

SEFIROT

THE
SPHERES OF HEAVEN
TAROT

Guidebook



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THE REALMS OF *SEFIROT* - THE SPHERES OF *HEAVEN TAROT*

The cards before you have a curious history. They were conceived by a game designer attempting to tease stories from Tarot cards by the means of solitaire game mechanics. What started as a little card-tinkering and divination ballooned into a much larger journey, culminating in the creation of this deck.

There's no need to burden you with the entire crowdfunding saga that supercharged this undertaking, but a few words should be said about how these cards manifested as part of the *Sefirot* game.

Sefirot, in its current form, was conceived as a board game with Tarot cards for one or two players that would involve some divinatory aspects. It is played on a two-sided game board, one side of which features a Tree of Life

a diagram used in various mystical traditions. This Tree is known in the Kabbalah as the Sefirot, the 10 emanations of the Divine.

I should also mention that we embedded the game of *Sefirot* in a fictitious land of our own creation: the shrouded isle of Dioscoria, a refuge for freethinkers throughout history. This was done not so much to invent an entertaining fantasy world, but rather to create a historical fiction, a lens that would help anchor the work in both space (the Indian Ocean and surrounding regions, where Dioscoria is said to be) and time (the 16th century). It is also important to add that this work was conceived as the joint and intimate collaboration of me, the aforementioned designer Georg Hofmeier, and the illustrators Eliot Baum and Viv Tanner, whose card art you are ogling right now.

Our intention was to create a new sort of Tarot rather than one that just reiterated the wisdom of the

Rider-Waite-Smith deck, which dominates Tarot iconography and symbolism. Instead, we decided to establish a new architecture of concepts through a synthesis of various sources, such as the writings of Levi, Jodorowsky, and Case. We did not ignore the propositions of Smith and Waite, of course, but wove them into this new fabric of meaning as well.

The process of making a card from start to finish sometimes took a full two weeks, due to the extensive time spent reading and researching. The three of us did not discuss our vision collectively, though. I would compile my research into briefings, which would cover foreground and background composition, including pictorial references. Viv and Eliot would then take over, embarking on their own organic and intuitive process; this involved thumbnail sketches, discussions over meaning, and the usually joint undertaking of drawing the final illustration.

Very early in this process we decided not to fully illustrate the numeral cards. There was the practical benefit that this would shorten our schedule by several decades, but we also felt the deck should have a hierarchy of complexity. Numeral cards would be represented only by the suit's symbol, aligned and assembled to convey the card's meaning; court cards would feature the suit's characters and have a lot more expression; but only Major Arcana, the great spiritual movers and shakers, would use the full spectrum of both symbols and characters.

Now that you have a rough understanding how *Sefirot* was conceived, here's what awaits you in this guidebook. The first chapters will introduce you to Tarot and its history, for readers who might not be familiar with it. After that, we take a brief voyage to the fictional land of Dioscoria, the shrouded isle. Finally, the main body of the guidebook is a detailed explanation of the deck itself, card by card.

THE EMERGENCE OF TAROT

Tarot has been used and interpreted over the centuries by different people with different perspectives and divining with Tarot has always been an intimate and personal practice. This guidebook will offer advice and recommendations to guide you on your spiritual path, helping you become comfortable making you practice your own. Before we dive into the “how-to” of Tarot, however, a brief introduction to its history might be helpful.

Playing cards are, of course, Tarot's natural forebears. It has been suggested they originated in China, where it is known Emperor Mu-tsung played card games—presumably with domino cards—in the late 10th century. Later on due to the Silk Road, the Islamic world was supposedly introduced to this format, creating decks that took a different approach to form.

Certain conditions had to exist before the game of Tarot could be first invented and then disseminated: inexpensive paper, cheap and accessible printing or crafting techniques, not to mention trading networks for deck distribution, and a dense urban population to buy those decks. Paper and printing were rare in the early 12th century since most books were handwritten collections of animal skin: costly, and typically the privilege of nobles, gentry, or monks. Later, paper mills appeared in early archives in Christian Catalan from the 1150s, implying these machines were of Islamic origin although this claim is unsubstantiated.

Printing itself—specifically block printing—was first used for printing cloth, religious scenes, and images of saints. People would tack them on their walls or carry them as talismans. Supposedly, as cards became more popular in the West and paper more available, printers started to adapt their tools and workshops for card production.

Most sources claim that playing cards grew in popularity around the mid-14th century across Europe, this trend most likely coming from the Mamluk region of Egypt. This is known mainly due to European records of the first banned card games. As card games grew in popularity, many were banned and many other variations became more popular. The first documented Tarot decks were recorded around the middle of the 15th century in Italy (where they were also known as *tarocchi* or *tarock*); these featured the complete 78-card format we know today. It is unclear whether these games originated in Italy and spread to Dioscoria later, or whether games of cards were invented in Dioscoria first and then spread to the Mediterranean.

Often seen as tools of gambling, Tarot cards quickly became associated with mysticism and divine or spiritual practice. Many decks were later commissioned by aristocrats in Italy and France as a form of court entertainment. We

believe it was this connection to spirituality—a subject of great interest to Dioscorian culture—that led this society to create many Tarot-inspired games in the 15th century, including *Sefirot*.

The development of France's Marseille Tarot card patterns over the next century provided the foundation of modern Tarot design. While Tarot art styles diversified from the early 20th century, Marseille designs have remained the staple among the 22 Major cards. In decks keen to preserve simplicity and beauty, the clean lines of the traditional Marseilles patterns often feature across all the cards.

In the late 18th century, the mysticist Etteilla—legal name, Jean-Baptiste Alliette—began to divine for an audience using Tarot cards. Etteilla wrote about Tarot and how he learned his method of card reading from an Italian. Introducing many techniques that are still used in today's practice, he published many ideas and was one of the first to use his own Tarot deck for

occult practice. Tarot's connection to astrology and the elements is largely due to his occult interests. Tarot and other card-based forms of divination thrived in France thanks to Etteilla and various other occult personalities, such as the mysterious Marie-Anne Adélaïde Lenormand, throughout the 19th century.

Occultists from the British Isles, notably Arthur Edward Waite and Pamela Colman Smith, brought Tarot to a larger audience across the English-speaking world. Waite and Smith were both members of the Golden Dawn, a secret society dedicated to the occult, founded in the late 19th century. Waite designed and Smith illustrated a new Tarot deck, which was then published by the Rider Company in 1909. This deck introduced new allegorical imagery for the Minor Arcana cards, and has become the standard template for most modern decks.

While the history of Tarot is quite extensive, we won't be unwrapping it more in detail, but we can only encourage the continued study of its origin for its own sake. Our deep understanding comes from Jodorowsky's *The Way of Tarot* and his research on the Marseille style of allegoric compositions, which are excellent threads to pursue if you want to learn more about Tarot history and interpretational practices. We also studied the B.O.T.A. Tarot by Paul Foster Case and its guidebook, *The Tarot: A Key to the Wisdom of the Ages*. This is a very detailed work that attempts to re-form some aspect of the Tarot proposed by the Order of the Golden Dawn and the Rider-Waite-Smith deck.

THE HIDDEN ISLE OF DIOSCORIA

The year is 1562. Hidden by ocean fog and encircled by reefs off the Arabian coast lies the ancient freehaven of Dioscoria. Since ancient times this mysterious island has been a harbor for mystics and misfits, rebels, and outcasts.

Legend has it that the founder of Dioscoria was the Egyptian sage Hermes Trismegistus after he fled the Ptolemaic Empire with only the clothes on his back, a mountain of rescued scrolls, and a handful of priestesses dedicated to the goddess Hekate. Through them the knowledge of ancient Egypt and its neighboring lands survives on Dioscoria. The Hekatean priestesses, led by the High Atropaia ("Warder of Evil") Hekate herself, established the first council on the island, laying the foundation for a clandestine but prosperous future. In the centuries since, the freehaven has been ruled by numerous councils, together with a citizens'

court and a ruling chamber where a rotating selection of volunteers settle matters of state.

The island is the natural enemy of all religious orthodoxy and is for them, due to its disposition toward knowledge and magic, synonymous with the forces of darkness and "sin." Politically, the island is neutral ground, and its councils refuse to tolerate overt exile. Various powers have, in the past, made attempts to subdue the island, but all efforts to reach the harbor without a guide have proven futile.

Dioscoria's inhabitants hail from the far corners of the world: raiders from the Fjords who settled in warmer lands; Spanish rabbis who escaped the Reconquista; retired Bengalese pirates; the last Catharian Perfecti; innumerable exiled (and forgotten) ladies and lords; the descendants of the Nizari Ismailis; Hindustanis of the *tritiya prakriti*; outlawed hermetic crusader orders; Moorish mathematicians; Persian fire worshippers; clandestine

emissaries from various sultanates; even a few lost-looking, pink-skinned adventurers from *Englaterra*.

Crafty traders arrive from countless ports to offer their wares in exchange for rare exotica, ancient artifacts, and, of course, knowledge forbidden in other lands. Scrolls and books considered lost can still be found in Dioscoria's market or the numerous grand libraries of its citizens. It is obligatory for traders to pay a harbor access fee of at least one book or scroll, resulting in the accumulation of enormous archives over the ages. While the island is more or less an egalitarian society, it has a monetary system very much based on the local obsession with games and gambling.

The prowess of the mind might be the highest good in this society, but so is joyful engagement in all manner of play and artistry. Sports, betting on fighting beasts, dice, cards, dancing, visceral magical rituals, theater shows, the circus, poetry readings, colorful

feasts involving the display of lightning powder—all this makes Dioscorians rejoice. The wisdom accumulated over centuries is balanced by their gleeful enjoyment of play.

There is one Dioscorian game that enjoys particular favor among its people, one that is as old as the island itself: *Sefirot*, the card game of divine orders. It is rumored that Hekate's priestesses brought the game from the temples of Thoth and Hekate, and that it has been played since the dawn of time.

Over time the game has absorbed numerous mystical influences, but it has always been a game of cards for one person to peer through space and time back onto oneself. It can be played in solitude at home as sincere divination, as an amusing parlor game, or as part of a magical ritual. Some houses sport their own rules and games. One of them—the variation known as *The Warring Planets*—has become a popular variation where two players compete against each other.

CARD SPREADS

One-Card Spread

A simple act of drawing one card to gain insight into the day, or a question. The one-card spread is a simple inquiry, but it also gives space to explore the meaning of the card in a relaxed way.

If you're unsure what to think of this spread, here are some questions you can ask for yourself:

- How will the day go? What is there to know about this day?
- How might I feel about this decision? What could the consequence(s) of it be?
- What might happen if I say yes/no?

As you hold the question in your mind, shuffle the deck, and draw a single card. Let your hand choose.

One card offers a lot of room for interpretation, so take your time to consider the card's meaning.

Two-Card Spreads

Two-card spreads offer more detail and context than a single card. This second card could lend greater context to a one-card answer or add a sense of time to the answer—for example, by foretelling how this might end.

Consider the placement and position of the two cards, what kind of relationship you might see between them. You could lay one down and one across if you feel one is encountering, or answering, another.

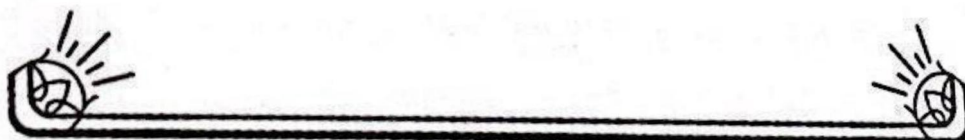
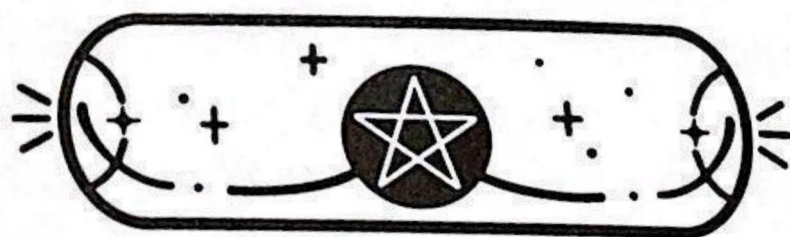
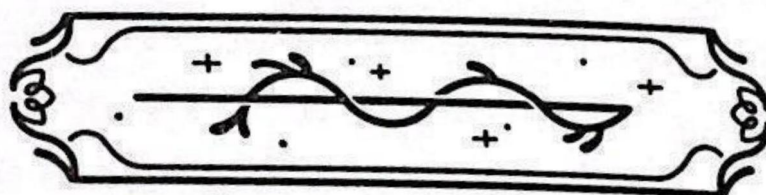
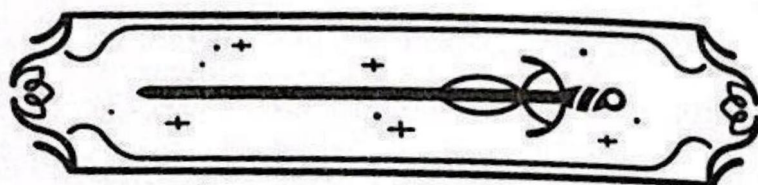
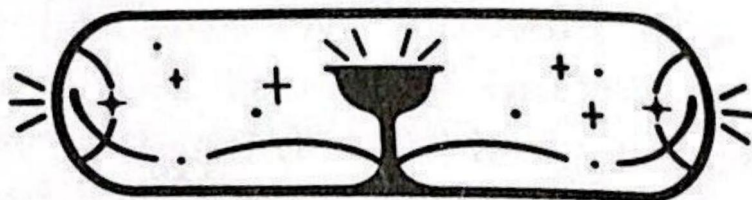
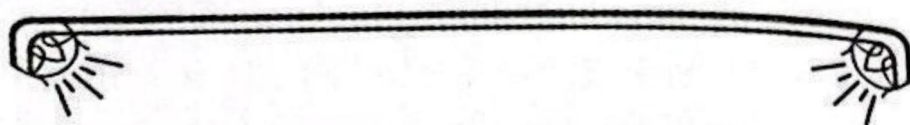
Two cards placed next to each other might better represent a two-way path or a choice. Their angle might also suggest a hierarchy in importance, or the intensity of the opposing choices.

Three-Card Spreads

The number three is often encountered in religious and spiritual contexts, so it is a fitting number of cards to draw for a Tarot spread. The number three forms an abundance of mythic or spiritual constellations across societies throughout the world: three kings; three seeresses; three parts of the Divine such as the Christian Holy Trinity or, in Celtic contexts, the Mother, Maiden, and Crone. Three also naturally forms compelling narrative triads: beginnings, middles, and ends; birth, life, and death; those who create, those who exist, and those who destroy.

Three-card spreads allow us to tap into these constellations. One popular spread uses each card to reveal the past, present, and future respectively. "Past" could represent the origins of the question, its roots, the beginning of what is addressed. "Present" would stand for the currently active process, the state of the situation at hand. "Future" might indicate what awaits us beyond

our ability to predict, though normally this is not set in stone: it is a prediction of where our current path will lead us if we do not intervene. Such a spread might appear simple, but it can offer us powerful guidance over time and help us understand situations and undertakings beyond their immediate context, through this narrative lens.





THE GARDS

The deck before you is a recreation of a Dioscorian deck dated to the 16th century: the so-called "Legendary Dioscorian Deck" from which many others originated, famous for its unusual style. The game of *Sefirot* had already been popular for many centuries by this point; as such, the symbolism and iconography on each card represents a fairly standard Dioscorian approach to spirituality. Any similarities in aesthetic to the art styles of the late 19th or early 20th centuries can be chalked up to the experimental nature of Dioscorian art in general,

and the possibility that those “historical” styles were themselves influenced by Dioscorian aesthetics.

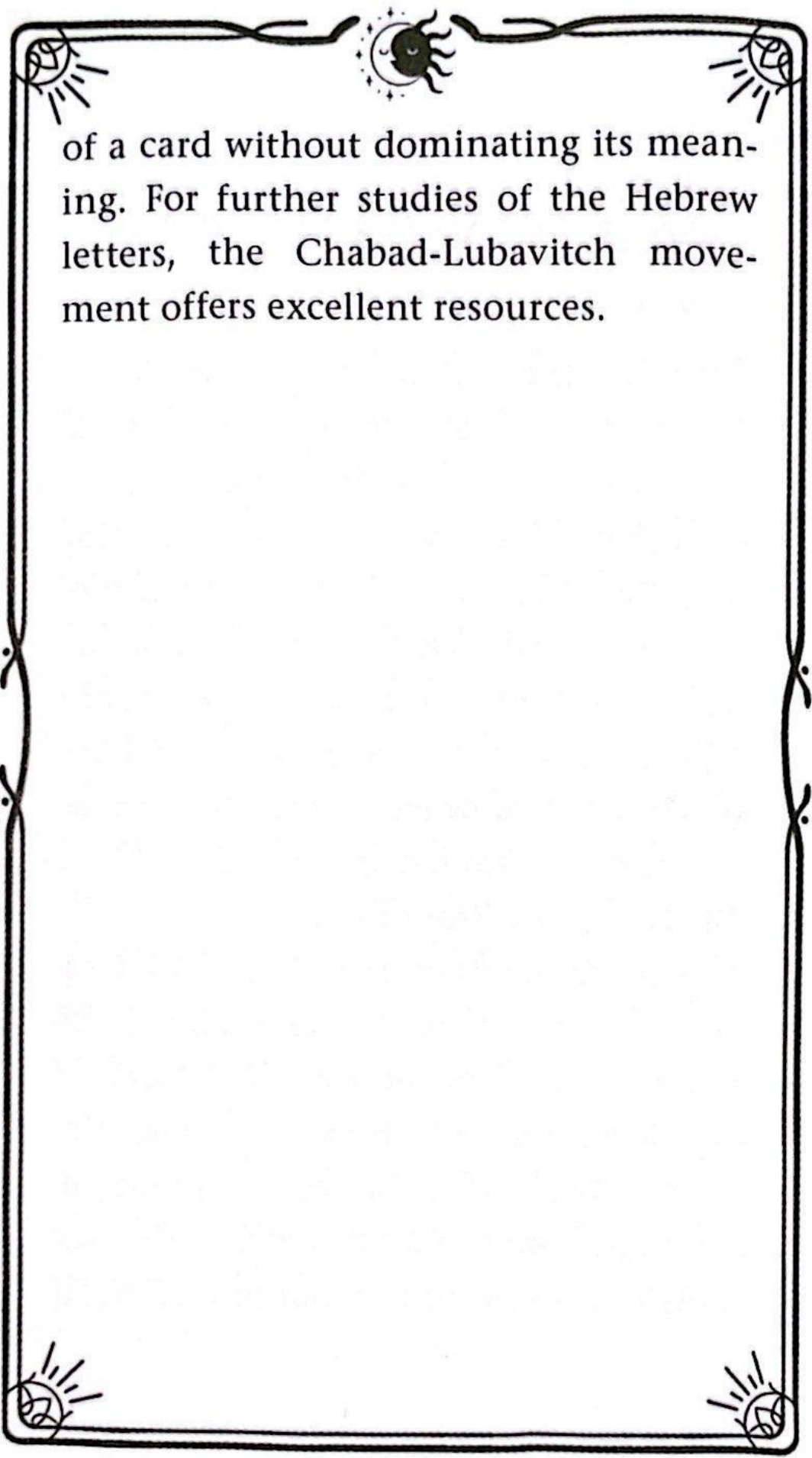
Whether in Dioscoria or in our own realm, the world of Tarot is diverse to say the least. There are numerous decks with diverse designs originating from different Tarot traditions, each with a different perspective on how to interpret a reading. Some of them remain close to one larger tradition, such as the traditions around the Rider-Waite-Smith deck, while others splinter off in their own spiritual direction. One thing is absolute in most cases: all decks include 78 cards, the 22 “Major Arcana” and the 56 “Minor Arcana.” The Major Arcana are 22 uniquely named cards that would originally have been used as trump cards when playing the game of Tarot. The Minor Arcana are split into four suits: cups, swords, wands, and pentacles.



THE MAJOR ARCANA

Unlike the Minor Arcana, the Major Arcana aren't assigned to suits. Instead, these 22 cards are intentionally ambiguous but illustrated in a unique way that gives space for a wide possibility of interpretations. The Major Arcana are also numbered with Roman numerals (starting from 0, "The Fool") and have associated Hebrew letters matching those numbers, positioned in the 22 paths of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life.

This Hebrew lettering is inspired by the B.O.T.A. Tarot, where each of the Majors bears one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, prominently displayed. For our deck, they should be considered more like discreet seals that contribute to the individual composition



of a card without dominating its meaning. For further studies of the Hebrew letters, the Chabad-Lubavitch movement offers excellent resources.

0. THE FOOL

Humanity Unbound

With the sun ablaze in the sky, the Fool strides forward, away from an open door into the mountainous wilderness with nothing to hold them back. They are a youthful and androgynous person, with flowers and floral designs woven into their hair and skirt representing budding possibilities. An enthusiastic dog runs after them, a symbol for tamed and loyal humanity that the Fool has left behind. To conservative voices the Fool is a mad person, an imbecile about to throw themselves into the mountains, perhaps even off a cliff—but more daring thinkers will see them for what they are: humanity unbound, bearing the sign of creativity unleashed, becoming the Divine.

I. THE MAGICIAN

Weaving the Future

In some ways the Magician is like the Fool: both are androgynous figures stepping boldly into a new future with total confidence. The Magician, however, does not *fall into* his future: he *makes* it. Handling a wand above a table of mystical paraphernalia, his knowledgeable patter and roguish smirk tell us he does things in his own time, according to his own will. This is a mysterious task that bends reality: note how the perspective of the altar before him does not match that of the figure himself.

His works connect the world of the unconscious with one's conscious energies. The magician is committed to the now and is a manifestation of all that is possible. A mercurial character, he is a messenger between the planes, helping us mold the future we see within. In the Marseille tradition we see a trickster, while Waite-Smith

gave us a more sober, less cunning Apollonic figure—most likely displaying Waite's own desire to become a priest-like magician. Nevertheless, this card encompasses a spectrum of "magicians," from back-alley conjurers to divine priests. The magician is unique in his self-consciousness: He knows the Tarot. He is within it, he practices it—he even invented it! In front of him we find all the elements of the Tarot and their attributes: (1) TO WILL (wand), (2) TO KNOW (cup), (3) TO DARE (sword), (4) TO BE SILENT (pentacle).

II. THE HIGH PRIESTESS

The Gateway to the Mind

The High Priestess has withdrawn from the world into a state of introspection, where nothing but the mind moves. Often regarded as female, a daughter of the stars, an avatar of moon gods and goddesses (Hekate, Diana, Khonsu, Nannar/Sin, Isis, etc.), her three faces—inspired by those goddesses—refer to the three aspects of the mind: ego, superego, and id. The High Priestess has moved away from their body, toward the mind and a deeper union. They are connecting to the prakriti, the pre-cosmic substance from which everything that exists derives in Indian philosophy. In their hand is a book emblazoned with the Hebrew letter gimel, which some assign to the moon.

Unlike the Magician who practices the Tarot to divine the answers to his questions, the High Priestess already

holds all knowledge in their hand, sitting at the crossroads of the universe. By traveling inward, into the mind and, ultimately, the unseen roots of the cosmos itself, they can reunite matter with spirit, bringing peace where there is confusion.

III. THE EMPRESS

Strength Through Passion

Brimming with passion, the Empress is an ambiguous figure with numerous forms and manifestations across the Tarot traditions. For some she is soft and boundless, ripe with child, sitting in a lush landscape filled with unstoppable growth. For others she is a ruler who shares many aspects with the Emperor, each one side of the same coin: her feminine energy to his masculine. In Dioscorian tradition this femininity is expressed as a determination to protect and lead her homeland, making it prosperous and powerful.

This regal aspect is demonstrated by her male eagle, erect pose, the strong vertical lines of her dress, and the wheat stalks around her; they also stand for the prosperity she ensures for her people. She has a stern exterior, a wise intellect, a connection to the Divine, and radiates an imposing

physical presence. She stands in juxtaposition to the High Priestess since she is hard and intellectual on the outside, with a soft core.

IV. THE EMPEROR

Stability Reigns Supreme

The Emperor is a symbol of stability and is depicted seated on a throne from which he guides the universe by enforcing the rule of law. All creation is either in its proper order or shall be put to order. He may be an omnipotent being, but, much like the Empress—whose hard outer shell hides a softer core—the Emperor is willing to be receptive and playful, to bend the rules when needed. This is what makes him a good ruler and differentiates him from a tyrant. At the same time, we can rely on his stability. He is closely associated with the number four: the most stable number across the Tarot, both in the Minor and Major Arcana. No matter what chaos comes to pass, he has the power to be the axis at the center of things and bring soothing order when the world is disturbed, unhinged, and

thrown into disarray. He can bring peace, both to bodies and minds.

As a symbol of stability, he is seated not on a throne but within the landscape of his kingdom. His body is cloaked with the fabric of his cities, and he holds and displays the scroll of his laws, which knit civilization together. A goat sits beside him, the symbol of Aries: the sign of leadership, expressiveness, and passion. The sun rises behind him, bringing the light of his rule and wisdom to his people.

V. THE HIEROPHANT

To Bridge the Worlds

The Hierophant—from the ancient Greek *ta hiera* (the holy), plus *phainein* (to show)—is a connector between worlds: they are also known as the Pontifex, from the Latin *pons* (bridge) plus *facere* (builder). While the High Priestess sits atop the temple, connecting to the Divine in introverted composure, the Hierophant sits in a more public space, communicating and revealing everything that can be said of the Divine to the world.

While European tradition renders the Hierophant as a religious leader, Dioscoria views the card differently. A land of questioners, heretics, and rule breakers, it was only natural for Dioscorian culture to see the Hierophant not as a font of religious wisdom—easily twisted into bigotry—but as a teacher and lecturer. This card places him firmly within the rounded cloisters of the Dioscorian academy.

The Hierophant is the tongue to the wisdom of the Fool and the Hermit, revealer of the sacred to the eager seekers of wisdom before him. Having mastered the intellectual understanding of the world and its five elements, he can now speak of what he knows and connect its meanings. He has learned these truths not by leaving the temple but through difficult study and by listening to the voices from above and below. At the same time, he is grounded in reality and the act of communication. He himself grounds knowledge that might otherwise seem ephemeral: he is the nail to the sublime so that it can be attached to the earth.

VI. THE LOVERS

Blissful Harmony

Although known as "The Lover" in the Marseilles tradition, where a group is depicted surrounding a single titular lover, this card is usually interpreted instead as two heteronormative lovers coming together: male and female; the universe's dualistic principles in harmony.

The three versions included in this deck reflect Dioscoria's free and open attitude toward love. A society formed from those rejected by convention, Dioscorians expressed their love and gender in uncountable ways. This was quickly picked up on by card painters; by the 16th century it was traditional for this card to depict the buyer and their love(s). This personal touch was also a way for card painters to showcase their skill.

Regardless of the genders (or number of partners) depicted, all interpretations of the card depict a union that

is emotional in nature, but encompasses the entire spectrum of love: body, mind, and soul. This union is brought about by a higher power and represents total fulfillment. While this might mean the bliss of romantic love, it could stand for any situation where complementary forces come together in harmony.

This deck represents this harmony in the form of a white sun casting its joy from above, but this power can take many forms including an angel or a being working with or through one. This could be Raphael, archangel of air, associated with Mercury and therefore a messenger. For some, the white sun might also evoke the Fool: After all, this figure (also associated with the color white) may be ignorant or innocent, but this is precisely why they are capable of unconditional love! Since they lack any unhelpful preconceptions, there is nothing to hinder them from a union with the Other.

VII. THE CHARIOT

Driving Force

In this card we see the universal will expressing its need to move forward, relentlessly. As the great occultist Eliphas Levi once said: "All magic is in the will." This willpower has taken on the form of a dashing chariot driver: a figure who leaves the comforts of the walled city and its lush gardens to pursue a journey with only a single, unyielding goal: "Forward, ever forward."

The charioteer has chosen a curious vehicle: a boxy wagon laden, like the charioteer themselves, with symbols. Their journey combines these powerful symbols, using their collective force to drive themselves forward for the sake of motion itself. The ultimate source of this movement is the astral will: granted to the charioteer by the Star, this drives both wagon and driver on their implacable, triumphal passage.

VIII. STRENGTH

The Actualization of Inner Power

Strength is one of the four cardinal virtues and draws upon millennia of philosophical tradition as well as esoteric wisdom. The card depicts a union of cosmic strength: The woman, ordained with flowers, is the vessel of cosmic energies. By approaching the lion with a gentle and confident demeanor, she effortlessly causes it to open its mouth. This represents her ability to approach and work alongside with the subconscious forces of nature. She has the same connection to the Divine as the Magician, but while he achieves his goals by connecting to the heavens, she works her will by taming the beast, signifying her rootedness in the earth.

Though not depicted overtly, the Kundalini Shakti (or feminine serpent power) is an unseen force within the woman on this card. The strength shown here is rooted in our center and

connected to our spine, where the Kundalini also resides. If we follow the correct path, we can manifest this power through ourselves.

Strength is a favorite motif in the writings of Plato, the Stoics, and Thomas Aquinas, lending this card a moral and psychological dimension: strength can also mean perseverance in the face of troubles and uncertainty, or overcoming fear. These texts remind us, too, that strength for its own sake is fragile: that to remain just, strength must have a sound moral foundation.

IX. THE HERMIT

The Journey Within

The Hermit is an isolated figure in the dark of night, an aged man at the edge of the world, gazing down with a troubled expression. The life he once lived is over; the path before him is new, dangerous—the end, but also the beginning. In his right hand he holds a lantern that sheds light on the wisdom of the past, but is also a beacon in the hope that a higher order might notice him, and perhaps even carry him forward. It glows with the light of brilliant intellect. Later this light will become the brilliant hope of the Star, but for now the Hermit bundles his hopes close to his chest.

The pains of his life have formed a cloak around him; the past itself has coalesced into his rounded, hunched back. In his left hand he holds a staff: a connection to practical, earth-bound wisdom as well as his root into

eternity. Above him hovers the letter yod, indicating that this person might have touched the Divine itself.

X. WHEEL OF FORTUNE

The Cycles of the World

In the world we exist in, there is but one fundamental law: mobility and change. However this world was set in motion, it cannot be stopped. It turns and turns and turns, often in uncanny repeating cycles, giving our existence a distinct rhythm. These repeating patterns might be as simple as the passage of time throughout a day, and the repetitions of days that form our impression of time itself—or they might be as profound as the great cycles of the seasons, or of our own personal triumphs and disasters, which seem to come upon us without end.

Until they don't: for things are always coming to an end. What goes up must eventually come down. Nothing ever stays on top, preeminent, forever. Everything rises, and everything perishes.

The laws of nature reside at the center of the wheel, represented by the Hebrew letter kaph, which indicates how those

laws hold sway. The paradox is that at the very center, everything is still. By this reasoning, the Wheel of Fortune will continue to turn until the extinction of time itself—which, by the very same reasoning, will come eventually.

XI. JUSTICE

To Judge Ourselves

Justice is one of the four cardinal virtues, and is often present in public spaces in the form of the statue of Justitia and her scales, also known as "Lady Justice." Justice is often enforced by our authorities, but its most vital aspect is found within us on a personal level: the will to treat others as we wish to be treated.

We all judge ourselves, whether we want to or not. Only a handful are as lucky as the Fool, able to live contentedly without having to take a good hard look in the mirror. This is Justice: our capacity to truly see ourselves and the worth of our deeds and render a fitting judgment. When applied rigorously, it leaves no hiding place: the stark, white walls and black pillars of this card are like an ethical microscope. Justice sees all within her walls.

The figure of Justice bears symbols both passive and active: Her scales

are balanced when holding nothing, in perfect well-tuned harmony, until they receive whatever needs to be judged. Once a verdict is rendered, justice can be meted out by the hard edge of her sword.

Opinion is divided within Dioscoria, however, as to whether the sword is truly a method of punishment. Many of its denizens still remember the unjust penalties they were forced to suffer in other lands, and instead see Justice's sword as a version of the Ace of Swords itself: an instrument of inner enlightenment, capable of bringing even the darkest truths to light.

XII. THE HANGED MAN

Sacrifice for Betterment

This willing victim is in a self-chosen state of torture. At first glance this might resemble an execution, but in reality it's a personal trial that could lead to profound wisdom or general betterment. Like the Norse god Odin who hung himself on the World Tree for three days and gave up his eye, the Hanged Man undergoes a great torment, and suffers great sacrifice, in the hope of attaining wisdom.

For the Hanged Man, the world is literally inverted, upside down. Reversing the natural order is key to both ordeal and solution. As Paul Foster Case states in his book *The Tarot: A Key to the Wisdom of the Ages*: "For the basis of the occult approach to life, the foundation of the everyday practice of a person who lives the life of obedience to esoteric law, is the reversal of the more usual ways of thinking, speaking and doing."

This is also a silent card: appropriate for this drawn-out moment of contemplation. Mem, this card's Hebrew letter, is like water, a silent mirror. Total submission to life and its rigors is symbolized by the tree—perhaps the Tree of Life itself.

XIII. DEATH

Radical Change

Looming over the bright and bustling Dioscorian capital, the bleached white skeleton of Death hunches over his staff. Death speaks to us all. It concerns us all. It is inevitable that we will all, eventually, meet it. We have been concerned with Death since the beginning of time, since we started to dream and to understand that we are mortal; Death has been with us ever since. For those who accept it, existence itself becomes unique and precious—but if we forget our mortality we fall prey to false promises, becoming trapped in a delusional void.

Nonetheless, when we face our end Death brings clarity to us all, whether to kings and queens, pages and paupers, beggars, or bishops. Death frees us from tyrants, old ideas, and those who cling to them; it cleanses the world and creates space so that new ideas can spawn and prosper.

Death is a constant companion, encircling us as this figure's scythe encircles the city, to remind us to cherish what we have. Death is change: eternal, ever-hopeful, implacable.

XIV. TEMPERANCE

The Benefit of Restraint

Temperance is one of the four virtues: the ability to balance ourselves, and respond to every slight in a measured way. Temperance allows us to reconcile negative forces with each other—inner and outer perception, caution and confidence, fiery intellect, and physicality—and reach a middle ground from which you can act healthily and decisively.

Temperance is the key to worldly clarity: The balance it brings allows you to see the world with new, unbiased eyes, and step seamlessly into the world's flow. It is also the avoidance of suffering and can manifest as a *via negativa*: improving something (one's life, perhaps) by subtracting things rather than adding. Temperance naturally leads us to seek the avoidance of negative things and excess. For every thing there is a time; we must simply wait, and calmly act when the time is right.

Scholars have suggested this card demonstrates a Taoist influence from nearby China on Dioscorian culture, citing the “yin and yang” gold-and-black orbs in the background. This card certainly conveys some of Lao Tzu’s warnings from the *Tao Te Ching*: “Fill your bowl to the brim and it will spill; keep sharpening your knife and it will blunt.”

XV. THE DEVIL

The Adversary Who Teaches

The Devil is the polar opposite of the Hierophant but, just like him, this strange spirit offers a vital lesson to those climbing the sacred peaks toward enlightenment. The Devil is a strange, paradoxical form reveling in its task: to teach humans that they are not free at all but bound by their inability to acknowledge, and therefore see beyond, their own darkness. This bat-winged creature, which delights in its place beyond the moral order, has ascended from the abyss to make its sport.

The Devil sees through the lies and hypocrisy of the human realm: Unlike us, its gaze pierces the murky shades of contradiction, the obscure complexities we can only grasp as a sick feeling when things don't add up. It is a beast associated with both Mercury and Saturn: Mercury for its role as (unwelcome) messenger and Saturn

as a nod to Saturnalia, the dark festival of reversal. By falling into the Devil's grip, its prisoners have suffered a reversal of fortune—but it is only a matter of time before they break free again, symbolized by the Dioscorian tradition of painting the figures the same color as the card's background.

Like the snake in the garden of Eden, it is easy to mistake the Devil for an adversary—but one might instead consider it an unsuspected manifestation of the Divine. Just like the snake—the serpent power—it is also rooted in the material world, hence its connection to the zodiac sign Capricorn. And like the snake, it uses trickery and suffering to teach humanity profound wisdom.

XVI. THE TOWER

The Joy of the Cataclysm

The Tower is a notorious card, brimming with symbols and portents. It can be interpreted in many ways: some positive, others utterly apocalyptic. But no matter the interpreter, all agree: the Tower signifies that a period of stability is coming to an end. Whether the House of God, the Tower of Babel, the Ziggurat, or some other edifice, they are falling. Whoever dwelled inside—nobles, high priestesses, worshippers—is cast out into the world. And since the Tower seldom represents a place that is *only* physical, those toppled outcasts might easily be our own deeply held beliefs, or notions about the nature of our world.

The building's top is a mighty crown representing willpower; it is shattered by a thunderbolt, an upturning of the once natural order. This might seem catastrophic, but the destruction of the old—even the violent, terrifying

destruction—is often necessary for something new to come into being.

The Tower originally bore the letter peh, a symbol of speech and communication; with its downfall, the voice of official doctrine is silenced. The divine energy and teachings hemmed in by the tower's walls are no longer held in a confined, controlled structure. They are now free to join the world again, spreading, becoming part of nature itself and materializing in new, unexpected ways. The world is turned upside down in fire, and the energy released can now fertilize the lands, minds, hearts, near and far.

As a side note, the particular Tower depicted on this card was the seat of the Dioscorian council. While this caused some civil unrest at first, the council eventually bowed to the wisdom that even their kingdom must one day fall: that to fail to acknowledge this was not only hubris, but childish folly.

XVII. THE STAR

The Flow of Knowledge

The first being kneels, rooted in creation. From them pours forth the cosmic energy radiating from its fierce primal origins in the heavens. The first being can channel this power and spread it boundlessly. They are the unknown part of ourselves that is deeply rooted in the universe itself, something we can have faith in: our lucky star.

This card follows the Tower, a vision of total destruction. But even if we know that destruction is necessary, it can be terrifying to move forward into a world that is ruined. The Star offers this hope: that even though we may fear and falter, as a part of the will of the universe we will find a way, guided by that light within ourselves.

The Star itself is the same hope and inner knowledge carried in the Hermit's lantern. It no longer needs to stay hidden: now that the worst

has struck, it can shine freely, illuminating the dark landscape—perhaps showing us a path forward.

XVIII. THE MOON

Through a Mirror Darkly

The Moon is the path of the shadow self, the dark night of the soul. Inside this darkness we find our true self. Everything is still; even the waters are motionless. The laws of physics are suspended by the rule of the mind. The night is like the deep sea: filled with instinct, dreams, primal forces. The unconscious, the primal, becomes conscious—or at least takes control of our conscious impulses. It rules, rising to the surface.

This dark mirror to our spirit might seem confusing, but even if a mirror distorts, it can only show what was already there. Our material body might fail us in the night, might be closed off, but our spirit prospers. In this moment, we look into ourselves and become aware of who we truly, deeply are. Not the dreamy, daylight image—the illusion we, or other people, want us to be—but the unapologetic fusion of animal and mind.

XIX. THE SUN

The Radiance of Life

Usually depicted as a child or children dancing under the all-knowing, bountiful Sun, Dioscorian tradition instead uses the imagery of twin birds, circling each other in flight. With the bountiful sun above, surrounded by cultivated gardens and sunflowers, these dancing birds are free to do as they please.

The Sun is the natural opposite to the Moon: in place of that card's dark mirror to the unconscious, the Sun depicts a moment of conscious joy. But this card is also, in some senses, the counterpart of the Devil. The prisoners on that card look heavenward, seeking divine enlightenment, but see only the dark form of the Devil itself. The figures on the Sun are free, blessed by a divine, all-seeing power. It looks into, and knows, both the world and the seeker consulting the cards. The birds themselves are free yet together,

innocent yet enlightened, unbound yet loaded with riches.

This power is bountiful, but not without dangers. The only boundary this card knows is heat, scorched earth, and fiery death. Too much of it creates deserts, lights fires, consumes the world. The Moon card, with its cool, frozen night, is this card's necessary counterpart. Together they form a pair critical for life, the Sun and Moon acting as a cosmic father and mother, respectively.

XX. THE GATE

A Passage of Transformation

This card is often rendered as "Judgment," but this is a Christian distortion. The sages of Dioscoria know better: it is a card of the far future, looking back at the eons that have gone before. For Christian Tarot practitioners, this was understood as the day of Judgment, the day when the works of the past and present are fully understood in their ultimate context.

For the Dioscorian seeker, the journey is both more personal and infinitely wider ranging. Our mortal bodies have carried us across the earth, we have overcome trials of loss and darkness, and we are now almost at the end of the journey. With one more step we might see the world again with new eyes, without the clouds of preconceptions, and may even regain the innocence and wonder of our childhood. Now is the time

to unite our individual selves with the universe, to overcome duality and to acknowledge that all is one. It is up to us to take this last step, to give all up and gain everything—to finally step through the Gate.

XXI. THE WORLD

Total Realization

At the edge of the heavenly gate, a once-foolish figure re-enters paradise, dancing. Their journey began with nothing—the value of the Fool is 0—and now has come full circle at the 21st card. This, in Kabbalistic tradition, is the transition from Malkuth to Yesod, which translates as “foundation to kingdom”—a passage from the physical to the astral planes.

In this moment everything is illuminated, and the letter tav, signifying salvation, blazes in the sky. The gravitas of the Hermit and Emperor or the stern gaze of the High Priestess are nothing but memories now: all that remains is a state of irrepressible energy and motion, hurtling forward with its own momentum. The dancer takes their final step watched over by four angelic guardians: guides who open the doors of heaven for this final, momentous

transformation. The dancer does not move to the left or right: rather, they are stepping out of the card itself, through the seal of infinite potential.



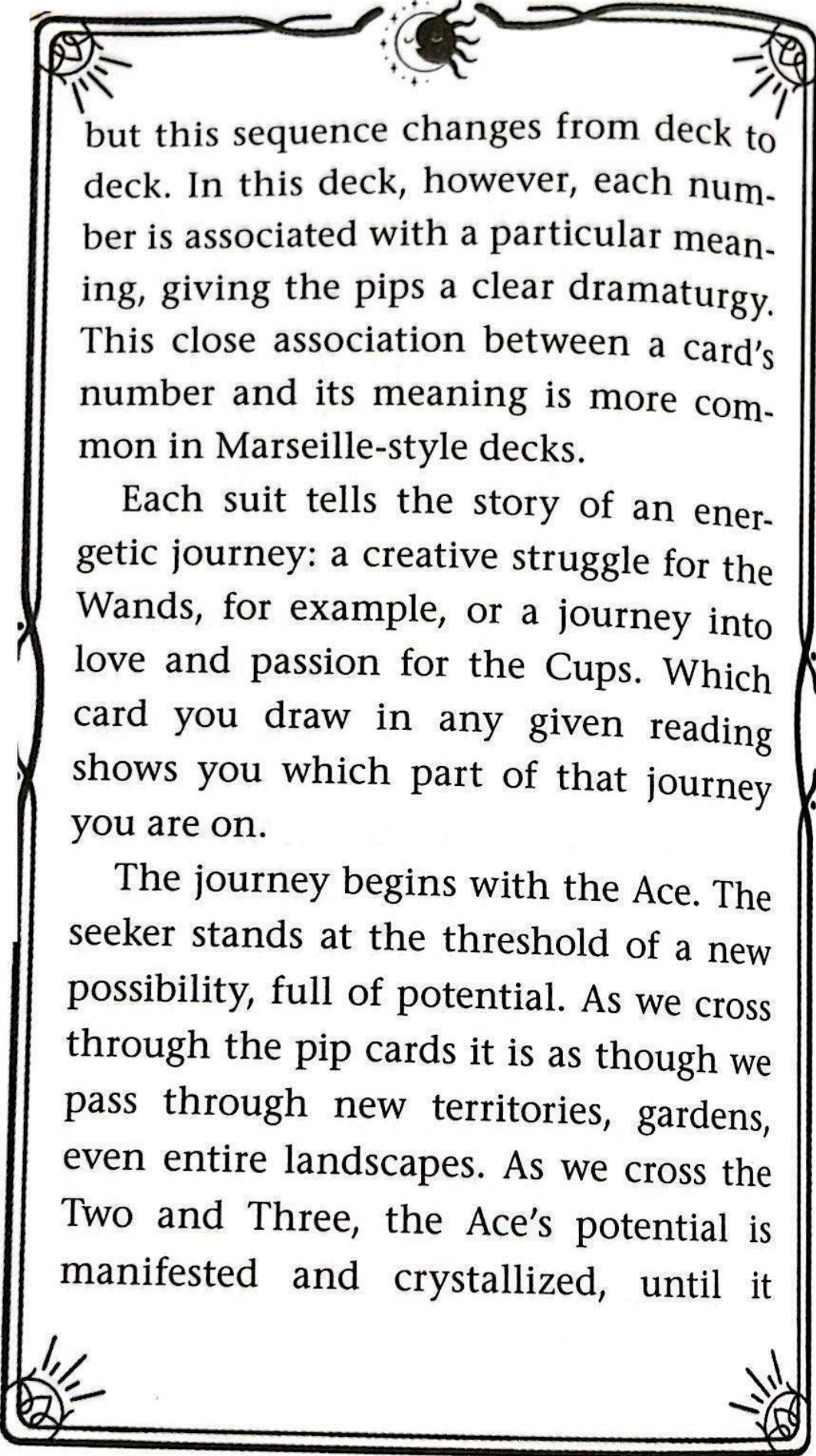
THE MINOR ARCANA

**"The whole of an Arcanum
is the sum of its details."**

—Alejandro Jodorowsky

When learning to read the Tarot, one might take one of several paths. One might be to begin with the abstract patterns of the "pip" or numeral cards, move onto the more complex archetypal figures of each suit's pages, knights, queens, and kings (the "court cards"), and then approach the more complex allegorical compositions of the Majors.

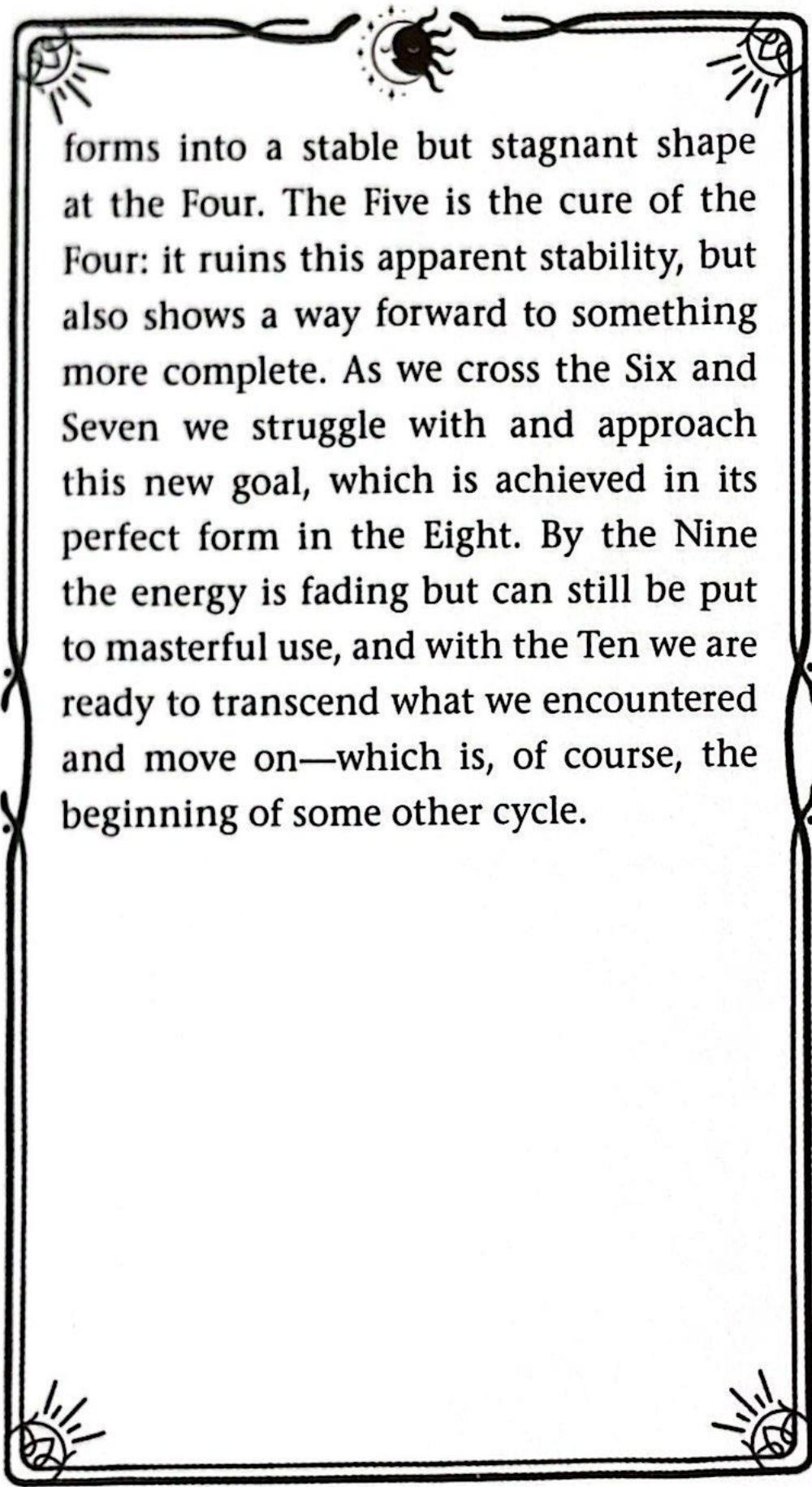
This deck also proposes a journey along the pip cards themselves. The pips of the Rider-Waite-Smith deck, for example, are arranged in a narrative sequence



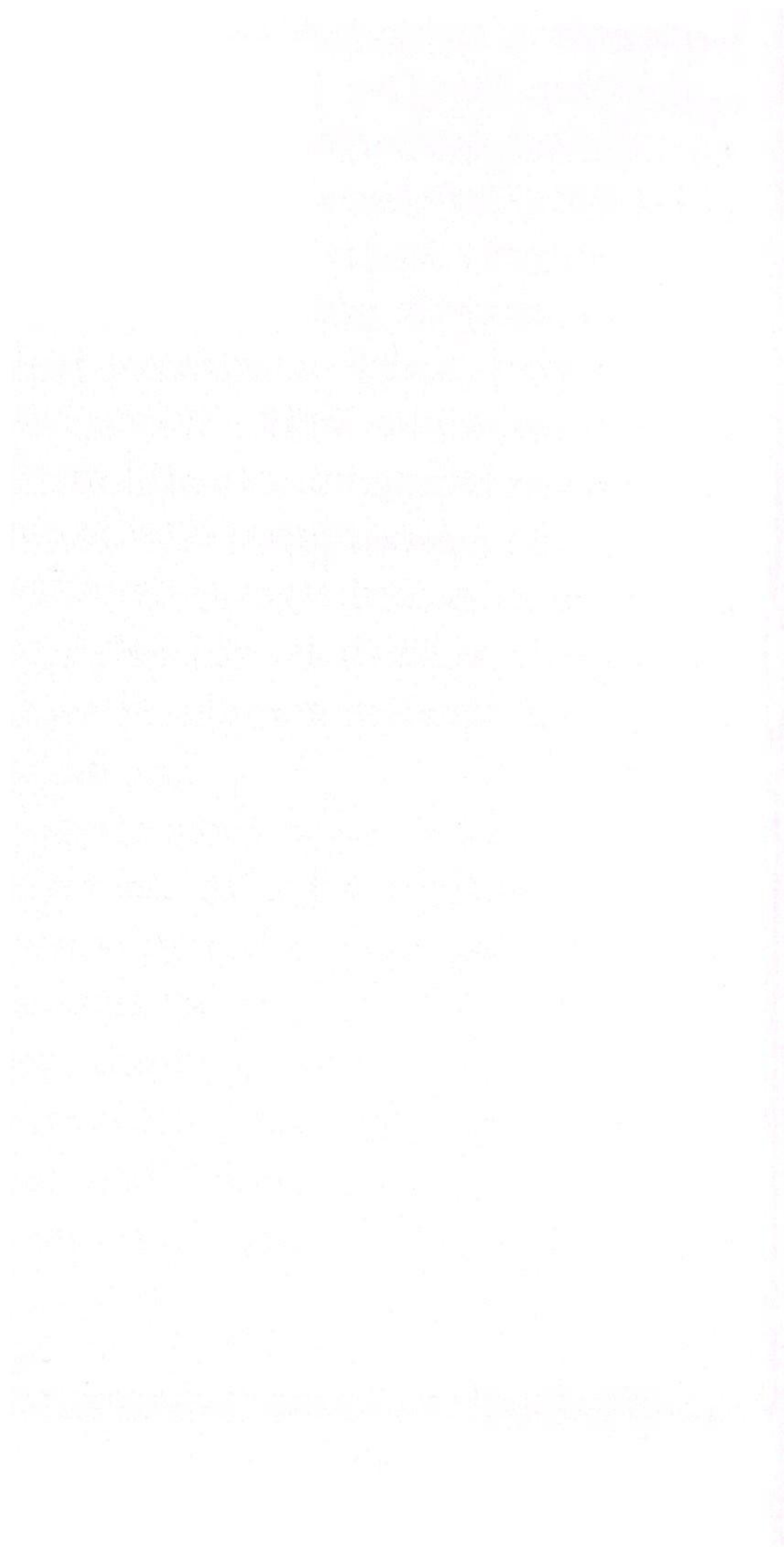
but this sequence changes from deck to deck. In this deck, however, each number is associated with a particular meaning, giving the pips a clear dramaturgy. This close association between a card's number and its meaning is more common in Marseille-style decks.

Each suit tells the story of an energetic journey: a creative struggle for the Wands, for example, or a journey into love and passion for the Cups. Which card you draw in any given reading shows you which part of that journey you are on.

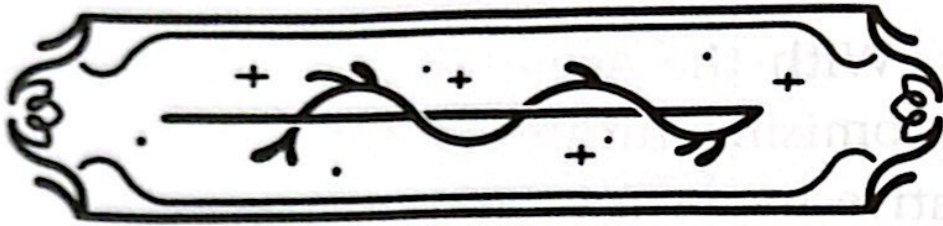
The journey begins with the Ace. The seeker stands at the threshold of a new possibility, full of potential. As we cross through the pip cards it is as though we pass through new territories, gardens, even entire landscapes. As we cross the Two and Three, the Ace's potential is manifested and crystallized, until it



forms into a stable but stagnant shape at the Four. The Five is the cure of the Four: it ruins this apparent stability, but also shows a way forward to something more complete. As we cross the Six and Seven we struggle with and approach this new goal, which is achieved in its perfect form in the Eight. By the Nine the energy is fading but can still be put to masterful use, and with the Ten we are ready to transcend what we encountered and move on—which is, of course, the beginning of some other cycle.



WANDS



Out of all the Minors, the Wands are the most authentic and straightforward suit. They are of this world, ready to be held and used. They stand for the power of action and creation. Like any tool they require skill and balance.

Using them too little leaves us powerless and unfulfilled, but overusing them can leave us overconfident, overambitious, and overworked. If we learn how to accept the Wands' offerings without burning ourselves with their intense energy, very little can hold us back.

ACE OF WANDS

Creative Potential

With the Ace of Wands, we hear a promising future calling all our creative forces into action. We grab this future by the horns or the handle since it is wielded as a mighty club! This is a moment from which anything can grow, even out of thin air: we can materialize something that will not stop until it is as vast as the world itself. This act is driven by the fire of passion, which later might lead one astray. For now, though, it is pure, authentic, creative energy.

TWO OF WANDS

Decision at the Crossroads

The Two of Wands is an intersection of energies: receptive toward the heavens, active toward the earth; generative and creative. These energies could oppose and stifle each other, or their contrast could bring immense power. At this intersection one might hold for a while, or move forward, which might require the synthesis of these forces. The path ahead promises fulfillment and pleasure.

THREE OF WANDS

Explosion of Growth

The Three of Wands depicts a trinity of staffs or branches: three shoots flowering upward. This represents a vector of growth pushing into the world, ultimately toward thriving, flourishing, decay, and death. These layers of symbolism reinforce the card's dominant principles: the number three for abundance and bursting growth, wands for vital/sexual energy, all coming together in the card's center. All stages in the cycle of life are represented: growth, stability, and decay. As Jodorowsky said in *The Way of the Tarot*, "It is the seed that violently opens its shell without knowing what plant it is going to become."

FOUR OF WANDS

Stability & Balance

The Four of Wands is a point of arrival. Our creative energies and emotions have reached a high point but are stabilizing into a fixed constellation. This could manifest as us establishing a creative practice, a familiar mode of generation, or even enjoying a celebration of our accomplishments or those around us. At first glance this seems very promising, but this stability risks a slide into stagnation: the fire slowly dying out.

FIVE OF WANDS

Disharmony & Conflict

With the Five of Wands, the harmony achieved in the Four of Wands breaks. Our creative energies, once stable, are now conflicting and can no longer sustain each other. The flame of inspiration has gone out, symbolized by the card's unlit blossom. Our creativity now flows chaotically in all directions, symbolized by the card's stems crisscrossing in many directions. The struggle is painful and frustrating, but necessary to break the gridlock of the previous card. The result of this clash is hard to predict. An immature seeker might be thrown by this obstacle, while a wiser, more mature mind could use this chaotic energy to push forward, toward a breakthrough or resolution.

SIX OF WANDS

Accomplishment

After the struggles of conflicting creative energies and combative passions, the Six of Wands is a moment of triumph.

The tangle of creative stems has been ordered, and an illuminated blossom standing for a work of passion is now cradled near the bottom of the card. Out of all this struggle, something has been created and stands proud. Nonetheless, this brings its own risks: that we might rest on our laurels, preferring to dwell on this accomplishment rather than pursuing further creative paths.

SEVEN OF WANDS

Defiance

The Seven of Wands heralds new strife on our journey. Unlike the Two or Five of Wands, which described internal struggles, this is a battle of the one against many: A single creative force struggling to rise above the tangle of six other shoots. This struggling force must fight against the established order—perhaps even the order of triumphs and achievements past—if it is to rise above them and ultimately best them. Nonetheless, the card's blossom bears a bright halo, signifying that forward progress is natural, and a breakthrough is near.

EIGHT OF WANDS

The Swiftiness of Artistry

The Eight of Wands is the essence of swiftiness, speed, and action; throwing caution to the wind, hastening to apply the lessons learned on the journey thus far. The confrontational forces of the previous card have either united with, or been deflected by, their heroic adversary. The card's eight stems, signifying our various creative energies, are finally aligned, each budding with passionate light. There is no stopping the creator now, their energy chasing through the skies.

NINE OF WANDS

Bearing Our Accomplishments Forward

Our creative energy is waning after a great triumph, but the momentum is not yet exhausted. Eight fiery stems, once proud and tall, now droop and shed their leaves. The fire of our creative passion may be flickering, but there is still time for one last surge—and in the flames we see our true selves, reflected in all we have made and accomplished. Now is the time to hold on to that self, stand our ground, and put the finishing touches to what we started.

TEN OF WANDS

The Burden of Completion

We have reached the end of our creative energies. As with all things that are completed, this could be a happy time or a difficult one. Did we take on too much? Have our passions or accomplishments become burdens—drudgery rather than challenges? The interweaving stems and lights of this card could symbolize a perfect accomplishment: the creative interweaving of many elements to create something angelic. But the rings of branches could stand for a hedge maze of our own creation, a creative labyrinth we have woven around ourselves. Regardless, we must be the ones to carry these accomplishments for good or ill: they are the spoils of struggles now long past.

Ten symbolizes completion; the end of the cycle; for some, a perfect number due to its numerical neatness. But just as no perfection can last in the material realm, so the end of a cycle is really the beginning of a new one.

PAGE OF WANDS

The Passion of Curiosity

This young Page holds a wand larger than themselves. A shepherd by trade, they cannot help looking to the horizon and dreaming of distant lands. Their heart is led by the nascent rays of their curious passion, symbolized by the blossom above them. They are ready for action: Full of eagerness, plans, desires, all bound up in them and ready to explode. They might not be prepared for what is to come, but they do not care. Don't think about it. Do it.

KNIGHT OF WANDS

Balanced Actions

This well-versed veteran of the world has seen and experienced it all. Although they were once driven by fierce emotions and overwhelming events beyond their control, they have transformed those forces and are now their own master. Having tamed their passions, symbolized by their fiery steed, their skill and control are masterful, allowing them to focus those forces on goals of their own choosing. They are neither driven by internal whims nor held back by doubt or trepidation. Their intuition has been heightened, allowing them to choose wisely no matter the dilemma, neither rushing nor hesitating.

QUEEN OF WANDS

Mastered Intuition

The Queen is a person of action, and a master of her intuition, seated on a throne as imposing as the Emperor's though less sober; more jovial. The Queen of Wands is at the top of her game: A master of her trade, with intricate knowledge that she can boldly put into action. She is a master of intuition: Her hands are relaxed but hold her staff at the ready, able to react in the blink of an eye. She sits surrounded by lionesses: these restrained, powerful beasts are calm for now but could leap into action in moments.

From her throne she can view the entire world and is receptive to everything around her. Far from being a passive observer, though, she acts on this knowledge when the time is right, making her move at the perfect moment. To resist this dynamic ruler is futile: Her charm is blinding, shining from her courageous breast like a

second sun, ensuring all who might oppose her simply acquiesce and melt away. Yet this Queen is not all flame and anger: her throne is decorated with and surrounded by sunflowers, a symbol of her hopeful, nurturing disposition.

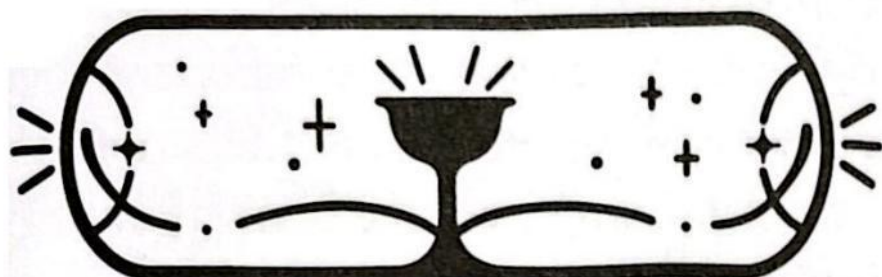
KING OF WANDS

To Act Without Inhibition

Like the King of Swords, this royal figure is young, expressive, and decisively active. At the height of his powers, everything he intends and envisions comes to pass. He knows no sorrow, no doubt; nothing can hold him back. Unlike the other court cards of this suit, his wand is not a crafted staff but a branch eagerly torn from a tree to symbolize his ardor. He is therefore a potent figure, but not without danger: when one wields one's will with total focus, without safeguards, second thoughts, or moral qualms, it is all too easy to make a fatal mistake. This is why his throne is lapped by flames and his companion is a roaring lion: there is great power, but great risk, in this reckless confidence. This style of rulership does not brook quibbling: It is pure will, commanding and manifesting as it sees fit.

Whatever it wills is a triumph, be that a creative act, or an act of mercy, or conquest—or terror. In this regard, the King of Wands has much in common with the Chariot, a card that knows no holding back.

CUPS



The Cups stand for compassion, love, and the continual flow of energy between creatures. They are an ever-changing dance of vessel and liquid. We are these vessels, and our emotions are the liquids. With the cups, everything is possible, but nothing should ever come to a halt. They teach us to avoid stagnation, to achieve perpetual flow, and to find a tender kindness free of ego.

ACE OF CUPS

Love's Limitless Potential

The Ace of Cups shows a single large cup, overflowing with water, often held by a divine power. It symbolizes the entirety of an emotional life, concentrated in a single source of overflowing potential. Everything is possible, all your hopes and joys: it all starts here. The symbol of the cup might also reference the Holy Grail and the Christian Blessed Sacrament: a symbol of abundant renewal and hope.

TWO OF CUPS

A Promising Encounter

With the Two of Cups, we turn away from the world and toward each other, opening ourselves. This is just the first step in a dance that is dominated by emotions. We are not bound in any form yet, but partake in a constant, fluid exchange, like water poured back and forth between two cups. This liquid substance could be called many things: love, respect, attraction—it is not ours to hold on to, it must flow to make sense, for it is not individual. For the exchange to even be possible, we need to already carry this within ourselves: to love another, one must love thyself.

THREE OF CUPS

The Formation of Love

With the Three of Cups, we are offered the ultimate magic potion. The alchemical process of our encounter with other beings has formed a unique and powerful force within us. This could be an intensification of the bond glimpsed in the Two of Cups, or the formation of a bond between more than one person. Regardless, the bond formed is some kind of ideal or romantic love.

It is a fragile creation that elevates us to heights that are breathtaking, but potentially harmful—perhaps even lethal. But the feeling is mutual: as of this moment, the beings sharing this bond feel intense love and attraction for each other. It is a tender seedling that could grow and become something more stable—developing into the Four of Cups—or it could perish in numerous ways, some of them excruciating.

FOUR OF CUPS

Stability and Stagnation

In the Four of Cups, love has transformed from the earlier, more ephemeral stages: It is now stronger, more defined, more self-supporting. Love is now fully expressed and manifested; it is ready to be integrated as a part of everyday life. The water pours from cup to cup in a seemingly endless fountain. The dangers and turmoil of the early stages of love have been overcome; the ship, so to speak, is now sailing in safe waters.

This is a moment of apparent stability, but if we take it for granted it will go stale, stagnate, and ultimately perish. The moment we realize this, it might already be too late. We can enjoy it only while it lasts, then seek to further transform and develop this love later.

FIVE OF CUPS

Following the Call

Sometimes it is time to move on. The Five of Cups signals we should bring forth something new because the old patterns no longer serve us. The spilled cup at the bottom stands for a mishap, or a squandered opportunity. But this setback is a signal that it's time for something new: an opportunity for a new ingredient, a new path that can be taken.

Leaving behind the old might have traditionally been considered an act of temptation—even something sinister—but we must look past those dualistic struggles to see the bright light of opportunity beyond such black-and-white thinking. This fifth cup might not mean the end of this love, but its transformation onto a higher level: a path of knowledge and realizations. Like everything new, change can be destructive—hence the spilled cup at the card's bottom—but it is the only way to maintain the flow of life.

SIX OF CUPS

The Beauty of Love

Three rows of cups, forming a natural pyramid: All three aspects of love—body, mind, and soul—together form a complete, energizing union. This ideal form suggests that our state of love has attained perfection. But while this conclusion is compelling, it is not the end of the journey, and the inverted sixth cup betrays this seemingly perfect vision. Whoever stops now to savor this beauty is in danger of being trapped in this mirage, mesmerized by the enticing power of narcissism and the ego.

This is a moment where one draws on relationship models from childhood, or from nostalgic ideas of how love “should be”—models that can provide a helpful framework, but can stop us seeing our relationships as they truly are. As such, this love can become distant from the objects of our affections, more self-involved.

Even reaching out, trying to reconnect this perfect love with others, can be dangerous: like two egoistic lovers who care for nothing but themselves, they might enjoy each other for a time but will find true connection elusive.

SEVEN OF CUPS

A Core of Kindness

This card holds an abundance of energy and signals that a breakthrough has been accomplished. The dangers of egoism and narcissism inherent to the Suit of Cups have been overcome. After a fundamental shift in perspective and a leap of the imagination, a new core driving the flow of love is discovered: eternal kindness. This is not a grand gesture or a public display of affection that encompasses the universe, but something tender and intimate, like a caress. It may be small and hidden from most, perhaps still growing, but it sets the cups dancing with contentment, and has the power to spread, unchecked, to the edges of the universe. This card offers us this vision, and a choice: Will we let go of our preconceptions and embrace this tenderness?

EIGHT OF CUPS

Being in Union

This is the flaming heart at the center of the universe: a union with the Divine. With the Eight of Cups, we have achieved emotional stability without imprisonment or stagnation. Instead, we have seen through the shallow temptation of seeming perfection, continued our expansive journey, and entered a nourishing, cosmic union, all while following the most tender and basic lesson: to simply love, and love simply. The sun-and-moon motifs on the cups symbolize the cosmic reach of this energetic power, and of the forces of light and dark being in total balance: everything is in flow. From this point, we can move the universe itself.

NINE OF CUPS

Moving On

Love cannot last in a static form. It either transforms and grows anew or perishes in one form or another. This is the nature of life—of all energy in the universe—and it is the lesson of the Nine of Cups. While the fountain-like edifice on this card is magnificent, it's also strangely ephemeral. Eventually we will have to move on; if we don't stand up and leave this tranquil fountain of our own volition, something or someone will force us. This is a tale of caution, but also hope: life is motion, and love is life in motion. If the flow is maintained, there will be countless more fountains: we need not cling to this one.

TEN OF CUPS

Entering a New Existence

With the Ten of Cups, we are not just ready to move on: we are stepping through the looking glass. This is a moment of ascension, of transformation, of realized communion. A gate has been opened for us; as we cross the threshold, we step into a strange, overwhelming transformation. There are no more doubts, dangers, or ambiguities: this is a holy opportunity, granted at the end of our emotional journey, which we grasp gladly.

PAGE OF CUPS

Powerful Emotions

This Page is brimming with tumultuous emotions. One moment they are outgoing and exuberant, the next they shrivel up inside themselves. In their cup they carry the entire spectrum of human feelings. This gives them a remarkable range of expression and creativity, but controlling and channeling these forces is a skill they still need to develop. When the Page of Cups arrives, things always get interesting—even chaotic. Their energy electrifies the room like a static charge; one should expect the unexpected when the Page is around. There might be drama, but also lots of fun.

KNIGHT OF CUPS

Perpetual State of Flow

The Knights are masters in what they do, and in the Knight of Cups' case they have achieved a state of grace. But the Knight is still young, mobile, and dynamic. Unlike a King or Queen, they don't hold and rule land but live life by experiencing it in motion. So the Knight of Cups carries on, moving fluidly to new shores, drifting. They and their horse are a single, flowing unit. They could rest—enjoy their accomplishments—but that would mean stagnation, entropy, and decay. To exist means to be in motion, and so the road goes on and on and on, unfolding.

QUEEN OF CUPS

Pure of Heart

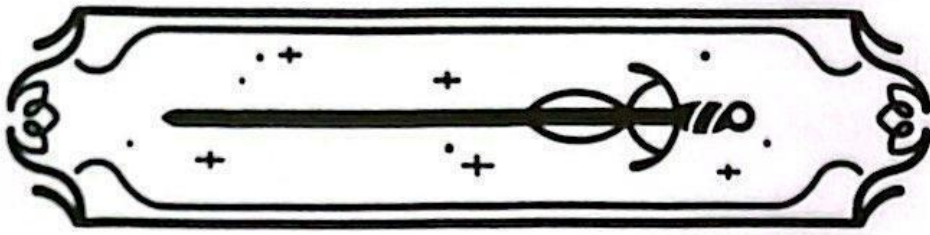
Residing at the edge of the sea, this Queen is a delicate creature. She connects with her realm intimately and cares for it deeply. She has no need to express herself outwardly, but tends to look inward instead. Her thoughts and feelings surface like ripples from her subconscious and soul, and flow like the waters that surround her—but unlike the Page, she is mindful of them and in full control. The Queen of Cups teaches us that holding ourselves still allows us to feel ourselves again, reconnect with our emotions, and act from the heart.

KING OF CUPS

Wisdom of Kindness

The most traveled of all the Kings, this ruler has seen the world and met everyone there was to meet. In his travels, he has learned that kindness can be the key that unlocks any obstacle. He would never use force or tyranny, as the harmony and happiness of those he interacts with are of the utmost importance to him. To those seeking his support, he will offer his treasured wisdom. In his cup he stores his precious feelings for those who thirst for peace, harmony, and companionship. The King of Cups can heal us with his kindness and teach us to flourish and grow with openness.

SWORDS



The Swords aren't blunt tools of war, but delicate instruments for our inward journey. One must learn to wield them skillfully if one is to rise above the confusion of the world. They are instruments of Logos, the spiritual force of divine reason, that is ever-present and immensely powerful if only we know how to look for it. If we wield them correctly, they can open up gates of perception within ourselves and cut the Gordian knots of our Earthly burdens. They can be fickle, troublesome, even painful, but can guide us to breathtaking heights of clarity.

ACE OF SWORDS

Power of the Intellect

Aces are symbols of potential, and the Ace of Swords is the potential of divine intellect. Our intellect is an active power that we can wield, reaching upward to the heavens. It is also receptive since it connects to and is reliant upon our five senses. Armed with our passive senses and active reasoning, intellect allows us to connect to the heavens and pierce the veils of confusion obscuring reality. This allows us to walk a path of disinterested logic, cutting away the extraneous: a path that narrows as it goes from more to less yet that we can walk in order to touch the expansive Divine. This difficult path is symbolized by the Holy Mountain on this card: the winding path upward mirrors the difficult journey toward self-enlightenment. By grasping the sword, we make a clear decision and take our first step down this road.

TWO OF SWORDS

The Aspiration Begins

The Two of Swords prepares us for our journey to the inner self. Since the Ace is more a promise of the Sword's power, our journey truly begins here. The first spark of intellect has been kindled and points the way forward, in the card's center. This will be a journey of divine intellect, as the swords remove any layer of reality that hinders us on our progress toward the Eight of Swords, a point of perfect clarity and void-like silence. Possibilities lie before us: we must choose which to seize and which to reject, as we narrow both our path and our focus for the journey ahead. Our plans begin to sprout, about to grow and sprawl across our mind and surroundings, like the seedling between the blades.

THREE OF SWORDS

Cutting the Ties

This is the moment of vivid, decisive embarkment. We are no longer witnessing the organic growth of the seedling between the swords: instead, we are slashing ourselves free—an act of violence, but a necessary one. Without this step, we would only be the passive subject of an external force and its unpredictable growth. The two curved swords are single edged—that is, effective and outward facing—signifying the effectiveness of this act. The sudden, destructive appearance of the red sword frees us, setting us on a path of our choosing, but this sword is double edged, signifying that this destructive energy can also cut both ways and carries risk to the wielder. This energy is rash, unilateral, and violent, but it must be done to walk the path of the swords.

FOUR OF SWORDS

The Practical Spirit

After the rash action of the Three of Swords, we must regroup and take stock. This means using the practical side of divine intellect to engineer, invent, and marshal resources. The four swords are laid as though in a weapon rack, organized and ready. But the stable and material qualities of the Four of Swords is dangerous: it could be a dead end, like a tool case that is highly organized but never opened. Constrained by practical thinking, our intellect can become grounded, and incapable of making intuitive leaps to other ideas or planes of existence.

FIVE OF SWORDS

A Leap of the Mind

Sometimes we need to do something forceful, even extraordinary, to break the bonds that constrain us. Five swords, led by a red-tipped dueling foil, marshal together to strike away the orderliness that no longer serves us. With the Five of Swords, we leave the order that we established with the four swords of the previous card. We leave our comfort zone audaciously, with a powerful leap. This could be a crazy idea, a daring plan, or even a figment of the imagination; regardless, we leap after it with all our strength and focus. Here, the danger is the opposite from the Four of Swords: there is no risk of doing too little but failure by doing too much, allowing yourself to be foolishly led astray by some unhinged plan. But perhaps we must be led astray to reach our destiny?

SIX OF SWORDS

Approaching the Inner Light

With the Six of Swords, we catch a first glimpse of divine bliss within us—a goal we have not yet reached but that we can finally see. Six swords, arranged like a prism, refract the divine light we seek. This is our reward for our courageous actions and the decisiveness that allowed us to leave worldly distractions behind. After trekking through difficult terrain we finally stand before the holy mountain, a symbol for whatever great challenge we are pursuing—perhaps spiritual perfection itself. Though the climb ahead is difficult, for now we can at least delight in the ecstasy of this mountainous vista. Here we experience the joy of the intellect, a taste of what is to come.

SEVEN OF SWORDS

Cutting into the Inner Silence

This is the final ascent. The peak lies before us; now we must climb. While the journey of the swords often seems like a clear gem of pure reason, here we must instead empty ourselves, shedding all that prevents us from seeing the clear light within. This is an active process that must, paradoxically, be achieved by actively doing nothing. We are withdrawing from the material planes; with every step toward the self, we see less of "reality" and instead glimpse more of what is truly real.

EIGHT OF SWORDS

Enter the Void

This is where our path ends: a place of total silence. The eight swords form an ideal circle; in the space between we see the piercing truth of divine enlightenment. We have eliminated the noise that muddies the waters, that clouds our vision from clear sight. Now we stare into the ultimate clarity—the void—at the end of our intellectual journey. There is nothing but the realization of our self, our own eyes looking back upon ourselves and seeing truthfully. We have found emptiness; within the emptiness, we have found ourselves.

NINE OF SWORDS

A New Beginning

With the Nine of Swords, we make the conscious choice to not linger in the void of the Eight of Swords, but return to the world and share our experience with others. We have learned something introspective about our true self; now we must turn that focus outward and look to others. This is necessary if we wish to be part of this world, rather than withdrawn from it. But we must also acknowledge that some knowledge can exist only in the void and cannot be brought back to our world. The thrust of our sword, therefore, is twisted and bends around our target.

TEN OF SWORDS

It Takes Two

Our aspiration to share our knowledge is fulfilled, marking the end of our journey and the beginning of a new one. The spark of enlightenment we sought cannot sustain itself, and splits—but this gives us an opportunity to share that same light. We have left the hermit's path, no longer in the crystal prison of our own inner self, but have found The Other to walk this path with us. The Other might be another person but could also be a new strength—such as emotional peace, material stability, or physical well-being—to complement our radiant, though solitary, intellect. Now we can strike with a different focus, cutting from Earth to the Heavens, wielding two blades that pierce the confused knotwork within us and penetrate the center of things. For this we have united all forces.

PAGE OF SWORDS

Contemplating the Journey

All Pages harbor doubt, and this one is no different. The Page of Swords is prepared—they have the appropriate clothing, their sword drawn and sharp, everything necessary—yet something is not quite ready. There is doubt: Which way to go? This confusion is normal for those young and new to the path: our simple concepts of duality are difficult to overcome, filling us with pressing, overwhelming questions. The Page will learn soon enough to commit themselves and their Logos, their knowledge, but that moment hasn't arrived yet. They remain pensive.

KNIGHT OF SWORDS

Lightning-Fast Thinking

The Knight of Swords has dedicated their existence to the pursuit of a very particular grail: to capture the essence of the Logos or divine intellect. During their journey they have shed most of their worldly baggage, whether their material or emotional needs. In return they have gained an immense capacity to master the mind, rendering their intellect swift and powerful. Theirs is a mind unleashed, thoughts that can flow unhindered, the spirit of the Logos manifested with unrivaled speed. Superficial interpretations of this card often assume this Knight is a warrior of some sort. But their sword is a delicate instrument, a symbol for the sharpness of the mind: when this Knight enters the fray, they engage with their supreme wit.

QUEEN OF SWORDS

Attempting Transcendence

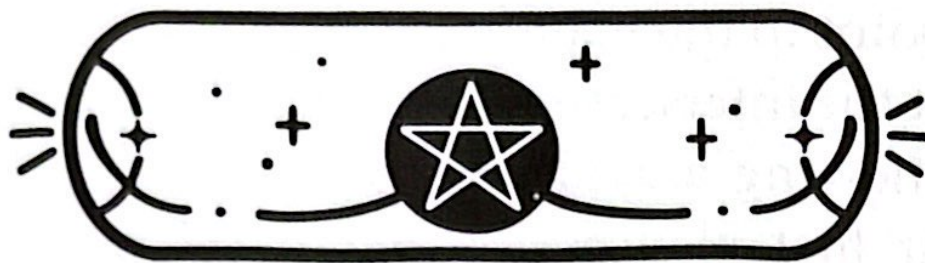
The Queen of Swords is a creature of the mind. She is well established in this mental realm and is experienced in the ways of the intellect. But she has reached a plateau in her own journey, realizing that to truly strike at the heart of things she must let go of everything. A metamorphosis is needed, symbolized by the butterflies around her. The Queen is on the verge of this decision, about to overcome the powerful emotions and fear of loss this step has engendered. This is the Queen's lesson to us: our one certainty is that nothing lasts; we must relinquish everything eventually, as the price of transcendence.

KING OF SWORDS

Wielding Intellectual Power

This fair, young ruler is a determined master of the mind and wields it like a scepter. With it, he controls the people and the lands around him. He employs armies of scribes, clerks, lawyers, thinkers, and tinkerers to do his bidding. Few are as brilliant as this young King in delegating tasks, and thereby extending his reach, and moths are drawn to the light of his intellect as though to a flame. With elegance, the King of Swords pulls the strings of the net he has cast upon the world, constantly mending, reeling, cutting, and adjusting. He is drawn to the power of new ideas and so, despite the supreme stability of his position, he ceaselessly pushes for change. He prefers the elegance of his flexible blade and mind to the blunt, powerful club held by his cousin, the King of Wands.

PENTACLES



Like the Wands, the Pentacles are of this world. They symbolize every material that exists in this domain. They teach us that the world around us is valuable too, and we should not scorn it in favor of distant spiritual promises. Instead, the Pentacles teach us that in order to learn in this world, we must embrace it. We achieve spirituality not by rejecting the material, but by looking at the material through spiritual eyes.

ACE OF PENTACLES

The Opportunities of the Material World

The Ace of Pentacles is our entry point to the material world. It is a card at the intersection of matter and spirit, allowing a synthesis of both realms. At first glance this might seem like only a humble coin, but like all currency it holds within it the power and meaning of all coins. It is the luckiest of all pennies and is stamped with the likeness of every ruler and numeral. Looking at the Ace of Pentacles, we realize that grand, good works can be achieved in our own realm, not just in the spiritual. The material realm may have its hardships, but it is where we live; we must embrace it to succeed and remain watchful for opportunities here.

TWO OF PENTACLES

Union of Material Forces

The material world, for which the pentacles stand, can be interpreted in a dualistic fashion: it holds light and darkness, life and death, growth and decay. These endless dualistic forces, and the friction between them, drive the dance of life. This endless dance is symbolized by the ouroboros figure snaking around the two pentacles in an infinite ribbon. One can master this dualism, reconcile opposing forces, and reap the benefits. This is less a single decisive action and more a continuous balancing act: keeping the dynamics of nature spinning at just the right angle. This attitude is often found simply in the observation and acceptance of life as we seek balance and to understand life's complex dance.

THREE OF PENTACLES

Explosive Growth

This is the first stage of learning and decisively acting in the material world. We now understand that the forces of this world can be manipulated, and then embark on a journey to achieve some practical goal. As when learning any new discipline, our progress could be enormous due to our untapped potential. But, of course, this is not without its dangers: we must beware of losing control of our newfound power, inflated expectations, and delusions of grandeur. This card is everything right and wrong with the first active steps down the road of material action.

FOUR OF PENTACLES

The Paradox of Material Wealth

Arranged in a sturdy pillar, the four coins symbolize security in the material world; this, combined with the Pentacle suit, means this card stands for financial or material stability; however, this is an illusory stability: nothing is truly permanent in our entropic world. If we were to hold still, comfortably remaining below this pillar's "stable" shelter, we would be disturbed by some other motion: petrification, decay, or some external shock, perhaps. To rest here is to err. The Four of Pentacles can only be used wisely when it becomes a foundation to move forward from.

FIVE OF PENTACLES

Aspirations that Break Stagnation

While the pillar has fallen, a new form has emerged, whether from sheer luck or our own designs: perhaps a shelter or a sunrise. No matter what toppled our stability, a new day has dawned, both spiritually and in the material world, beckoning us to seize our chance. The Five of Pentacles readies us for self-knowledge and brilliant, applied ideas. In all, this is a tempting moment to push forward and get something done . . . but it can also be the wrong kind of temptation, leading us down blind alleys.

SIX OF PENTACLES

The Realization of Beauty

In the material world for which the pentacle suit stands, one type of perfection can be reached: beauty. This is not our ultimate goal, the unknowable truth, but it can be a sort of heaven on Earth. The Four of Wands held a hope of such perfection; in the Five of Pentacles, we struggled to reach out and realize it. Now it has been achieved, and we behold a splendid fountain of material plenty, cascading like liquid starlight.

SEVEN OF PENTACLES

Transcending the Material World

Numerologically, the Seven of Pentacles represents our urgent desire to find depth, meaning, and spiritual connection in our labor. When pursuing enlightenment and mastery in the material world, we eventually find we must transcend the world itself. We must stop seeking short-term success and take actions that might seem less effective in the here and now but will lay the groundwork for long-term victory.

Our actions in the world and upon ourselves will eventually cycle back to us, shifting us onto a different plane; this is the harvest of our work. Notice how the four pentacles forming a perfect square have risen above the three of the earth: this symbolizes how, even if our work is material, it will ultimately have meaning only within the spiritual realm.

EIGHT OF PENTACLES

Material and Spiritual Perfection

This pillar shape mirrors the perfection of the Four of Pentacles, but this pillar is sturdier and more flexible: it is strong not only in the material plane but also in the spiritual. This is true fulfillment, true wealth. This world may contain a wealth of objects to be possessed and coveted, but here we reach beyond the physical, attaining a richness in spirit and soul—not just coffers filled with gold, seemingly rich but ultimately hollow. The Eight of Pentacles is matter saturated with spirit. This is where holiness can happen.

NINE OF PENTACLES

New Growth from Plenty

The Nine of Pentacles depicts a pillar of pentacles, four of which are “budding,” about to sprout new matter. This card signals the arrival of a new material condition such as a child, project, or stroke of fortune. This new growth is possible because we have already mastered the synthesis of the material and spiritual through our past achievements and established resources. At the same time, special precautions are necessary: though promising, the budding opportunity is yet fragile.

TEN OF PENTACLES

The Spirit of Matter Renewing

The material cycle is now ending. A new one is coming. From a structural point of view, one might mistake the Ten of Pentacles as a continuation or climax since it comes last in the Pentacles sequence. But upon closer inspection, one sees another geometry at work: the circular portal seen also in the last of the Major Arcana, XXI. The World. The tenth card in the suit, therefore, is both the aspiration of the material, now married to the spiritual, but it is also a portal to the next cycle, the beginning of something unique and new. All matter must perish, but in perishing, create the new. This card, then, is about the ending of a material cycle—an achievement that has been fulfilled—but also about the new worlds that have been opened up as this cycle comes to a close.

PAGE OF PENTACLES

A Promising Opportunity

One of the great gifts held by this youth is the ability to grow, symbolized by the lamb. This Page holds the world in their hand, and with it the possibility to acquire wealth and security. They have just stepped onto the scene of life, having left the innocent playgrounds of childhood. They are framed in a threshold to signify this is a transitional moment; the doorway itself is an arch of flowers to symbolize their potential for further growth. They are not in a hurry, still looking around curiously to see what the world might hold for them. But they have a talent to both give and receive. On top of everything, they have the luck that brought them this opportunity in the first place.

KNIGHT OF PENTACLES

The Fruits of Hard Labor

Tempting though they are, we eventually learn that shortcuts and quick fixes are illusions; one might occasionally get lucky, but for the realist there is only one route to success: hard work. The Knight of Pentacles stands for this like no other. They wield no weapon: They work not through violence but via cycles of labor, symbolized by the arcs of starlight behind them. They are in no hurry, preferring to assess their plans thoroughly before taking action. Once they have set them in motion, they will execute them with great diligence and a stubborn persistence that knows no mercy, neither to themselves nor others. Though the work may be repetitive and tedious, at the end of the cycle they know they are assured the fruits of their hard labor.

QUEEN OF PENTACLES

Content with Wealth

This Queen takes care of business. When it comes to managing anything on the material plane, she is at the top of her game. Hard work has made her skillful, and wide experience has taught her a breadth of knowledge and to be content with her accomplishments. Her carefully gathered resources—the hanging stars above her—are arrayed within easy reach, ready to be used as necessary. Others might become restless and reach beyond their capabilities, but the Queen of Pentacles is happy with what she has, what she can do and what she has achieved. The ram whose chin she cradles stands for her passionate, entrepreneurial spirit, but it is calm rather than reckless: the Queen possesses these energies but keeps them in check, to serve her. She is generous with both her skills and her possessions. What the world gave to her, she is happy to share with those she takes care of.

KING OF PENTACLES

The End of the Journey toward Material Wealth

The King resides at the end of the road of all material wealth. He has grown old in the pursuit of it, and now he enjoys it in a more passive and receptive manner. He looks toward a future, where additional gains might wait, but there is no need for action; he holds the staff of power, but there seems little need to use it. He understands the entire spectrum of wealth and has adorned himself with it: jewels, coins, a throne impressed with the forms of plants, and a bull crowned with the Ace of Pentacles. This bull stands for Taurus: the King's practical, dependable, steady nature. He has left his palace and resides in his garden, a paradise of a sort on Earth. This old man, surveying his kingdom at the end of his life, finds serene peace by discovering the nature of material wealth and being content with it. But

here rests also a danger: this is a complacent card, a final stage, and therefore subject to decline and entropy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to gold extra for supporting the early stages of *Sefirot*.

Thanks to Causa Creations for pouring in their own resources for this great leap forward.

Thanks to everyone involved in the success of the Kickstarter campaign: Ben Wahl, Bakanoë, Meredith Graves, Michael Liebe, Wobblersound, Thomas Ortsik, Lisa Nielsen-Spieler, Christian Knapp, Reinhold Bidner, Small Furry Games, Natalie Neumann and Ricardo Bayer, Sarah Hiebl, Brian Main, and Leali Heyman.

And last but not least, thanks to Zsombor Sváb for being the relentless machine behind this project for countless months.

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James Patton is an independent game developer and co-founder of quirky narrative-focused studio Clockwork Bird. Born in the UK, James moved to Vienna, Austria, after finishing university; upon realizing the UK was spiraling into “failed state” territory, he remained. James has been a practicing witch and user of Tarot and the I Ching for divinatory and spiritual purposes since 2018. He is owned by two cats.

Eliot Baum and Viv Tanner are an artist duo located in Austria, working as freelance illustrators and comic artists. They have worked collaboratively for many years on such projects as their long-form comic *Heart of Gold*, and other, smaller endeavors.

Since 2017, Eliot has been focusing on 2D, sequential, and illustrative artwork. They have created illustrations, comics, and concept art for clients such as Titmouse, Mi'pu'mi Games, Chronicle Books, and Polygon.

Viv is passionate about illustrating characters in atmospheric settings for magazines, comics, books and more. They have worked for clients such as Chronicle Books, Power & Magic Press, and BOOM! studios.

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