deep connections in the British government gathers allies to perform a magical working to stop Hitler from winning WWII. John Graham, a member of the coven, involves his friend William, the King's brother, in the exploration of his—and thus, as it turns out, their—past lives. Realizing that they have lived out a ritual sacrifice of human blood many times before, they eventually decide that another sacrifice may be required to strengthen the magic that will save Britain.

One of the central images used to identify the recurrence of a specific kind of sacrifice in reincarnated lives as mythopoeic is the Tarot Hanged Man, which is mentioned and discussed a number of times, particular with reference to readings performed by Alix (ch. 12, 14, and 23), who is the female "leader" of the primary coven of the novel.

**Laubenthal, Sanders Anne.** *Excalibur* (Ballantine, 1973). Shortlisted for the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award in 1974.

In *Excalibur*, the Pendragon returns and saves the modern world from being transformed into a waste land (akin to that in T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land") (esp. ch. 10) by the restless spirit of Morgeuse. Morgeuse is aided by her sister Morgan, who has been cursed with immortality until she finally knows her true self, and the unwilling Elaine, who has been reborn as Linette Silverthorne. Much of the story attends Rhodri (Arthur), who seeks Excalibur; Anthony (Lancelot?), who seeks the Grail; and Linette who shifts her favors from Anthony to Rhodri and back again, as they save the Grail from Morgeuse's efforts to use Morgan to destroy it with Excalibur.

Morgan practices various magical arts, including the ritual use of Tarot. On several occasions, she lays her cards in the Wheel of Power (32; ch. 4 and 195; ch. 12) and the Triangle of the Sun's Weird (43; ch. 5 and 66; ch. 7) pattern to help Morgeuse possess Linette and destroy the Cup. When Morgan realizes that this Cup is the cauldron of the Great Goddess whom she serves before all others, she withdraws her support from Morgeuse. This act demonstrates that she at last understands her true self and she is rewarded by being extinguished in Excalibur's flame: the partly burned Ace of Swords is found at the spot where her hand turns to ash. It is buried with her remains (see Epilogue).

**Lee, Tanith.** *A Heroine of the World* (1989; Headline Book Publishing, 1995).

Aradia loses her parents to war and her aunt to suicide by hanging. After her city falls, she becomes the servant, lover, wife, and finally the widow of the Kronian Flag Colonel Keer Gurtz. With the aid of Gurtz's principal aid Meln and the influential society woman Vollus, "Ara" claims Gurtz's estate, only to find that Vollus's price is a "heartgift" bond with a man who needs the estate's income to become the next emperor. When the bond is made, Ara has only just turned sixteen and she immediately confesses to him that she is in love with Thenser Zavion, one of her own countrymen whose name she struck from a death list and who subsequently made his way as a traitor. To her surprise, the would-be emperor helps her to go in search of Thenser. She finds him and he takes her as his wife, but while separated from him during the ever-shifting military maneuvers she is imprisoned—pregnant with his child. He rescues her just seconds before she is to be hanged.

Aradia demonstrates volition primarily with regards to Thenser and when she calls on the aid of the virgin goddess Vulmarts/Vulmardra (who generally answers): both the fortune-teller Jilza (104) and Gurtz's mother (289) identify her with the Tarot Heroine, or World's Girl, shown with lightning striking her upheld wand. The Heroine, one of the cards of She, the goddess of Vulmardra (104), is the primary device by which Aradia is posed as a heroine: she survives the lightning bolts that life throws at her, claims the man she saves from death as her true lover, and then embarks on the path to motherhood.

**Lynn, Elizabeth.** *The Chronicles of Tornor Trilogy* (1979): *Watchtower*, *The Dancers of Arun* [No Tarot], and *The Northern Girl*.

*The Chronicles of Tornor* tells the story of the fall and rise, and fall and possible rise again, of the ancient medieval kingdom of Tornor, a kingdom in which sexual preferences are allowed considerable freedom of expression. In book one, southern enemies take the region and kill the King, but keep the King's son Errel and his head guardsman Ryke alive. Errel is forced to play jester for the new court and Ryke is obliged to serve the new King to keep the true heir alive. Errel possesses an ancient set of cards, which help him to plan their escape to a purportedly mythical region where not only military, but also dance training is provided. The Dancer is the first card in Errel's deck; sometimes called the Fool, it describes the balance of the universe. Some of the other cards that appear in the various past-present-future readings Errel performs include Demon, Sun, Lord, Illusionist, Wheel of Chance, Scholar, Phoenix, Weaver, and Mirror. Eventually they retake Tornor and Errel, never having wanted the crown, passes it to his sister Sorren.

Book two tells the story of a one-armed boy training to be a scribe at Tornor who is retrieved and taken on to greater adventures by his long-lost brother. Although there is no mention of Tarot in this book, it does expand considerably on the "mind gifts" that many possess, including mind speech, patterning, foreseeing, far travelling, weather work, mind lifting, and healing.

In Book three, a young bond servant named Sorren possesses not only an ancient Tarot deck, evidently the same one used by Errel, but also the unique gift of seeing into the past. She never does learn to read the cards, but she frequently finds herself watching vignettes from Tornor's ancient history. After she helps to save her employer, a woman who is head of a distinguished family and a member of the governing council, from an assassination attempt, she is granted her freedom a year ahead of schedule. She travels north to see Tornor, but is disappointed to discover that it is all but abandoned and on the verge of a final collapse. Sorren, however, immediately sees the strategic potential of the place and sets about using her talents and connections to restore it to its former glory.

**Powers, Tim.** *The Drawing of the Dark* (Ballantine, 1979. Ebook edition).

Sixteenth-century Irishman, traveler, swordsman, and jack-of-all-trades Brian Duffy has a seemingly accidental encounter with Aurelianus in Venice, and Aurelianus hires him to work as a bouncer in his tavern in Vienna. From then on Duffy's life becomes increasingly weird, as he is pursued by monsters and protected by more of the same. He finally discovers that Aurelianus is Merlin and he is King Arthur, reincarnated for the express purpose of protecting the wounded Fisher King of the West and his lands, which are under siege by the ruler of the East. The tavern is crucial to the battle as it is where a unique beer has been brewed for thousands of years in a vat placed directly on the earth. Generally, only the upper levels are consumed, but the "dark," that from the bottom of the vat, will, when ready, restore the Fisher King to health.

The reference to Tarot in this novel is a fleeting but resonant mention of the Death card. Both Duffy and Arthur have spent much of their respective lives facing death, and yet, as Duffy muses at one point, he can't imagine it.

Odd, he thought as he stared at the low ceiling, how I can't imagine death. I've seen a lot of it, cautiously flirted with it, seen it take more friends than I'll let myself think about, but I have no idea what it really is. *Death*. All the word conjures up is the old Tarot card image, a skeleton in a black robe, waving something ominous like an hourglass or a scythe. (Bk 3, ch. 21; 301)



Left: *Marselles Tarot*. Grimaud, 1963. Right: *Etteilla. Grand Etteilla Tarot*. B.P. Grimaud, Paris, 1910. Public domain.

In its 15th century printed forms, the Death card included body parts strewn across a battlefield of the sort that both Duffy and Arthur have spent more time on than they cared to. Since Duffy-Arthur is proof of reincarnation, it is perhaps not surprising that he thinks of death in terms of the Tarot card caricature.<sup>3</sup>

**Pratchett, Terry.** *Mort: A Discworld Novel* (Transworld, 1983), *The Light Fantastic* (Transworld, 1986), and *Lords and Ladies* (1992; Corgi, 1993).

Pratchett's reinvented Tarot, the "Caroc" deck, reflects the Discworld universe of much of his fiction; the Death card, for example, includes the infamous "luggage," which (like Death) follows its owner everywhere (*Light Fantastic* 83-84). Death himself is associated with divination insofar as he has the ability to see both past and future (*Light Fantastic* 22). The Caroc deck is not an indispensable motif in the Discworld novels, but it does make a number of striking appearances in scenes that include some of the popular tropes about Tarot, particularly the Death card.

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Powers makes far more extensive use of Tarot cards in *Last Call* (1992), which was nominated for the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award in 1993, and the other books in the *Fault Lines* trilogy.

In *Mort*, for example, Princess Keli, the fifteen-year-old heir to the throne of her kingdom is saved from an assassin by Death's apprentice Mort. Keli's death, however, was so much part of history in-the-making that her people find it increasingly difficult to acknowledge her existence and are willing to support the coronation of the man who arranged her assassination. In desperation, Keli goes to Cutwell, a magician who performs a Caroc reading for her. When the Death card shows up the first time, he offers the familiar platitude that Death doesn't always mean death. When it turns up twice more, they check the deck. While the reading is not particularly helpful, Cutwell proves to be useful to Keli in her efforts to return to her place in society.

In *The Light Fantastic*, the sequel to *Mort*, the amateur magician Rincewind suffers because a powerful spell from the Octavo, a book of magic kept at the unseen university, has taken up residence in his head. When his adventures lead to his imminent fall off of the edge of Discworld with his companion, a tourist named Twoflower, the Octavo adjusts things to keep him safe, with the result that all of the Octavo spells must be read to avert the destruction of Discworld itself. As the signs of the impending catastrophe accumulate, including Tarot cards turning up blank (21)—also a Tarot trope, in the movies if not in popular literature. Although Rincewind thinks "All that stuff about [the Caroc cards] being the distilled wisdom of the universe is a load of rubbish" (82), he becomes so desperate to restore his companion Twoflower to health that he seeks help from a necromancer with "a pack of greasy cards," who turns up, among other cards—"Rincewind had been expecting it—Death" (83). Subsequently, she sends him on a drug-inspired trip to Death's realm where he finds Twoflower teaching Death, Famine, War, and Pestilence how to play cards with a Caroc deck (96).

*Lords and Ladies* is Pratchett's version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In it, seasoned witches do not have much use for Tarot cards, but they are of interest to ambitious young novices, like Diamanda, who is learning the craft from books. She tries to impress her fellows by explaining the moon card: "'Of course it's not the moon. It's a non-mimetic convention, not tied to a conventional referencing system, actually,' said Diamanda" (86). Diamanda is among those who enable the invasion of the village by destructive elves, a situation that requires all of heroine Esme Weatherwax's skill to put right.

**Sherrell, Carl.** *Arcane* (Jove Publications, 1978).

This mythologized account of the creation of civilization in the small village of Arcane is structured by chapters titled with Tarot trump labels in conventional order. The central characters are directly associated with individual cards and their characteristics and actions associated with esotericism and other cards. For example, Abeth, the Magician who is the conduit for knowledge about civilization and whose name suggests the Hebrew "aleph-beth," is tutored by magicians named for the Sephirots of the cabalistic tree of life. Unicorns figure prominently, as does a fickle Fool named Niko and a villainess in the form of a jealous witch.

**Yolen, Jane** *Cards of Grief* (1984; Open Road Integrated Media, 2013). Based on two short stories "In the Hall of Grief," *Elsewhere* Vol. II, eds. Terri Windling and Mark Alan Arnold (Ace Fantasy Books, 1982); and "Cards of Grief" in Yolen's *Tales of Wonder* (Schocken Books, 1983). *Cards of Grief* won the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award in 1985.

Linni, the Gray Wanderer, is born to a world in which the arts are centered almost exclusively on grieving, especially in songs, so that the dead will not be forgotten. Her talent for writing lyrics catapults her out of her village to the Queen's service. In the end, when she dies, her apprentice honors her by inventing a new form for the expression of grief: a deck of Tarot-like cards. These cards are not used for future-telling, but rather to promote remembrance of the Gray Wanderer, her life, and her associates.

**Zelazny, Roger.** Amber series (1970–1991).

The Corwin Books (1970–1979): *Nine Princes of Amber* (1970; Avon Books, 1972), *The Guns of Avalon* (1972; Avon Books, 1974) Nominated for the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award in 1973, *Sign of the Unicorn* (1975; Avon Books, 1976), *The Hand of Oberon* (1976; Avon Books, 1977), and *The Courts of Chaos* (serialized in *Galaxy* magazine Nov. 1977 to Feb. 1978; Avon Books, 1979). (*Nine Princes of Amber* in 1971 and *The Guns of Avalon* in 1973 were both shortlisted for the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award.)

The Merlin Books (1986–1991): *Triumphs of Doom* (1985; Avon Books, 1986), *Blood of Amber* (1986; Avon Books, 1987), *Sign of Chaos* (1987; Avon Books, 1988), *The Knight of Shadows* (Avon Books, 1989), and *Prince of Chaos* (Avon Books, 1991).

The series begins with Corwin, the hero, suffering from long-term amnesia brought on by the machinations of his not-so-loving family, several of whom want to deny him his birthright of Kingship over the Amber universe. This universe is the central and primary one, but Amber royalty and a few others have the ability to traverse their way out of it into regions and times of their own imagining. By the end of the Corwin books, Corwin no longer wants to be King and willingly passes the onerous position to his younger brother. The Merlin books recount the adventures of Corwin's son in the Amber universe.

The Amber Tarot deck, of which a number of copies exist, was created by the family artist Dworkin. It consists primarily of images of members of Corwin's family, but other characters and locations can be added by anyone knowing the necessary magic. The primary role of these decks throughout the series is to serve as communication and transporter devices. The person initiating contact simply holds the other's card and concentrates until they answer. Either person may draw the other through the card to their current location. The Amber Tarot is introduced in the first book, where its images of family members also play an important role in Corwin's recovery of his memories of who he is and what his world is really like.