# Bound by the Cards

The Tarot Encounter Deck

IT IS A TRUTH UNIVERSALLY acknowledged that cards with the power to summon monsters are among the best things in life. Cards and monsters are already linked in too many media to recount, and this is by all accounts a great thing. For this reason, the tarot encounter deck was created to provide GMs an amusing and rewarding way of creating random combat encounters.

Why a Random Encounter Deck?

The inspirational power of an encounter deck is not to be underestimated. A single "reading" of random monsters can inspire an entire dungeon or adventure, in case you need a fresh idea to start designing your next dungeon. Taken to the extreme, one can even generate a random dungeon and populate it with the encounter deck. (This is a fun choice for solo adventures and Halloween one-shots.)

ACE OF SWORDS
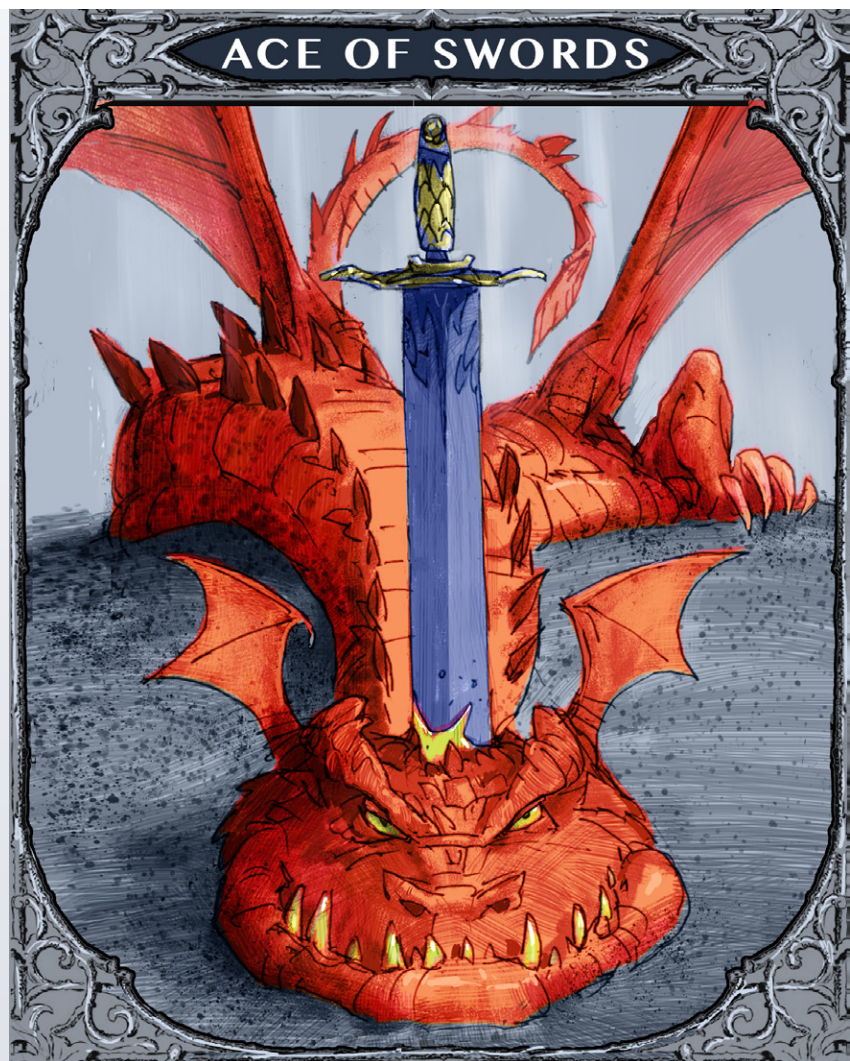
WRITING Josh Gentry
COLOR ART Ellis Goodson
EDITING James J. Haeck
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If one of the players uses the cardcaster class*, creating encounters every so often using leftover tarot cards gives a sense of narrative control to the player who does not always have full control over their character's powers. Since tarot cards are aligned with the classical four elements, they also benefit characters and campaigns with elemental themes. Furthermore, if your campaign has an broad theme of divination, fate, or magical cards, you can use the options below to generate random encounters that enhance these motifs.

Forbidden Fates

Those who use a tarot deck put their fate on the line with every draw. While a cardcaster's techniques wield the tarot safely, more casual readings may unleash forces beyond control. At the GM's option, a character performing a tarot reading can cast any divination spell of any level. Once the spell is cast, generate a tarot encounter of a tier appropriate for the spell cast (for example, generate a Paragon-tier encounter for a 6th-level divination spell). Those creatures appear within 1d4 miles of the fortune-teller and (unless friendly) seek to do them harm.

This may result in an encounter where a fortune-teller agrees to a reading, and the PCs must defend her. It may also result in a sly villain who intentionally distorts reality, and forces his enemies to pay the price. Players too are sure to tempt fate with this deadly rule, so be sure to ruthlessly capitalize on the creatures' collateral damage factor.

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* Josh Gentry, "The Cardcaster." *EN World EN5ider*,
   https://www.patreon.com/posts/cardcaster-6947104

** Josh Gentry, "The Greater Secrets: New Options for Cardcasters" *EN World EN5ider*, coming soon!

Bound Beasts

Cardcasters who focus on the Jack of Beasts** specialize on unleashing monsters bound within their tarot cards. At your option, this tradition has troubling implications for the entire multiverse. In this variant, "monster tarot" cards are extremely rare and potent, and some spellcasters spend their arcane career creating such a deck. Many monster decks are incomplete—or scattered for fear of their power. Others lay sealed in secret tombs, a secret their wielder hoped would be forgotten.

When the PCs find a monster tarot card or an incomplete monster tarot deck in a treasure hoard, create a tarot encounter. The creatures appear within 5 miles of the PCs and (unless friendly) seek to harm them.

Once claimed, a character can permanently sacrifice a monster tarot card and arcane reagents worth 1,000 gp × the CR of the creature contained within the card. If the card summons multiple creatures, determine the effective experience total and round to the nearest CR. The creatures appear at the end of the sacrifice and will obey a single order issued by the character, as though the creature failed its saving throw against *geas*.

Alternatively, players might make it their personal objective to reconstruct a monster tarot deck, or return the cards to their rightful master. The GM can use these plot hooks to begin a new adventure, or interweave the threads into an ongoing adventure. Maybe the rightful owner of the monster tarot is an important spellcasting NPC, or a new cardcaster PC. Perhaps high-level operatives within certain organizations seek to keep the power of monster tarot a secret, and hunt those spellcasters who create them? What if a well-meaning operative in such an organization hears about the forbidden cards, and foolishly attempts to wield them for good?

Making Tarot Encounters

Taking your real-life tarot deck, separate out all the high arcana cards. If you have a player using the cardcaster class, this means that you can each split one tarot deck. Shuffle the deck, and place a small number of cards in front of you. The number you should reveal are based on the number of PCs the encounter is designed for.

Size of Tarot Encounter

| Number of PCs	Tarot Cards Revealed
1–2	1
3	2
4–5	3
6+	4

Each card revealed adds creatures to the encounter. The creatures generated per card are dependent upon the tier, or average level threshold, of the party.

Tiers

- ► Novice—Levels 1 through 4
- ► Veteran—Levels 5 through 10
- ► Paragon—Levels 11 through 16
- ► Legendary—Levels 17 through 20

If, once you calculate the experience total (including scaling for the number of creatures in combat) and you find that the combat is too weak, reveal another card. If the creature fits with the others—be that the budget total or your design goal for the encounter—then throw it in the bunch. You can also replace one of the first cards with the extra one revealed, or even throw out the lot favor of a single card.

If there are four or five party members, and their characters are in the upper levels of their tier, you may consider upping the challenge even further. Do this by drawing one more card and refer to the creature list for the next highest tier. Using the next highest tier is also a great option if you prefer to run an many-versus-one encounter instead of a many-on-many combat.
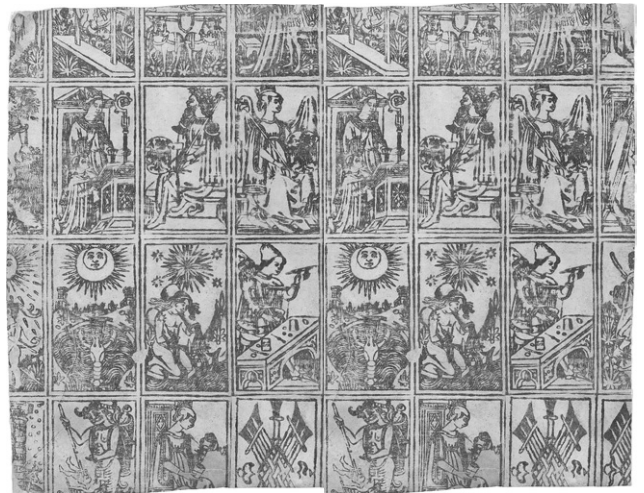
Modifying the Generator

This encounter deck was created with a few things in mind. It assumed that the encounters should all be land-based. It also assumed that the best assortment of creatures to draw from was the widest array possible, while still conforming to themes of each suit. If you campaign has other specific assumptions, or you want to include monsters outside the core game, you can modify the generation list. Simply replace creatures with those of a similar effective XP totals.

The Minor Arcana

Each card entry, in addition to its tiered monster lists, also has a word or short phrase appended to it. This is a concise expression that approximates each of the cards' meanings in a tarot reading. If your random encounter generation occurs in front of players' eyes, you can create a sense of anticipation or foreboding by alluding to each card's meanings.

Many entries have special notations. Some entries require you to roll dice. Some entries produce a different creature if the card you reveal is right side up (upward) or upside-down (reversed). A creature denoted as friendly will be non-hostile to the player characters at first meeting; if it determines the PCs are basically or mostly Good-aligned, the creature will become friendly toward the party.

Cups

Ace of Cups—Emotional Force
- Novice—**Kobold**
- Veteran—**Giant toad**
- Paragon—**Yeti**
- Legendary—**Water elemental**

2 of Cups—Attraction
- Novice—Silver dragonborn **guard** (friendly)
- Veteran—**Copper dragon wyrmling** (friendly)
- Paragon—**Winter wolf**
- Legendary—**Unicorn** (friendly)

3 of Cups—Celebration
- Novice—Elf **tribal warrior** (friendly)
- Veteran—1d6 **drow**
- Paragon—**Green hag**
- Legendary—**Drow elite warrior**

4 of Cups—Withdrawal
- Novice—**Giant crab**
- Veteran—1d4 **ice mephits**
- Paragon—**Water weird**
- Legendary—**Night hag**

5 of Cups—Regret
- Novice—**Poisonous snake**
- Veteran—1d4 **lizardfolk**
- Paragon—**Lizardfolk** and a **lizardfolk shaman**
- Legendary—**Giant crocodile**

6 of Cups—Return to Innocence
- Novice—**Winged kobold**
- Veteran—**Lizardfolk shaman**
- Paragon—**Unicorn** (friendly)
- Legendary—**Frost giant**

7 of Cups—Options
- Novice—(Upright) **constrictor snake** or (reversed) **giant poisonous snake**
- Veteran—**Giant constrictor snake**
- Paragon—**Giant crocodile**
- Legendary—**Hydra**

8 of Cups—Progression
- Novice—**Giant frog**
- Veteran—**Gelatinous cube**
- Paragon—**Night hag**
- Legendary—Drow **priestess**

9 of Cups—Satisfaction
- Novice—**Gray ooze**
- Veteran—**Black pudding**
- Paragon—**Hydra**
- Legendary—1d4 **giant crocodiles**

10 of Cups—Peace
- Novice—**Lizardfolk**
- Veteran—**Lizardfolk shaman** and 1d8 **lizardfolk**
- Paragon—**Frost giant**
- Legendary—1d4 **water elementals**

Page of Cups—Embrace Intuition
- Novice—**Crocodile**
- Veteran—**Chuul**
- Paragon—Drow **priestess**
- Legendary—1d4 **driders**

Knight of Cups—Excessive Romance
- Novice—**Ice mephit**
- Veteran—**Bone naga**
- Paragon—**Young green dragon**
- Legendary—**Young silver dragon** (friendly)

Queen of Cups—Compassion
- Novice—**Dryad** (friendly)
- Veteran—**Water elemental**
- Paragon—1d6 **winter wolves**
- Legendary—**Night hag**, **green hag**, and **sea hag** (in a coven)

King of Cups—Harmony
- Novice—(Upright) **silver dragon wyrmling** (friendly), or (reversed) **black dragon wyrmling**
- Veteran—**Young white dragon**
- Paragon—**Young silver dragon** (friendly)
- Legendary—**Vampire**

Pentacles

Ace of Pentacles—Material Force
- Novice—**Troglodyte**
- Veteran—**Animated armor**
- Paragon—**Mummy**
- Legendary—**Earth elemental**

2 of Pentacles—Enjoyment
- Novice—**Giant rat**
- Veteran—**Brown bear**
- Paragon—**Ankylosaurus**
- Legendary—**Triceratops**

3 of Pentacles—Cooperation
- Novice—1d4 **rats**
- Veteran—**Scarecrow**
- Paragon—**Basilisk**
- Legendary—**Bulette**

4 of Pentacles—Possessiveness
- Novice—1d4 **crawling claws**
- Veteran—**Ghoul**
- Paragon—1d4 **ghouls**
- Legendary—**Troll**

5 of Pentacles—Hard Times
- Novice—**Giant weasel**
- Veteran—**Half-ogre**
- Paragon—**Minotaur**
- Legendary—**Hill giant**

6 of Pentacles—Having or Lacking
- Novice—(Upright) **zombie** or (reversed) **skeleton**
- Veteran—**Gargoyle**
- Paragon—**Shambling mound**
- Legendary—**Tyrannosaurus rex**

7 of Pentacles—Milestone
- Novice—**Boar**
- Veteran—Dwarf **berserker**
- Paragon—**Hill giant**
- Legendary—**Fomorian**

8 of Pentacles—Diligence
- Novice—**Grimlock**
- Veteran—**Ankheg**
- Paragon—**Bulette**
- Legendary—1d4 **elephants**

9 of Pentacles—Refinement
- Novice—**Worg**
- Veteran—(Upright) **wereboar**, or (reversed) **weretiger**
- Paragon—2d6 dwarf **knights**
- Legendary—**Stone golem**

10 of Pentacles—Affluence
- Novice—**Black bear**
- Veteran—**Elephant**
- Paragon—1d4 **elephants**
- Legendary—1d4 **medusas**

Page of Pentacles—Embrace Practicality
- Novice—**Vine blight**
- Veteran—**Poludnista***
- Paragon—**Tyrannosaurus rex**
- Legendary—1d4 **earth elementals**

Knight of Pentacles—Prudent Overacheiver
- Novice—**Myconid adult**
- Veteran—**Ettin**
- Paragon—**Fomorian**
- Legendary—1d4 **cyclopes**

Queen of Pentacles—Hospitality
- Novice—**Animated armor**
- Veteran—**Earth elemental**
- Paragon—**Bugbear chief**, **hobgoblin captain**, and a **goblin veteran**
- Legendary—1d4 **stone giants**

King of Pentacles—Enterprising
- Novice—**Rhinoceros**
- Veteran—**Medusa**
- Paragon—**Treant**
- Legendary—**Rakshasa**

* Artem Serebrennikov, "From Stranger Woods." *EN World EN5ider,*
https://www.patreon.com/posts/monstrous-from-6143220

Swords

Ace of Swords—Mental Force
- Novice—**Flumph** (friendly)
- Veteran—Human **spy**
- Paragon—Human **knight** (friendly)
- Legendary—**Air elemental**

2 of Swords—A Closed Heart
- Novice—**Blood hawk**
- Veteran—**Giant eagle** (friendly)
- Paragon—Human **veteran**
- Legendary—**Revenant**

3 of Swords—Emotional Pain
- Novice—1d4 **scorpions**
- Veteran—**Harpy**
- Paragon—**Phase spider**
- Legendary—**Vampire spawn**

4 of Swords—Introspection
- Novice—**Stirge**
- Veteran—**Hippogriff**
- Paragon—**Doppelganger**
- Legendary—**Young remorhaz**

5 of Swords—Selfishness
- Novice—1d4 **jackals**
- Veteran—**Bugbear**
- Paragon—**Werewolf**
- Legendary—**Wraith**

6 of Swords—Difficult Journey
- Novice—**Wolf**
- Veteran—**Griffon**
- Paragon—**Wraith**
- Legendary—Elf **assassin**

7 of Swords—Independence
- Novice—**Flying sword**
- Veteran—**Faerie dragon** (old)
- Paragon—**Revenant**
- Legendary—**Chain devil**

8 of Swords—Powerlessness
- Novice—**Goblin**
- Veteran—**Ghast**
- Paragon—**Vampire spawn**
- Legendary—**Cloaker**

9 of Swords—Grief
- Novice—**Gnoll**
- Veteran—**Gnoll pack lord** and 1d8 **gnolls**
- Paragon—Elf **assassin**
- Legendary—1d4 **invisible stalkers**

10 of Swords—Sacrifice
- Novice—**Giant wasp**
- Veteran—**Chuul**
- Paragon—**Cloaker**
- Legendary—**Deva**

Page of Swords—Embrace Opportunity
- Novice—**Hobgoblin**
- Veteran—**Lamia**
- Paragon—**Chain devil**
- Legendary—1d4 **air elementals**

Knight of Swords—Abrasive Ideology
- Novice—**Cockatrice**
- Veteran—**Banshee**
- Paragon—**Young bronze dragon** (friendly)
- Legendary—1d4 **wyverns**

Queen of Swords—Wise and Forthright
- Novice—**Tiger**
- Veteran—**Air elemental**
- Paragon—1d6 **werewolves**
- Legendary—**Erinyes**

King of Swords—Master of Reason
- Novice—**Peryton**
- Veteran—**Invisible stalker**
- Paragon—**Cloud giant**
- Legendary—**Storm giant**

Wands

Ace of Wands—Creative Force
- Novice—1d4 **giant fire beetles**
- Veteran—**Fire snake**
- Paragon—1d6 **fire snakes**
- Legendary—**Fire elemental**

2 of Wands—Personal Power
- Novice—Human **cultist**
- Veteran—**Death dog**
- Paragon—**Hellhound**
- Legendary—**Half-red dragon veteran**

3 of Wands—Exploration
- Novice—**Flying snake**
- Veteran—**Brass dragon wyrmling** (friendly)
- Paragon—**Nightmare**
- Legendary—Half-orc **gladiator**

4 of Wands—Culmination
- Novice—**Twig blight**
- Veteran—**Lion**
- Paragon—**Manticore**
- Legendary—**Salamander**

5 of Wands—Competition
- Novice—1d4 **homunculi**
- Veteran—1d4 **magmins**
- Paragon—**Bearded devil**
- Legendary—**Barbed devil**

6 of Wands—Accomplishment
- Novice—**Pseudodragon**
- Veteran—**Mimic**
- Paragon—**Salamander**
- Legendary—1d4 **flameskulls**

7 of Wands—Aggression
- Novice—(Upright) **smoke mephit** or (reversed) **steam mephit**
- Veteran—**Allosaurus**
- Paragon—Tiefling **gladiator**
- Legendary—1d6 **hell hounds**

8 of Wands—Conclusion
- Novice—(Upright) **pixie** or (reversed) **sprite** (both friendly)
- Veteran—Elf **druid**
- Paragon—**Half-red dragon veteran**
- Legendary—1d4 **shadow demons**

9 of Wands—Perseverance
- Novice—**Orc**
- Veteran—**Orc war chief**
- Paragon—**Orc war chief** and 3d6 **orcs**
- Legendary—1d4 **fire elementals**

10 of Wands—Exhaustion
- Novice—**Shadow**
- Veteran—**Flameskull**
- Paragon—1d4 **flameskulls**
- Legendary—1d4 **chimeras**

Page of Wands—Embrace Novelty
- Novice—**Satyr**
- Veteran—**Couatl** (friendly)
- Paragon—1d4 **shadow demons**
- Legendary—1d4 elf or human **mages**

Knight of Wands—Fickle Charm
- Novice—**Magmin**
- Veteran—**Red dragon wyrmling**
- Paragon—1d6 **hell hounds**
- Legendary—(Upright) **young gold dragon** (friendly), or (reversed) **young red dragon**

Queen of Wands—Wholehearted
- Novice—**Fire snake**
- Veteran—**Fire elemental**
- Paragon—1d6 **manticores**
- Legendary—High elf **archmage**

King of Wands—Revolution
- Novice—**Azer**
- Veteran—Human **mage**
- Paragon—**Fire giant**
- Legendary— **Ice devil**