
Sacramancy

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Sacramancy

An sacramancy journal by
DOUG HOPPES

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Evolution of Sacramancy

Like all fantasy illustrators, I wanted to create an art book. However, I didn't just want to create the traditional art book, full of pretty pictures and some text that discussed the painting or my process. You know that book. You look at it for a little while and then put it away forever.

I wanted to do something different.

On my fourth attempt at writing the book, I noticed that the prints of my paintings scattered around my desk triggered the idea of a story. That was the basis for my first book, *Selik's Road: Shadows*. As I laid down more and more prints, I saw my main character's journey and what would happen to him. After a while, I thought I was done, having written most of the story.

Uh... yeah... my wife didn't think so.

She said the book ended too quickly. According to her, and she was right, it had started well, but just wrapped up way too fast. So, back to the drawing board. I thought...and thought...and thought...and realized I had no more ideas. However, as I reread the first part of the book, it occurred to me to incorporate more of my paintings to complete the story.

I gathered all the unused prints and rearranged them at

random. Some new ideas emerged, and I knew what would happen for the rest of the story. I soon had an art book with large full-color illustrations, but it wasn't your typical art book. The overall arching story linked all the illustrations into a cohesive fantasy world that I could expand on.

Even after finishing the first book, when I tried to come up with fresh ideas, I kept rehashing everything I had just watched or read. I was relying on other people's ideas and not developing my own, and I couldn't come up with a new twist or an original concept. Yet by turning my paintings into card-sized images, I could create my stories wherever I went—and help others by making them available to everybody.

That was the moment the Sacramancy decks were created.

Beyond A Writing Tool

Several months later, I was scheduled to attend my first gaming convention—GenCon. I spent the first couple of hours trying to sell my decks as writing tools, but that was a disaster. People loved the art, but no one was interested in it as a writing tool. Then a casual conversation with a customer changed my entire focus.

She simply asked me, “Can I use these in my D&D game?”

Such a simple question. But they always start that way.

I had been playing Dungeons & Dragons since the late 1970s. I remember my friends and I gathered around a table, playing our favorite characters, fighting monsters, and reading *the Monster Manuals* and the premade campaigns. There were so many stories in that game, and, even better, it was within a world that fueled my imagination.

So, when this customer asked me that, I was floored! “Of course!” I said. “Think of the cards as a Deck of Many Things or props. You can also use them to develop new ideas for one-off adventures or full campaigns.”

Smiling, she showed them to her players who were with her and said, “We’re going to have so much fun with these!”

As she left with several decks, I wished her and her players fun adventures.

Several other customers approached my table at the same gaming show and asked if they would work as oracle or tarot cards. Now, I have little experience using them that way, so I asked for more information. They discussed layouts and how the meaning of the images helps one understand something going on in their life. The more I listened, the more I realized they had tapped into another use I had never considered.

You see, every painting has a story and a personal meaning. I’m just an average guy, but I understand these meanings are

the same situations everybody goes through. When I look at my paintings and remember their stories, I remember the situations and how I dealt with them.

To customers interested in oracle readings, I explained that the cards and images were designed to help individuals understand their true selves and express that understanding, which was exactly what oracle cards were meant to do.

Later, a shaman and another intuitive said that it was called shadow work reading. They talked about it in terms of understanding your dark and light sides.

When I told them I saw random shapes that told me a story (or a meaning) and that the story refined the shapes, they said I was a channeler. They were excited to hear that people teared up and cried at my shows when they read a story that connects with them.

“That is why you are a channeler,” one of them said. “You aren’t really creating the painting and story. You are responding to what the universe is telling you.”

Now, I don’t know about that, but I do know that about one to three people do cry or tear up at a show. Maybe there is something to what they are saying.

At other conventions, I found that customers also used them for creative writing classes, therapy tools, and many other projects. It was amazing. Some told me stories about how they helped a particular student or got some students

interested in writing.

I will say though that my favorite use of the cards is when therapists use them with PTSD patients or inner-city school kids. That field is called drama therapy, and they use the cards to guide the conversations with their patients.

The cards went far beyond my first simple idea as a writing aid.

Being True to Yourself

So, what is Sacramancy? Sacramancy is a way to help you develop new stories and ideas while being true to yourself. The images on the cards are designed to provide you with enough information about what is happening, but not enough to tell you the whole story. That way, the ideas and stories reflect who you are and how you think.

Think of it this way: If I ask you for an idea for a story or a situation, you will do the same thing you've always done or what someone else has done or liked. You are not being true to yourself. You are a result of what those around you want. Not what you like.

How do the Sacramancy decks help? As you lay the cards in a random order, as mentioned earlier, you will begin to see

the basic thread of a story or an idea emerge. That reflects you. Not your friends. Not the latest movie you saw. You. It's how you see the world.

That is Sacramancy—ideas created from you and a reflection on how you see the world. This is the first step on a journey to become who you truly are, rather than what anyone else says you should be.

How to Use the Decks

Now, what if you're not creative? How does that help you? Good question.

The reality is that everybody is creative. We all have our own ideas. Some are good. Some are not. However, creativity is a muscle. Just like people who have large and defined muscles, it's a matter of training and exercise to get to the level of many “creative” people.

But before we start using the decks, remember: **Do not compare your stories or ideas against others.**

Too many times, people give up because they think their story or idea isn't good enough. They compare themselves to best-selling authors or screenwriters, and that's not fair. Those people have trained for years to get where they are.

You can also get there!

It's about being true to yourself and showing the world who you are. It's a good idea to see what others are doing because they may have an interesting idea you can incorporate into your use of the decks, but don't compare yourself to them. Please don't give up because you think you can never be as good as they are.

Now, let's get started!

Shadow Work Oracle Reading

You've heard this term before—shadow work. Just what is it?

Shadow work is a form of oracle reading that does not focus on what will happen in the future but on what is currently affecting your life. Within each of us, there is a light side and a shadow side, the darker aspects of our inner selves that we often prefer not to acknowledge. Using traditional oracle cards, a shadow work intuitive can discern inner issues and find ways to resolve them.

Now, this isn't the same as tarot cards. Similar but not the same. Unlike tarot, oracle cards are more fluid and free-form. Tarot cards have a defined set of cards, and each

card's meaning is static and the same across all decks. The meanings of oracle cards are defined by the card set, but they can be altered based on the intuitive feelings of the reader.

The power of shadow work oracle reading lies in helping a person understand and illuminate the darker aspects of their life. Through this understanding, they can face their issues head-on and create a path to resolve their problems. It's about transformation, not quick fixes. This leads them to self-reliance and, hopefully, a more joyful life.

Do I believe in this? Yes and no.

Let me share a concept about how I view life and my place within it.

Imagine yourself standing in the middle of a river, and the water flows around you. As you closely look around, you'll see a lot of floating branches, flotsam, leaves, and debris rushing past you. You'll be interested in some and not others.

You'll also notice that everything is floating past you at a different rate, and parts of the river will run faster than others. You'll see quiet areas, where everything is calm, and nothing changes. And you'll see a lot of foaming water, where change is happening too quickly for you to see it all.

When you wish to obtain something interesting, you must decide whether to stay where you are and hope it comes to

you or move to get it. If you venture too far out, you may get swept up in the rapid part of the river. You may also arrive too late.

Life is like standing in the middle of a large river. It is moving around you, and as you watch opportunities appear, you must decide: Do you wade through the river to grasp that opportunity, or do you stand still and watch it float by?

Every day, you face opportunities and challenges. Your current situation and how you view the world determine how you react to those situations.

Here's a real-world example:

In my late twenties, I went on vacation to Banff, Canada. I had the opportunity to go fly-fishing with a guide, and since I'd never done that before, I was pretty excited to try it. The guide took me to a small lake near a road. It was okay. Not that exciting. We got to talking, and he understood that the fishing was nothing to write home about. He suggested a favorite fishing spot he thought would be more interesting.

Well, I was game.

He asked if it was okay if we did a little bushwhacking to get to the area. Now, that sounded a lot more interesting! So, we headed off with our gear to the new location. Over rocks and fallen trees, he led me to an area with a fast-moving river. We both looked at the water and realized it was probably chest deep.

Now, I could have said, “No. I don’t think so. Let’s go back.” But I was young, healthy, and confident that I could cross the river. We both grabbed some tall, thick walking poles and made our way across.

And guess what? Nothing bad happened.

We fished for the day and then headed back across the same river. We caught no fish, but that was my fondest memory of Banff.

Besides being an actual river, how does this relate to the river analogy? Well, for many years, I’d never really done anything adventurous. I went to my day job, played sports with my friends, watched TV, and had the same vacations as most people. After that river experience, I realized a lot was missing from my life. In my thirties, I spent more time rock climbing, mountaineering, freelancing, and taking more risks.

I left my secure place in the middle of the slower part of the river because I saw an opportunity and waded out into the faster-moving part. Because I had moved out of my safe place, I could see parts of the river from new vantage points. Afterward, I became more confident in my ability to navigate faster areas and reach new goals and opportunities.

Using the Sacramancy cards as oracle cards works the same way. You can grow and expand your world by seeing where you are and understanding who you are. When you

choose those fresh opportunities, you'll see the world from a new vantage point and grow even more. Plus, you'll be confident you can navigate new situations.

You can use the information from the Sacramancy cards to expand your horizons and take chances on fresh opportunities.

Preparation:

First, find yourself a quiet location and calm your thoughts. Don't worry about what is going on or what you must do.

When you are ready, close your eyes and inhale deeply through your nose. Imagine following that breath throughout your body. Feel it flow into your nostrils, down your throat, and into your chest. Will the breath travel to your arms and legs? As it settles in your fingers and toes, guide the breath to travel back to your core and slowly out through your mouth.

Do this several times until you can feel the world fading away. You'll sense a calmness.

When you're ready, focus on the deck, shuffle it, and draw the card or cards

Here are some suggested layouts to try.

Daily Reflection Layout:



WHAT ASPECT OF YOUR LIFE SHOULD YOU LOOK AT?

The Daily Reflection Layout deals with how to handle daily situations. You can select the card in the morning to control your reaction to what will happen during the day, or you can choose it at the end of the day to see how you could have improved yourself that day.

Shuffle the deck and draw one card from the top. As you shuffle, the important issues will work to the top.

First Card (What aspect of your life should you look at?): This card represents an underlying issue or strength that may affect your life. If the card is an issue, you can figure out ways to resolve it. If the card represents a strength, then you can utilize that strength to enhance your current situation.

The daily card is about understanding and seeing something you are unaware of. In terms of issues, it will not solve the

problem for you. Problem resolution can always be done faster if you understand the root cause.

Besides drawing the daily card, consider Journaling. Keeping a daily journal that records the topmost card and how it relates to you is a great way to see any emerging patterns in your life. Once you see a particular pattern, you can decide whether to continue on that path or make a change.

Dilemma Resolution Layout:



CAUSE



**CURRENT
SITUATION**



RESOLUTION

The dilemma resolution layout is an advanced version of the daily reflection layout. Rather than just identifying the source of the issue, it helps you figure out how to resolve it. You are given some ideas on approaches to take.

Remember: There is no white knight in shining armor

coming to save the day. You won't wake up the next morning and find that someone has fixed everything, and your life will be perfect. Understanding who you are and what you are capable of is the best way to resolve things.

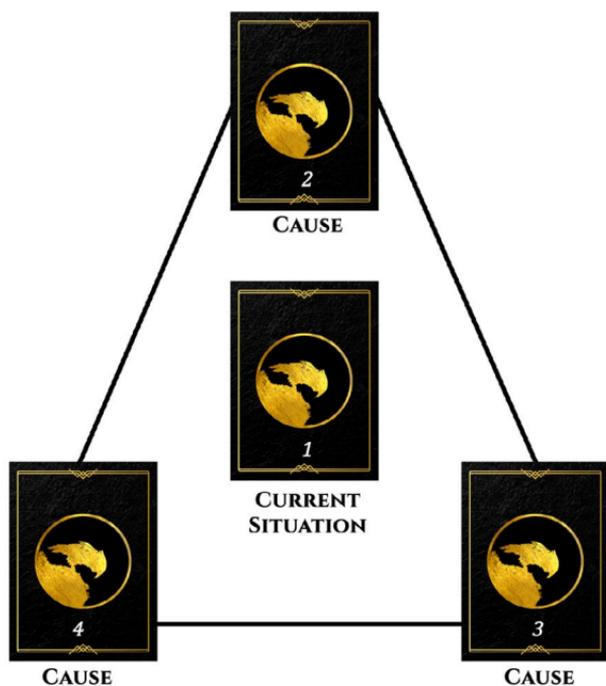
Shuffle the deck and draw three cards from the top. The cards are laid out in the order above.

First Card (Current Situation): This card represents the current situation that worries you. By understanding what is going on, you have a chance of resolving that issue.

Second Card (Cause): This card represents what, in the past, has caused the current situation. The things we struggle with often have their roots in the past. Some minor situations we ignored or thought nothing of. Over time, that unresolved initial problem causes conflict in our lives.

Third Card (Resolution): This card represents how the problem can be solved. The best way to resolve issues is to break the problem down into smaller pieces. Following this card's guidance will help you determine how to approach a possible solution.

Pyramidal Energy Matrix:



The pyramidal energy matrix provides a detailed layout showing how your current situation is influenced by other events in your life. These outside influences may be something that has happened in the past or that you actively know will happen.

Shuffle the deck and draw four cards from the top. The

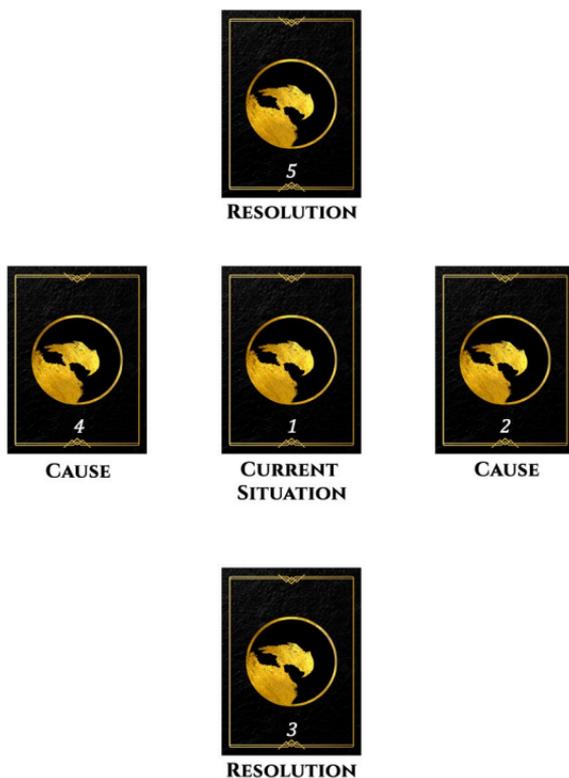
cards are laid out in the order above.

First Card (Current Situation): This card represents what aspect of your life you should look at. This is the most pressing issue you are facing. Think about what is going on and how the image represents that situation. The card will not give hints on how to solve the problem but will allow you to understand your issue.

Second Card (Cause): This card represents a significant action causing your current situation. The action is something you know is on the horizon. You can make plans to deal with that situation here and now rather than just allowing it to happen (if you don't want it to).

Third and Fourth Card (Cause): These cards represent significant actions in the past that caused your current situation. Many things that happen are usually not a result of a single action. They are a group of actions or inactions that combine into an overall problem.

Cross Settlement:



The cross settlement is another detailed layout that helps you understand and resolve your current situation. Like the dilemma resolution layout, it enables you to assess your current situation and identify the cause of the issue.

Additionally, it provides various ways to help you resolve any problems.

Shuffle the deck and draw five cards from the top. The cards are laid out in the order above.

First Card (Current Situation): This card represents the aspect of your life that you should examine. This is the most pressing issue you are facing. Consider what is happening and how the image reflects that situation. The card will not give hints on how to solve the problem, but will allow you to understand your issue.

Second and Fourth Card (Cause): These cards represent significant actions in the past that caused your current situation. Many things that happen are usually not a result of a single action. They are a group of actions or inactions that combine into an overall problem.

Third and Fifth Card (Resolution): These cards give you an idea of how to solve the problem. Like the causes, one answer may not fix everything. If you can approach the situation from multiple areas, you have a better chance of breaking down the problem.

Writing Prompts

At one time or another, every writer is faced with writer's block, and the more you struggle with the problem, the more frustration builds.

Like you, I had that same problem. I just couldn't come up with interesting ideas, but then I turned to my Sacramancy decks. I have a basic technique that I use: the three-card sequence.



**PRINCIPAL
CHARACTER**



**CHANGES FATE
OF CHARACTER**



RESOLUTION

Many of us have heard of the three-act structure for storytelling. The first act is the setup, the second act is the conflict, and the final act is the resolution. I do something very similar for my short stories; for me, each act is around two thousand words. This is how I use the cards:

First Card (First Act): This card shows the story's inciting incident. This is where the story is set up and the main characters are introduced. In addition, for my short stories, I like to get to the point where something happens to my characters that causes them some stress.

Second Card (Second Act): The second card focuses on how the characters deal with the stress created by the first card. This is typically the longest part and accounts for around fifty percent of the story. In this act, I'm focusing on different ways they are trying to get out of their situation and the failures or revelations about why they are in it.

Third Card (Third Act): Naturally, as the final card, this is where the story concludes. I wrap up the story with a plot twist or a final conflict.

Now, if I were writing a long book, I would use the same card structure described above, but have multiple groups of three. For instance, in a long novel, the first act may consist of a total of nine cards (three groups of three cards).

Let's look at an example of how we can use the cards to come up with our own short story!



This story will be somehow related to flowers. Now, what is the purpose of the flower? Is it needed for some special medicine? Is it an opioid that is coveted by the underworld, based on the people approaching that dragon structure in the second image? Who are they, and what are they doing?

The First Card (Left): Cold morning mists wafted over the broken field, and all Sami could do was stare at the lone flower left by the raiders. He didn't know why they had left this particular one, but they did. They had come at night to grab every flower they could, and if they didn't have time to dig one out, they had destroyed it: all but this one. Tears welled in Sami. These were his children. He had nurtured them since they were small seedlings.

The Second Card (Middle): Sami knew what he had to do—to go to the local nursery that provided seeds for all farmers in the surrounding region—but didn't want to do it. He didn't trust them. They had moved in about two

months ago and overtook all the other businesses. Some farmers reported they had been threatened, but for some reason, no one believed them. The only way Sami could restore his farm was to use their seeds, though. He hoped the stories about their tainted seeds weren't true.

The Third Card (Right): The next morning, after Sami had planted the seeds, his special flowers returned. However, each now sported a small skull that leaked foul-smelling mist. As the mist wafted up, he tried to move away but couldn't. Stuck. He just kept staring at the plant. A voice sounded in his head, telling him to plant more. It wanted more. At the local nursery, he found many other farmers with that same dazed look, trying to buy large amounts of seeds for their farms.

This was a simple story structure, but it's about organizing your thoughts when you see the images in their unique order. If you change the order of the cards, you'll have a different story.

Role Playing Game Ideas

I'm an old-school gamer. I started playing Dungeons & Dragons around the late '70s and continued off and on for much of my life. If I wasn't actively playing a game, I was reading the *Monster Manual* or other gaming-related books. The big thing I always noticed about role-playing games was that they all started the same way:

1) You wake up and have no idea where you are or how you got there,

or

2) You visit a king, and he wants you to stop a cult or solve some mysterious disappearances,

or

3) You're searching for a magical item.

The games then typically turn into a hack-and-slash type, where you just fight baddies and collect gold. Really? There is an infinite world of possibilities, and these are the three principal plot lines?

The Sacramancy decks can help you come up with more interesting campaigns. You can use the decks as **a prop or a campaign idea.**

Let's look at how to use them as a **prop**.

Your party enters the room. The room's walls are decorated with various glowing sigils, accompanied by a slight humming echo. The room itself seems to vibrate. The only furnishing is a small table with four cards lying face down.

(The dungeon master places four Sacramancy cards before the players.)



“Chooooooosssssseeeee,” someone whispers. “Chooooosssssseeeee.”

One important point I want to make is that you don't always have to have the drawn card be a monster that the party fights. For instance, imagine if the drawn card summons a creature that can answer one question from the party. Or the card can allow some form of magic that the party can use to help them solve a puzzle in an unfamiliar part of the dungeon. Try to make it more interesting.

The most popular way gamers use the cards is as **campaign generators**. Using the three-card sequence talked about

in the writing prompts section, you can come up with campaign ideas. The beauty is that you don't need to use the specific creatures shown in the cards. Just replace them with representative monsters from the game.

Let's look at an example:



For this campaign, I see a bunch of souls stuck in a tree, some nefarious creature, and a lone cat being solicited by others. The creatures can be anything from the Monster Manual, your own home-brewed monsters, or a monster in the ShadowMyths Biomagy Deck.

What if the villagers are reporting a lost love missing in the night? All they know is that there are reports of a shadow man and a large cat haunting the alleyways. This campaign could be:

The First Card (Left): For many miles, tourists come by to hear the Screaming Tree. Some townspeople say it is a natural phenomenon caused by the gaps between the leaves. It is strange that the leaves never fall and that there seem to be faces in them.

The Second Card (Middle): Nalan is the tree's caretaker and seems to relish the excitement of all the visitors to his unique garden. Although a warm person, he isn't a nice one. Every night, he releases his large cat into town to see if there are new souls to feed the tree.

The Third Card (Right): Rumors that the authorities are "tagging" homeless people with magic symbols to attract a shadowy cat spread. Every night, the cat summons the tagged people, and they disappear. Some people have reported seeing a shadowy figure with a large cat in the same area.

Now, you've got an adventure where the players have to figure out who the shadow man is, why the authorities are tagging people, and how to release the souls, if they can.

Teaching Tool

In the classroom, teachers are always looking for fresh ways to engage their students and encourage class participation. This is especially true in creative writing classes. From the teachers I've spoken with, several have mentioned two methods they use for classroom study: writing prompts and vocabulary lessons.

Writing Prompts: Similar to the writing methods mentioned earlier, provide each student with up to three cards to help them begin their story.

You could also have each student draw a card, and they will write one paragraph about the card to start the story. Next, they will pass their paper to the next student. The next student will add to the story, using their card. At the end of the lesson, each student will have their original page back, and they will see how their story has evolved.

Vocabulary Lesson: Rather than just using an introductory lesson to learn extra vocabulary words, try having them come up with descriptive words based on the cards.

For example, have each student draw a single card. Once all the students have a card, ask them to write down five adjectives and five nouns that describe what they see on their card. After the students have finished writing their

words, collect all the papers. Next, show all the cards to the students, choose one of the papers, and read the adjectives and nouns listed. See if the students can guess what card is being described. Naturally, the person who described the card cannot participate.

Therapy Tools

Like the Rorschach inkblot test, from what I've been told, the therapists help patients discuss what they see in the cards. The primary purpose is for communication, not for revealing innermost secrets. When we tell stories, we always refer to things we know or have seen.

The standard method used is for the patient to pick five cards and lay them down in any order they wish. They then tell the story they see in the cards. You can ask them about plot situations, who the main character is, and why they are performing specific actions. The goal is to allow the patient to tell the story in their own way and become comfortable with what is being said. From there, you can explore other avenues and search for ways to help them based on what you've learned from their story.

Oracle Meanings

Don't Eat the Pie



World View

The world is not a nice place. The truth of the matter is...that it's not a terrible place either. It is what it is. How we see the world is often based on our nature and beliefs. If we only think of the horrible, that is what we see. If we only think of the lovely, that is what we see. Focus on the good things surrounding you; you'll see that it is not as bad as you think.



Freedom

We like to think we are the masters of our world, that we're free to do whatever we want. Yet this is an illusion. As free as we think we are, there is always something holding us back. Maybe that something happened in the past. Maybe that something is our fears. Maybe that something is some physical or societal limitations. Whatever it is, true freedom can come when we can navigate around those boundaries.



Eternal Thirst

It's natural to crave things—we all do. The satisfaction kicks in once we get what we want and are okay with it. However, some never experience that feeling. They constantly crave something, and no matter how hard they try, they are never satisfied. It is important to understand the reason for the need and see if something else can replace it. Otherwise, the desire eventually eats away at them, leaving them with an eternal thirst.

Undesirable Effects



Trust

Trust. It's such a small word for an important part of our lives. We trust our loved ones to protect us, to make us feel wanted, and not to hurt us. We trust our friends will bring joy into our lives and make it more interesting. Trust. Yet when that trust is broken, we see those who broke it in a different light, and it's hard to regain it back because we will always wonder if it'll happen again. Relationships can work again as long as both sides learn to trust again.



Embracing One's Nature

We all know those people who can't live a quiet life. The risk-takers. The rock climbers. The racers. The marathoners. The entrepreneurs. Many of them don't want the simple life of a family with children and the day-to-day of going to the same day job until they retire. They feel life is more important than that. They are right, and they are wrong. Life is not absolute, and one way is better than the other. Life is about being true to our nature.



Unforgiven

Everybody makes mistakes because, let's face it, we're all human. We need to make mistakes because we learn the most from failures, not successes. The trouble starts when we let those mistakes control our lives and take over our daily routines. We will always be stuck in that moment of failure if we don't learn to forgive ourselves or others who have wronged us. There is no growth.

It's Never
Worth It



Facade

We all wear a mask when we are out in public, and, unfortunately, sometimes that is the same face we show those closest to us. In reality, no one knows what we are going through and our current troubles. It doesn't matter if they could help; we just don't want to be a burden. So, we show them that everything is okay. This is the same lie that is present on social media. Be open with those you trust, for they may genuinely be able to help.



Poisonous

We can sense the poison, yet we do nothing about it. Initially, we admired the beauty and elegance of our desire, wishing we could hold them forever. Over time, we believe they have changed, but they haven't; we've merely ignored the signs that others noticed. Eventually, we come to recognize their poisonous nature. We must trust our gut, not our eyes, as it will never lead us astray.



What's Wrong With Me

Who's asking the question? The doctor or the patient? The doctors are so wrapped up in technology that they don't see the patient before them. They rely on the equipment, not the patient. The patient is so wrapped up in social media that they are comparing their lives to others, or they don't realize the "research" of their issues is misinformed. Technology is great until we lose who we are and how we feel. Until we lose our humanity.

An Exchange of Gifts



Magic is Everywhere

Look around us. We can feel it—not the electronic devices people have, but the people themselves, the way people help one another even though there is nothing in it for them. These good people bring a power that changes the world. They care about others, not because of their wealth or status but because someone is in need. They don't just do it once in a grand gesture. They do it every day with small, loving gestures. Be one who brings magic to others.



The Gift

When we receive a gift from someone, it's a personal communication between the two. It doesn't matter what the gift is, it's personal. Most of the time, the gift represents how much that person understands us and values our relationship. Many may judge us or the person giving the gift, but it doesn't matter. They are not part of that relationship.



Here I Am

Sometimes, we're so focused on what we think is important that we forget what makes our lives enjoyable. The work deadlines, the money, and the life we think others will envy are all important—to a degree. What about making time for our loved ones? Our children? Our pets? Ourselves? When do they become important to us? Will we look back and realize that we forgot them? The now is guaranteed, but the future isn't. There is no better time than the present.

A Life Deserved



Exposed

There is a part of us that is always shown to everyone around us. No matter how strong, pretty, or tough we are, everybody can see it. It is in the way we look at others, in the way we care about others, and in the way we define how we see life and treat others. It's our inner self, and no matter how hard we try to hide it, it is always there for others to judge. Our true friends are the ones who will accept our inner selves. No others.



Spirituality

We all have our beliefs that support us when times are tough. Whether it is the belief in a god (or many gods), nature, or some ethereal concept, that belief is our anchor to help us overcome situations. As time passes, and things go well, that belief can fall by the wayside. This belief is not a benefactor that gives us all our desires and is easily dismissed when unnecessary though. It's a reflection of who we are.



Escape

We try to be brave and think we can conquer all our fears. We're told that we should always be strong and persevere. Sometimes, we can't. We hide and bury our heads. We want to escape everything and go somewhere safe. Sometimes, life is hard, and we're not strong enough to face it. And you know what? That's okay. Learn to step back, take a breath, and then come back stronger. Running away is okay as long as you don't do it all the time.

No Recourse



Dreams

We all have visions of how we want our lives to be. For many, the life we live and the life we want are vastly different, and we feel trapped because we believe we can't reach our dreams for one reason or another. Money. Family. Ourselves. The obstacles are endless. But perhaps the path to our visions involves making small, incremental steps rather than giant leaps and ignoring those who try to impose their own dreams on ours.



Disillusioned

We're all creatures of habit. We do the same thing day in and day out. Years go by, but we don't tend to remember them. They all blend together. When it is all said and done, can we look back and say we are proud of our lives? That we lived fully and are proud of our accomplishments? Or will we look back and see we have nothing to show for it because we just went through the motions? Ignore grand gestures. Find joy and satisfaction in the little moments.



Emissary

Death is a natural part of life. Our deaths bring life to others. In the natural world, it feeds the animals who depend on death to participate in the circle of life. For humans, it reminds others that life is so much more than just working every day. It reminds people that there are friends to be enjoyed, people to love, young ones to care for, and adventures to be had. The knowledge of death brings nourishment to the lives of others, for we enjoy it more when we know we won't be around forever.

We All Need
Friends



Release

Letting go of children so they can grow up, of our childhood, of a favorite balloon—it's so hard. We can't hold onto something forever and expect nothing to change. Life doesn't work that way. So many people try to recreate that same feeling over and over, but over time, we change, and the way we think and feel changes. It's inevitable. We must embrace the change, for that is where growth really happens.



Abandoned

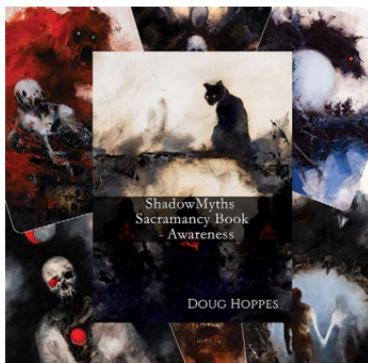
We wonder where it went wrong. What did we do? What could we have done differently? Sure, it could have been our fault. However, it could also be someone else's fault. In the end, it doesn't matter what happened. Will we gather our courage and deal with the situation? Or shall we ignore it and stay stuck? All that matters is how we react because our reactions are the only thing we can control.



Memories

Time moves on whether we want it to or not. Buildings are created and fall into ruin. People are born, live their lives, and pass on. There are many things we don't want to forget, so we try to preserve them or create monuments to remind us. But those are only temporary solutions. After a while, that memory will also fade or become altered so that it is not the same. Relish in the memories and build new ones to enhance them. Time moves on whether we want it to or not.

Learn more about ShadowMyths



Jonathan knew life would never be the same when he entered the Gallery of Nightmares. Inherited from his mother, the gallery flooded his sense of reality with mysterious shadow people and dark voices from creepy paintings. He thought he could handle it until he stepped into the Shadow Nook. In that room, he was transported to a world of nightmares and realized his problems had just begun.

You can learn the life lesson behind each painting in the gallery by checking out the Shadows and Light series of books which are available at

www.shadowmyths.com