

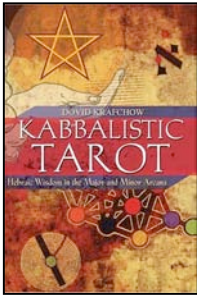
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## Reviews

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### **Kabbalistic Tarot**, David Krafchow

(Inner Traditions, 2005, 144pp, \$14.95)



I must admit that I approached reading *Kabbalistic Tarot* by David Krafchow with trepidation. A relationship between tarot and Qabalah is taken for granted by cognoscenti. Another book on the subject promised to do little to advance my understanding. Heck, I used to teach a course called “Tarot and the Tree of Life.” Since it is a slim volume, I figured I might as well be nice and give it a read through. I was most pleasantly surprised. Krafchow has come up with an original approach to interpreting tarot in relationship to the Tree of Life. He focuses on the popular Waite/Colman-Smith deck. His book is the best practical manual on reading the Waite/Colman-Smith I have read.

Krafchow does not rely on the popular pre-existing models of applying Qabalah to tarot in his work. In short, there are three widely popular formulae in use. The paths between the Sephirah are designated Hebrew letters. The Hebrew letters are linked with the first 22 cards of the tarot, the Major Arcana. The most popular methods for doing so are:

- The French School, advocated by Papus, Levy, Wirth, and de Guaitia. The Major Arcana are interpolated in numerical

order to the Hebrew Alphabet, beginning with the Magician as Aleph and ending with the unnumbered Fool moved to the 21st position, Shin, and the World marked by the 22nd letter Tau.

- Thoth, developed by Aleister Crowley. In this approach, The Fool begins the alphabet. The alphabetic positions of the pairs Adjustment (Justice) and Lust (Strength) and the Emperor and Star are inverted which gives the progression through the alphabet the form of a mobius strip and foretells the evolution in consciousness of the New Aeon. (This is the model I have taught.)
- Frater Achad's Body of God. This is the formula most commonly applied to the Waite Colman-Smith Tarot. It applies the Jacob's Ladder or Serpent's Ascent progression up the Tree of Life, starting at Malkuth, the lowest Sephirah, in its correspondences between letters, paths and Major Arcana. Justice and Strength are inverted here, but the Emperor and Star or not. To me, this imbalances its structural integrity. Furthermore, on some level it tries to retain the starting order progression favored by the French and Crowley (which begin at the top of the Tree with the three supernals). It gets pretty confusing kind of like one of Waite's infamous four page sentences. For years, this model was a key factor in my distaste for the Waite/Colman-Smith deck.

Krafchow does not bother with any of these. Instead, he has developed an innovative approach that finds correlation between the Waite/Colman-Smith deck and Qabalah. It is based on his direct observation. He studied the deck and applied his own understanding of Qabalah to it. His insights come across as both fresh and incisive. For instance, he does not seek to correlate the Major Arcana to the paths. He writes:

“The twenty-two letters of the Hebrew language represent each of the male and female aspects of the Ten Sefirot plus the two essences, Will and Pleasure. The twenty-two cards of the Major Arcana represent the twenty-two letters and thus express the male and female sides of our nature. These twenty-two letters and the Sefira qualities they represent are embedded within each human soul. The Major Arcana are numbered from zero to twenty-one and these numbers reflect the duality of each of the Ten Sefirot, yielding an intricate portrait of the human experience.”

To someone who has not read innumerable treatises on tarot and Qabalah, this may simply come across as a sage observation. To one who has invested much time in these studies, Krafchow’s work represents a major shift in perspective. Any time an author does that he contributes to the body of wisdom in his field, and inspires new lines of thought.

Krafchow adds to the power of his unique insights by writing in a clear and elegant manner. He brings to his subject a voice of authority that illuminates rather than obfuscates divine truth. Consider how effortlessly he conveys some very sophisticated ideas in his pairing of the Hanged Man and the Tower, akin to Pleasure and Will. (Note that pairing of non-sequential arcana is an accepted part of tarot structural analysis. However, this is not a pair recognized by other scholars and adepts.)

“The Hanged Man card depicts a young man hung upside down by his foot. A yellow crown, representing pleasure, encircles his head. The crown, Keter, is the cabalistic symbol for pleasure, that source of all energy and reason for all action. The all-encompassing motivation of pleasure is seen in Cabala as being beyond logic, and is therefore sometimes also called chaos. In this card image we see that just beyond the intellect, pleasure—the fountain of life overflows in a fuming stage of unbridled energy.

“The Hanged Man’s heart is elevated above his head. In the human body the heart is beyond logic when the heart is elevated above the head, it is a sign that chaos rules. Cabalistically, chaos is what precedes logic and is considered one of the higher realms. The realm of logic is further

from the singularity of the Light Without End; it is the chaos of light and darkness, Pleasure and Will, that connects the infinite with the finite.

“The line—the essence of male—is represented in the tarot cards by The Tower, that most phallic of images. Here a bolt of lightning strikes the tower and blows off its crown in a burst of fire as men jump from the window. Will is single-minded: Everything else can jump out the window. Nothing stands before Will.”

Simple, to the point, yet quite profound, the writing style employed here characterizes the *Kabbalistic Tarot*. It makes it a pleasure to read and reflect upon.

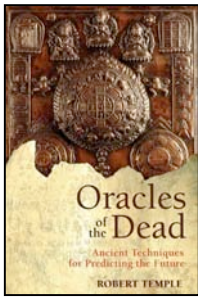
Krafchow's views are not entirely inconsistent with the body of convention that has developed around tarot. For instance, he makes the traditional elemental associations between the tarot suits and the four elements and his further interpolation of the suits to the four worlds is consistent with Crowley and Fortune. However, his reactions emanate from a focused mind that is clearly looking at the cards themselves. Particularly noteworthy in this regard are his interpretations of the Minor Arcana. Rather than rooting them in Waite's gobbledygook (even my writing style is more lucid than Waite's!) like many tarot writers do, he looks at Colman-Smith art and responds in his deceptively simple style. This strikes me as being a far more enlightened approach to the deck. (Indeed, I have always held Colman-Smith in high regard as a charismatic and engaging figure whose artistry is a far more enduring factor in the deck's appeal than Waite's rhetoric.) It is simply sweet to find a serious writer basing his understanding of the deck by reacting to Colman-Smith's work than deciphering Waite's writing.

There is much greater breath to the scope of *Kabbalistic Tarot* than I indicate here. Unlike many other metaphysical texts, this one manages to be highly accessible to a lay reader. It does not serve the book or the reader's understanding for me to waste a lot of paper or screen real estate explaining it. It is well worth reading. It can be readily grasped. The reading technique he advocates can be applied to both the Waite/Colman-Smith deck and others. I enthusiastically recommend

*Kabbalistic Tarot* as the primary reference book for anyone wishing to begin his study of the Waite/Colman-Smith deck. Krafchow has written a book that contributes to the understanding of tarot and Qabalah and lays groundwork for further exploration.

### **Oracles of the Dead, Robert Temple**

(Destiny Books, 2005, 480pp, \$19.95)



Robert Temple's *Oracles of the Dead* examines ancient techniques for predicting the future. In the first half of the book, Temple focuses on techniques of the ancient Greeks and Romans. The focus is on Oracles ("underworld" passages through which a seeker traveled to attend a séance with a medium/priestess) and divination through examining animal entrails. The second half explores the I Ching and its similarity to naturally occurring cell structures and physics theories. There is a wide range of ground to cover here, and in reading Temple's work, I was alternately stimulated and frustrated.

The opening section, in which the author himself explores the Oracle of the Dead at Baia, Italy, carries narrative force and intrigue. The author is part of a discovery team that uncovers one of the central oracles of the ancient world. Temple's combination of archeology, history, theory, first person experience and imagination work together well. He carries the reader along on his adventure. He succeeds in suggesting to the reader what the experience of oracular divination was like for the ancient querent.

Temple expands the scope of his study here to include other famous Oracles, such as the one at Delphi, and explores what the value of the oracle's riddle statements was. He also makes a foray into the significant role that courier birds may have played in accounting for the oracle's accuracy. Temple both debunks many of the so-called metaphysical powers of the ancient sages, while at the same time paying them respect.

Temple clearly understands that the value of a riddle is to motivate the client/querent to think outside the box about his situation and perhaps realize a new means of personal/community evolution. He is also aware of slight of hand techniques that many shamans continue to employ. His position as a scholar leads him to perhaps overly emphasize the magnitude of such tricks in their relationship to the total experience. Still his admiration for many of the underlying values expressed by oracular communication prevents him from disregarding its value.

Indeed, one of the most admirable qualities about Temple is that he is willing to get his clothes and hands wet. When he examines extispicy (the examination of animal entrails for divination), he jumps right in and examines a lamb's liver after slaughter. The insights he achieves in doing so go a long way to explaining the value that such divinatory practice had. It gives Temple credibility.

The first half of the book holds together very well. There are some excesses in the Temple's tendency to get sidetracked by providing too much information on a seemingly tangential subject. It does not detract substantially here. The author's asides and occasional proclamations establish him as being very personable. It makes the reader his companion on his investigation. His investigation of Greek and Roman ancient divinatory practices could well stand as a book in its own right.

Temple goes on to examine ancient Chinese practices. His work here does not parallel the structure of the first half, and there is not a lot of comparison and contrasts made between East and West. Temple examines the development of the I Ching and its similarity to cellular structures and ultimately the shape of events themselves. He provides an excellent introduction to the I Ching and its divinatory formula. His observations form what is both the most intriguing and unsatisfying dimension of *Oracles of the Dead*.

Temple rigorously describes how the I Ching developed from the technique of using oracle bones. Oracle bones revealed their subtle meaning through the angles at which cracks formed when the bones were heated. This leads to a lengthy discourse on how hexagonal lattice

constructs exist in cellular structures and thus underpin the foundation of physical reality itself. After all, is not physical matter an integral factor in the formation of events the affect it

Temple writes:

What I propose is that events which are in the process of changing drastically, of coming to fruition—of giving birth, as it were – manifest similar connect links with “event –cells” far distant as well as near, and that some geometrical or structural “crystallizations” occur when this happens. Such forces may possibly affect material object with the “event-fields” in which they are operating, leading to cracking or other phenomena of that kind. And I believe we cannot rule out that “event-fields” may influence physical processes or material objects such as the sorting of yarrow stalks [the traditional medium to cast the I-Ching] or the cracking of bones and shells by heat. In other words, there may well be a thoroughly respectable and scientific basis for even frequent accuracy of traditional Chinese divinatory techniques.

The “off” and “on” configuration of the cell gap junctions remind of the “off” and “on” results in Chinese divination.

Temple elaborates on the resemblance between the crack formations, cell patterns and event structures. He creates a branch-like model to illustrate the formation of real life events. Where he does not succeed is in integrating his model for higher event structures with the practical example of an I-Ching reading. This made me feel greatly short-changed.

On one hand, I’m reluctant to criticize any author who makes me want more. Temple makes progress in enhancing the understanding and

ultimate value of divination by relating a divinatory system to physical reality. (In a way that is something an experienced diviner grasps without elaborate scientific analysis.) On the other hand, I think that Temple has very worthwhile ideas here that deserve better representation.

Temple's tendency to digress gets in the way here. He goes to enormous lengths to describe the contribution of little known scientists to the study of cell structure. From a religious perspective, I realize that one must pay tribute to one's ancestors, especially at those moments in history when their names may be lost to future generations. However, Temple is working out a complicated line of reasoning. The subject matter is necessarily dense. As a writer, I have learned that the best tactic to employ when trying to explain something so daunting is to keep the writing as straight forward as possible with little if any interruption. I think Temple would have been better to include some of the historical background in the generous appendices at the back of the book.

Furthermore, the book really seemed to end mid sentence. Now this worked for D.H. Lawrence in a work of fiction, but I really expected Temple to pull it all together with a practical demonstration of how his theories would actually be reflected in an actual I-Ching reading (heck, even a fictitious I-Ching Reading.)

I formed the impression that Temple wrote at the same time that he formed his theory. The writing style occasionally incorporates some of his witty and salient asides that made him a welcome guide during the first half of the book. In small amounts, these give the reader pause before approaching more demanding sections of the text. Here, they get in the way and the course does not seem well planned out. The digressions cloud the argument, and I had the distinct feeling he stopped writing when he had reached a point of mental exhaustion.

This in no way is meant to argue that *Oracles of the Dead* is not worth your time to read. I enjoyed coming back to it some months later to write this review. It is my sincere hope that in the future Temple will write a more clear study of the I Ching in relationship to his higher event

structure. His argument carries weight and deserves a more lucid expression.

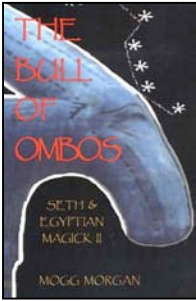
**God, Jr.** Dennis Cooper

(Black Cat, 2005, 163pp, \$12.00)



I find I am either captivated by a Dennis Cooper book or am left indifferent. *God, Jr.* is really a departure from Cooper's usual themes of lost drifting teens and serial sadists. The writing is, as one has come to expect from Cooper's novels, terse and impeccable. *God, Jr.* focuses on a father, Jim, grappling with the loss of his son in an automobile accident that leaves his father crippled. In an attempt to deal with his grief, Jim embarks on building a monument based on one of his son's drawings. He soon spirals down into the same marijuana-clouded space that had shrouded his son away from his parents. In an attempt to fathom the secret of his son and the mysterious meaning of his artwork, Jim begins playing his son's video games and quickly shuts withdraws from his wife and the rest of the world around him. This is a sort of "adult" book for Cooper, different from his other works. There is no overt abuse, no squaller, no degradation, no murder. This is a Cooper novel most surely and does take on themes of loss and de-evolution that run through his other works. But here Cooper turns himself toward a family and the impact the loss of a child has on it. The tearing apart of the husband and wife as they both wrestle with dealing with the devastation of their lives. This may be a small book, more of a novella, but it is not lacking in debth.

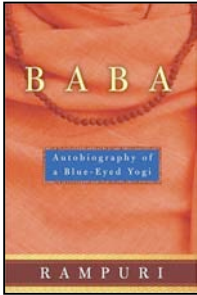
**The Bull of Ombos: Seth & Egyptian Magick II**, Mogg Morgan  
(Mandrake of Oxford, 2005, 356pp, £13.99)



The publication of a book devoted to the Egyptian deity Seth (aka Set) is a rare enough event even in the rarified halls of academia. The publication of a modern magickal text focusing on Seth is even rarer. Despite the important role Seth played in the history of magick—his frequent appearances in the magical papyri of the Hermetic period—few modern texts have taken a serious look at the enigmatic god. This is not all too surprising, given the short-shrift and a good dose of bad PR both in antiquity and also in the Victorian mis-interpretations of the early Egyptologists. Two other modern texts come immediately to mind: Don Webb’s short treatise *Seven Faces of Darkness* and Mr. Morgan’s earlier work *Tankhem*. Mr. Morgan is an amateur Egyptologist who has long maintained an interest in the maligned figure of Seth. *The Bull of Ombos* begins with the 19<sup>th</sup> century discovery of an ancient city near Naqada, Egypt. The city proved to be the capital of the earliest Egyptian state. The lost city was known to the Greeks as Ombos, the Citadel of Seth. Once ruled by the Hidden God the site had been left to be swallowed by the sands of the desert—the image of the god transformed through later layers of Egyptian power and politics. As Mr. Morgan notes that most of the knowledge discovered at Ombos was quickly reburied in academic libraries. *Bull of Ombos* delves into these forbidden areas. Mr. Morgan painstakingly puts together the intricacies of early Sethian worship and the role the god played in the Egyptians’ daily lives. He does not shy away from analyzing the more disturbing suggestions of previous archeological conclusions—even hints of cannibalism. From the scant clues available, the author has produced a detailed and intricate portrait of Seth that is at the same time very applicable to the modern Sethian. Mr. Morgan also provides retellings of the key Seth-related stories as appendix material—a welcome supplement to the text.

**Baba: Autobiography of a Blue-Eyed Yogi, Rampuri**

(Bell Tower, 2005, 243pp, \$23.00)



*Baba* tells the story of a sixties drop-out who journeys to India and is transformed into a Hindu renunciate. The young man sets out on a personal pilgrimage trying to find himself amidst his own myths of spiritual India. Early on he meets another western seeker (spiritual tourist). This fellow traveler points him in the direction of Hari Puri Baba, an English-speaking guru. Hari Puri was a yogi in the ancient tradition of the Renunciates of the Ten Names. The young traveler eventually takes initiation from Hari Puri and thus begins a complex adventure both within an ancient spiritual tradition and within himself. The youth became Rampuri and began his discipleship. Very quickly, he comes face to face with the harsh reality of being an outsider in a closed spiritual culture. Rampuri touchingly retells of the mysterious death of his guru. This singular event puts the traveler on a mission. By the 1980's Rampuri has founded his own ashram and begun to fulfill the course he began to walk when he left the West over a decade previous. The author does a fine job capturing and conveying hints of the smells and sights of India. His description of the *mela* is superb. Ultimately, this is still one person's journey and is not always easily universalized. There are moments where the reader is left wishing for more depth. All in all this is a fascinating story of the quest for spiritual India.