

Shmanners 232: Tarot

Published October 16th, 2020

[Listen here at themcelroy.family](https://themcelroy.family)

Travis: What did the man say when he got a really good card reading?

Teresa: I don't know, what?

Travis: Tar-whoaaa!

Teresa: [laughs quietly] It's *Shmanners*.

[theme music plays]

Travis: Hello, internet! I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: And you're listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis: For ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove.

Teresa: Hello, my dear.

Travis: How are you?

Teresa: I'm doing okay, getting over some tonsillitis but feeling better now.

Travis: I just made that joke up on the spot.

Teresa: It was great.

Travis: Thank you!

Teresa: And I'm really glad you didn't test it out on me beforehand, like you do with some of the others.

Travis: No, it's—it's the element of surprise.

Teresa: Yeah, right right right. Yeah.

Travis: "Tar-whoa!" [through laughter] You gotta get 'em—

Teresa: [through laughter] You gotta get—[laughs]

Travis: Gotta get 'em. You gotta get 'em!

Teresa: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Travis: What are we talking about this week?

Teresa: Well, this week we are talking about tarot readings.

Travis: Okay. Not the potato-like thing, right? Taro root? That's a thing, right?

Teresa: No, not that. It's a delicious thing.

Travis: And not, like, a scary thing, which is, like, "Terror."

Teresa: Right. Right in the middle.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Right between taro and terror is tarot.

Travis: Is tarot. Now, it looks like tay-rot.

Teresa: It does.

Travis: But it is tarot.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Hello, everyone.

Teresa: Hello.

Travis: [laughs quietly] Welcome to my TED Talk. [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Now, have you ever had—is it your tarot read? Tarot cards read? Had your—had a reading?

Teresa: I have never had a reading.

Travis: Oh, really? I've had a lot.

Teresa: Oh yeah?

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: Well, great.

Travis: And I found it—

Teresa: I've watched it on TV and in movies.

Travis: Yeah. I—I—oh. Can I tell you, I find it very meditative.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: And, uh—so I have tarot... uh, there's a—there's something about—and what I am about to say, let me be clear, is not an endorsement of any of these things.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: As far as their—especially reiki.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I don't—as far as it being effective? No thank you. But...

Teresa: Fun!

Travis: Well, but meditative, it's very—it's a very big ASMR trigger for me.

Teresa: Oh, certainly, certainly.

Travis: Yeah, and it has nothing to do with—[under his breath] I know it doesn't work. [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I know reiki doesn't work. But... I find it very relaxing. Uh, but I've had tarot—

Teresa: And maybe that's what does work about it.

Travis: Well, so that's the thing.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: And we'll talk probably more about this. But... I have had tarot readings across the gamut, from, you know, like, friends sitting around, to, like, paying professionals to do it. And in between as well.

Teresa: Well, Alex was personally very excited to do this episode because she does read tarot cards for people.

Travis: Mm-hmm.

Teresa: Um, so it's quite close to her heart, and I am excited to share a lot of her findings with y'all.

Travis: Can I—can I, right off the bat, state my opinion—and it is just that, folks—

Teresa: Certainly.

Travis: —on, like, what I think about the effectiveness of tarot.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: I think the—the beauty, the thing about it is, it is very interpretive, right?

Teresa: Oh yeah.

Travis: And so I see it almost as like a psychological jumping off point for discussions, right? And that is always when I enjoy it most. Like, "This card means this. What does that make you think about in your life that you need to work on, or that you need to address, or that makes you happy, or all of those things?" Now, I think—

Teresa: It's kind of like a journaling prompt. [laughs]

Travis: Sure, yes, very much so. Now, I think, as with a lot of stuff, if it crosses over into "Charge me money and I will—" or, like, "Pay me money, and I will magically tell you how to fix your life—"

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: —that is when it crosses over into, uh, like... hmm. Hmm!

Teresa: No thank you.

Travis: No thank you. Uh, now, if it's like a fun thing that maybe gets me thinking about my life, great. But I think that this is true of—one of my heroes in life is Harry Houdini.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And I think that this is true of a lot of, like, psychic fun, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Is, like, it's fun. It's fine as long as it's fun. And as soon as it starts to be, like, "Pay me money and I can tell you, you know, where your missing child is," that's where it starts to be like, "Oh, no no no no no. No thank you. Get outta here with that."

Teresa: Because a lot of—a lot of the reading part is about also reading the person, reading the room.

Travis: Yes, like cold reading.

Teresa: Exactly!

Travis: It's the same deal. It's fine as long as it's fun.

Teresa: That's right. Okay.

Travis: [simultaneously] Okay.

Teresa: Hah!

Travis: Now, I assume that tarot reading has a looong history?

Teresa: Um, it does. It also has a long perceived history, and we'll get into that. Okay.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, first of all, I would like to start off by saying that a lot of things have been projected on to tarot.

Travis: Oh, sure. A lot of devil stuff.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: And that's not how it's supposed to be. Um, it's not supposed to be evil, and it is also not supposed to, like, truly predict the future, right? Even people who—people who do this right know this about it.

Travis: Yeah. I think that the thing about a lot of stuff like this, if you, like, look back through history, especially, like, witch trials and—anything, it's people who project their puritanical or, like, Christian beliefs onto a system that doesn't recognize [laughs] like, puritanical and Christian beliefs. So in order to, like, fit it, it has to be like, "Well, then you're the devil."

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: And it's like, "Well, but... I don't believe in the thing you believe in, so no!"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: It doesn't—it's not the same system!

Teresa: So we won't be demonizing tarot, because there's nothing to demonize.

Travis: No. You might as well demonize Dungeons and Dragons, you know what I mean?

Teresa: Exactly. So let's start off with the little pieces about it, okay?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Uh, 78 cards in the deck. Um, 22 of them are called major arcana, and the other 56 are minor arcana.

Travis: For point of reference, it's kind of like in a deck of cards, where some of them are face cards, some of them are number cards, right? It's that.

Teresa: Exactly, exactly. Um, and here are some of the more famous cards that you may recognize. Uh, The Empress.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Death.

Travis: Yes.

Teresa: The Hanged Man.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: Uh, The Devil.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: All of that stuff, right? Um, and they sound scary, but they're not.

Travis: No. The thing is, it's an interpretive thing, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And so it has to do a lot in relation to the person being read, the person reading, where the cards fall, all that stuff.

Teresa: Exactly. And a lot like the deck of cards you mentioned, it probably started as a game.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: It's derived—

Travis: Sorta like Ouija.

Teresa: A little bit, yeah. Uh, it's derived from the Italian word tariocinoi—excuse me, tarocchini.

Travis: Uh-huh. Oh, I love a good tarocchini. Mmm, delicious.

Teresa: [laughs] Delicious.

Travis: Mmm. [eating noises]

Teresa: And that's the name of the game, right? Nowadays they're used as divination tools, claiming that tarot is actually an ancient book of wisdom, disguised as a deck of playing cards.

Travis: No it's not, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Well...

Travis: Yeah, okay.

Teresa: Um... the consensus is that tarot is primarily used by people who identify spiritually as witches, but the cool thing about it is that anybody can learn, and benefit from learning about it.

Travis: Right. It does not require a belief system—

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: —to be effective.

Teresa: Exactly. Um, so like I said earlier, it's perceived as possibly related to ancient Egypt, but probably not, right? Um, that rumor probably came from the 18th century, when the occult was very popular. And, you know, we've talked about this. And, like, everything that was cool was Egyptian, and all that kind of stuff. Um, some—some may say that the deck contains the wisdom of the Egyptian god Thoth.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Uh, but, you know.

Travis: [high pitched doubtful voice] Every deck? Does—uh—uh? Uh, he's gettin' spread pretty thin then, huh?

Teresa: Probably not, right?

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Here's what we actually know. The cards themselves first popped up in Europe in the late 14th century.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: And, I mean, while it probably—

Travis: So not quite ancient Egypt.

Teresa: Not quite ancient Egypt. And, I mean, they probably had card games. They had a lot of cool stuff! Um, but they weren't a direct line to any ancient pharaohs.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: For the most part, the deck was used to play tarocchini, which is a game a lot like bridge.

Travis: Oh!

Teresa: Yeah. Um, tarot was a word that meant foolishness. [laughs quietly] And it eventually involved being called tarocchini, which roughly translates to the idea of something being faked or forged.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Right? Um, which makes sense, because a card being played in the place of another card is fundamental to the game, right? So it's not about... I don't want you to take away, like, tarot... everybody who plays tarot knows it's fake tarot, all that stuff. No, no, no. It's about the intricacies of the game.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Replacing one card for another card.

Travis: Got it.

Teresa: Um... so, you find versions of this game, tarocchini, still being played in France and Italy today. Now, it's different from tarot readings.

[pause]

Travis: Okay?

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: No, I'm following you. I'm getting all of this.

Teresa: Okay, alright, alright. Well, you know, you're a little quieter than usual.

Travis: I'm listening!

Teresa: Okay!

Travis: Listen, I wanna be very careful.

Teresa: Alright.

Travis: Because this is a—a topic that broaches on belief systems. You've talked about, like, witches, Wiccan, that kind of thing.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: And I try very, very hard to be respectful of people's beliefs, as long as they don't harm others.

Teresa: Okay. Yeah, totally.

Travis: Um, and so I'm trying to find the daylight within this discussion of where I can make observations and jokes without being offensive. And the thing is, is I—I wanna clarify as we're talking about it, I'm sure that there are people out there who believe that these things actually have some kind of divination power, and some kind of psychic ability, and those kinds of things.

And if you believe that, I respect your belief. I don't. Uh, I am a man of science. [laughs quietly] Um, a—a man of podcasting.

Teresa: [laughs] I was gonna say, "Show me your laboratory, science man."

Travis: Uh, my laboratory is private.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: But, uh, once again, I will restate, it's fine as long as it's fun. If it becomes predatory, that is where I draw the line and have an issue with it. But if you believe that you actually have some kind of power, and the cards have some kind of mystical ancient energy, cool! Great. Good for you.

Teresa: You do you.

Travis: Yeah, I'm sure there's lots of weird things I believe that you're like, "Huh? What's that? Okay... "

Teresa: Okay. Um, so this game involved a lot of the cards that we know of, but probably not in the same way. We don't know how much of the original deck would have resembled the deck we have today, right?

Travis: Well, and even now, that's one of my favorite things in watching people do it on, like, YouTube and stuff. Is, like, there are countless different designs, where—I saw a tarot deck that was, like, all different cats.

Teresa: I saw that, too! That made its rounds around the meme—meme-verse.

Travis: And, like, that kind of thing, right? Where a lot of it is, like, the art. So if that's the case, I imagine that the evolution of the cards has been pretty rapid, with everybody trying to, like, do different designs and say, like, "Oh, what if it did it like this," right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm, yeah. The oldest surviving decks are the 15 Visconti-Sforza ones, painted in the mid 15th century for the rulers of Milan.

Travis: Sure. Of course.

Teresa: Um, so... uh, we've talked about, like, the different kinds of decks, right? A lot of these decks consist of four elements, right? The four elements.

Travis: Cups, swords—

Teresa: No.

Travis: —no, this is—yeah.

Teresa: Well, okay.

Travis: You have, like, the King of Cups, and the Seven of Swords, and, like—is that what you're talking about?

Teresa: Sort of.

Travis: 'Cause it's like hearts, diamonds, clubs, and spades, right? But it's like... am I—am I talking out of my rear?

Teresa: I haven't—I haven't gotten to a lot of that yet.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: What I'm talking about is this kind of—the heart of the decks, right? Four elements. Earth, water, wind, fire.

Travis: Heart.

Teresa: No. That's—that's *Captain Planet*.

Travis: Ahh, ri-ri-ri-ri-ri-ri-ri-ri-right.

Teresa: Um—

Travis: Which one's left? I know—they were all in *Avatar*, right?

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: Earth, wind, fire—okay.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: It's just there's not a lot of air. [out of the corner of his mouth] 'Cause Aang's the only one left, you know?

Teresa: Not in *Legend of Korra*.

Travis: I mean, that's true. Ugh! Let's just talk about *Avatar* for the rest—

Teresa: No.

Travis: —okay.

Teresa: Let's not. Alright. Um, and astrological symbols, and then the beginnings of the traditional motifs.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, and this is where, in the 15th century, people start landing on one side or the other about the, quote, "evil" tendencies of this.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Um, no one at this point is associated with tarot and devil worshipping, until a Dominican preacher sermonizing about the evils of the cards in the 15th century. Um, and more it was about, "You shouldn't be playing poker," than it was about, say, sacrificing goats in the woods.

Travis: I mean, sure. I mean, if you wanna talk about, like, predatory practices, poker. You get somebody—especially if there's no, like, uh, judges, nobody makin' sure nobody's cheating, bet there was a lot of predatory card playing, you know?

Teresa: Also, like, in this time period, that people have associated with this kind of, like... demonization, again, of the tarot. Uh, didn't... [sighs] here's the thing. [laughs quietly]

Travis: Uh-huh?

Teresa: There weren't a lot of them. They were super rare, because they were all hand-painted beautiful cards, right?

Travis: Right right right, yeah. And they weren't, like, durable.

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: You know? It wasn't like you could coat 'em in plastic or whatever.

Teresa: Exactly. Uh, then came along the printing press.

Travis: Ohhh, I've heard about that. They printed things, right?

Teresa: Mm-hmm, they sure did!

Travis: Like a laser printer.

Teresa: Right. And this what—no.

Travis: Well—

Teresa: Not a laser printer.

Travis: It was like the first laser printer.

Teresa: It was—it was ink?

Travis: Sure, but, like—

Teresa: And typeset.

Travis: But it was, like, the great-great-grandfather of the laser printer.

Teresa: Alright, fine. Um, so that is when tarot cards start, like, really, really cruisin' around Europe. Switzerland, France, Italy, all that places. Well, I mean, it was already in France and Italy, but you know. All over it.

Travis: Gotcha. Do you think that the demonization of it, one of the contributing factors was like, if people were using it for, like, predatory practices, that you had to convince people that bad stuff was going to happen to them so that they would, like, keep coming to you, so you could tell 'em how to avoid that bad stuff? And so that made it seem like a really negative thing, 'cause it was always, like, doom and gloom, and "Evil is gonna befall you," and it's easy then to associate the cards with evil themselves. Whereas—

That makes sense.

Travis: —whereas, like, if the readings were all like, "Yeah, life's goin' great for you! You should be happy." That people would be like, "This is a nice thing that makes people feel nice."

Teresa: Yeah, sure.

Travis: Or maybe the other side of that then is, like, if it's nice things that make people feel nice, they're less likely to worry about going to church to feel nice.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: And then the church would see it as a threat. I bet it was a mixture of those things.

Teresa: Well, I think also in the Renaissance era, that's when people really tried to, like, find all the answers and kind of, like, make it one sort of soup that—this is the answer to life.

Travis: Brain soup, yes.

Teresa: Brain soup, ex—[laughs quietly] exactly. [laughs]

Travis: A term that we all have used, and definitely I didn't just make up.

Teresa: [laughs] Um, and so people were looking for answers. People were looking for the one key to everything, so that everything made sense. And so trying to put all of these different things in the same soup, you kinda messed up the soup a little bit.

Travis: Sure, yeah. You can't put all the elements in the soup, or it tastes like... your feet. Or, you know, something equivalently bad. I don't know how your feet taste.

Teresa: Your—your—your feet?

Travis: It tastes like butt? I was trying to think of, like, a PG way to say it tastes like... you know. Bad.

Teresa: Poop.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Poop.

Travis: Butt. Okay.

Teresa: I mean, I've never tasted poop, but...

Travis: Well...

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: I can't imagine it tastes good, or you probably would've tasted it before, right?

Teresa: [laughs] I guess you're right!

Travis: Right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Right. Alright. So, when did it move from bridge party to divination tool?

Travis: I can't wait to hear, but first, how about a thank you note for our sponsors?

[theme music plays]

Travis: Teresa, could I tell you a little story?

Teresa: Please do.

Travis: Last night, I drank just a little too much. Just a li—just a *little* too much.

Teresa: Just enough to think that all of your ideas are the best ideas.

Travis: And that—it doesn't take much! [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And so then I thought, "You know what would be great? Tomorrow morning, wake up and have breakfast delivered. And I'm gonna order it now, so it'll be delivered tomorrow. And then—"

Teresa: 'Cause you can do that on...

Travis: DoorDash.

Teresa: DoorDash!

Travis: And then I promptly forgot.

Teresa: [laughs] And it was quite a surprise this morning!

Travis: It—yes, this morning, I looked at my phone when I got the notification and I said, "Oh."

And Teresa said, "What is it?"

And I said, "Well, you're gonna be mad, but... "

Teresa: [laughs] You know what? I wasn't mad.

Travis: Yeah?

Teresa: It was delicious.

Travis: It was delicious! I—okay. I did order, for some reason, along with, like, chicken and waffles, three different kinds of pancakes?

Teresa: Well...

Travis: Yeah. And—mm. [laughs] That one had been a mistake. But ordering food from DoorDash was not a mistake. It was a great idea, because I could support local restaurants, get food I love, and have it all done safely, because we use the contactless delivery option where they just leave it at your door, and then text you later and say, "Hey, your food is here."

So all you have to do is get the DoorDash app. And right now, our listeners can get \$5 off their first order of \$15 or more, and zero delivery fees for their first month when you download the DoorDash app and enter code "shmanners."

That's \$5 off your first order and zero delivery fees for a month when you download the DoorDash app in the app store and enter code "shmanners." Don't forget. That's code "shmanners" for \$5 off your first order with DoorDash. [holding back laughter] So get yourself a surprise breakfast tomorrow.

Teresa: Yummy.

Travis: Courtesy of *Shmanners* and DoorDash. Now, Teresa, do you brush your teeth?

Teresa: I sure do.

Travis: Oh, thank goodness.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Oh, I realized halfway through the question I might be trapping you. I didn't want to set you up.

Teresa: Well, if I didn't brush my teeth I think that you would know, because this booth is quite small.

Travis: That is absolutely true. Now, when the last time, Teresa, you got rewarded for brushing your teeth?

Teresa: Rewarded?

Travis: Yes, and I don't just mean with healthy chompers. I mean with, like, actual rewards.

Teresa: Wow. I—I haven't!

Travis: Well, then you need to start using Quip's new smart electric toothbrush!

Teresa: Nice!

Travis: Yes. They're good ha—good habits will earn you perks, like gift products, gift cards, and more.

Teresa: Ooh! More.

Travis: Yes. And it's not just for adults. They have it for kids, too. And it connects to the Quip app with Bluetooth to track your brushing and earn rewards from Quip and partners. And if you already have Quip, you just need to get a smart motor to upgrade to the connectivity to your phone. And you'll keep all the features you know and love, like the timed vibrations that let you know if you've actually brushed long enough, which I'm willing to bet most of us aren't.

Teresa: Uh, Bebe definitely doesn't. [laughs]

Travis: No, Bebe does not.

Teresa: We have to convince her every time. "No, you're not done. You're not done."

Travis: She just likes making her mouth foam up, and then she just goes, "Ewww!"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And holds it out at you. Um, and you also get—the thing I love is it—the vibrations are powerful but gentle. It doesn't make it feel like it's beatin' up your gums. So, start getting rewards for brushing your teeth today. Go to getquip.com/shmanners right now and get your first refill pack free. That's your first refill pack free at getquip.com/shmanners. It's spelled G-E-T-Q-U-I-P.com/shmanners. Quip: better oral health, made simple and rewarding.

Teresa: Rewarding!

Kirk: Video games.

Jason: Video games!

Maddy: Video games. You like 'em?

Kirk: Maybe wish you had more time for them?

Jason: Maybe you wanna know the best ones to play?

Kirk: Maybe you wanna know what happens to Mario when he dies?

Jason: [laughs]

Maddy: In that case, you should check out *Triple Click*. It's a podcast about video games.

Jason: A podcast about video games? But I don't have time for that!

Kirk: Sure you do. Once a week, kick back as three video game experts give you everything from critical takes on the hottest new releases—

Jason: —to scoops, interviews, and explanations about how video games work—

Maddy: —to fascinating and sometimes weird stories about the games we love.

Kirk: *Triple Click* is hosted by me, Kirk Hamilton.

Jason: Me, Jason Schreier.

Maddy: And me, Maddy Myers.

Kirk: You can find *Triple Click* wherever you get your podcasts, and listen at Maximumfun.org.

Maddy: Bye!

Travis: Okay. So, you were about to talk about how we made the transition from fun parlor game to a divination card thing.

Teresa: Exactly. Um, and keep in mind that now, if you're a good card reader, you can actually even use card—like, a regular card deck. So—it has nothing—not as much to do with the cards themselves, but the reader doing it. Anyway.

Travis: It's the interpretation. We've talked about this, you know?

Teresa: Right. So, 1781.

Travis: A fine year. 17... 81. We had just finished winning the Revolutionary War!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "What's next?" We asked.

"Well, what about tarot?"

"Tarot?" We said.

"Yes, it's the next revolution."

Teresa: Oh boy.

Travis: Now continue.

Teresa: A French free mason and former protestant minister named Antoine Court de Gebelin—

Travis: Of course. I know him well.

Teresa: —uh, published his own personal analysis of the tarot, where he claimed that the cards were derived from the esoteric secrets of Egyptian priests.

Travis: [clicks tongue] Okay.

Teresa: And he went on the claim that this ancient occult knowledge was sent as a card game to Rome so that the Catholic Church could keep this arcane knowledge a secret.

Travis: Uh-huh. Okay.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: There was—if I could give Antoine one note—

Teresa: Uh-huh?

Travis: —there's too many flavors there.

Teresa: There's a lot of flavors. And—

Travis: Too many flavors to be believed.

Teresa: —it's very much in the way of, like, "[sing-song] Ooh, this is a secret, don't you want it?"

Travis: Yeah, that's what I'm saying is, like, this is occult knowledge, from ancient Egypt, that's been locked down in Rome, and for three payments of \$9.99, it could be all yours today. Okay, Antoine.

Teresa: Mm-hmm, right. Uh, like you said, no proof. There's no proof, and basically this protestant guy was like, "These Catholics, they are—they've got this stuff. Don't you want it? They've been keepin' it from you, those terrible people!"

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Um, and of course when you say, "This is a secret, you can't have it. Nobody wants you to have it."

Travis: Especially when you say it like you have just said it.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: It's like, "But now I want it."

Teresa: Of course you want it!

Travis: This is a thing—

Teresa: So everybody in Europe, anybody who was ev—everybody who was anybody wanted it. They wanted to have—

Travis: This is a thing that happens to me constantly where I will be completely uninterested in something. There is a brand of whiskey called Pappy Van Winkle that I have seen the name of a hundred times and thought, "That sounds gross."

And then I found out that it's extremely rare, and people will pay upwards of, like, 5000, 7000 dollars for a bottle. And then I thought, "Well, now I want it." [laughs]

Teresa: [through laughter] Exactly!

Travis: "Well, now I wanna try it!"

Teresa: Exactly. And this also happens to be timed at the end of the Victorian era spiritualism, right?

Travis: Of course.

Teresa: The interest in tarot and ghosts and all things occult became a very popular pastime for bored upper class people.

Travis: Well, this is—yes. This is where you get, uh, people like Arthur Conan Doyle, who was like, "Oh, ghosts are real. Spiritualism's real." This is where you get Houdini, who came—and we're talking about the end of the 1800's, right?

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: Yeah. So we get Houdini coming in goin', "Ehh, I think that this is all BS, and I'm gonna bust it up."

Teresa: And of course when you have that side, you also have the opposite side of an evangelical revival, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Which led into split offs from traditional Christian religions, right? So you have these—these two ends, like, making a fun fight out of this, right?

Travis: Right. Yes, yes.

Teresa: Um, and that's where—that's where tarot fits in, doesn't it? It's, like, this thing that the Christian people don't want you to have, and, like, we're Christian so we don't like it, and, you know, all that kind of stuff.

Travis: Well, and, you know, I mentioned, like, Ouija boards earlier. And I think it fits into a similar, like, kind of vein, niche if you will, where because it has a game element to it, it's also, like, something kids can do where it's just like, "We shouldn't be doing this, how naughty!"

You know, like "Light as a feather, stiff as a board" kind of thing.

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Like, "We get together at our secret sleepovers, and we're gonna do these naughty evil things like Ouija boards and tarot cards!"

Teresa: Okay. Yes. So, as far as specific decks go, you have probably seen the iconic Rider-Waite-Smith deck.

Travis: It—what—

Teresa: These are the three people, right?

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: Um, so Arthur Waite, in 1901, decided he wanted to... illustrate his own tarot cards, right? And, uh, Rider was the name of the publishing company, and Smith was the designer.

Travis: Okay. So, I'm looking at them now, right? If you've ever seen, like, a deck—it's a lot of, like, pale blue backgrounds in it. A lot of, like, yellow—pale yellows, pale blues, very clean lines, um, illustrate-y? Right?

Teresa: Right, right.

Travis: They're almost like—they almost look like fancy comic strips.

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Yeah. And, um, it's got also a little bit of a Monty Python cartoon look to it.

Teresa: Oh yeah!

Travis: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Teresa: I can totally see that. But these are the ones that, when you hear of tarot cards, this is what we think of. They're used a lot in movies and television. They're kind of like—like—

Travis: They're iconic.

Teresa: They're iconic!

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: They are. Um, and this is what really started the fashion for all kinds of different decks. You talked about the cats one just a second ago. Um, art deco designs, King Arthur lore, [holding back laughter] vintage 1950 ads, pugs, and Hello Kitty! I mean, they're—anything that you like—

Travis: Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry. Hello Kitty tarot cards?

Teresa: Yep.

Travis: Okay!

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Okay!

Teresa: Pretty fun!

Travis: I like that.

Teresa: Um, anything that you like, you can find in a tarot card, basically. Because tarot cards are fun for everyone.

Travis: Yes, absolutely. Hey, do you wanna do some questions?

Teresa: Sure!

Travis: Okay. Let's do it! Okay, this one comes from [holding back laughter] Catboy Monarchy.

"Can you request an alternate analysis of the card they pulled, or ask what else it could mean, if you're unhappy with the initial reading?"

Um, yeah. I mean, like, I think that saying, like, "I don't know that that applies to me—" like, we've been talking about throughout, it's very interpretive, and a lot of it is, like, what it means to you. And I think if you're getting it done, right? Any good reader wants you to walk out satisfied and not confused.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: So if you're like, "That doesn't really apply to me."

Then it's like, "Okay, cool. Then maybe it's this?"

Like, I—I think that... you know. I—it's not—I—I don't think it's—

Teresa: Here's the thing, right? This is how that reader interprets the cards that they have. So if you want a different outcome, get a different reader.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: It's not about the cards. It's not—it's about the way that the person is reading for it, right? Um, so if you're unhappy with that one, find another person to do it. Right?

Travis: Yeah. And, you know, like I said, I've had my cards read by professionals before who, like, have, you know, full on storefronts set up and stuff. And the thing about it is—is it's—even—even a, like, perfect person doing it isn't gonna nail the interpretation every time. It's just not gonna fit the whole time, right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Like, that's why I think it's fine to either ignore something they said or say, like, "Well, that doesn't really apply." Or just give feedback. Uh, this is from @diyvampirism.

"How do I ask for legitimacy, and how do I know if they're charging a reasonable rate?"

Uh, well, as far as the reasonable rate thing goes, it's the beauty of living in the internet age, is we get to all kinds of research beforehand. Uh, even just going on Twitter and saying, like, "Hey, what's a reasonable rate for a tarot reading?"

Um, legitimacy is... tricky. Um, but I would... rather than think in terms of legitimacy, I would think in terms of, like, customer satisfaction.

Teresa: Certainly, certainly.

Travis: And so I think that you could look at reviews of them. You could ask people you know, like, "Where have you been that you enjoy going?" That kind of thing. Um, because legitimacy implies that some people have, like, psychic abilities and some people don't, and that is, like, a belief system, and hard to prove, and hard—all that stuff. But, satisfied customers is easy to determine.

Teresa: Right. Because there are a lot of readers out there who will be like, "Yeah, I'll do a reading for you. Um, I've never done it before, or whatever. Gimme 50 bucks." Right? Obviously that's not the kind of person that you're looking for if you're gonna go have a good time, right? So do your research, I think, is the way to find something that is, quote, "legitimate" to you.

Travis: This next question I think kind of sums all of that up. Uh, @beefygordita asks:

"How do I explain to my friends that want a reading because they think it'll be fun, that tarot is a serious tool for reflection, not a casual thing? This happens a lot, where someone wants a reading, but doesn't expect to take it seriously, and it makes things awkward."

I think that, one, something we talk about a lot, communicating your expectations ahead of time and saying, "I like to do tarot readings as a means for personal reflection, not as, like, a fun party game. Um, so if you're comfortable with that we can proceed. But I also will say, I really like the way that you kind of define that as a tool for reflection, which is how I think I think about it as well.

Teresa: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Um, so, like you said, it's about expectation. But also, um... I hate to say that you should spend the kind of emotional labor educating your friends about this, but what you should do is make sure they understand that it's a big deal to you, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: That's the thing. And if they want, like—I've seen on TV, you know, reading tarot at slumber parties or whatever. If that's what they think this is, I'm sure that they can find someone to do that for them.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: But not you.

Travis: Um, @RealSlimKaylee asks:

"Is it rude to express skepticism when getting your cards read? I'm a naturally curious person and I'm interested in tarot, but I'm not sure a believer."

Uh, like I've said a hundred times now, I don't think you have to be a believer to enjoy the experience. Um, I think that, you know, it's all a grain of salt, and—you know, I think it's—it's worth it if the person asks, like, "Do you believe in the power—" say, like, "No, but I'm interested in the process, and I'm looking for the new experience."

I think you can be honest, but I think expressing skepticism in anything unprompted, um, mostly could just hurt someone's feelings.

Teresa: Right. But if you—okay. Here's the skepticism I think that is very welcome. Lots of these cards—I mean, these cards—all of the tarot cards have multiple meanings, right? For example, the Empress card is a card that represents nurturing and motherhood, but that could mean literal motherhood, or the symbolic mothering of a situation, project, person, lifestyle, any of that stuff.

So there's nothing around about asking about that interpretation and be like, you know, if someone—if you bring up the Empress card, to continue this example, and you're not interested in literally having children in your life, it could mean so many different things. So, asking for that kind of clarification is absolutely something you should do.

Travis: I also think—and this is, once again, just my personal opinion, but I think a good reader will ask questions rather than make statements. Like, they might flip over the Empress and say, "Are you thinking about whether or not to have kids? Are you having some trouble with your mother or a mother-like figure?" Right? Like, they will ask questions.

And once again, it is because that card can be a prompt for you to talk about or think about different solutions to problems you're going through, and not because it magically was the card you needed to see. Um, like, once again, my opinion. One last question! This is from Colton.

"Is it rude to suggest to shuffle the cards yourself to ensure there is no rigging?"

I don't think people are rigging. It's not poker. [laughs]

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: They're not stacking the deck.

Teresa: Um, it depends on the reader. If the reader offers to allow you to shuffle the cards, that might be part of the deal, right? But if you suggest, I would say, "Would you like me to shuffle my own cards?" It's up to them, right? That's how they're doing, conducting the reading.

If they don't want you to shuffle the cards—I mean, there's a lot of different rules that different readers follow. Maybe you're not supposed to buy your own deck. Maybe you're not supposed to let the cards touch the table or the floor, and you don't share decks. You can't reuse the deck. Like, all of this different stuff is up to the person reading.

Travis: Can I make a suggestion of a way to look at it, right? If you paid to watch a magician perform, you wouldn't be like, "Let me sit behind you instead of in front of you, so I can see what tricks you're doing." Right?

Teresa: Right.

Travis: It—at the very least, even if you're like, "I don't believe in any of this and I'm incredibly skeptic," then look at it like a performance, right, that you're gonna enjoy. And, you know, what you're looking for is a good performer, right? And you can enjoy it no matter what you think of it. That's kind of how I feel about it.

Teresa: Try to have an open mind, and roll with whatever the specific reader's process it.

Travis: Indeed. So, that's gonna do it for us. Couple of announcements, folks.

Teresa: Well, first, I would like to say. Alex loves tarot, and she does tarot readings, and you can find her at Pay What You Can Tarot on Instagram. Feel free to comment, like, and subscribe.

Travis: Please do. Please do. Uh, let's talk about some things you can do.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: Uh, do you like another McElroy podcast called *The Adventure Zone*? Well, good news. *The Adventure Zone: Crystal Kingdom*, which will be book four of our graphic novel series, is available for preorder now at theadventurezonecomic.com.

It comes out July 13th, 2021, and if you head on over to Syfy Wire, that S-Y-F-Y Wire, you can see exclusive preview pages. Also, here's a whole bunch of merch that we got! New merch. There's a new *Sawbones* horseshoe crab shirt, uh, celebrating the contributions of horseshoe crabs to vaccinations.

Teresa: That was a great ep.

Travis: So check that out. There is—our pin of the month is a tiger on the table pin designed by Sam Schultz, which benefits the Marsha P. Johnson Institute, as well as the Sylvia Rivera Law Project.

Uh, we have a Candlenights ornament by Lin Doyle, a Candlenights wrapping paper by Justin Gray, a super cute jump scare pin, and a "Thanks for vibing and keeping it tight" t-shirt, and a portion of those proceeds go to the Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights, which protects and advances the rights and best interests of immigrant children. And all of that is at mcelroymerch.com.

Uh, we're also going to be doing livestreams on the Two Gether Twitch channel, that's T-W-O, Gether, G-E-T-H-E-R, Twitch channel. [Twitch.tv/twogetherstudios](https://www.twitch.tv/twogetherstudios), uh, over the next few weeks, and it's gonna be us playing some Adventure Zone board game. If you wanna check it out, please do. Justin's playing one this weekend, I believe. Uh, and if you didn't preorder the game, you can go to theadventurezonegame.com and sign up for updates for when it goes on sale.

Uh, let's see. One last thing. *Everybody Has a Podcast (Except You)* is available for preorder now. If you go to themcelroypodcastbook.com, you can preorder the how-to-podcast book that me and my brothers wrote, with contributions from Teresa and Sydnee and Rachel.

Teresa: [singing] I just did my reading today!

Travis: Yes you did. Uh, and it was very good.

Teresa: Aw, thanks.

Travis: You're welcome. Uh, it's a step-by-step podcast how to guide, that is also funny, and fun, and good. You can preorder it at themcelroypodcastbook.com. That comes out January 26th.

Oh! Also, one last thing. On October 20th and 9 PM Eastern Time, we're going to be doing a livestream of the game *Among Us* as kind of a spooky Halloween murder mystery thing, I guess. Uh, you can watch it on the McElroy Family YouTube channel. Teresa's gonna play with us, me and my brothers.

Teresa: It's gonna be a fun time, I hope. [laughs]

Travis: It's gonna be a thing. Uh, and I think that's gonna do it for us. What else do we say in our thank yous?

Teresa: We always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Also, thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art. You can tweet @shmatterscast. That's where we get a lot of these great listener submission questions.

Uh, thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, *Shmatters* Fanners. Join that if you love to give and get excellent advice.

Thank you to Alex, or research assistant, for a lovely episode, as always. Um... what else? Oh! Please submit your topic suggestions! Shmatterscast@gmail.com. Alex reads all of those, by the way, so... say hi to her.

Travis: And that's gonna do it for us. Join us again next week.

Teresa: No RSVP required!

Travis: You've been listening to *Shmatters*...

Teresa: Manners, *Shmatters*. Get it?

[theme music plays]

Maximumfun.org.
Comedy and Culture.
Artist Owned.
Listener Supported.