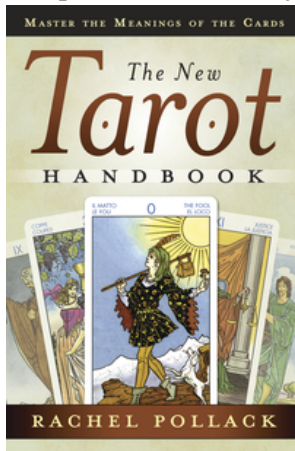


The New Tarot Handbook - Book Review (Llewellyn Publications (July 8, 2012))

"The journey of tarot continues on, Rachel Pollack presents tarot in a simple and direct manner in the style of Eden Grey, that proves there is always more to learn"



Tarot author, teacher and all-round legend best known for her '78 Degrees of Wisdom' has written a new book, 'The New Tarot Handbook'. I was very excited when I saw that this book was an upcoming release, anything that Rachel writes is simply worth reading. I was looking forward in seeing what The New Tarot Handbook had to offer. What more is there to be said? If you have read 78 Degrees of Wisdom or her 2008 release, 'Tarot Wisdom' you may think the same thing. To be honest I had some concern as to what was going to be presented. Was it simply going to be another 78 Degrees, reworded in a different fashion with a few updates? Or will be refreshing offering new insights? Let us explore and find out.

To start the book is in total 280 pages long and is grouped in six chapters. Listed as Introduction, The Major Arcana, The Minor Arcana, The Court Cards, Readings and Further Study.

In the introduction Rachel explains her background in how she came across tarot. Rachel speaks about the influence that Eden Grey author of Tarot Revealed impacted her and on modern tarot reading. This is a very nice homage to Eden as Rachel also describes The New Tarot Handbook as restoring the Eden Grey tradition by saying 'I like to think that this book revives Eden Grey's tradition - a work that is short, direct, yet hopefully is backed up by deeper knowledge and awareness'. This statement gives us our structure and intention of this book. A book that is simple, easy to read, that is backed by real knowledge and solid understanding that people can grasp onto. After reading most of the book I can say that Rachel had done exactly what it was she was hoping for. The New Tarot Handbook is short, direct and easy to understanding. Now to say short I do not mean short in content, there is plenty of solid background on the cards, explanations of symbols and meaning.

To give a brief description of how this is setup, there is a Waite-Smith image of the card, in this case The Empress. Below that are a few keywords to generalize the essence of the card, for The Empress it is 'passion, love, motherhood, abundance'. Below that is Rachel's spiel about the card. After that you will see divinatory meanings and reversed meanings in the style of Eden Grey's Tarot Revealed. After each card is a 'reading for' the card, a spread customized for each card.

As for what is presented in the actual description and explanations of the cards in the words of Goldilocks "Ahhh, this porridge is just right" so to is the amount of information just right. In 78 Degrees of Wisdom and so to in Tarot Wisdom there is a sense of

information overload, that there is a lot to soak up. This is not the case here, where you are given the right balance of knowledge needed without feeling like a deer caught in headlights. The writing is casual and easier going than previous writings. But by all means this is not dummed down tarot, a good way to describe it is as Diet Tarot Wisdom or 78 Degrees of Wisdom Lite, still has that refreshing taste with no calories! The New Tarot Handbook provides new insights along with already established ones, so readers of Rachel's other books will find out there is more to learn.

The flow of the book is smooth; Rachel shows how cards are interrelated to one another, building up from previous cards and showing the development and growth from one to the other. This is a very important thing for tarot readers to understand, how cards are connected to each other and how that impacts the meaning. In the example of The Empress she does this by showing the connection via pairs, the Magician and Empress, High Priestess and Empress and Emperor with Empress.

I love to read about the mythologies in the cards, with The Empress we are taught the association with two goddesses, Venus/Aphrodite and Demeter, then going further explain the myth of Persephone's kidnapping by Hades. I would like to make a quick side note that Rachel says Hades is the god of death; in actuality he is the god of the underworld, not death himself. Death is represented by another figure, that of ?Thanatos? who is the personification of death. But Rachel was making a point with associating Hades with death in that in the end Demeter gets her daughter back from ?death?, revealing a lesson that you should never underestimate a mother.

Moving onto the Minor Arcana Rachel explains the suits in terms of their elemental qualities and explains the numerological meanings of each number, the foundations that all readers should have. The minors are setup just like the Majors with the removal of the keywords under the card instead replacing it with the Element & Theme of the card. The minors are at times linked to the majors to give you a sense of deeper connection, while some cards like the 2 of Swords simply states it ?links her to the High Priestess?, without any other explanation of that that connection.

Towards the end in the section of ?Readings? Rachel explains the reading process and goes with the ?do as you will? mentality throwing to the wind the notion that you have to follow certain ritualistic ?rules?. She also lists several complex free spreads.

In conclusion The New Tarot Handbook was a wonderful read. Rachel's aim at writing a book that was simple and direct to the point was achieved. Who would this book be good for? Anyone really, however I would recommend it to a new reader who is looking for a deeper awareness to the cards meaning, mythology and symbolism without feeling lost in the esoteric translation.

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