

## A Tale of Three Magicians

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"Take up your cup, your wand, your sword and your pentacle. Use them to channel the energy of the universe, use them to create your own reality," says the Magician, one of my favourite tarot cards. Is it any wonder, therefore, that I went to the creators of four tarot decks to see how they visualised their Magicians, how they made their vision of the tarot a reality.

"The Magician is the planet Mercury, which rules Virgo and Gemini, two very different astrological signs," says Kay Steventon, creator of two decks - the *Spiral Tarot* and the *Celestial Tarot*. "Attention to detail and precision are characteristics of Virgoans, while Geminis are mercurial - forever moving like quick silver, and at times, they can be flippant. So, for me, there are two sides to the Magician - he can be trickster or Magus, and which energy is operating at any given time will depend on what you're dealing with."



"I've used the same figure in both the *Spiral* and the *Celestial*. Mercury is the great communicator - he represents the element of air. In the *Spiral*, he traverses the universe - from the air above, to the vegetation below. In the *Celestial*, he is pure thought - he is in the clouds where there is only air. But he still has his caduceus, his wand with the light going from heaven to earth and through to the underworld. He is the god who guides the traveller through life and death."

"I've never liked the idea of the Magician being a trickster, or evil. I know my image is very different to the traditional one - for a start, she's a girl!" says Lucy Cavendish who collaborated with artist Melinda Ayre to create the *Oracle Tarot*. "But there are correlations between my girl and the traditional image of the Magician as conceived by one of my all-time heroes, Pamela Colman-Smith - the artist for the Rider-Waite deck.



"My Magician sends out messages about knowing your own power - the stars flying between her hands are the magic of her ability to create. She is benevolent and compassionate,

she is earthy and celestial - the message of 'as above, so below' is in my Magician. She's dressed in purple, the colour of sovereignty, and she's surrounded by waves of energy - her wonderful wavy hair."

"The moment I saw the image of the hooded person gazing into his open hands, I knew I had my Magician," says Nicolette Neish, whose *Creative Fire Tarot* is available as a limited edition deck. "My medium is photographic collage and I found the images for my cards from the everyday world. You only have to look at the world around you and the archetypal messages of the tarot cards jump out at you from the pose of a statue, from monuments, from gardens, from flowers.

"My Magician isn't the showman of the Rider-Waite deck. He's focussing on the crystal in his hand - the conduit of

energy. He's already working his magic with the four elements of the tarot – blending them together into infinite possibilities. I deliberately keep



aspects of the Pamela Colman-Smith images – the red and white flowers above my Magician are a close-up of the red roses and white lilies in the Rider-Waite Magician.”

Everyone who encounters the tarot encounters magic. As I talked with my tarot deck creators, they each recounted magical moments that shaped where they are now on their personal tarot journeys.

In 1987, Lucy had her first ever professional tarot reading in a shop in London. During the session, the tarot reader recommended that Lucy get a copy of Louise Hay's book, *You Can Heal Your Life* – which she did.

Fourteen years later, Lucy received a phone call out of the blue from Hay House - Louise Hay's publishing house. Would she be interested in creating a tarot deck for them? The answer, of course, was a resounding 'yes' and the Oracle Tarot was published in 2003. What sort of magical link was established between Lucy and the Louise Hay publishing empire back there in 1987? Even though Lucy had often said she would love to create a tarot deck, she had never actively pursued that particular goal. As it turned out, she didn't have to – the universe heard her message and provided.

Nor did Kay Steventon set out to have a deck published. In the mid 1990s, she was doing a course on the Kaballah with Evelynne Joffe, one of the founding members of the Tarot Guild of Australia. An integral part of

the course was the correlation between the tarot and the Tree of Life and Kay was so inspired by the symbology of the major arcana cards that she turned up each week with her artistic representation of one of the major cards. Evelynne could see the magic of what Kay was creating and encouraged her to send photos of her cards to US Games in the USA. A letter came back – yes, we'd like you to do a whole deck for us! The rest is history – 45,000 copies of the *Spiral Tarot* have been sold since it was published in 1997. In 2005, US Games published Kay's *Celestial Tarot* and the *Spiral Tarot* book and deck have just been translated into Chinese.

Nicolette Neish never thought about creating a deck until she participated in a group creative project on the *Aeclectic Tarot* website. Creating just two cards was enough to ignite the creative spark and she decided to do a whole deck. For Nicolette, it was a personal creative project and she decided to do no more than display the cards on her website. She did, of course, have a few decks printed and brought them to the Melbourne International Tarot Conference in 2005. There she was fascinated to see how other people interpreted her images and used the deck in readings. Encouraged by the response from people at the conference, she has now chosen to go down the limited edition path and is content to continue in this fashion.

During the year it took to create the *Creative Fire Tarot*, Nicolette learned a lot about trusting her instincts.

“While I was creating the deck, I dreamt a lot. I would dream I was moving around in the images and I would dream about places I had been to or had thought about going to. I'd then go to those places and, there, to my amazement, would be something I could photograph to help me create whichever card I was working on. Sometimes, on a whim, I would drive home from work by a different route.

After a while I knew these were not random decisions –because each time I followed this so-called whim, I would find something to photograph.”

The images and sequencing of the tarot cards tell the universal human story and explore archetypal human behaviour patterns. To me, that explains why so many people are inspired to use an artistic medium to present their own version of that universal journey. I asked my three Magicians whether they found themselves living the energy of each card as they created it.

For Kay Steventon, creating the major arcana cards was a very personal, heartfelt experience. If you look closely at the Devil in the *Spiral Tarot*, you see a rather startled Kay looking at her reflection in a mirror, while a casual, playful, almost seductive devil looks on.



“There is a sense in which you live the energy of each card as you create it. The message of the Devil is to look at yourself honestly – the good, the bad and the ugly – and

sometimes you get a fright at what you see!”

The contemporary images of Lucy Cavendish’s *Oracle Tarot* led one reviewer to describe the deck as “exuding girl power”.

“We certainly didn’t set out consciously to appeal to young women. Anyway, you could interpret that comment as meaning ‘reclaiming the feminine divine’ – something I do resonate with!”

Lucy didn’t find herself living the energy of each card on her creative journey, but she did draw on entries in her extensive tarot diaries. In this way,

she was able to re-explore issues she had associated with cards at different points in her life.

Nicolette Neish preferred to see the experience as exploring, rather than experiencing the energy of each card.

“It varied from card to card. I struggled with the Hierophant and found I really had to come to terms with what that card meant for me and why I didn’t like the male-orientation of the conventional images for this card. For me, the collective wisdom of the ages is both male and female, so both genders are represented in my Hierophant. Then I added an elephant – the animal of memory – to the mix so that humans and animals together symbolise learned wisdom over the ages.”

Creating the court cards is an area where all three Magicians deviated from the images on conventional decks. Both Kay and Nicolette wanted to redress the gender imbalance of three male to one female in the court cards. Their solution is to have Princesses instead of Pages. Lucy adopted the rather radical approach of having no court cards at all!

“This was a guided decision. I received very strong channelled messages about not including them – not for now. Mostly court cards are seen as representing people in our lives. But I believe you receive messages about people coming into your life, or people who have been in your life, from all the cards. The Emperor, for example, is a strong male influence.”

Finally, what advice do my Magicians have for those who would like to tread the same path?

Kay: You’ve got to be passionate about exploring the meanings of each card – you’re bringing the unconscious into the conscious. You have to know what you’re doing, because the way you present the tarot journey can influence other people’s lives. And don’t forget, there are 78 cards, so be prepared for a lot of hard work!

Lucy: You have to love the tarot, you have to be ready for that journey into who you are and who you've been. And it requires a long-term commitment – you can't just start and then walk away from it because you're unravelling your own story, you're introducing the idea of magic into your life. If you trust that it will happen, it will work out.

Nicolette: Enjoy it! Enjoy the journey of exploring the tarot. Don't worry about doing the cards in an orderly fashion. I started out that way but found it was much better to go with the flow and follow my intuition. Don't be afraid to think of yourself as an artist – we can all visualise the archetypal messages of the tarot.

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All three Magicians have websites where you can learn more about them and their wonderful tarot decks.

Kay Steventon:  
[www.tarotguild.org.au/ksteventon.htm](http://www.tarotguild.org.au/ksteventon.htm)

Lucy Cavendish:  
[www.lucycavendish.com](http://www.lucycavendish.com)

Nicolette Neish:  
[www.creativefireimages.com/tarot](http://www.creativefireimages.com/tarot)