

The Golden Dawn

by
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This introductory article into the Order of The Golden Dawn provides an insight into this significant 19th century institution.

Almost all modern practical occultism comes directly or indirectly from the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. This initiatory magical group was founded in London in 1888 to aid philosophical, spiritual, and psychic evolution. The Order described itself as "An Hermetic Society whose members are taught the principles of Occult Science and the Magic of Hermes."

The Golden Dawn is not a religion, although religious imagery and spiritual concepts play an important role in the Order's work. It is a school and a repository of knowledge, where students learn the various elements of Western philosophy and magic. Tolerance for all religious beliefs is stressed, and the symbolism used comes from a wide variety of religious sources. People from many different religious paths consider themselves Golden Dawn magicians including Christians, Gnostics, Jews, Pagans and Wiccans.

Since the late 19th Century, the influence of the Golden Dawn has been strongly felt in all areas of magic and Tarot development. Many magical organisations have borrowed heavily from the methods used by the Golden Dawn, sometimes without giving any credit to the Order.

The members of the original Golden Dawn were almost all-respectable upper and middle-class men and women, who were interested in the occult. Many members of the Order also belonged to other esoteric groups, such as the Theosophical Society and the Freemasons. They were intelligent, creative, and otherwise normal people who had a great thirst for spiritual knowledge. Their aim was to understand the hidden mechanics of the universe through the study and practice of magic.

The goal of the Golden Dawn has always been the continued preservation of the magical tradition via the teaching of new initiates, and their continued spiritual growth. This spiritual endeavour has often been referred to as the "search for the Quintessence, the Stone of the Philosophers, True Wisdom, Perfect Happiness, the Summum Bonum," It is "the Completion of the Great Work."

The number of people who are studying the Golden Dawn's system of magic in the 21st Century is steadily increasing and shows no sign of abating.

DECK REVIEW: Victoria Regina Tarot

by Sarah Ovenall, Text by Sarah Ovenall and Georg Patterson

Review By Sezo Kral

When I opened the box I immediately felt spoiled. The set comes with a black velvet bag with blue silk lining and blue tassels! The bag gives a wonderful first impression of the set and a hint of Victorian elegance that this deck is draped in. The book is of a decent thickness as well, not something quickly put together but has been written with the care and talent to match the deck. It's a great read and something to keep for constant reference, for it gives a wealth of information for the beginner to the period to get a taste of this multi-faceted and unique era.

The images are black and white which was a little disappointing at first because there is a lot of colour and extravagance to the period that would make the deck shine. However, flicking through the cards was like looking at the first cinematographs and the grey haze of industrial activity covering vast areas of the UK was a very appropriate choice I feel, plus it means that Ovenall can use all sorts of contemporary images.

Sarah Ovenall has beautifully worked and blended the images and I had to check a few times that this was a collage deck! So many collage decks look like a 5 year old gone mad with paper and glue, but the images flow wonderfully. All the cards are created from actual wood and steel engravings from the period! This is the Victorian age speaking for itself, using Ovenall as a wonderful tool to bring this strict and ordered era back to life. The card backs are an irreversible engraving of Victoria as Queen and Empress, with a simple and delicate border.

To anyone who feels the Victorians were stuck up, repressed, aggressive and violent expansionists will take a beautiful double check. The Majors are traditionally titled, Strength is 8 and Justice is 11. I'll just tease you with a few descriptions of a few cards... The High Priestess with her hunched skirts shows the sensuality and sexuality of the period. The Wheel of Fortune depicts a stunning Tibetan mandala of Karma, complete with an image of the Chinese goddess of mercy, Kwan-Yin. It is a very refreshing and unusual image for the Wheel of Fortune. The Moon is stunning, stark yet complete and honest. The Devil is a rather evil looking clown (after having seen too many horror films with murderous clowns I can really believe this Devil is a devil!) is another image of the boundaries the Victorians surrounded themselves in but how they loved to tear them apart secretly.

The carnivals, the madams and the crazy 'aunts' were all legitimate and acceptable ways of breaking free. Great architects of design also designed a neat social tool so that you can be straight laced and a functioning member of society again on Monday morning after going wild at the weekends.

Obviously Queen Victoria shows up in many of the cards. In the courts she appears as the Princess of Swords in her youth, The Queen of Wands shows a fun loving, charming and deeply passionate new Queen of England. The Queen of Swords shows the image we are all familiar with of a Queen in mourning after the death of Prince Albert. However the courts range from Edward her successor, other close members of

the royal family to Benjamin Disraeli her friend, advisor and Prime Minister. Of course no Victorian deck would be complete without Oscar Wilde. There is the scope of libertarian and conservative political, sexual and religious views of the time, as well as the pushing and reforming of social boundaries. Some of the minors also reflect key times in Victoria's life, but that's understandable for her private life and public life where the same and what made her great and was the power and energy of the time! Although it could be tedious seeing Victoria again and again, the images are so varied that makes her a woman and a human being, rather than just another Queen on the timelines and posters at school.

The minors are the guns (swords) watches (coins), jars (cups) and pens (wands). Each image is a wealth of symbolism with the traditional Rider Waite meanings. Here we can closely see the society, technology, architecture and lavish beauty of the industrial age. There are glimpses from around the Empire, and domestic life of all sections of society; the royals, prostitutes, the military, performers, athletes etc. Such a cross section of this revolutionary age is difficult to do, and yet Ovenall manages it without distorting it or judging it with our modern views on Victorian ideology etc. The Victorians speak for themselves, asking to be judged on their own terms and merits.

I challenge anyone who has this set to not find the images alive with passion, love and care for this fascinating period of British history, but also the accuracy and detail that Sarah Ovenall has gone into. In the book each card's write-up is divided into a description, interpretation, the card in your life and notes on the sources for the images. Don't fret if you aren't completely clued up on the history for the text gives you an overview of the period, and the cards themselves speak for the rich and complex society. What a better way to learn about history, by reading the tarot!

The spreads section gives a lot of brief information, including a section on elemental dignities! The book also offers two wonderful spreads; an 8-card spread called Victoria's Sceptre ideally for creative endeavours and a 11-card spread called Victoria's Chalice encompassing all of who Victoria was, which will be great for questions with two options and there is also a wonderful sample reading using the Chalice spread.

Here is a complete and accurate reflection of the Victorian period that your mind fills the images with a rich colour and texture of the time. It shows not just the domestic era, but the Victorian influence of the empire on cultures and technology, and those first steps towards globalisation, a consumer age and worldwide communication. It's strange to see a lot of our modern society has its foundations around a remarkable lady, time of change, convention and sensationalism, and sometimes you may wonder if we have moved on since the height of imperialism – but you may not see that as an entirely bad thing! 'Long Live the Queen!'

Deck Review – The Royal Thai Tarot

By Sungkom Horharin (Director)
illustrated by Wasan Kriengkomol, Verasak Sodsri
US Games Systems Inc
ISBN 1572814741
Review by Sharon Walker

Unlike Western tarot readers who seem to be trying to get away from the tarot as fortune-telling image, the director of this deck, Mr Horharin states: “I received recognition as the first Tarot card fortune-teller in Thailand and the most famous in Asia who could forecast accurately according to the tarot card tradition of fortune-telling.”

Mr Horharin has created a deck with two well-known Thai artists that is based on Thai customs, traditions, art, culture and literature and also draws on the history and the religions of Thailand.

It is 4 ¾ inches long by 3 ¼ inches wide, so is slightly bigger than a standard size deck but still comfortable to shuffle and hold. The back features a reversible design of gold vase with an arrangement of lotus blossoms and buds on a royal blue background.

The cards have a stylised border of gold and blue that surrounds the image. The images are depicted against a plain background and the major arcana show a minimal of symbolism – at least if you’re familiar with the RWS deck and the amount of symbolism that that deck contains.

I liked the clean image of the Major Arcana but felt that I perhaps could have gained more from the cards, if I knew more about Thailand and it’s culture etc. This was especially noticeable when doing readings for other TABI members whilst reviewing this deck, as I found myself searching the web for information on symbols, Thai dance, etc. This perhaps could have been provided in some detail with a companion book for the deck. The LWB provided is basic and pretty much standard for decks published by U.S. Games Systems Inc.

The people within the deck all seem to be portrayed very similarly and in some cases, if it were not for the name of the court card being on the image, it would have been very easy to get the courts mixed up. The dress is very similar and sometimes the poses of the figures only differ very slightly in the positioning of the fingers. In Thai dance, this would be significant and provide meaning; this is again a reason why a companion book would be useful.

The Minor cards are “pip” style – although in the cups and the swords suit, there are minor differences in the suit icons on the ace and two of the suit compared to the rest of the Minor cards 3-10.

Not being used to pip decks, I found myself relying on the standard meanings of the suit icons and the numerology and the familiar images of the RWS deck which I

normally use immediately coming to mind. Those used to pip decks would probably find that this did not happen.

To get even more out of the deck, familiarity with or a trip to Thailand in order to gain knowledge of the previously mentioned culture etc would probably be a good idea. Apart from reading and fortune telling, this deck could be used by Travel agents to inspire tarot readers to visit Thailand. Perhaps TABI could stretch to a trip for me and I could do a review of the deck afterwards? *grin * **[Ed – nice try Sharon!]**

The artwork on the deck is well drawn with clean lines and illustrated well throughout all the cards. I found it a joy to use despite only being a pip deck. However, I would probably recommend it only to experienced readers or those used to using a deck with non-illustrated Minor Arcana, contrary to what the LWB states of being easy to use by beginners to tarot.