

Book Review: *Sowa's Ark: An Enchanted Bestiary* Published by Chronicle Books, San Francisco; 1996

This book is a collection of illustrations by Michael Sowa. This artist's drawings are addictive, containing images that tell strange tales.

His pictures of animals caught in improbable and amusing situations open the doors of comment and discussion. One illustration, entitled "Laptop sheep", is of five sheep on a green hill. Four of the five sheep are white, while the fifth sheep is black. But colour is not the only distinction between the sheep, the four white sheep are using laptop computers while the black sheep is watching a television with a white sheep on on the screen. There are plenty of racial criticisms in this drawing; however, Sowa makes the picture general enough so that many interpretations can be deciphered.

His style can be described as a combination of far side comic strips in Norman Rockwell paintings. Many of his pictures are dark, but quite humorous. One picture is entitled "Happy Easter" and it shows a huge, pissed off Easter bunny chasing a man and his daughter who is carrying a big blue egg.

Another picture is of a huge gramophone on a stage and is situated in the front of the picture. This gramophone is pointed towards the audience which happens to be all dogs. The dogs are the same except for two, in the third row there is a german shepperd, and in the first row there is a pug dog. All the dogs are staring intently at the gramophone. The picture is entitled "Their master's voice".

Sowa uses warped images to create odd impressions, which consequently forces the viewer to decipher the message of the artist. If you are looking for an interesting Christmas present for someone who you never know what to buy, this book could definitely be a winner.

A Brief Introduction to TAROT

by Joshua Deacons

The oldest Tarot cards to survive to the present were produced in the Fifteenth Century in Europe. The card designs fascinate artists, art historians and investigators into the occult, as the power of the images lies in intricate symbols woven together in specific patterns. Tarot cards resemble regular playing cards with certain additions. Tarot decks include four court cards instead of the Jack-Queen-King in regular decks. In addition, the Tarot incorporates the Trumps, or Major Arcana.

The major arcana incorporate twenty two cards, numbered from zero to 21. The images include symbolic or allegorical information distilled from larger bodies of knowledge and hidden within the pictures. The symbols are related to the deepest spiritual and emotional meanings we can imagine - meanings which are shared, sometimes even across cultures.

The attributes of the four suits vary from source to source. Some assign the elements - fire, earth, air and water - to them; some say they represent the virtues - justice, fortitude, faith and

charity; still others assign geographical directions or locations to the suits. Certainly the division into four is one which occurs in all cultures and which Carl Jung saw as significant in the individuation process.

The Tarot used as an oracle allows one to ask a question, deal the cards in a certain way, and extract an answer from the images and symbols. Part of this ability comes from familiarity with the symbols. Another element of a successful reading lies in the ability to intuitively select the proper meaning for the particular question from among the many possibilities.

Many designs have developed over the years. Yet the cards retain the basic meanings. Different reading styles are designed to answer different questions. Often the answer to a yes/no question is elusive, while questions about how to approach a problem are more revealing. Even if you are not at all interested in the oracle itself, you may find the artistic design of the cards worth investigation. Try a couple of readings to see what you think. You may be surprised at the relevance of a seemingly arbitrary card selection.

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