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## Tarot and T.S. Eliot in Stephen King's Dark Tower Novels [Article]

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### Abstract

Characters and events in King's Dark Tower series are inspired by the Fisher King, Arthurian, and other mythologies and legends, as well as the works of more contemporary authors who derived inspiration from similar sources. This paper explores King's use of Tarot motifs in the Dark Tower series with attention to similarities and parallels to the presentation of Tarot in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. King's central character Roland, whose cards are read by his nemesis, has the satisfaction of knowing when the cartomancer is dead and of saving multiple universes, but then discovers that he is doomed to keep saving those universes over and over again.

### Additional Keywords

King, Stephen. Dark Tower novels; Tarot in Stephen King; King, Stephen—Characters—Roland; Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land*; Eliot, T.S.—Knowledge of Tarot; Tarot in T.S. Eliot

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Note: I have permission for the use of the Tarot images for the numerous Rider-Waite images (U.S. Games edition).

### **Tarot and T.S. Eliot in Stephen King's Dark Tower Novels**

Authors create mythopoeic novels by developing a new or pre-existing mythology or fairytale. This development is not about static references to Arthur, Merlin, and Excalibur; it is about using the generative potential of such characters and elements in a transformative way as the primary substance of a narrative. Arthuriana is among the favored inspirations for contemporary mythopoeia, often developed by way of the conventions of such popular genres as fantasy, gothic, science fiction, and western. In such novels, cartomancers and Tarot cards<sup>1</sup> sometimes supplement or replace classical prophets, oracles, and diviners. King Arthur and Merlin are among the many recognizable models for characters in mythopoeia and the plight of the Fisher King is among the favored plots, sometimes reinvented by way of references to T.S. Eliot's (1888–1965) "The Waste Land" (1922).<sup>2</sup> Stephen King incorporates all of these elements in his mythopoeic Dark Tower series: Arthuriana, the conventions of popular genres, a cartomancer—albeit a villainous one—and Tarot, as well as themes more specific to Eliot's poem, such as the linking of Tarot with the loss of memory.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I discuss Tarot in association with popular genres at length in *Tarot and Other Meditation Decks* (2004) and the associations of Arthuriana with Tarot in "Arthurian Legend in Tarot" (2002).

<sup>2</sup> All quotations from T.S. Eliot's poetry and poem line numbers are taken from *T.S. Eliot The Waste Land A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, ed. and introduction by Valerie Eliot (Harcourt Brace, 1971), and identified with the abbreviation WL.

Eliot acknowledged the importance of Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) to "The Waste Land." Weston's book, however its scholarly content or its influence on Eliot may be judged today, has been tremendously influential for its attention to the grail and wasteland motifs and the origins of the King Arthur legends, and for its notes on Tarot. See Booth's (2015) chapter on Weston's book and Eliot's poem (23–26). "The Waste Land" is readily understood as mythopoeic; Michael Bell (2016) offers a critical discussion of that assessment.

<sup>3</sup> Those who have read but not made a study of the Dark Tower series may find Robin Furth's (2006) guide useful. Bev Vincent (2004) describes the main appearances of Tarot cards in the Dark Tower novels. Heidi Strengell (2005) provides a detailed assessment of the Dark Tower novels as a fairytale using Propp's functions (114 ff).

Eliot undoubtedly used the *Rider-Waite Tarot* (Waitinas 370-72, 375), created by Golden Dawn initiate Arthur E. Waite and artist Pamela Colman Smith and published in England in 1909, as the basis for his poetic elaborations, and developed the fragments that make up his work from a wide range of literary sources. King too may have been familiar with the *Rider-Waite* deck, as it was certainly readily available in 1970 when he began work on *The Gunslinger*. The earliest extant Tarot decks of the fifteenth century consist of four or more suits plus a set of trump cards. While the earliest decks were unique, each being painted for a specific aristocratic patron, cheap printed decks soon came on the market. What is now called the "Marseilles" Tarot—the Grimaud edition is something of a modern classic—is not one deck but rather a type of deck characterized by a set of conventional card designs, with many variations, that originated with these early printed decks. Following the publication of the *Rider-Waite Tarot* (with twenty-two trumps and four suits—wands, cups, swords, and pentacles—of fourteen cards each) and guidebook, Tarot became an increasingly popular fortune- or future-telling tool for both professionals and amateurs and began to make regular, if not frequent, appearances as such in fiction and film.

Fictional cartomancy scenes tend to emphasize the trumps, and the Dark Tower series is no exception, but King does hint at an association between his Tarot and the suits of the deck used in the same series for playing a game called Watch Me (*DTI* 34; *DTIV* 17, 72, 171, 563; *DTV* 559; *DTVII* 17), evidently a kind of poker with multi-handed, two-handed (*DTIV* 408), solitaire (*DTVII* 271), computer enabled (*DTIII* 366), and chip inclusive (*DTVII* 627) variations.<sup>4</sup> The Watch Me deck suits include hearts, spades (*DTI* 34), diamonds (*DTIV* 171), and wands (*DTVII* 18), rather than the expected clubs. In a line

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<sup>4</sup> "Watch Me" is the phrase with which the winner declares their hand and can also mean "you have a deal" outside the game (*DTIII* 278). Having a "Watch Me" face seems to be the equivalent of a poker face (*DTVII* 38). Having a "Watch Me" card up one's sleeve suggests having a winning gambit (*DTIV* 17).

King also throws in a few pithy aphorisms about cards and life, including a picture of "Arthur, the Great King of Eld astride his white stallion, and a sign which read (in a curious mixture of High and Low Speech): ARGYOU NOT ABOUT THE HAND YOU ARE DELT IN CARDS OR LIFE" (*DT IV* 171). In the final book, Moses Carver, Susanna's godfather, tells Roland, "I'd give a great lot, gunslinger, to see my goddaughter again, but I don't guess that's in the cards, is it? Unless we meet in the clearing" (*DTVII* 413).

added to the new edition of *The Gunslinger* King refers to cups and wands,<sup>5</sup> which not only converts the suit hitherto called hearts into the cups now familiar in North America primarily as a Tarot suit, it also reinforces the existence of wands—also familiar today in North America primarily for its Tarot association—as a Watch Me deck suit. Wands are also mentioned in a game in which the winner "had built Wands, the high run, and the card on top was Madame Death" (*DTVI* 18).<sup>6</sup> As "the high run," wands have more power or status than the other suits.<sup>7</sup> The ominous appearance of the Death card is an effective, if also familiar, trope associated with Tarot and, as this paper shows, with Roland. The identification of the card as female, however, seems to disassociate it from Roland and the Dark Tower divination deck, and generally makes the connection between the Dark Tower Tarot and the Dark Tower Watch Me deck somewhat ambiguous.

Some of King's images and card descriptions suggest a familiarity with Tarot decks other than the *Rider-Waite*, including the Marseilles deck or one of its variants, although commentators tend to emphasize his literary sources.<sup>8</sup> King himself pays direct homage to both Eliot and Robert Browning, notably Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (1855), in several of the Dark Tower novels, and there is no doubt of his admiration for Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. King (1981) does regard certain story

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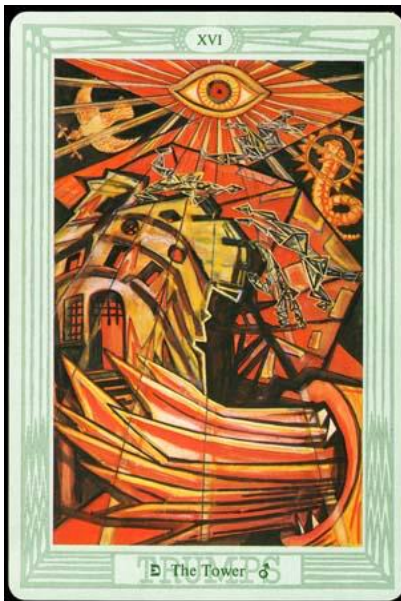
<sup>5</sup> In *The Gunslinger*, a preacher's rousing sermon compares the Interloper, the person who turns the cards in a "faro or a Watch Me game," to the devil who tempted Eve and also Moses's people, and who fosters alcoholism and other vices. Soon after, Roland threatens to shoot her if she does not tell him what he wants to know. She screams that he wouldn't dare, and he responds "Want to bet?" (*DTI* 69). In the new edition, this line is followed by "'As the gambler said when he laid down a handful of cups and wands, just watch me'" (82).

<sup>6</sup> This game is one including Rosalita (*DTVI* 18), one of those who aids Roland along his way: "'Watch Me,' said Rosalita, and laid down her cards. She had built Wands, the high run, and the card on top was Madame Death" (*DTVI* 18).

<sup>7</sup> Eliot refers to the "Man of Three Staves" card. As Waitinas points out, this identification indicates Eliot's familiarity with Waite's guidebook, where Wands are titled as such in the relevant headings but called staves in the card descriptions, as well as the cards which are labelled as Wands (371).

<sup>8</sup> King mentions Tarot in passing in *The Eyes of the Dragon* (1984; Signet, 1987). The 1987 edition is illustrated by David Palladini, the artist of the *Aquarian Tarot* (Morgan Press, 1970), which was revised and republished as the *New Palladini Tarot* (US Games, 1996). The *Aquarian Tarot* was made available through US Games, so it seems at least possible that King knew of it.

elements as archetypes that are generically identifiable as Tarot cards, but not necessarily as the conventional Tarot card titles and images. He prefers to write about such "Tarot" cards as "the Vampire, the Werewolf, and the Thing Without a Name" (61), along with ghosts (and gunslingers, of course), rather than the classical and mundane contemporary types named and alluded to by Eliot.<sup>9</sup> Readers familiar with Tarot, however, whether inclined to recognize literary or visual citations in King's work, will find it hard not to see its familiar images throughout the series, particularly Death as rendered in at least two well-known decks and the *Thoth Tarot* Tower, which, with its intense reds and glowering red eye, could stand as an illustration of the Dark Tower itself.



***Thoth Tarot.* Aleister Crowley and Frieda Lady Harris (artist).  
1944. U.S. Games edition, 1978.**

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<sup>9</sup> In his essay "Tales of the Tarot," *Danse Macabre* (1981), first published just before the first edition of *The Gunslinger*, King discusses the creatures of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Frankenstein*, and *Dracula*; that is, the Vampire, the Werewolf, and the Thing Without a Name as "an almost perfect Tarot hand representing our lush concepts of evil." The addition of the Ghost might make this a perfect, rather than an "almost perfect" hand, but King observes that "the Ghost is an archetype (unlike those represented by Frankenstein's monster, Count Dracula, or Edward Hyde) which spreads across too broad an area to be limited to a single novel, no matter how great. The archetype of the Ghost is, after all, the Mississippi of supernatural fiction, and although we will discuss it when the time comes, we'll not limit its summing-up to a single book" (61).

Stephen King's Dark Tower<sup>10</sup> series in story order and with abbreviations used in this paper include:

- "The Little Sisters of Eluria" (1998)  
 DTI *The Gunslinger: The Dark Tower I* (1982)  
*The Gunslinger: The Dark Tower I* (2003)  
 DTII *The Drawing of the Three: The Dark Tower II* (1987)  
 DTIII *The Waste Lands: The Dark Tower III* (1991)  
 DTIV *Wizard and Glass The Dark Tower IV* (1997)  
*The Wind Through the Keyhole* (2012)  
 DTV *Wolves of the Calla: The Dark Tower V* (2003)  
 DTVI *The Song of Susannah: The Dark Tower VI* (2004)  
 DTVII *The Dark Tower: The Dark Tower VII* (2004).

### **Tarot in T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land"**

[...] you know only  
 A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
 And the dry stone no sound of water. Only  
 There is shadow under this red rock,  
 (Come in under the shadow of this red rock),  
 And I will show you something different from either  
 Your shadow at morning striding behind you  
 Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;  
 I will show you fear in a handful of dust. (WL ll. 21-31)

"The Waste Land" is widely understood in relation to the Fisher King, whose lands will die if he is not healed; indeed, Eliot identifies the *Rider-Waite Tarot* 3 of Staves as the Fisher King (WL note to l. 46). This and other cards are laid by the cartomancer Madame Sosostriis in Part I "The Burial of the Dead." The other two principal seers in the poem are the Cumaean Sibyl who wishes for death in the epigraph

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<sup>10</sup> "Little Sisters of Eluria" (1998) and *The Wind Through the Keyhole* (2012), sometimes called Dark Tower 4.5, do not add significantly to the Tarot references in the core novels. "Little Sisters of Eluria" includes a note from King informing his readers that he has just finished *Wolves of the Calla*. The fourteen stories in *Everything's Eventual*, an anthology that includes "Little Sisters of Eluria," were organized by King by using the suit of Spades plus the Joker to make up fourteen cards. His publisher had sent him a numbered list of the stories, so he shuffled the fourteen cards and dealt them out and, by co-relating them with the numbers on his publisher's list, invented the order of the collection. He also promises that his next collection will be "selected by Tarot" (7). If such an anthology exists, I have missed it.

and the blind Tiresias, a man who lived as a woman for many years, in Part III "The Fire Sermon."<sup>11</sup> Of these three, Sosostris's cards are of primary interest here, but attention is given to the other two as they have counterparts in the Dark Tower where their prognostications overlap with those of the cartomancer.

The Cumaean Sybil gives an account of her life to Aeneas in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* 14.145-234. When Phoebus Apollo, who sought her affections, offered her whatever she wanted, she asked for as many years of life as there were grains of sand in the heap that she gathered up. Unfortunately, she neglected to ask for youth during this time, estimated by some scholars as being 1,000 years, and was thus doomed to be diminished by age until nothing remained but her voice. Eliot's epigraph, which is taken from Petronius's *Satyricon*, translates as: "For I actually saw the Sibyl at Cumae with my own eyes dangling in a bottle, and when the children asked her in Greek: 'What do you want, Sibyl?' she used to answer: 'I want to die'" (48). Both the Sibyl and Eliot's expression of her desire in the line "I will show you fear in a handful of dust" (WL 31) have echoes in King's Dark Tower novels.

Eliot provides a note about Tiresias in which he advises readers to look again to *Metamorphosis* (3.409-452) for details relevant to understanding his poem. Ovid's passage describes an argument between Jupiter and Juno about whether men or women derive more pleasure during love-making. They regarded Tiresias as a good judge of the question because he had lived both as a man and as a woman. After he used his staff to strike two large copulating snakes he spent seven years as a woman. When he observed the same snakes going about the same business, he struck them again and was turned back into a man. When Tiresias agreed with Jupiter, the angry Juno struck him blind. The delighted Jupiter offered some compensation for this loss by granting him knowledge of the future.<sup>12</sup> In a note, Eliot says that his Tiresias is "a mere spectator and not indeed a character" but that he

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<sup>11</sup> Kenner (2007) discusses the Sibyll and Tiresias in "The Waste Land" in some detail.

<sup>12</sup> Murphy (2007) discusses Eliot's choice of Ovid as a source for his poem (459-63). The story was reportedly elaborated by a poet named "Sostratus" in a lost work such that Tiresias underwent seven sex changes (Cameron 56). The name of Eliot's cartomancer, whose reading comes between the Sibyl's words and the appearance of Tiresias, is suspiciously similar to that of the poet said to have exaggerated Tiresias's experiences,



is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants melts into the Phoenician Sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias *sees*, in fact is the substance of the poem. (WL note to l. 218)

The *Rider-Waite*-linked Tarot cards from Madame Sosostris's oft-quoted reading that are most relevant to the discussion of King's Dark Tower novels are the "Phoenician Sailor," probably based on Death or the 10 of Swords; "Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks, The lady of situations," thought to be the Queen of Cups (and perhaps also the Da Vinci painting "Virgin of the Rocks"); the man of three staves or the 3 of Wands—the Fisher King; the Wheel, or the Wheel of Fortune; the Blank card; The Hanged Man; and "death by water," which again may be either Death or the 10 of Swords. Others include the "one-eyed merchant," undoubtedly the 6 of Pentacles, and "people, walking in a ring," which could only be the 10 of Pentacles.<sup>13</sup>

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,  
Had a bad cold, nevertheless  
Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,  
With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said she,  
Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,  
(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)  
Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,  
The lady of situations.  
Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel,  
And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,  
Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,  
Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find  
The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.  
I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring [...] (WL ll. 43-56)

Eliot refers to characters associated with each of these cards later in the poem. For example, "Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks, The lady of situations" seems to be associated with a marble throne, a Cupidon, and glittering jewels (WL ll. 77 ff), and thus

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but Eliot may have borrowed the name from Aldous Huxley, whose like-named clairvoyant plays a role in his satirical *Chrome Yellow* (1922) (Blistein 98-100).

<sup>13</sup> I have used the card associations given by Waitinas (2014). While many authors have speculated about the cards Eliot intended to identify in this passage, Waitinas proposes that he also meant the cards to be understood in terms of a celtic-cross spread. See Blistein (2008) for a comparison of Eliot's treatment of the Hanged Man and occult meanings assigned to it (318-19) and the Tower (332-33).

also with the Queen of Cups. His notes not only identify the 3 of Staves or Wands with the Fisher King, they also link the Hanged Man to Frazer's Hanged God and to "the hooded figure in the passage of the disciples to Emmaus in Part V" (WL note to l. 11).



Top two rows: Cards referred to by Madame Sosostris in T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land"  
 Bottom row: Additional cards suggested by lines T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land"

Pamela Smith (artist) and Arthur Waite. *Rider Waite Tarot*®. 1909. ©1971 U.S. Games Systems.  
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Who is the third who walks always beside you?  
 When I count, there are only you and I together  
 But when I look ahead up the white road  
 There is always another one walking beside you  
 Gilding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded [...] (ll. 359-363)

This "hooded figure" further suggests the *Rider-Waite* 6 of Swords or the Hermit. The predicted death of the Phoenician sailor is recorded in "Part IV Death by Water."<sup>14</sup> He is, as Eliot asserts in a note, associated with the one-eyed merchant who has already forgotten about "the profit and loss" (l. 314) though he has only been dead for a fortnight. In this brief section, Eliot simultaneously invokes Fortuna—"[...] O you who turn the wheel and look to windward [...]" (l. 320)—and Sosostris's Wheel of Fortune Tarot card.

Much of "The Waste Land" is about memory, including memories of the dead—as the Phoenician Sailor and the title of the first part suggests—and the loss or absence of memory. References to the loss of memory and to the Tarot reading of Part I are explicit in Part II "A Game of Chess," which includes a dialogue between a woman and an unknown person. The woman asks "Do / you know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you / remember / Nothing?" (ll. 121-123), and the answer is only "I remember / Those are pearls that were his eyes (ll. 124-125). The next questions are: "Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?" (l. 126). The "pearls" line was first spoken by Sosostris (l. 48) about the Phoenician sailor, which in turn suggests that the only thing the interlocutor remembers is death.

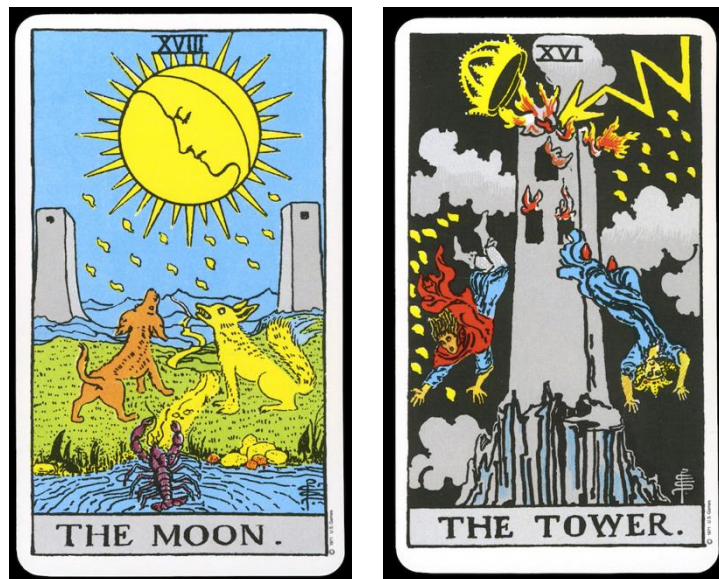
Further, and more specifically, Eliot's notes link line 126 with those about pearls (ll. 48, 125), and an earlier observation about returning late from the Hyacinth garden (l. 37) when the narrator's "eyes failed, I was neither / Living nor dead, and I knew nothing [...]" (ll. 39-40), which immediately precedes the introduction of Sosostris (l. 43). As Allyson Booth (2015) observes:

What these three moments have in common is experience that hovers between life and death, neither one nor the other, but somewhere in between. This half-dead-half-not-quite-dead state is one of the poem's persistent patterns, troubling many of its characters and inflicted by multiple causes. (Booth 21)

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<sup>14</sup> These lines first appeared at the end of Eliot's poem "Dans le Restaurant." The effects of these lines in their first context is compared with that in "The Waste Land" in Booth (187-91).

The line itself "Those are pearls that were his eyes" comes from Ariel's song "Full Fathom Five" in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "Full fathom five thy father lies; / Of his bones are coral made; / Those are pearls that were his eyes; [...]" (1.2.399-402). Notably, Ariel is using the song to try to make Ferdinand believe that he is the only survivor of a shipwreck and that his father is dead, when, in fact, he is alive. Eliot made his debt to Ariel explicit in "Dirge," one of the poems he originally intended to incorporate into "The Waste Land." "Dirge" begins "Full fathom five your Bleistein lies / Under the flatfish and the squids. / Grave's Disease is a dead jew's eyes! / When the crabs have eat the lids / Lower than the wharf rates dive / [...] Lobsters hourly keep close watch / Hark! Now I hear them scratch scratch scratch / Those are pearls that were his eyes. See!" (WL 121-23). These lines further suggest the Tarot Moon card with its crayfish or lobster crawling out of the deep. This card and others used by Eliot seem to have made an impression on Stephen King, as did the Tarot Tower and perhaps "The Waste Land's" falling and fallen structures: "London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down" (l. 426) and "Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie" [The Prince of Aquitania, his tower in ruins] (l. 429).<sup>15</sup>



Pamela Smith (artist) and Arthur Waite. *Rider Waite Tarot*®. 1909. ©1971 U.S. Games Systems. Illus. reproduced by permission of U.S. Games Systems. Further reproduction prohibited.

<sup>15</sup> This latter line is taken from a poem by Gérard de Nerval's "El Desdichado" (Booth 243-45).

## Stephen King's Dark Tower Novels

The man in black fled across the desert and the gunslinger followed. The desert was the apotheosis of all deserts, huge, standing to the sky for what might have been parsecs in all directions. White; blinding; waterless; without feature save for the faint, cloudy haze of the mountains which sketched themselves on the horizon and the devil-grass which brought sweet dreams, nightmares, death. An occasional tombstone sign pointed the way, for once the drifted track that cut its way through the thick crust of alkali had been a highway and coaches had followed it. The world had moved on since then. The world had emptied. (*DTI* 11-12)

Stephen King's Roland Deschain, the Fisher King/gunslinger descendant of "Arthur of Eld," travels through a world that shares much of "The Waste Land's" topography. His backstory, which is told by way of personal reminiscences and campfire tales, follows him as he moves from his boyhood at the political-social center of a semi-feudal post-Arthurian-round-table world to increasingly distant hinterlands, filled with images and events suggestive of fantasy, horror, occult, tech-noir, western, and other genres. The Arthurian elements are underscored when we learn that Roland's mother had an affair (albeit an unwilling one) with a man (who, unlike Lancelot, is a villain) of her husband's court, and that Roland's guns were made for Arthur of Eld from the metal of Excalibur (*DTVII* 492).<sup>16</sup> Roland's Grail is the Tower: "There were such things as rape in the world. Rape and murder and unspeakable practices, and all of them were for the good, the bloody good, for the myth, for the grail, for the Tower" (*DTI* 111). His quest is to see and climb the Tower; in fulfilling this quest, he also saves the Tower and, since the Tower is a nexus of all universes, he saves them from destruction too. Time is flexible in most of these universes, but in the two key worlds—those of Roland and the writer Stephen King—time is supposed to travel in only one direction. King writes himself into the series as a kind of twin to Roland, and as the means by which Roland's tale is told, with the emphasis—at least at first—on the writer as merely a conduit for recording the

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<sup>16</sup> King offers further clues to his novel characters about the quest in the last book when he provides them with a copy of Robert Browning's poem "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (1855), along with a note from himself pointing out the passages that inspired him to write their latest adventure (*DTVII* 558 ff). Roland's life suggests that of Oedipus, as well as the Fisher King, since he killed his mother while he was still a youth.

workings of Gan; Gan being a sort of prime mover or creative force.<sup>17</sup> King as author can "see" the story as it unfolds and anticipate the trials his characters will undergo, but Roland is gifted with an extraordinary capacity to physically see into the distance and the minute details of things at hand with great precision.<sup>18</sup>

In Roland's world, beams of power run from the Tower out to twelve points arranged in a circle around it. These points were once protected by twelve guardians—an image that suggests the Wheel of Fortune Tarot card, as do the frequent assertions of the power of "ka" or fate over the protagonists. Roland, with the help of some unlikely companions, prevents the villains from destroying the Tower's beams (or spokes) and thus causing it to fall. Once the Tower is safe, the last of his companions leaves him, and he approaches, enters, and climbs it alone. On the long way up, he passes many rooms containing his memories. At the top, he finds a door with his name on it, opens it, instantly realizes the meaning of what lies on the other side, makes a futile attempt at resistance, and is grasped by Gan and flung back to the first line of the first novel, *The Gunslinger*: "The man in black fled across the desert, and the gunslinger followed." His memories of the quest just completed rapidly vanish;<sup>19</sup> but he retains his determination to see and climb the Tower and this time, unlike the last, he has the Eld horn or Horn of Deschain that he lost in the long-ago Battle of Jericho Hill. This variation suggests that the success of Roland's quest is never certain until it is achieved.

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<sup>17</sup> After Roland and Jake save him from death in a car accident specifically so he can finish the Dark Tower series, King proves himself more than a mere conduit when he interferes with Roland's adventures by leaving various messages intended to aid him.

<sup>18</sup> This ability, however, means that he cannot see what is on a television screen, as one of his quest allies discovers: "She turned on the television, thinking it would divert him, and was shocked by his reaction [...] It wasn't until he told her that he heard voices, yes, but saw only lines which made his eyes water that she realized he was telling her the literal truth: he could not see the pictures on the screen" (*DTVII* 390).

<sup>19</sup> In *The Gunslinger* (2003) Vannay, one of Roland's teachers, taught him that "Time's the thief of memory" (160). Certainly, Roland is old, perhaps a thousand years old or more, but his experience in the tower is an almost instant and selective memory wipe, not part of a natural aging process. In his "Tales of Tarot," King identifies, among others, *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Dracula*, and *Frankenstein* as stories about immortality, "one of the most common themes in fantastic literature" (60). Roland likewise, and like the Cumaean Sibyl, seems to be immortal or nearly so.





Marseilles Tarot. Grimaud. 1963.

### Seeing "in part"

The entire Dark Tower series is filled with signs and portents, all of which serve to emphasize Roland's quest as his destiny, the true purpose of which is to save the Tower and to then choose to go inside, climb the stairs, and commit himself to saving it all over again. In the first novel, *The Gunslinger*, Roland receives information about the future from three seers, all having parallels to those in "The Waste Land": the sibyl wishing for death becomes a demon in a wall; Madame Sosostris becomes the man in black; and the blind gender-shifting Tiresias becomes a succubus.

Roland encounters the demon at an abandoned desert waystation where, suffering from dehydration and heat stroke, he almost shoots the boy Jake before collapsing. Jake had been pushed to his death by a serial killer named Jack Mort<sup>20</sup> and then brought to the waystation through a world-linking portal by the man in black, who hopes that Jake will undermine Roland's resolve to complete his quest. Jake rescues Roland from death by dehydration and later Roland sets about retrieving food from a cellar that Jake is too

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<sup>20</sup> Jake evidently came through the same door used by Callahan (*DTV* 459, 461). Jake thinks that the man dressed as a priest—the man in black—whom he encountered in the desert was the one who pushed and killed him in his home world. However, Roland later realizes it was Jack Mort/The Pusher. As Roland also eventually realizes, Jake's confusion of the two men arose from the fact that when Mort pushed Jake to his death he was dressed in priest's robe of the kind also worn by the man in black at the desert waystation (*DTIII* 61-62).

frightened to enter. There, he hears the rocks groan, sand pours from the cracks, and the groan becomes louder: "an abstract noise of ripping pain and dreadful effort" (*DTI* 125). When it stops, he demands the creature's name, but instead of answering, it offers a warning.

"Go slow," a dragging, clotted voice said from within the wall. And the gunslinger felt the dreamlike terror deepen and grow almost solid. It was the voice of Alice, the woman he had stayed with in the town of Tull. But she was dead; he had seen her go down himself, a bullet hole between her eyes. Fathoms seemed to swim by his eyes, descending. "Go slow past the Drawers gunslinger. While you travel with the boy, the man in black travels with your soul in his pocket." (*DTI* 126)<sup>21</sup>

In warning him about the "drawers," or a specific aspect of the waste lands that lie ahead, the demon is comparable to the Sibyl, whose words warn readers that the fragmented images that follow are not for the faint-of-heart. Roland then—"the custom was strict, inviolable. The dead from the dead, as the old proverb has it; only a corpse may speak"—punches through the wall and pulls out a rotted jawbone (*DTI* 126-27).<sup>22</sup> The last sand has trickled through the hourglass of the demon/Sybil's life with its service to the last gunslinger.

Later in their journey, Roland consults a succubus that comes to his attention when it threatens Jake (*DTI* 182-83). In exchange for the opportunity to take advantage of him sexually, the succubus informs Roland that the number of his fate is three, and identifies some of his future companions, while repeating the caution that she can only see "in part"—King, unlike Eliot, writes in fully developed prose and consigns "fragments" to prophetic visions.

*"We see in part, and this is the mirror of prophecy darkened."*

Tell me what you can.

*The first is young, dark-haired. He stands on the brink of robbery and murder. A demon has infested him. The name of the demon is HEROIN. [...] "We see in part, and thus is the mirror of prophecy darkened." There are other worlds, gunslinger, and other demons. These waters run deep.*

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<sup>21</sup> The warning about the drawers is justified by events in Book One, Part I of *The Waste Lands*.

In *The Gunslinger* (2003) the Demon in the wall also warns Roland about the taheen which figures prominently in later books.

<sup>22</sup> The jawbone later serves briefly as a protective amulet, but it does not offer any more warnings or predictions.



The second?  
*She comes on wheels. Her mind is iron but her heart and eyes are soft. I see no more.*

The third?  
*In chains.*

The man in black? Where is he?  
*Near. You will speak with him.*

Of what will we speak?  
*The Tower.*

The boy? Jake?  
 ...  
 Tell me of the boy!  
*The boy is your gateway to the man in black. The man in black is your gate to the three. The three are your way to the Dark Tower [...] (DTI 182-83)*

Roland asks how Jake might be spared, and is told that to save Jake he must give up his quest. He thinks this impossible as he is sworn to take revenge on Marten, the man who corrupted his mother and betrayed his father, but the succubus tells him that Marten is gone, his soul having been "eaten" by the man in black. Roland insists he must continue as he has sworn to do. "Then you are damned" (DTI 184), the creature declares. Changing genders, as Tiresias did, it returns later in male form to impregnate one of Roland's companions, Susannah—this is how Mordred, the shape-shifting boy-spider fathered by both Roland and the Crimson King who defends the Tower—comes to be born.

After the succubus is finished with Roland, he and Jake continue on.

For Jake, the gateway had been a strange death in another world. For the gunslinger it had been a stranger death yet—the endless hunt for the man in black through a world with neither map nor memory. Cuthbert, and the others were gone, all of them gone: Randolph, Jamie de Curry, Aileen, Susan, Marten [...]. Until finally only three remained of the old world, three like dreadful cards from a terrible deck of tarot cards: gunslinger, man in black, and the Dark Tower. (DTI 197)

Thus, the remains of the old world include two mythopoeic elements in familiar forms: "Arthur" in the person of the last gunslinger and the grail in the form of the Tower. Readers also find a Magician—suggesting the Tarot card—in the man in black, but although they are led to expect him, they "do not find" Merlin. The man in black has been and has possessed many men, including Marten, Walter, and others, and is sometimes called a wizard and sometimes called "Maerlyn," but while in the guise of the Ageless

Stranger, he asserts that he is not and was never Merlin.<sup>23</sup> The man in black's frequent use of priest's robes also aligns him with the Hermit Tarot card.



Left: *The Book of Thoth* (Grand Jeu de Oracle des Dames). 1870. © 2003 Lo Scarabeo.  
 Right: Pamela Smith (artist) and Arthur Waite. *Rider Waite Tarot*®. 1909. ©1971 U.S. Games Systems. Illus. reproduced by permission of U.S. Games Systems. Further reproduction prohibited.

The Tarot Magician is usually shown as a man presiding over the suit symbols. The *Book of Thoth* version is somewhat unique for its suggestion of the creation of a doppelganger.

Near the end of *The Gunslinger*, Jake dies a second time when he and Roland are crossing a rotten railway bridge, an image that evokes Eliot's falling London Bridge. They are almost across when the man in black deliberately startles them, so that Jake loses his balance and dangles by one hand over the pit:

All chips on the table. Every card up but one. The boy dangled, a living Tarot card, the hanged man, the Phoenician sailor, innocent lost and barely above the stygian sea. (DTI 280)

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<sup>23</sup> The man in black is Marten Broadcloak, a member of the court of Roland's father Steven Deschain: "Walter was Flagg and Flagg was Marten and Marten ... was he Maerlyn, the old rogue wizard of legend? On that subject Roland remained unsure" (DTV 412). In the Afterword of *The Waste Lands*, King says that Walter is also the Ageless Stranger (422). In the second last chapter of the same book, the Ageless Stranger says he is a "man of many handles" including "Merlin or Maerlyn—and who cares, because I was never *that* one, although I never denied it either. I am sometimes called the Magician ... or the Wizard [...]" (387-88).

Roland, who could probably have saved Jake, abandons him to his fate; and then spends an unnaturally prolonged night with the man in black, who reads his future in a Tarot deck.<sup>24</sup> Many books later, King compares this night with Roland's last before reaching the Tower, referring to that long ago occasion when the man in black "read a bleak fortune from an undoubtedly stacked deck" (*DTVII* 618).

The cartomancer lays seven cards, the first in the middle, four marking the corners around it, one over that in the center, and a final card that he throws in the fire (*DTI* 282). Card one is the Hanged Man, whom the man in black says is Roland and that

in conjunction with nothing else, it signifies strength and not death. You, gunslinger, are the Hanged Man, plodding ever onward toward your goal over all the pits of Hades. You have already dropped one co-traveler into the pit, have you not?" (*DTI* 178)

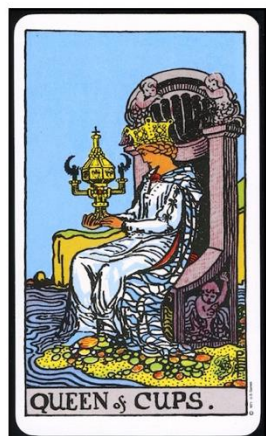
King previously associated this card with this very co-traveler—Jake—whose absence at the time of the reading, like the disassociation of Merlin from the man in black, again recalls the words of Madame Sosostriis: "I do not find The Hanged Man."

The second and third, and probably the fourth cards identify the companions Roland will draw to his quest through magic portals like the one that brought Jake to him in the desert. The second card is The Sailor which the cartomancer says is the already deceased Jake:

The Sailor. Note the clear brow, the hairless cheeks, the wounded eyes. He drowns, gunslinger, and no one throws out the line. The boy Jake." (*Gunslinger* 280)

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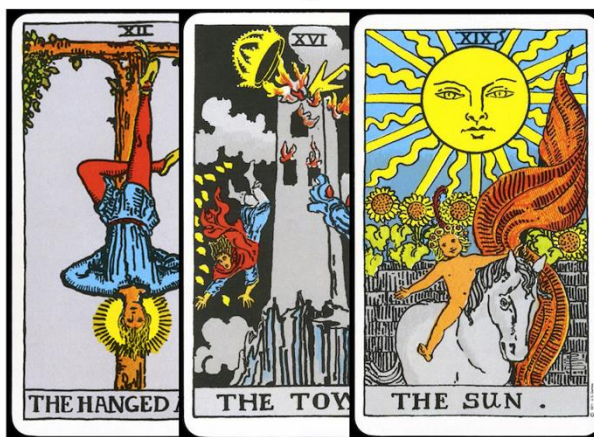
<sup>24</sup> The man in black also gives Roland a vision, which is described in some detail, and promises to read his future in the runes, which readers of the novel learn nothing more about.



4.



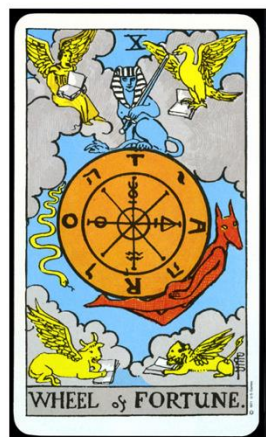
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1.

6.

7.



3.



2.

Pamela Smith (artist) and Arthur Waite. *Rider Waite Tarot*®. 1909. ©1971 U.S. Games Systems.  
 Illus. reproduced by permission of U.S. Games Systems. Further reproduction prohibited.

This spread recreates— with *Rider-Waite* cards —that drawn by the man in black for Roland in *The Gunslinger*. See additional Tarot images below for alternative cards and versions of these cards.

These Tarot-based references to Jake as a sailor and the Phoenician sailor who drowns, point readers to Eliot's Tarot card of a drowned Phoenician sailor. Although the "clear brow" and other facial features are not in evidence in either, the *Rider Waite* Death and 10 of Swords both show dead people near water.<sup>25</sup> King treats the Sailor as a unique card that combines elements of the conventional Hanged Man (which is appropriate given the close bond between Roland and Jake), *Rider-Waite* Death (which also makes sense given how often Jake dies and nearly dies in the series), and the *Rider-Waite* 10 of Swords (also suitable as the card that looks, more than any other, even Death, like Death itself and like Death delivered many times over). In the third book in the Dark Tower series, not incidentally titled *The Waste Lands*, King establishes that the card in the spread does refer to the future, rather than the recent past, as the man in black suggests. However, before readers get to that book, there is card three "The Prisoner."

The Prisoner card is described as a baboon with a whip riding on a young man's shoulder. Shadows make his face "seem to move and writhe in wordless terror" (*DTI* 281). "A trifle upsetting, isn't he?" The man in black said, and seemed on the verge of sniggering" (*DTI* 281). None of the *Rider-Waite* Tarot cards fit the description of Eddie exactly, but the Wheel of Fortune is often interpreted as the card of addiction by way of its visual suggestion of the idiom "falling off the wagon,"<sup>26</sup> and Eddie is, as the succubus predicted, addicted to heroin. He is also a talented carver and translates one of his dream images into magically empowered form. After Eddie dies, he is replaced by the artist Patrick Danville who has a similar talent. Roland does not bring Danville through a magic portal, he and Susannah find him imprisoned by a vampire-like creature that repeatedly tortures him so that it can feed off of his emotions (see *DTVII*). Thus the "prisoner" label and its associated image are apt, psychologically and literally, to two characters, but only Eddie is addicted to heroin.

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<sup>25</sup> The card is distinct from the Hanged Man in Eliot as it is in King, as both authors cite the Hanged Man card separately from that of the drowned Phoenician sailor.

<sup>26</sup> For example, in the movie *Bewitched* (2005), Samantha, who is still trying to kick the habit of using magic to solve her problems, draws out a Tarot Wheel of Fortune and uses it as a credit card to pay for the nice things she has bought for her new home—where she is planning to live without using magic (see Auger, *A Filmography of Cartomancy and Tarot* 20).



Etteilla. *Grand Etteilla Tarot*. B.P. Grimaud, Paris, 1910. Public domain.

An ape-like creature presides over the *Grand Etteilla* Fortune or Wheel of Fortune card. One of the labels for the Tower card of the same deck is Prison. Neither is quite Eddie's "The Prisoner," but conflated together they suggest King's invented card.

Card four shows

A woman with a shawl over her head sat spinning at a wheel. To the gunslinger's dazed eyes, she appeared to be smiling craftily and sobbing at the same time.

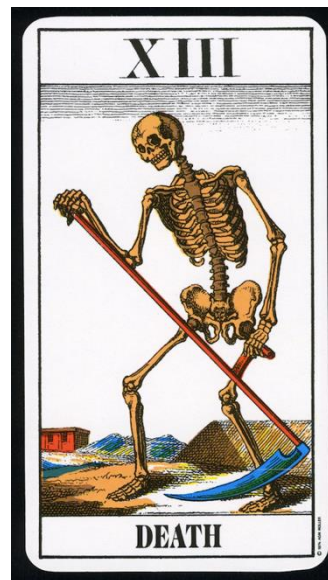
"The Lady of Shadows," the man in black remarked. "Does she look two-faced to you, gunslinger? She is. A veritable Janus." (*DTI* 281)<sup>27</sup>

This is Susannah Dean, a kind of unification of her previously split personalities: Odetta and Detta. Detta appeared after Jack Mort, the same serial killer who pushed Jake to his first death, dropped a brick on Odetta's head when she was a child. As an adult, Odetta lost her legs when Mort pushed her under a subway car: she subsequently had to spend much of her time in a wheelchair. After Roland brings her through the portal into his

<sup>27</sup> In *The Drawing of the Three*, King identifies this as the fifth card (254), but it is actually the fourth in the spread laid in *The Gunslinger*. In *The Gunslinger* (2003) the man in black also says that "she broke the blue plate." This reference is to the blue "for-special plate" mentioned frequently in *The Drawing of the Three*. There are several Tarot cards from different decks that feature a woman spinning, but all those I have found postdate *The Gunslinger*.



world, they move on to the next door, which is labelled "The Pusher," rather than Death as Roland expects. There Detta escapes to a "shadowy den" (*DTII* 329) located "almost 150 yards above" (*DTII* 305) Roland, Eddie, and the door. From this vantage point, she observes and plans her near-deadly assault on them. Roland, however, orchestrates the reunification of Detta's and Odetta's personalities and she—Susannah—agrees to join Roland's quest (*DTII* 386-89). Eventually, she becomes the last survivor of his original human companions and the only one to choose to leave him rather than die in the quest. Susannah's three personalities suggest Eliot's tri-named card. As Belladonna—also the name of a nightshade plant used to make poison—she suffers two nearly fatal assaults and then becomes a deadly gunslinger. As the Lady of the Rocks, she fiercely resists Roland's conscription and then becomes steadfast in her commitment to his quest until she can do no more to further it. Also, she is the one who recognizes Patrick's unique artistic talents, thereby affirming the notion that the Lady of Shadows is a reinvention of the Queen of Cups. As the lady of situations, Detta keeps secrets from herself/Odetta and has a way of surfacing when her energy and force are required to deal with the situation or circumstances at hand.



Left: Marseilles Tarot. Grimaud. 1963.  
 Right: 1JJ Swiss Tarot. © 1972 AGM-Urania/Koenigsfurt-Urania  
 Verlag GmbH, [www.tarotworld.com](http://www.tarotworld.com).

The fifth card, Death<sup>28</sup>—"A grinning reaper clutched a scythe with bony fingers"—seems to identify another companion, but the cartomancer says only "Yet not for you" (*DTI* 282). Roland quite reasonably associates this card with Jack Mort for a time, although he enters Mort's consciousness through a door labelled "The Pusher," rather than Death. In addition, the *Rider-Waite* Death card shows a drowned man lying above a water bank, and a child—suggesting Jake—and a woman who seems to be missing part of her legs—suggesting Susannah—nearby: both Jake and Susannah were Mort's victims. Later, Roland comes to think of the Death card as himself, since his quest seems to cause the deaths of all those he loves.

*Death ... but not for you.* That was what Walter, clever as Satan even at the end, had said. A lawyer's answer ... so close to the truth that the truth was able to hide in his shadow. Death was not for him, death was *become* him.

The Prisoner, the Lady.

Death was the third.

He was suddenly filled with the certainty that he himself was the third.

(*DTII* 318)

The four cards—The Sailor, The Prisoner, The Lady of Shadows, and Death—reinforce and add to the information provided by the succubus. The succubus's words suggest three companions, evidently Eddie and Susannah, and one who is "in chains" that might be Patrick. The card reading suggests three or four companions: Jake, Eddie (and perhaps Patrick as his replacement), Susannah, and a fourth that might be Mort (however unwillingly and briefly he serves the quest) and might be the man in black, or might be, as Roland believes, Roland himself. The fourth—Death—may also be linked to Jake (after his resurrection) and the billy bumbler Oy (see below), both of whom die as stand-ins for Roland, doing what needs to be done for the quest when Roland cannot, just as Patrick fulfills a part that Eddie might have played had he not already died in the quest.

Like the Hanged Man, cards six and seven—the Tower and the Sun—describe Roland. The man in black silently places the Tower directly over the central Hanged Man. The lines describing the scene and dialogue accompanying the Sun differ somewhat between the first (*DTI* 282-83) and the 2003 edition (*DTI* 278) of the book. The added lines are inside square brackets.

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<sup>28</sup> In *The Drawing of the Three*, King identifies this as the sixth card (301), but it is actually the fifth in the spread laid in *The Gunslinger*.



A sun rose in a luminously blue sky. Cupids and sprites sported around it. [Below the sun was a great red field upon which it shone. Roses or blood? The gunslinger could not tell. *Perhaps*, he thought, *it's both*."]

"The seventh is Life," the man in black said softly. "But not for you."

"Where does it fit in the pattern?"

"That is not for you to know," the man in black said. "Or for me to know. [I'm not the great one you seek, Roland. I am merely his emissary.]" He flipped the card carelessly into the dying fire. It charred, curled and flashed to flame. The gunslinger felt his heart quail and turn icy in his chest. (*DTI* 282-83)

The cards that are identified by conventional Tarot card labels: Hanged Man, Tower, Death, and Sun, sum up Roland's fate to never die and to live only to find and save the Tower. That there is Death, but not for Roland, and Life, but not for Roland, returns us to Eliot's "The Waste Land" with its descriptions of a state of being between life and death: when the narrator's "eyes failed, I was neither / Living nor dead, and I knew nothing [...]" (ll. 39-40).

### **Beyond the Doors**

The man in black tells Roland that all he has to do to continue his quest is walk another twenty miles to the sea. Then he hypnotizes and puts Roland in a deep sleep while he prepares another trick: he dresses some old bones in his own clothes so that when Roland wakes, it will seem that the night has lasted so long that the man in black has died and rotted away—this scene may be taken as confirmation that the Death card refers to the man in black, or more specifically, the Tarot trope that the Death card does not really mean death, or at least not right away.<sup>29</sup> Roland isn't fooled by the man in black's joke, although readers might be, at least for a time.<sup>30</sup> Even so, much time—a favored theme in the series—has passed by the time he wakes by the dead campfire. He finds "himself ten years older. His black hair had thinned at the temples and gone the gray of cobwebs at the end of autumn. The lines in his face were deeper, his skin rougher" (*DTI* 303).

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<sup>29</sup> For more on some of the familiar treatments of the Death card in popular culture, see Auger, *Cartomancy and Tarot in Film 1940–2010*, 140-46.

<sup>30</sup> In *The Gunslinger* (2003) Roland expresses specific doubts that the bones belong to the man in black.

Roland goes to the sea, falls asleep on the beach, and dreams. He awakens at the beginning of *The Drawing of the Three*, a book laid out in sections identified by King's made-up card titles: The Sailor, The Prisoner, The Lady of Shadows, and The Pusher [Death], alternating with the headings: shuffle, reshuffle, and final shuffle, and punctuated with echoes from the prophecies of *The Gunslinger*. Roland wakes as he is attacked by vicious lobster-like creatures<sup>31</sup> that sever the index and middle finger of his right hand (*DTII* 17)—his shooting hand—and his right big toe. Although the card is not mentioned, these images and events powerfully evoke the Tarot Moon card with the creature crawling out of the sea and the pathway off between distant tower-like gates. They also restate Roland's status as the wounded Fisher King—the Man with 3 staves or the Man with 3 fingers (technically, 2 fingers and a thumb). He survives and starts walking down the beach, where he finds first one and then another two-dimensional magic door labelled, like two of the Tarot cards, "The Prisoner" and "The Lady of Shadows." These doors are the portals that he uses to enter the minds of first Eddie and then Susannah and to bring them back to his world, where his consciousness immediately returns to his own body.

Tower imagery plays an important role in Roland's responses to aspects of Eddie's world and to Eddie's subsequent prophetic dream imagery. For example, Eddie's boss, Balazar, likes to build card towers (*DTII* 117 and 120) and when Roland, who is hitchhiking in Eddie's mind, sees a neon Tower at Balazar's bar, he thinks it is a sign that they are in the right place (*DTII* 121), and he thinks the same when he sees the card tower on Balazar's desk (*DTII* 127). In *The Waste Lands*, Eddie dreams of Balazar in front of a magic shop called the House of Cards (*DTIII* 51). The window display includes a tower built of Tarot cards with a King Kong model on top sporting a radar dish on its head (*DTIII* 51-52). That very day, Roland's party is confronted by one of the former

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<sup>31</sup> These creatures sound "weirdly like human speech: plaintive, even desperate questions in an alien tongue. 'Did-a-chick? Dum-a-chum? Dad-a-cham? Ded-a-check?'" (*DTII* 16). At the end of "What the Thunder Said" Eliot uses the terms *Datta*, *Dayadhvam*, *Damyata*, meaning "give, sympathize, control: three sorts of giving. To sympathize is to give oneself; to control is to give governance" (Kenner 28). Once started on a comparison of "The Waste Land" and the Dark Tower series, it is hard not to read the strange language and behavior of King's lobster-like creatures as a dark corruption of these words and Eliot's use of them.

guardians, the gigantic bear Shardik, a robotic creature spouting a radar dish on its head, running amok as its brain deteriorates.

Roland assumes that he will discover another companion at the third door, but when he finds it labelled "The Pusher," rather than "Death" as he expected, and goes through it, he realizes that he has piggy-backed into the mind of the serial-killer Mort—the same man who assaulted Odetta and murdered Jake. Roland uses him for his own purposes and kills him; specifically, he kills Mort BEFORE Mort has a chance to push Jake to his first death under a car (*DTII* 386). In the third book in the series, *The Waste Lands*, it becomes clear that this alteration in Jake's life has created a debilitating psychological split in both Jake's and Roland's minds: one side with, and the other without, Jake's death. Previously, Jake (or "a" Jake) had been transported at the moment of his death in his own world to Roland's where he died a second time; but now, with that moment of his first death erased, he, like Roland, is neither dead nor alive.

In *The Waste Lands* "Book One," titled "Jake: Fear in a Handful of Dust," the neither dead nor alive Jake writes a final essay for school called "My Understanding of the Truth," which references the Tarot cards the man in black drew for Roland and opens with the epigraph "I will show you fear in a handful of dust" attributed to "T.S. 'Butch' Eliot," followed by a line from "Robert 'Sundance' Browning" (*DTIII* 97). Eliot's line first appears just before the Tarot section in "The Waste Land." Jake mutters the words to himself as he enters the haunted house containing the door by which he will rejoin Roland

A snatch of poetry occurred to him suddenly [...] It was supposed to be about the plight of modern man, who was cut off from all his roots and traditions, but to Jake it suddenly seemed that the man who had written that poem must have seen this house: *I will show you something different from either / Your shadow in the morning striding behind you / Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you; / I will show you ...*

"I'll show you fear in a handful of dust," Jake muttered, and put his hand on the doorknob. (*DTIII* 195).

Both man and boy know they will go completely mad if they do not rejoin each other. Jake follows his intuition and dream cues, and Roland and his companions, especially Eddie, follow theirs to a portal between their respective worlds. Jake makes his way past the obstacles to the portal, which is a locked door labeled "The Boy" in a

haunted house, drops the key (*DTIII* 201), recovers it, and unlocks the door, only to be confronted by a wall of earth (*DTIII* 206). While Jake struggles with the murderous doorkeeper, Eddie draws a door (*DTIII* 194), including a keyhole and the label "The Boy" (*DTIII* 202), which immediately becomes a real door. His hand-carved key requires some adjusting before it works, just in time for Roland to dive forward and drag Jake through to safety (*DTIII* 210-11).<sup>32</sup> Later, in the fourth book of the series, *Wizard and Glass*, Roland explains how he and Jake were healed on that occasion: "'We went back to time's pool,' the gunslinger said, 'and pulled him out before he could drown'" (*DTIV* 78). The time's pool/drowning metaphor reaffirms Jake's association with the card of the Sailor, and Roland and his companions thwart the man in black's prediction because they do throw out the line and Jake lives.

When Jake is resurrected into Roland's world, he also fulfills the Death card's happier prediction that death is not final and that even dire circumstances present opportunities for new beginnings. Thus, two cards in the Tarot reading—both Sailor and Death—may be identified with Jake, both the Jake killed by Mort, transported by the man in black to undermine Roland's quest, and whom Roland allowed to die; and the Jake that Mort did not kill and whom Roland himself drew into his world. Jake dies a third time much later in the final book: Roland tries to save Stephen King from a fatal hit and run car accident so that he can finish the Dark Tower books, but his arthritis prevents him from doing so. This arthritis has progressed rapidly, crippling him so badly that it is less and less likely that Roland will complete his quest as it becomes simultaneously less and less likely that King will ever finish writing about it. When Roland's body fails him, it is Jake who dives forward and simultaneously dies in the author's place and cures Roland of his disease. Since Jake died the first time when Mort pushed him under a car, it seems his ka has brought him full circle, but to an end he chooses and with a more noble purpose.

Soon after Roland and his companions rescue Jake, a billy bumbler, a small animal that behaves something like a dog, joins the quest (*DTIII* 220-22). They name it Oy for its faulty imitation of the word "boy." It bonds closely with Jake and after Jake's death saving Stephen King and after Susannah's departure near the end of the journey, he

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<sup>32</sup> Eddie first sees the key before the confrontation with Shardik (*DTIII* 48-50).

dies saving Roland and Patrick from Mordred (*DTVII* 623-24). Roland foresaw this death, as readers learn when he tells the story of his youth to his companions in *The Wizard and Glass*, book IV of the series. He had come into possession of a magical orb, one of the "thirteen glass balls in [Maerlyn's Rainbow]—one for each of the Twelve Guardians, and one representing the nexus-point of the Beams" (*DTIV* 437). When he dares to look into it he sees, among many other things,

*an iron chair (to Roland it looks like a torture device) equipped with wheels, and the boy gunslinger thinks The Lady of Shadows without knowing why he thinks it or what it means. [...]*

*Ahead is a tree like a crooked, clutching hand; on its topmost branch a billy-bumbler has been impaled. It should be dead, but as the pink storm carries Roland past, it raises its head and looks at him with inexpressible pain and weariness. "Oy" it cries, and then it, too, is gone and not to be remembered for many years. (DTIV 571-72)*

Although Oy may not have a card of his own, his last crucial role in the quest is thus shown following a vision of the wheelchair used by The Lady of Shadows aka Susannah. Another orb, known as Black 13, enters the story in the fifth book of the series, *Wolves of the Calla*. Readers learn that shortly after Jake and Roland left the waystation together in *The Gunslinger*, the man in black used the door there, which is labeled "Unfound," to bring a man named Pere Callahan to the same location. He forces Callahan to carry the orb through to another door in a cave near Calla Bryn Sturgis, thinking it to be another way to make sure that Roland dies without completing his quest (*DTV* 458-65).

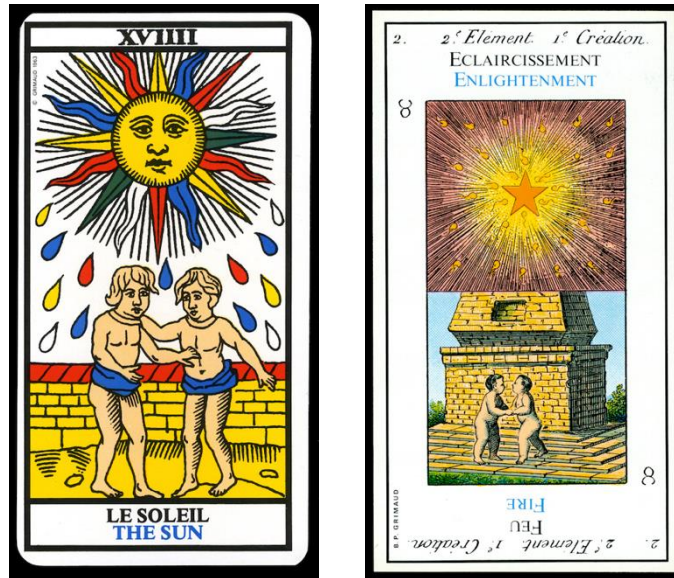
In the seventh book, *The Dark Tower*, when The Lady of Shadows card appears on an electric cart that Susannah uses to help destroy the compound where psychics are busily working to destroy the Tower's radiating beams, Roland knows, and knows correctly, that the man in black is finally dead (*DTVII* 202). He was killed by Mordred, who has been following Roland and waiting for an opportunity to murder him. Perhaps not incidentally, the reappearance of the Lady of Shadows card takes place at the mountain caves where the group is able to both hide and study the compound occupied by enemies of the Tower that they plan to attack and destroy. The scene echoes that shortly after Roland brought Odetta into his world when Detta watched from a high den for a chance to kill both Eddie and Roland.

Toward the very end of this final volume, Susannah dreams of Eddie and Jake, both of whom have died helping to save the Tower: she sees them thriving as brothers on an alternative world. In her dream, they show her a door labeled both "Unfound" (in hieroglyphics) and "The Artist" (*DTVII* 587). It was at their last encounter before arriving at the Crimson's King's castle—the last stop before the Tower itself—that Roland and Susannah had rescued Patrick. Just as Eddie's stick-drawn door became real, what Patrick draws appears in real life, and what he draws and erases, disappears. Susannah—the Lady of Shadows cum the Queen of Cups—who discovers this talent, asks him to draw the door Eddie and Jake showed her in a dream and when he does it appears in reality. She goes through it to join Eddie and Jake; memories of their adventures with Roland immediately begin to fade, although she knows they will remember enough to remain sure that their adventures on Roland's world really did happen.

When Roland arrives at the Tower with Patrick—after burying Oy—he finds it standing in a field of roses, "its windows gleaming under the sun." A road forms a circle around it; other roads run off from the circle in each of the four cardinal directions: "From above, the Dark Tower would look like the center of a blood-filled gunsight" (*DTVII* 633).<sup>33</sup> Patrick helps him defeat the mad Crimson King who still guards it by the expedient of drawing the Tower and the King and then erasing the King, except for his eyes, which, being rendered with red pigment made from a rose, refuse to respond to the eraser (*DTVII* 647). The artist then treks back the way they came as Roland directs him to do, leaving Roland to approach the Tower door, which he finds is labelled Unfound and then changes to Found (*DTVII* Coda 663).

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<sup>33</sup> Roland and Susannah had seen two of Patrick's paintings before meeting him in person: one a fantasy showing Mordred with his foot on the corpse of Arthur of Eld's horse, an animal that once ornamented the flags of Gilead (*DTVII* 445). The other was of the tower, a dark soot-coloured spiral around 600' high standing at the far end of a field of roses. Windows followed the spiral around and there was a multi-colored oriel window at the top, each color matching one of those of the wizard's glasses. The pink of the orb that Roland had looked into was just outside the center, and the center was Black Thirteen (*DTVII* 445).



Left: Marseilles Tarot. Grimaud. 1963.

Right: Etteilla. *Grand Etteilla Tarot*. B.P. Grimaud, Paris, 1910. Public domain.

The Sun card of the *Rider-Waite* deck shows a child carrying a banner on a horse, but the more conventional image in decks of the Marseilles type shows twins facing each other in front of a brick structure. In the *Grand Etteilla* revision, the card shows two children facing each other before a large structure with a star shining above.

## Conclusions

Stephen King works constantly with images of twins, triplets, and even larger multiples. Some live in the same body, as Susannah, Odetta, and Detta do. Some are from different worlds, as are Roland and Stephen King. Some are look alike, as the various Jakes are, and some, like Eddie Dean and Patrick Danville are not.<sup>34</sup> The twins or counterparts to the Tarot cards include their predecessors in the conventional deck and in Eliot's poem and successors in and beyond the magic portals. The cards in King's and Eliot's decks include some that are not in the traditional Tarot, and there are Doors that, if they are represented on the cards in the man in black's hands, he does not choose to show them to Roland. The cards with traditional labels and summing up Roland's life do not appear as doors, but those with invented labels do. The cards, shown and not shown, the doors, found and unfound, also seem to be memory portals. Susannah, the only one of the questers to leave Roland's world permanently by using a door, quickly begins to lose most of her memories of it. When Roland goes through the Tower entrance marked

<sup>34</sup> Fans of the series will recognize Roland's former friend Cuthbert as part of this set.

"Found," he effectively leaves his own world, and embarks on a passage through his memories, only to leave them all behind when he goes through the final door with his name on it.

The man in black lays cards for Roland as a trick and believes he is sending him on to certain death at the sea, but the cards play true to their cartomantic purpose, in spite of being stacked, as Roland's entire life seems to be, and guide Roland to those who will help him save the Tower and all the worlds it maintains. Once the Tower is saved, Roland's personal goal of climbing the Tower is his to achieve and the fate that comes to him when he does—that is, the return to the beginning—is the result of this exercise in what passes for free will in his life. The final card in the spread—the Sun—suggests an enlightenment waits for Roland somewhere on his quest, but does not show him what will happen after he opens the last Tower door. The cards really only show what he already knows of himself and point to the companions who will help him on a journey through his—the Fisher King's—lands, a journey that he has forgotten though he has taken it at least once, and perhaps many times before.



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