



SPECIAL TOPICS IN TAROT

# TAROT TIPS



EIGHT OF PENTACLES

RUTH ANN AMBERSTONE  
& WALD AMBERSTONE

FOREWORD BY MARY K. GREER

# TAROT TIPS

78 Practical Techniques to  
Enhance Your Tarot Reading Skills

## About the Authors

Ruth Ann and Wald Amberstone are cofounders of The Tarot School in New York City, offering Tarot instruction in several formats and media.

Together the Amberstones teach, write, and publish about Tarot on all levels from divination to psychology to esotericism and magical practice. They are perpetual pioneers of new Tarot techniques, and remain lifelong Tarot students. Between them, Ruth Ann and Wald have amassed more than seventy years of experience as Tarot practitioners. Ruth Ann began her career as a reader in 1974, and Wald began his Tarot studies in 1959.

More than a thousand students have taken live classes at The Tarot School since it opened its doors in 1995. Hundreds more from around the country have participated in Tarot Teleclasses and Telecourses (a pioneering program of classes given entirely on the telephone), and students from all over the world have purchased tapes from The Tarot School Audio Course Series and study The Tarot School Correspondence Course. *Tarot Tips*, the Tarot School's e-mail newsletter, has thousands of subscribers worldwide.

The New York Tarot Festival, presented in June 2002 by Ruth Ann, Wald, and the students of The Tarot School, was the first national and international Tarot symposium to be held on the East Coast. The Readers Studio in April 2003 was the first Tarot conference targeted specifically to advanced students and professional readers.



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with

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Llewellyn Publications  
Woodbury, Minnesota

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FIRST EDITION  
Third Printing, 2006

Cover art © 2001 by Robert M. Place, background image © 2001 Photodisc  
Cover design by Kevin R. Brown  
Editing and interior design by Connie Hill

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Amberstone, Ruth Ann.

Tarot tips / Ruth Ann Amberstone & Wald Amberstone : with foreword  
by Mary K. Greer.

p. cm. — (Special topics in tarot)

ISBN 13: 978-0-7387-0216-2

ISBN 10: 0-7387-0216-1

1. Tarot—Miscellanea. I. Amberstone, Wald. II. Title. III. Series.

BF1879.T2A475 2003

133.3'337—dc22

2003060580

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Llewellyn Publications  
A Division of Llewellyn Worldwide, Ltd.  
2143 Wooddale Drive, Dept. 0-7387-0216-1  
Woodbury, MN 55125-2989, U.S.A.  
<http://www.llewellyn.com>

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Printed in the United States of America

*To our family, friends,  
teachers, and students*

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## Acknowledgments

We offer our heartfelt love, respect, and gratitude to:

Our students and Tarot enthusiasts around the world for asking the questions that form the basis of this book.

Jo and Norman H. Kass, for their unwavering love and support, which has enabled The Tarot School to exist.

Rachel Eve Brauser, my dearest daughter, for her love and patience with me through the endless deadlines of publishing a weekly newsletter, and the challenges of running my own business.

Lelia Dickerson and Irene Kendall, for helping us envision and start The Tarot School, and for their continued support.

John Rozsa, Ivy Beloff, and the staff of the SLC Conference Center, for providing the perfect place to hold our classes.

David Heizer, for his eagle eye, encouragement, good cheer, and for being our technical lifeline.

Judith Zweiman and Johanna Gargiulo-Sherman, for their enduring friendship and willingness to listen to us talk shop ad nauseam.

Our esteemed colleagues in the Tarot community, from whom we continue to learn and draw inspiration.

Barbara Moore at Llewellyn for her vision, hard work, enthusiasm, and friendship—and for nudging us to write.

Connie Hill, our editor, for all the special magic that editors do to bring this book to the Pentacles stage of creation.

Robert M. Place, for his stunning rendition of the 8 of Pentacles, which graces the cover and captures the spirit of our work.

The beautiful people at SYDA for their Love, Trust, and Truth.

## FOREWORD

Ruth Ann and Wald Amberstone are incredible people in that they have devoted themselves and their lives to the teaching of Tarot to an extent I've rarely before encountered. They've taught their weekly Tarot School class, open to all, in New York City for nine years; they offer a correspondence course with personalized support, teleclasses exploring specialized topics, audiotapes of classes; and they put on the New York Tarot Festival in 2002 and The Reader's Studio in 2003—the first in-depth training for Tarot professionals. More remarkably, they got married at the 2002 Tarot festival, pledging their vows before the Tarot community, in a ceremony filled with Tarot and magical symbolism.

Those who take their correspondence course with the intention of earning a certificate will attest to the high and exacting standards elicited, as well as the the wise and detailed guidance they receive. When attending their class, which I do whenever I am in Manhattan, I am amazed by their powerfully simple techniques that are uniquely different, yet as profound as anything I've yet encountered. Underpinning everything they teach is a deep study of metaphysical and spiritual teaching, of which only a glimmer appears in this book. They are constantly experimenting with Tarot's potentials and expanding their own knowledge about its mysteries.

The practical Tarot tips found here arise not just from a desire to teach, but from a dedication to advancing the student's expertise in and knowledge of Tarot's capabilities, and, even more importantly, from a deep concern that each person achieve an awakening of their own capabilities and an honoring of their own wisdom. These are the ideals the Amberstones consistently impart beneath all their instruction.

Ruth Ann, as is well demonstrated in this book, doesn't try to tell you what to do or think, nor does she present absolutes, but, instead, shares concepts and techniques that have worked well for herself and her friends. Her years of experience and her deep empathy are apparent, yet she always emphasizes the importance of each person's checking to see if the advice fits their own circumstances and worldview. She offers reasonable guidelines, while asking you to trust your intuition.

Why am I telling you so much about Ruth Ann and Wald? It's because I want you to have an experience of this extraordinary couple. Imagine you are attending one of their classes or workshops. Knowing that you have overcome a number of minor crises and annoyances to get here, they've planned for the first experience to be one that will bring you fully into the present and that will awaken your intuitive self. Wald, a smiling figure with a shock of white hair and a round, cherubic face, leads you in a deceptively easy relaxation and focusing exercise. Ruth Ann has an earth-mother presence, with very long, swirling brown hair that is reminiscent of her days as a folksinger. She seamlessly steps in to take you on a short journey to meet a wisdom figure on the Tarot card, chosen to introduce you to the theme of the day. You exit the meditation into a room of fellow-journeymen, the cares and concerns of the outside world left far behind. Wald and Ruth Ann preside like kind but firm parents over this school of wisdom-seekers. Wald generally presents the broad concepts and their philosophical basis; Ruth Ann fills in the details, keeps track of

real-world needs, and adds the strength of her practical observations. It is often her exercises and spreads that bring the principles and insights home. *Tarot Tips* is an arena where Ruth Ann excels and her experience prevails, but for anyone who has seen both Amberstones teaching you'll know that it's not easy to separate their individual influences.

There is so much of value in this book, sometimes commonsensical and sometimes unique to their own practices. Don't skip any of it, and don't assume, if something sounds utterly simple, that it won't be the most powerful tool you'll ever learn.

Mary K. Greer  
Author of *Tarot for Your Self* and  
*The Complete Book of Tarot Reversals*  
August, 2003

## INTRODUCTION

The title of this book, *Tarot Tips*, is deceptively simple. In two words, it opens the door on a treasure of accumulated practical wisdom gathered over two lifetimes of involvement with Tarot.

*Tarot Tips* was begun by Ruth Ann in the fall of 1998 as a free e-mail newsletter that went out to a few of our students and was made available to visitors to the Tarot School website. It was intended to answer simple, direct, practical questions about Tarot reading techniques in a simple, direct, practical manner, and that's exactly what it did. Every week, Ruth Ann discussed things like how to pick a card, how to shuffle a large deck with small hands, and how to choose a first deck from among hundreds of possibilities.

Week followed week, and a year passed. A few subscribers became nearly a thousand, with many from other countries around the world. *Tarot Tips* began responding to reader queries, and as simply and directly as always, answered questions of increasing complexity.

At about this time, I began to help out when Ruth Ann asked me. Saying something practical and useful every week, week after week, began to seem like something that couldn't continue indefinitely, even with the two of us pooling our knowledge.

But another year passed, and with the generous help of some of our colleagues as guest contributors, *Tarot Tips* never missed an issue. The number of subscribers grew to 1,500, and we began to get very sweet letters thanking us for what was seen as valuable work.

A third year came and went, and by the end of it, *Tarot Tips* had become one of the major Tarot newsletters in the world. One hundred fifty issues were in the archives, answering questions and discussing techniques on what would have been, in any other setting, a bewildering array of practical Tarot matters. I hadn't guessed at the beginning that there was so much to talk about.

Eventually, Ruth Ann had the great idea of making *Tarot Tips* into a book, and so a portion of what had been previously available only in electronic form is now between these covers. By no means all the tips that have been written are contained in this volume. *Tarot Tips* remains a work in progress. Its true value is that it is a constantly growing storehouse of the kind of knowledge that everyone needs to be a competent reader. It is pretty fat-free, containing only solid information and well-constructed answers to real questions posed by Tarot students on every level of expertise, from everywhere in the world that Tarot is appreciated and practiced.

It should be noted that, much to our subscribers' general satisfaction, there is not a hint of esotericism to be found anywhere in *Tarot Tips*. I don't mean to say that there are no practical uses described for what is considered to be esoteric material. But the esotericist's perspective and emphasis never gain a foothold. The reader, and the reader's interest, reign supreme.

It is more than a little ironic that it should fall to me to call attention to the absence of esotericism as a virtue, since I am by nature drawn to magic and secrets and the company of those who pursue such things. But it is Ruth Ann's genius for the down-to-earth, and her empathy with the struggles of the apprentice and

working reader, that make *Tarot Tips* the small work of art that it is. Everything in it has the effect of making every reader feel comfortable, at home, while constantly learning.

In small pieces, easy to grasp and digest, one technique after another is laid out before you. One question after another is answered. At a leisurely pace, but rather quickly for all that, the small ignorances and awkwardnesses of the apprentice are overcome and disappear. If you are an experienced reader, you will find neat formulations and well-stated answers to difficult questions that you can pass on to your own students. In the process, a considerable portion of the vast practical lore of the Tarot reader is organized and preserved.

The funny thing is that all this happened unselfconsciously. *Tarot Tips* grew one small piece at a time, like a coral reef. Unlike most books, it wasn't written. It happened. And like most organic creations, it works because it is a continuous and appropriate response to a real need. In the world of Tarot literature this is, I think, a rarity. It has been my experience that Tarot books generally have a conscious agenda, perspective, or idea to purvey, or, more frequently, are how-to primers written expressly for a market of Tarot beginners.

*Tarot Tips* is by no means lacking in ideas, and beginners will find it to be a gold mine of useful information. But what gives it a distinctive, even unique quality, is what it doesn't have, what you won't find in it.

*Tarot Tips* contains no theory. It espouses no point of view. It advocates no approach. It lays down no rules, not even by implication. It is partisan to no school of thought, and takes sides in no argument.

These remarkable absences might, at first glance, make you wonder what the book does contain, what useful content could survive such an intense distillation. The answer is, in part, that it contains answers to a universe of real-world questions on how to

read Tarot. It addresses every practical question about Tarot put to its authors by a large, heterogeneous audience over a period of years. In addition, Ruth Ann and I have raised issues of skill and technique that no one has yet thought to ask about, but which we feel are useful and significant.

Never is any answer or technique presented as absolute or even “right.” The one principle we offer as universally applicable is to regard whatever anyone says about Tarot, no matter how expert or authoritative, as a suggestion, only as useful as you find it to be when you actually try it out. If it works for you, use it. If it doesn’t, feel free to try something else instead. Ruth Ann and I lay no other claim to knowledge than that of any craftsmen who have learned their craft by long experience.

Creating *Tarot Tips* has been for us, and remains, a labor of love. We hope you enjoy and profit from it as much as we enjoyed writing it. We truly believe you will.

— Wald Amberstone

ONE

## DECKS, CARDS & CARD HANDLING

**Q**uestions about Tarot begin when you get your first deck, and sometimes even before that. Do you remember your first deck and how you got it?

You may never have even given Tarot a thought before you received a deck from a friend or relative. Your first feeling when you held the deck in your hand may have ranged anywhere from foreboding to delight, and your first question might well have been, "What's this, and what do I do with it?"

Or maybe you already knew, or at least had heard, about Tarot. Perhaps you had a relative who was a psychic and used Tarot in her work, or you had a friend who had a Tarot deck. If this was your experience, and you found yourself drawn to Tarot, your first questions might have been, "Where can I get my own deck? Which one should I buy?" To complicate matters, you might have heard of the tradition that says you should receive your first deck as a gift. That might have made you wonder if you were even allowed to buy a deck for yourself, or instead, needed to wait for someone to give it to you.

It may be that these early questions are ones you asked recently, or you may have asked them half a lifetime ago. Either way, everyone begins at the very beginning with

questions more or less like these. You will also want to know how to acquire a deck, care for it, and handle it; how to evaluate different types of decks among the hundreds, even thousands, that are available; how to choose the one that's right for you; and how to use different kinds of decks for different purposes. We address these and similar questions in this section.

Here, and throughout this book, our answers are given in the form of reasonable guidelines drawn from long experience, rather than rules that you ignore at your peril. They are intended to help you get comfortable with Tarot if you are a beginner, and to be useful if you find yourself answering these questions for others.

## **Tip #1: The Gift of Tarot**

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### **QUESTION:**

I bought Tarot cards several years ago, and now someone told me that they must be given to you as a gift! Do you know if that is true? — CH

### **ANSWER:**

No, the “must” part is not true. In some circles, there used to be a tradition that you should receive your first deck as a gift. This is a lovely practice; receiving your first Tarot deck from another reader can add extra personal significance to that deck. However, it certainly is not required. This tradition was started a long time ago when Tarot cards were almost impossible to come by. Usually, at that time, the only way to acquire a deck was to know somebody.

Nowadays, there are hundreds of different Tarot decks easily available through shops, catalogs, and over the Internet. The problem now is only which ones and how many to collect. There are those who still feel that to be properly “initiated” into Tarot, their first deck should be given to them. Even if you choose to