

JANUARY 13, 2011

READING #2

CARDS DEALT: The Drift, Big Brother, The Cabin, The Plankton, The Fissure, Divination, Universalis, La Poubelle

The first card I laid out was *THE DRIFT* and this card represents a message in a bottle. This card is *BIG BROTHER* and it represents paranoia. This card is *THE CABIN* and it asks the question: How did I get here? This card is *THE PLANKTON* and it represents a Nansen bottle.

So now I am going to deal the next round of cards. Now please pick one of the four cards that are face-down.

This card is *THE FISSURE* and it represents the lines on the palms of a hand.

Of the three cards I just put face-down please pick one.

THE DIVINATION card. This card represents the displacement of the gods as the tellers of the future with the gods of science.

Please pick one of the new cards.

This card is *UNIVERSALIS* and it represents the last 40 days.

And the final card of your reading is *LA POUBELLE* and it is the recycling card.

And now I am going to take a moment and consider your reading. We will begin with *UNIVERSALIS* card. I can see in this card an intense ice movement. The ice around the entire back of Tara moving away. This is one of the most iconic images of the drift. Uncertainty. For weeks we could have a field of ice to walk on, to layout our scientific equipment. But one never knew when a major break would happen. On this day we lost our survival tent, our toilet, our tractor, gallons of diesel drums. The scariest thing was always whether we would lose the scientific equipment. And that was the stuff we had to recuperate first during an ice break. Luckily, we never lost the equipment. The reasons why we had an ice-break like this was because we were moving closer and closer to the ice edge. Now if you can imagine the ice edge, it stops at about 80 degrees in the winter. But it doesn't just stop. It's push and pull. Some days, maybe for a couple of days, a mixture of ice and water. A couple of days later it will go back to being solid ice. So the closer we get to the ice edge the more instability we have in the environment.

The theme of instability leads us to your next card *THE DRIFT*. Here we have the chief of the expedition marking the drift. Now the drift was a circuitous movement and we had no control over our direction or our exit from the ice. Once a month...on the first of the month...just for the hell of it...the chief would mark our course on the map. We had GPS and computer generated pictures of our course so we didn't really need to do this. *THE DRIFT* card also represents a message in a bottle: an object drifting with currents. One of the first ways to understand ocean currents was by sending out messages in a bottle. The first message in a bottle known to history was launched in ancient Greece by Theophrastus. He wanted to know if the Mediterranean sea flowed into the Atlantic Ocean. 2,000 years later Ben Franklin would launch many, many messages in a bottle out into the Atlantic to figure out the gulf stream.

The idea of being carried away with the currents is a powerful motif in these cards. That brings us to the next card, *LA POUBELLE*, the recycling card. Here we can see beer cans literally being put into the ocean through a hole in the ice. This card also represents the recycling of a water molecule. It takes at least 3,000 years for one water molecule to travel on the oceanic conveyor belt, past the equator, down to Antarctica and back up again to the Arctic. So the water is like the centuries, and the expedition was a moment, trying to measure the centuries as we passed by.

The next card, *THE PLANKTON*, summarizes all these cards because the plankton can only drift with the currents. It was the only form of life up there besides us and the occasional polar bear. The word comes from the Greek word 'planktos', which means to wander. The plankton has no control over its course so I always found the plankton to be an apt metaphor for our existence on the ice. The plankton in this card is being held in a

Nansen bottle. A Nansen bottle was named after the Norwegian explorer and biologist Fridtjof Nansen. Nansen was the first one...and this will bring us back to *THE DRIFT* card..to purposefully lock himself in the ice in order to drift. Nansen had a hunch. And that hunch will bring us back to the message in a bottle. He had heard about objects from an American boat, the Jeannette, that had washed up on the west coast of Greenland after having been crushed in the ice in eastern Siberia. Nansen knew the ocean currents and he knew that there was no way those objects could have washed up on the shores of western Greenland unless it went over the North Pole. But how could that have happened?, Nansen asked himself, if the Arctic Ocean was frozen up there. That's when he realized that there still must be current underneath the ice that moves the ice.

And that ice movement brings me back to *UNIVERSALIS* card and onto *THE FISSURE* card. This card represents the lines on the palm of a hand and the idea that perhaps we can read the future with very local lines. I would often light up these fissures with our head-lamps, like highways illuminating the future. The possible points where the ice might weaken and we may break free.

So now I am going to take a moment and consider the other three of your cards.

I will draw a comparison here between the two light sources emanating from *THE FISSURE* card and *THE DIVINATION* card. The light in this card comes from a snow pit. A snow pit was a way to measure the snow. We would stick a thermometer in the snow to take its temperature.

Finally, through our journey with these cards, the remaining two cards have a strong relationship to one another. The first, *THE BIG BROTHER* card is a document tacked to the communal bulletin board in the dining area of Tara. It tells the story of paranoia. We were being videotaped once a week eating dinner at the request of a psychologist in France who was studying the effects of solitude and social dynamics of a crew. This psychologist was part of a team that was going to do a Mars simulation study in Antarctica by putting a small crew in an enclosed bubble to see how they would react. The video tapes of us eating ended up in the office of Tara in Paris and there was paranoia about who was watching the tapes.

And that brings us to the final card in your reading, *THE CABIN* card: the question of origins, of how did I get there. I was told many different stories about how I ended up on the expedition. And I definitely had developed paranoia myself as to who was telling me the truth. The doctor had told me that she had voted for me to come and that most of the other crew didn't. Later I was told that it was the doctor who had voted against me because there were already two women on board and the dynamic was perfect already. I would piece together later on in a bar in Norway...the true story. The captain didn't want anyone to share a cabin during the winter months and there were one too many people promised to come on that winter. The captain wanted to have an extra mechanic aboard for the exit from the ice and not an artist. As it turns out, the second mechanic broke his back and then I was invited on. Ironically, a week before I was set to leave New York...the Russian government...some shady thing I never figured out... had an influence on things and part of the agreement was that they would always have a Russian aboard. So at the last minute, there was a demand to have a Russian scientist added for the winter crew. At that point the captain said, "well, we will have to say no to the artist." At which point there was a vote and it was decided it would be too cruel to say no to me so close to my departure. So in this card, I can see the cabin of the two scientists who ended up sharing a cabin because of me.

Often, at the end of a reading, I like to extend one question. So, do you have a question of these cards?

When did you feel most lonely during the expedition?

After the poker tournament. I had initiated a poker tournament and one night the French contingent taught themselves to play from a book in the library. And they insisted on teaching me their version of poker. It was that moment I really missed my friends and playing poker with no complications.

With that said, we will end on *THE CABIN* card. Both the card of companionship and solitude. And that concludes your reading.