

Intro

The North Atlantic is the ocean most ringed with civilization, but it remains a completely wild thing. We have overfished parts, spilled oil in it, dumped generations of trash into it, and traversed it for centuries, and it still contains treasures and surprises. All the world's oceans are connected, but each piece retains individual characteristics. The North Atlantic, bounded by ice at the poles and the equator, contains multitudes.

Even as it remains the most viewed, studied and traversed, it is also one of the most feared. Plimsoll marks show the safe loading for ships carrying cargo and passengers - the most restrictive mark is for the North Atlantic -- because of the storms, possibly, or because of the density of shipping across it. Whatever the underlying reason, the basis is respect for the ocean.

The tarot of the North Atlantic explores the flora and fauna of a body of water that has mattered to me, in all its moods, for all of my life.

I have taken some liberties with the iconography of the tarot but I have worked to stay close to the emotions and connotations the cards have for me. Included in the descriptions of the cards are some scraps of the oceanography to expand on the images.

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| Major Arcana

Fool - a puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) at the rocky edge of an island, stepping into the air

Puffins are small, pelagic birds that come ashore in spring to nest in holes on rocky islands offshore. Their nesting range stretches from the northern coast of Maine north to Greenland and Iceland and across the ocean to Scotland. They are comically ungainly on land, but strong swimmers and fliers. When they launch themselves from their burrows, they start running towards the ocean as fast as possible, and launch themselves into the air. If they flap hard enough, they fly. If they don't flap hard enough, they swim. Either way, their journey has begun.

The fool starts their journey with one step and another, each step taking them more or less confidently into the unknown, whatever happens, they can cope but it may not be graceful - Go boldly forward into the future

I Magician - an octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*) near its lair, tentacles entwined, shows the suits of shells, bones, feathers, and stones

Vulgar octopuses (or octopodes [oc-TOP-oh-dees] but not octopi(e) because it is a word of Greek roots and not Latin) are a wide ranging species, with many interesting and slightly uncomfortable traits. They are clever, colorful, and capable of fitting through tiny spaces. They can solve puzzles and open jars, and slip their way down a corridor to throw a bad shrimp at a researcher. The only reason they do not rule the world is that they do not live long enough to transmit knowledge across generations.

A mastery of the objects at hand. Deep skill through practice and cleverness.

II High Priestess - a giant manta ray (*Manta birostris* - "two nosed manta") swoops downward in shallow sunlit waters:

Sometimes called "the delicate queen of the lagoon," manta rays are enormous filter feeders. (Note: only vegetarians get this big. See also all the Balenidae and whale sharks.) They inhabit mostly tropical and subtropical waters, though they sometimes travel into temperate water in summer. The females lay eggs which they keep and hatch within their bodies, giving birth to a small number of live pups after 6-8 weeks. This is called aplacental viviparity, a strategy used by some other rays and sharks to protect very small young from predation.

A guiding spirit for warm and shallow waters, an enormous but gentle presence. Be polite, listen carefully.

III Empress - a blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*) dives into the deeps, having surfaced for a breath

The largest animal ever to live on Earth, up to 100 feet and over 200 tons, the blue whale is a giant in flux, relying on tons of krill and plankton filtered from the surrounding ocean rather than chasing and biting their prey.

Growing all things. Energy, accomplishments, life.

IV Emperor - a humpback whale (*Megaptera novaenglia* = long winged New Englander) breaches joyfully, flippers akimbo, before splashing back to the sea:

Also a filter feeder, the humpback whale is better known for their songs. No one knows for certain the purpose of the songs, but there are regional dialects, songs change from year to year, and individuals have distinct and recognizable phrasing. While both males and females make noises, the males sing the long songs. There is speculation that the songs help individual whales explore new territory, as whales will change their song as they enter new territory.

Advice, wisdom, authority. A song of exploration.

V Hierophant - a horseshoe crab (*Limulus polyphemus*) is returned to shallow water

Horseshoe crabs are living fossils, existing unchanged in the fossil record for 445 million years. They carry unusual blood. Copper based hemocyanin rather than iron based hemoglobin carries the oxygen in their bodies. Their blood is collected for its amoebocytes, the antibodies within it. From these amoebocytes coagulum is produced, which is used to screen vaccines and medical equipment for contamination before use.

"I am the key to every lock." Their blood unlocks secrets and their ancient body plan has carried them through 450 million years. There is strength in tradition, in refining a process chosen early.

VI Lovers - a pair of eider ducks (*Somateria mollissima*) swim together, having chosen each other as mates for the upcoming season

The largest ducks in the northern hemisphere, eider ducks are sociable in and out of mating season. Females return to the location of their birth. Matrilineal groups of birds engage in social rearing of their young, laying eggs in related female's nests, and sharing care of hatched chicks. Eider ducks chose a single mate for the season, but return to social territories.

Giddy falling towards another - person, idea, project - and preparations to choose that over another, and dedicate some time

VII Chariot - a blue shark (*Prionace glauca*) swims through deep water

Blue sharks are some of the fastest sharks known. Slender and powerful, they cover an enormous range. Large eyes make their vision more acute in darker or deeper water. They are also viviparous, birthing between 4 and 100 pups after 9 to 12 months' gestation. While all sharks require movement, this particular shark implies strength and controlled speed as well.

Straight ahead forward motion, with momentum. Don't stop. Pay attention.

VIII Justice - a harbor seal noses the skeleton of a wreck

At a fundamental level there is no justice in the ocean. There is cooperation, coevolution, symbiosis, parasitism, trophic levels, and food webs. There are also hazards humans, as a species, have introduced, including ship strikes, net entanglements, and eating things you think are your jellyfish dinner and are actually deflated helium balloons. All species in the oceans suffer impacts from humans, but some we are willing to contemplate and mitigate. Harbor seals are an example of a species we have served fairly well. Once we stopped hunting them for fur and meat, or as nuisance species co-preying on cod, the populations have bounced back and as a species they are healthy and widespread.

Only your actions provide a basis for determining justice.

IX Hermit - a polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*) stands at the edge of ice floating on ocean, looking towards Polaris

Generally solitary except during breeding season, polar bears live throughout the Arctic, relying on ice-dependent seals for most of their diet. They inhabit the edges of the ice, and are actually classified as a marine mammal. They are simultaneously an indicator of arctic environmental health and a totem of the arctic, in the same uneasy fashion that they are beautiful, adorable, and deadly.

Take time for self-examination. Travel carefully while you are alone. Look for what sustains you. Bring back new knowledge.

X Wheel - an illustration of the swing of the tides

The tide moves constantly; it is never actually still. Pulled by the moon, shaped by the basin containing the water, tides are both present everywhere, and similar nowhere. Every coast or shoreline has a distinct tidal pattern as unique as a thumbprint.

This is continuous change, the liminal space between here and there, up and down, all the shades of nuance between high tide and low.

XI Strength - a hawksbill sea turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) swims down, away from the surface

Spending most of their time migrating to or from nesting sites from Florida into the Caribbean, hawksbill sea turtles eat sponges and some corals. They prefer shallow warm waters when they are not journeying.

The strength to start and complete a long journey. Strength to persist with effort.

XII Suspended One - a jellyfish (*Pelagia noctiluca* - night-light of the open ocean) hangs in the water column

It looks helpless, at the mercy of wind, wave, and current. However it has control over one thing: where to rest in the water column. It can move towards the surface, or deeper into the ocean. This persistence will carry it through storms and catastrophes, in some cases with less trauma than a mad struggle to avoid them.

Suspended, you can only wait. Yield to the current moment. Eventually a path will become clear. Until that moment, only existence is possible.

XIII Death - whale fall: a whale dies of natural causes and the body drifts to the bottom of the open ocean

A whale might live for 50 to 75 years, gathering and using resources from the open ocean. When it dies, its body becomes the basis for a progression of ecosystems, spanning 50 to 70 years, releasing those resources back into the ocean for use in the cycle of life.

Change is coming. There is nothing you can do about it. Something good will come of it. It is ok to mourn a loss, even when it opens space for new and wonderful things.

XIV Temperance - a seahorse (*Hippocampus erectus*)

Seahorses mate for life, and do a courtship ritual at the beginning of every day. During breeding season, the female lays her eggs in the male's pouch, and he tends them until they hatch. The babies are "born," emerging from his pouch into the ocean, where they start imitating their parents. After hatching, the parents replay their courtship ritual. Temperance because of the care they take of each other, and how they as a species have found this cooperative way to reproduce that is so gentle on both of them. To me, Lovers is about that first beginning swoop of feeling, the pull and heat of starting something new, while this is more about finding compromises that ultimately serve everyone, not treating relationships as zero-sum.

Look for ways to merge and balance your connection to another or to a project. Seek moderation

XV Devil - a lobster (*Homarus americanus*) looks out from a crevice between rocks on the bottom of the ocean

A rope twists down from the surface. Shells and other things surround the outside of the lobster's home. Derided as a trash species and fed to prisoners in the early years of our country, lobsters are scavengers and omnivores. Through scarcity and clever marketing they have come to represent luxury rather than poverty. They are caught using traps that were once assumed to be unidirectional. A lobster was thought to enter a trap but be unable to leave it. Research has shown that lobsters treat a trap as a snack bar and retreat, entering and leaving as hunger and social pressure are balanced, riding to the surface only if the pot is pulled while they are inside.

Bondage, especially to luxury, but also self, to comfort of body and comfort in thinking. Chains removable with thought, introspection. Think more, want less.

XVI Tower - an iceberg is seen at hand, two thirds of it not entirely visible beneath the surface of the ocean

You must change your course.

Your previous course is no longer an option.

XVII Star - a sea anemone (*Condylactis gigantea*) holds fast to surrounding rocks, tentacles waving gently in the wash of the waves

Anemones are sessile (attached to an unmoving base), benthic (living on the bottom) organisms that manage to distinguish between creatures living within its shelter and the things it scavenges or catches to eat. Protecting the commensals - cleaner fish and shrimp species - each anemone acts as a central station for cleaning.

Hold fast. Be hopeful. Guidance can be found. Be gentle.

XVIII Moon - shining between two islands, across the water, the moon paints a treacherous pathway across the sea

The moon rolls through cycles like the tides, influencing them. The moon is never still, never stable, always in flux. Those changes drive and influence the tides, and our emotions as well. Things seen by moonlight are more intense, or more hidden.

Use intuition to make distinctions in what you can see. Pay attention to what you cannot see.

XIX Sun - the sun drives all the processes on the planet:

Starting with tides and winds, the sun is the engine of life. It supports the base of the food web with plankton. It warms the ocean to drive the big currents that send warm tropical water to the poles. It sends cold nutrient-laden water from the poles towards the equator. Without the sun, earth would be a barren rock, covered in ice. With the sun, it is a blue and green cloud-wreathed marble rolling through the universe.

The sun drives growth and provides energy. It illuminates the world. The golden light blesses all it touches.

XX Judgement - Cod (*Gadus morhua*), including present stocks, ghost of past stocks, and their young

Cod are a population we have not done well by, looking at the depleted cod stocks on Georges and Grand banks. The small number of fish near the top represent the percentage of the original stocks left. If we are to be judged as a species, it must be by how well we have looked after our planet. To me this is symbolized by our ability to manage these fish that we once believed to be inexhaustible.

At some point, your actions will be judged. Judgement will be served on your actions, not on your intentions. Transformation, resurrection, heeding a call to action.

XXI World - a kelp forest (*Laminaria* sp.)

A kelp forest is to the sub-tidal zone precisely what a temperate forest is to the terrestrial zone, a full ecosystem providing food, shelter and opportunities for mating and rearing young that are not available in the open ocean. It is, in an ecosystem, a microcosm for the entire world.

Just as the world is round, things go around, and come back around. Balance, fulfillment, and achievement.

Minor Arcana

Shells

The Shells represent the element of water. They bring messages about emotions, about situations that are fluid, shifting and reflective.

Ace - A single shell stitched to the ghost of another shell, the ace brings happiness overflowing, bringing further happiness around it.

II - Two heads are better than one. Sorrow shared is halved; joy shared is doubled. Commitment to a partnership in business, in life, or in love.

III - Power of three. Stability of a triangle. Friendship, community, and connection.

IV - Boredom, apathy and missed opportunities.

V - Things are changing, and not the way you expected or anticipated. It is ok to grieve the loss of a set of dreams.

VI - Childhood or childish memories, nostalgia, light-hearted foolishness.

VII - Illusion, wishful thinking, groundless optimism.

VIII - Escape, withdrawal. Taking away, but only the bare necessities. Traveling lightly away.

IX - Self-satisfaction, solitary repleteness, individual fulfillment.

X - Fulfillment of wishes and hopes. Not a stable moment, but a happy one.

Paqe/Coastal - Romantic or creative beginnings, synchronicity.

Knighl/Near shore - Romantic, charming and flashy.

Queen/Offshore - Emotional security. Calm, compassionate.

Kinl/Pelaqic - Emotional control, balance.

Bones

The Bones represent the element of fire. They bring messages about the body and the heart, and about moving through the world.

Ace - Inspiration, creation, potential. An invitation to start NOW.

II - Future planning, but not too deep. Decisions, progress.

III - Expansion, preparation, foresight. Be open to moving out of your comfort zone.

IV - Celebration and harmony, within home and community.

V - Disagreement, conflict, competition.

VI - Public recognition, credit for accomplishments. Possibly not yours.

VII - Challenge, competition, perseverance

VIII - Forced choices, speedy change, travel or movement.

IX - Test of faith, resilience, persistence (or pig-headed?)

X - Burden, stress. Put down one thing before you drop it all.

Paige/Coastal - Enthusiasm, free spirited exploration, heedless.

Knight/Near shore - Impatience, impulsiveness. Active but easily frustrated.

Queen/Offshore - Queen of action. Exuberant, demanding.

King/Pelagic - King of action. Trust this guy to lead you well. He has vision, but also ruthlessness.

Feathers

The Feathers represent the element of air. They bring messages about thoughts and the intellect, and about motivations and impulses.

Ace — Raw power, breakthrough, mental clarity.

II - Indecision, too many choices, information overload.

III - Sorrow, separation, rejection. Things causing grief.

IV - Contemplation, rest.

V - Intellectual loss, defeat, or betrayal.

VI - Transition or rite of passage. Hard now, better later.

VII - Betrayal, deceit. Lying liars.

VIII - Stuck, trapped. But change is available. Change will take effort.

IX - Regrets, defeats, hauntings. The long dark tea time of the soul.

X - Betrayal, utter defeat, the end. A nadir. It cannot get worse.

Page/Coastal - Curious, restless, energetic.

Knight/Near shore - Opinionated and talkative, compulsive, hasty.

Queen/Offshore - Clear thinker, perceptive, organized, independent

King/Pelagic - intellectual power. Truthful, but can be manipulative or overpowering.

Stones

The Stones represent the element of earth. They bring messages about material objects and material concerns, and encouragement to stay grounded.

I - New made manifest. Opportunities, prosperity.

II - Adaptability and balance. Juggling objects, projects, people, and time.

III - Learning through teamwork, collaboration, projects undertaken.

IV - Possessive, controlled. Security through locks and guards.

V - Isolation, insecurity. Help is available, but you must ask.

VI - Generosity, charity, sharing.

VII - Profit and reward from perseverance.

VIII - Skilled work, emotional engagement, improving quality.

IX - Culmination, gratitude, luxury.

X - Planned investments pay off. Harvest, inheritance.

Paqe/Coastal - New financial opportunity, new work/project.

Knight/Near shore - Conservative, methodical routine, efficient.

Queen/Offshore - Practical, homey. Provides security and comfort.

King/Pelagic - Abundance with control. Security through planning rather than luck.

Afterword