



*A Muggle's Look at  
Tarot for Writers  
by Sandra Dell Coburn*

My husband-to-be introduced me to tarot cards in college 28 years ago. Not one to do anything by halves, I went out and bought a coffee-

table book full of beautiful illustrations and explanations of each card, and a tarot deck, which I wrapped in a colorful silk scarf and kept under my pillow. I gave practice readings to my roommates and friends. College students are particularly interested in the future, so I had many eager to ask questions.

That was the problem. I am not a magical type. In Harry Potter's world, I would be a muggle. I worried my friends put too much stock in the prognostications of a skeptic armed with 78 illustrated pieces of cardboard. Eventually, I disposed of the book and the deck.

So it was an odd feeling when I found myself crouching before the unlocked glass cabinet at Borders in search of a particularly inspiring deck of tarot cards. This time, though, I was not seeking to know the future. This time, I was looking for a creativity tool, motivated by a book I spied in my critique partner's bag – *Tarot for Writers*, by Corrine Kenner.

*Tarot for Writers* grew out of an article Ms. Kenner wrote for National Novel Writing Month. The 400-word article turned into a 350+ page book. Corrine Kenner sees tarot cards as a "machine for writing stories." Each of the 78 cards in a tarot deck is ripe with symbolism.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I: *Tarot 101* introduces tarot, the history, the symbolism, and the basic spreads. Part II: *The Writer's Tarot* illustrates how a writer can use tarot cards to help with character generation, storylines and plot, and setting and description. She even introduces a spread that corresponds with Joseph Campbell's hero's journey.

Parts I and II include writing practice assignments. Part III: *A Writer's Guide to Tarot Cards* describes each card and the meanings associated with it, upright and reversed. She also provides writing prompts for each card.

The book is clear and well written. The author provides examples of how writers can use the cards to spark their creativity. Her tone is respectful of the skeptic. You do not have to believe to benefit from the exercises.

The book does not stand alone. You need to purchase a deck of tarot cards. You can choose from dozens of decks with illustrations ranging from Victorian Romantic to Gothic to Zen – whatever you think will best fit your genre and personality. Kenner uses Lo Scarabeo's *Universal Tarot* by Robert de Angelis in the book. Although you are by no means limited to this particular deck, some of the descriptions might not fit as clearly if you use another deck.

Most decks come with some sort of instruction booklet that explains the meaning of the cards. If you want a more in-depth exploration of the history and meaning behind tarot, you may want to purchase a separate book. For most of us, Kenner provides all the information we will need.

A writer can find all sorts of tools to spark creativity – from computer-based plot engines to low-tech cards, calendars, and collages. All can be useful; none are magic bullets that take the place of time spent writing. However, even a muggle can see the unique appeal of tarot cards. Tarot cards are visual, symbolic, historical, fantastic – designed to tell thousands of stories.

*Tarot for Writers* has helped the practical, conservative muggle in me make peace with the idea of owning tarot cards again as a creativity tool. I store them in a black silk bag, not out of any magical belief, but because it came free with my tarot cards. Honest. Now excuse me while I brew some sage tea and light some candles – it is time to get back to work.

*Sandra Dell Coburn is a member of Tampa Area Romance Authors, an RWA chapter where magical things happen -- even to Muggles.*