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TAROT *of the* ABYSS

BY ANA TOURIAN

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By Ana Tourian

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INTRODUCTION

According to many Western traditions, the world began formless and chaotic, as a deep, dark abyss. There was nothing, not even light, and certainly no matter *in existence*. In the instant that Spirit willed it, out of that darkness came light, the source of all that is. That light gave rise to the entire universe, first as energy and then as matter. Through their combination and interdependence, galaxies, solar systems, and even living things arose. Out of nothingness was born the world. Out of the abyss came forth the light.

Tarot of the Abyss is born out of the same notion, though of course on a smaller scale. We all start off our tarot experience as beginners, shapeless and void as the abyss. With every shuffle of the cards, a little light dawns. With every reading performed, our knowledge and ability improves just a little. We grow, evolve, and develop, metaphorically moving from chaos to cosmos.

I can't remember a time when divination was not part of my life. In some shape or form, it has always been present. As a child growing up in Romania, I remember visiting my great-aunt and watching her read coffee grounds. She used to say "The first sip is the most important; make sure you state your intention clearly. What do you want to know?" Once the last sip was taken, she'd start the process of turning the cup, rotating the grounds that were left inside, and flipping the cup over to settle. She used to tell me all the events she was seeing, and the different paths I could take to change the course of certain events. I thought it was pure magic—that somehow, she had this otherworldly power to predict the things that were yet unseen. As I grew up, a cup of coffee was always waiting for me.

I have never been a coffee ground reader. To no avail, my aunt tried to teach me, showing me the patterns and figures and their possible meanings. The idea of having such knowledge at her fingertips was fascinating. It was

clear to me that we were given keys and clues that can help us navigate this beautiful, mysterious life. And this revelation brought me a great sense of comfort.

I've always been a visual person. Images that told a story were easy to understand and become immersed in. When I was thirteen, I befriended a wonderful card reader who lived in my building. I'd spend hours watching her lay the cards. I was surprised when I noticed she spoke to them as she shuffled, almost enchanting them, as if she were talking to an old friend. Through her whisperings, I could make out a poetic rhythm. Even at that young age I knew I was witnessing a very intimate process. The transition from a mundane setting to a very mystical one was quite clear and familiar, even though the medium was different. The pathways created through the cards were the same as those created by my aunt through her coffee readings.

In Romania, card reading—also known as cartomancy, is a very common form of divination. However, years ago there

were no books on such practices. Everything was passed down by word of mouth and practice. There really was no way of learning unless you knew a cartomancer, who usually read standard playing cards. Not to mention that traditionally it is expected that those who want to learn the art of cartomancy, have to “steal” the knowledge, as diviners liked to call it. The common belief is that you must “steal” the craft by watching. And I was a very diligent watcher. I’d sit there weekly and ask her to read for me. That is how I initially learned.

Within a couple of years, I was doing readings for friends and family. I have to admit that at the time, I was completely stunned at the accuracy of my readings. The images I saw began to take shape, and slowly led to stories that appeared to form from some depth of which I was not consciously aware.

One day, a woman asked me to bring her a tarot deck from the United States. I had never heard of tarot before, and was quite stunned when I picked up a

Rider-Waite deck. It was full of such beautiful images! Needless to say, I bought two decks that day—the Rider-Waite for her and my first Tarot deck, The Mythic Tarot, which became a good friend of mine. I loved that deck, and still have the original one to this day.

I'm not going to say it was easy. I spent years pondering over the guidebook that came with the deck. I memorized every single card and meaning. Yet, for some reason, I felt there was something missing. I was straining and trying to do it “by the book” so to speak. And whenever something is forced the results are usually less than desired and somewhat temporary.

There was nothing natural in forcing my mind to take in all those meanings. I had forgotten all about the “stealing” method that I had learned. There was something fluid to that way of learning, it was intuitive and that's what I was missing. Therefore, one day, I put the book aside. I tried to speak to the cards as I'd seen my teacher do. I created

my own little chant, something that linked the cards to me and solidified our bond. It was our little secret, and so my new journey began. I started seeing their stories in much more detail than before. I was used to reading 24 playing cards. Now I had 78 cards that I had to understand and form bonds with. It was a very fun journey and along the way I found many beautiful decks that spoke their story, each with their own unique personalities. I never imagined becoming a deck creator. I like to call it an act of serendipity.

Tarot is a beautiful system, designed to mirror the journey of the soul through the universe and on a macrocosmic stage, our own life journey. Its structure is broken down into two categories: the Major Arcana and the Minor Arcana. In total it is comprised of 78 cards, each with its unique stand-alone message. There are twenty-two Major Arcana cards, which show the different progressions of the soul, followed by the Minor Arcana, itself divided into four elemental suits (Air, Fire, Water and Earth). Each

suit consists of ten numbered cards and four court cards (Pages, Knights, Queens and Kings). All cards within each suit fall under the specific ruling elemental.

There is a tendency for individuals to focus more on the Major Arcana, considering it more important than the Minor Arcana. That is a false representation and should not be approached as such. In our own lives there are indeed major events that impact our destiny, however, it is the little decisions and trials that enrich us and develop our characters. Therefore, the Minor Arcana should be given just as much emphasis. They are the mirror to our own emotions, drives, and thought processes. To understand the suits better, take a look at the element they are representing and apply those principles to your reading.

➔ The Suit of Swords is ruled by the element of Air. Just as the air is swift and crisp, sometimes cutting, so is the mind. This is why this suit deals with the mental aspect.

➔ The Suit of Wands is ruled by the element of Fire. This suit is about creativity and building new things in our lives. It's the spark of the creative driving force that propels us, giving us the energy to achieve our dreams.

➔ The Suit of Cups is ruled by the element of Water. In this case, we see water as a conduit, ever changing, fluid, and sometimes turbulent. It has the power to create and destroy. It is one of nature's greatest wonders, and we cannot live without it. For this reason, the Suit of Cups is associated with emotions and our subconscious.

➔ The Suit of Pentacles is governed by the element of Earth. It represents stability, money, and the ways in which we can achieve them. Whether we are talking about a new education or a new career, the Suit of Pentacles deals with the material aspects of life. Earth brings harvest and nourishment, but can also produce famine and drought.

THE COURT CARDS

As mentioned previously, there are four court cards in each of the Minor Arcana suits. They are the Page, the Knight, the Queen and the King. Their function is to embody those particular elements. They also represent the different stages of human life, and are not necessarily depictions of a particular gender, but rather are archetypes of each suit and their stages. The Page is the youngest of the court cards and is associated with youth and the idea of the novice. He is the individual who is just starting out on his journey and has much to learn. The Knight has progressed to a more mature period and is now capable of taking a more active role, although he still has not gained full knowledge or reached his full elemental potential. The Queen holds the qualities of one who is now adept at governing, but her rule is gentler. And lastly, the King is the epitome of the element he represents, wielding his power with full authority and understanding.

Within each suit, as a reader progresses from the Ace to King, he/she travels through the various trials and tribulations that each element has to offer. As readers we gain experience through trial and errors, accumulating insight, until we reach the status of the Queen or King.

Aside from their elemental status, the court cards can also act as representations of the people in our lives. However, this can be a tricky approach to interpreting the cards. Personally, if I am using this method I establish it from the beginning of the reading. This practice has stayed with me since reading playing cards. Depending on the traits of the people in your life, you can establish a link with the court cards. This can be done through pure intuition, or perhaps by finding out the astrological signs those individuals fall under. Since all of the 12 zodiac signs fall under one of the four elements mentioned, you can easily establish which elemental court card to assign to a particular person by looking up their birth year and

day. Here are the categories to look for:

Water Signs—Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces

Fire Signs—Aries, Leo, Sagittarius

Air Signs—Libra, Aquarius, Gemini

Earth Signs—Capricorn, Taurus, Virgo

As has hopefully become clear, having a good grasp of the court cards is essential, for they will bring nuances to your readings, and help clarify how well each element is balanced within your life or the lives of those being read for.

ABOUT THIS DECK

We don't always know where our paths will take us, which decisions will withstand the test of time, or which ones will weave themselves into the map of our lives. For me, it was a late night when I set pen to paper to painstakingly sketch the first card of this deck—the Fool. I didn't know then that this was to become a labor of love that would expand over the course of three years. Tarot is a fickle thing; its life-force an ever-changing

entity that sometimes wills itself into being unbeknownst to the creator. In this sense, the artist is but the tool that brings about its birth.

After creating the first few cards, I wasn't yet aware that I would pursue this "Fool's errand." I have always been drawn to black and white drawings as I find they possess a certain mystique and mystery. At the time I began the creation of this deck, I was searching for black and white tarot decks, but there weren't many to be found. As I continued to add more cards drawing them became a meditative process I cherished. By the time I reached the end of the Major Arcana, I realized that this would become my soul deck.

I believe decks have their own personality, and like our own, they evolve and progress throughout their development. When I began drawing *Tarot of the Abyss*, I could make out the faint outline of its character. Even though it was constructed to follow the Rider-Waite system, there were distinct

dimensions that I wanted to incorporate and explore. One such idea was the personal, intimate relationship that the characters could have with you, the reader. For this reason, you will notice that the majority of the people in this deck will be looking at you, engaging you in some form or other.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT

Even though *Tarot of the Abyss* is a deck based on the Rider-Waite-Smith system, I deliberately introduced a few slight modifications. These changes emerged based on a number of discussions with readers, as well as my own present understandings of the cards.

Within this deck, you will find a few alternative cards from which to choose, specifically, for the Three of Swords and Ten of Swords.

The other modification includes the naming of several cards. Within the Major Arcana, the traditional title The Hierophant has been changed to The

Wise One. Instead of Judgment I have substituted Awakening. The Hanged Man has become The Hanged One since the card is seen through the reader's eyes, who may be female or male. Their traditional meanings and representations, however, are retained.

As regards to interpretation, the Three and Ten of Swords provide two options. In tarot readings these cards are important trigger cards. Hence, in this deck, you will find one traditional representation of the card from the Rider-Waite system, and another version that follows the numerological progression of the card. For example, in the Three of Swords you will find the traditional meaning of the card, namely heartbreak and loss. In the alternate optional card, I focus on what the number three represents in the mental sense—the idea of the development of knowledge. The number three is a combination of 1 (The Ace of Swords, which ignites the mental spark of gnosis, or knowing) and 2 (The Two of Swords, which provides

us with the ability to make intelligent choices based on thought and experiences.) I offer the readers the option to incorporate the cards that they feel will provide the most effective readings.

It is my hope that you will find deep and abiding value in this deck, and that it will aid you in your exploration of the tarot. Always remember, the cards are but tools that are meant to be wielded not with force, but with patience and introspection.



THE MAJOR ARCANA



0 • THE FOOL

The Fool is someone who is not ashamed to explore her dreams. She will venture off into the unknown, regardless of what people say or think about her. She is not scared, although perhaps a little bit of fear would do her good in some cases. The Fool is the inner child who so eagerly tries to escape, to be fresh and full of hope and not stifled by the conditioning that society and the world places upon us. The Fool will step off the cliff and know that, somehow, her feet will sprout wings and lift her to her destination. In *Tarot of the Abyss*, the Fool is within her element; she is carefree, her hair is long and untamed like tentacles as it expands and reaches for the Sun. Her expression is serene, as she places one foot over the edge of the cliff, and casts aside the rose that she has carried from the beginning of her journey, a symbol of the world she's left behind. She closes her eyes, as if to avoid the evidence of any potential threat that she might encounter. Perhaps the wind

is bringing warnings of an impending storm. Perhaps there are other paths that she should take to get to her destination. Regardless, the one she is on now will be full of adventures. Below, the bright rays of light tell us something is below, we just don't know what that is yet. In the distance, two birds fly, free just as the Fool, coming or going at their pleasure.

When the Fool appears in your reading, something new is on the horizon. You're on the verge of a new adventure that will require you to take a leap of faith. While this is generally a positive card, it is still a good idea to look before you leap. Enjoy the ride, for a time of new beginnings and adventures awaits.

1 • THE MAGICIAN

The Magician stands centered, his gaze steady and full of intent. This is no ordinary man; he is a blender of paths, one who grasps the heavens and yet is still rooted to Mother Earth. There are no barriers for him, since his world is boundless. The Magician harvests the

energies of both earth and sky fusing them to his core. He is wise and knowing, his power a gift given freely from the Source of all.

In this card, there are no human tools on hand. There is no elemental representation, since he himself holds all the elements within. Fire is at his core, the spiral energy he's harnessed. Air is within his mental capacity and ability to maintain the perfect balance. Water flows as his emotions, turning deep below his surface. And last but not least, Earth grounds him, his roots providing a constant connection to that which nourishes the body and all living things.

There is great responsibility on the shoulders of the Magician. There may be no mistakes in maintaining this perfect elemental harmony. What we must always remember is that this type of understanding develops with time. As we strive to be like the Magician, we must first become aware of the powers we are aiming to balance.

The Magician represents the symbiotic

relationship between the conscious and the subconscious. He is capable of intelligently and lovingly controlling the forces of nature, and has access to the higher realms, thus unifying spirit and matter. When this card appears, it signals a time when we have the ability to will things into manifestation.

2 • THE HIGH PRIESTESS

The High Priestess is a still and quiet figure, guarding the door of both positive and negative forces. She is the sorceress who is aware of all mysteries and sees all that is hidden. She represents the subconscious and the doors within your mind that want to be opened. Within her palms she holds the yin and yang, representations of the positive male and negative female energies. The High Priestess is the one who stands at the veil of consciousness. Around her waist she holds three keys that unlock the soul, mind and heart. Her head is crowned with the crescent moon, for she is a daughter of the moon and draws her force from it.

When the High Priestess appears in your reading, she brings forth a period of spiritual enlightenment. And whereas before, through the Magician we had the desire to create and bring things into being, the High Priestess has the *power of unseen forces to manifest these desires*. Nevertheless, do not forget that she is a figure who lives within the shadowy realm of the night. Therefore, be aware that her influences are sometimes hidden and can come through unexpected avenues.

3 • THE EMPRESS

The Empress is the Bringer of Life. She walks the Earth with grace, love, and care, cradling her ripe belly as she births the world around her. She is in perfect harmony with all her surroundings and her intentions are from the heart. She is Mother Nature at her core, the epitome of fruitfulness and bounty. She is summer in her prime, her hands blending and shaping the world around her, leaving a trail of blooming flowers and

new life. In some instances, that creative energy can take the shape of artistic birth or even physical birth.

Whereas the High Priestess represented the virginal aspect, the Empress represents the maternal aspect, physically active in her creation and a problem solver. She is the creator, the birther of creativity, of life itself.

When she appears in your spread, she brings with her the active forces of progression, whether in love, business, creation, or literally pregnancy and physical birth. Be open to what this period will bring and utilize her gifts wisely. There is also a sense of hope that comes with this card, the idea that all the work that was put in at the beginning was not in vain. Since the Empress is shown at the end of her pregnancy, this too is an indication of an abundant outcome that will soon materialize. If you were to search for her in your own life, you'd most likely find her as a woman who is important to you, someone helpful and influential.

♄ • THE EMPEROR

There are many ways to show power, sometimes through force, sometimes through silent presence. The Emperor sits in silent presence. His strength is *felt from a distance* as he protects his kingdom at all times. He reigns from the outside, as his throne is seated outside the walls of his kingdom. But make no mistake, at any sign of danger, the Emperor is ready to stand and confront would-be attackers. In his hand he holds a spiral globe, a symbol of evolution and expansion. He is Aries, the god of war and a skilled strategist. His eyes are stern and full of life, denoting a vast experience that gives us but a glimpse of the many wars he has fought. He is a ruler and therefore holds the traits of one; power and dominance over those he rules, but also closely guarding their protection.

If the Emperor appears in your reading, seek to determine if he represents the reader or someone else in the querent's life. Perhaps he represents a father figure who brings the qualities and attributes of

the Emperor. He typically represents a man of great influence and reach.

This card can also signal important changes or events that are about to unfold. Perhaps a shift in power, a new position at work that brings with it more authority and responsibility.

Depending on the surrounding cards, in a positive reading the Emperor represents stability. He knows how to set strategic boundaries to gain the perfect vantage point to protect his kingdom.

5 • THE WISE ONE

The Wise One is traditionally known as the Hierophant. In this card, he represents the spiritual healer, the shaman. We witness the exchange between the healer and his people, a sacred moment when he is passing down his knowledge and wisdom. Tradition is important to him, something that has taken generations to acquire and master and cannot be achieved through solitude or isolation. The fire is burning bright and

with its heat it warms their souls and lights the path of enlightenment.

When this card appears, know that perhaps some spiritual guidance is coming your way. There are many forms through which this knowledge may come into your life, perhaps through a counselor or a spiritual mentor. However it may be, guidance is coming your way. The Wise One is a card of doctrine and of spiritual tradition. And at its core, tradition in general is passed down and continues living within a group setting. Perhaps you've been searching for a group of spiritually minded people to connect with? If spiritual doctrine is not your cup of tea, then a good balance would come through incorporating some aspects of tradition to your spiritual practice; things that could become ritual, that could feed your soul.

6 • THE LOVERS

There is nothing more beautiful to me than nature itself. Trees have always fascinated me, their rough exterior hiding

their vulnerable life force. They can be as straight as arrows, but at the same time bend with the wind. They adapt their solid bodies, innately knowing their survival depends on it. Their roots run deep within the earth, sharing nutrients and a bonding with others of their kind that is unseen for all the rest of us. For this reason, I chose two bonding trees to represent the Lovers. Two trees bend to reach each other, their roots intertwining, almost becoming one entity. It has taken many years for them to be able to connect in such a way, through storms and drought, their only witnesses *the* changing seasons of the soul. They do not need to express their love verbally; their love is shared instantly and equally. And through their merging, they are stronger still.

The Lovers is a card that represents a deep soul-felt connection with someone. Some would call it finding their soul-mate, their life companion. And even though, generally speaking, this card does deal with romantic relationships, it often goes beyond this level of

interpretation. The Lovers card talks about allowing yourself to be vulnerable and true, letting the other person know you for who you truly are. Break down the walls and trust that the other person will be there for you. Just like the trees have joined their roots together into one, so must you in your own relationship. You may be pleasantly surprised by what you discover!

7 • THE CHARIOT

The rider stands tall on her two swans, brave and full of determination. There is no fear in her as she guides the regal feathered creatures. She knows that fear will not help her in this mission, and any sort of wavering could bring about her demise. Therefore, she guides the swans with steady hands, aware of the power hidden in the winds. She knows it's useless to try to go against the wind so instead she harnesses it. In this manner, her journey will be swifter and easier on the swans. The rider has to balance herself with care, taking

note of her surroundings and also her charges. These are wild animals, and at any moment they could try to go their own ways, even pulling in opposite directions.

The Chariot is a card that encourages us to take action. This card brings with it the potential for success in your projects or even physical moves. When this card appears in your reading, know that now is not the time to procrastinate or let yourself be distracted. *Set your goals and maintain your focus.* There are many things that can distract our attention on a day-to-day basis. Remain steadfast and know that the road to success is often filled with obstacles; it's all about how you approach them. It's your strategies, your tenacity, and your courage that will ultimately allow you to realize your goals.

♁ • STRENGTH

This card depicts a woman and her trusted companion, the lion. It is an unusual alliance, not something that

just anyone could master. Relinquishing your fear is key, as the great beast can smell fear. The woman's hand holds the lion gently, a subtle hint at the power she possesses over this creature. She is calm, yet her gaze is steady as she becomes aware of our presence. In a way, she resembles her predator friend, on guard and perceptive of her surroundings. Her clothes are plain; there are no hints of worldly treasures. Her riches cannot be bought; they come from her abilities and her inner strength of character. She has mastered her emotions and conquered her anxieties. All the tools she needs to take on challenges are within her. The lion is a symbol of what we fear the most, and she has mastered that fear through equilibrium and inner strength.

The Strength card appears when we need to take control of our internal environment. It's not a card about physical strength or any external influences that can be manipulated or controlled. It calls us to focus inwardly, to look deeply at those internal insecurities that cause us to doubt our own abilities. The greatest

saboteur often lurks within. Remain fixed in your confidence and you will hold the reins to your emotions, as the woman holds dominion over the lion.

9 • THE HERMIT

She walks alone into the desert, searching. Her withered face reveals the tests of time she has seen and surmounted. The Hermit has no regrets; she has gained profound knowledge of the material world, yet senses that there is more to reality than simply what is visible. In her right hand she grasps a large snake, a symbol of renewal and rebirth. As the snake sheds its skin as it grows, so shall the Hermit shed her old self and re-emerge wiser and more whole. Her left hand appears to radiate light, illuminating the path, one step at a time. Her journey is a slow one, but she is in no rush. The Hermit has deliberately removed herself from the world in order to subdue the conscious mind.

When the Hermit appears in your reading, it augurs a time for soul-searching

and introspection. This voyage must be solitary; it cannot be achieved through others. It is a soul journey that requires inward attention. Perhaps you need to take a break from the business of life and focus on reconstituting your inner self. The snake moves slowly and is a grounded animal. Therefore, be like the snake, be sure that regardless of the things going on in your life, particularly if it is a more tumultuous period, that you remain grounded. Do not rush; the Hermit is calling you back to center. You must be still in the midst of the storm so that you may discover balance and the answers you seek.

10 • WHEEL OF FORTUNE

The weaver holds the wheel of time, an endless spiral that can influence the events of life itself. She bears no ill will, nor does she control where or when it stops. She is simply the guardian and wheel. She has existed here since the beginning of time itself and her name is Infinity. She neither rests nor sleeps. She

is a constant witness to the world, viewing its highs and lows with impassivity and temperance. Fate can be a very fickle friend, one moment whisking you to the heights of bliss and fulfillment, the next, dropping you to the depths of loss and despair. The spiral of time has its own motivations, its all-seeing eye ever open and awake.

When the Wheel of Fortune appears in your spread, know that times are changing. If your life has been stagnant know that big changes are afoot.

If you've had a run of bad luck lately, your life will soon change for the better. Conversely, if things have been spectacular, brace yourself for unexpected changes or obstacles.

This is not a subtle card; the Wheel will turn things upside down and its impact could potentially have lifelong repercussions. It often alters the course of your life to a greater extent than anticipated; nor can these changes be helped or avoided. When it comes to karmic influences, there is very little we

can do to control the events that befall us. However, we always retain control over our reactions to and perceptions of these life changes. Often our greatest strength is in our adaptability to the changes that inevitably occur in life. Seek to establish a healthy perspective of the changes that befall you and much of the battle is won.

11 • JUSTICE

Justice is fierce, but fair. She holds the scales of positive and negative forces with her eye, constantly scrutinizing and weighing our decisions. Yet still she stands, staring straight into our eyes, looking deep into our soul. Justice can see the most hidden of our intentions; she can sense if our choices and actions are based on truth or deception. In a sense, she represents our inner voice of reason and conscience. She knows no grey area; her judgment is stark and absolute. However, remember that unlike us, she can see the bigger picture. You only have one chance to present

your case before her, so make it count and don't try to trick her keen eye.

When Justice appears know that all will be revealed, for better or worse. Everything hidden will make its way to the surface in true revelation. This card can indicate legal proceedings or lawsuits. One way or another the truth must come out. If you have been wronged or if you have wronged someone else, justice will prevail. All will be judged for their actions, so act responsibly and be honest with yourself and others.

Perhaps there are some big decisions that need to be made at this time. If so, the Justice card can also indicate the need to consider those choices carefully. Balance is key in all things. Hence, remove anything that is in excess or difficult. Useless things must be put away in order to restore equilibrium.

12 • THE HANGED ONE

Suspended above the ground dangles the Hanged One. He is us and we are him. We see through his eyes and feel palpably his predicament. The world is *askew*, a *dizzying* rush of emotions and confusion. We are not accustomed to seeing the world from this perspective. Everything appears strange and yet new. How did the Hanged One get there? Was it his own doing? Or was it something inflicted upon him? We can't assume he's bound in any way, as we really can only see what's in front of him. Perhaps it's not as important how he got there, but rather how this situation has changed him and how his perception of the world has since changed. The road ahead of him ends near a home, with no one else in sight. No one, that is, except the two inquisitive ravens Huginn and Muninn, Odin's trusted messengers. They represent thought and mind. One of them holds a small branch in his beak as an offering.

If the Hanged One appears in your

reading, it offers you an opportunity to see things from a different perspective. This is the time when evolution will come about through stasis rather than action. The Hanged One brings a period of stillness or even possibly stagnation. It indicates a spiritual evolution achieved only through sacrifice or loss. It can augur a time of discomfort.

Still, the discomfort is worth the price, as the reward will be greater than the sacrifice. In life, nothing of value is achieved without some form of sacrifice. Time, energy, comfort, and anything that you personally cleave to—can be temporarily affected. No matter the methods, transformation will occur.

13 • DEATH

She has walked the earth since the beginning of time. Her expression is pensive and solemn as she strolls up and down the annals of the earth. A tireless presence, unseen yet felt by all.

She is Death, the bringer of change and transformation. She waits within the liminal state, and hears the call of transmutation. Her roots dig deep into creation itself, her core is the endless night sky, where stars collapse and are *reborn in an endless cycle* that she calls home. She is the door that opens when all else closes.

When the Death card makes its presence known in your spread, it rarely indicates the literal death of a loved one. This Major Arcana card is powerful indeed, typically depicting life-altering changes. It represents a very important ending in your life, but also the beginning of a new period. It is metamorphic in its message.

Through this process of change you will need to shed those things that are no longer necessary, in order to make room for new possibilities. It is sometimes said that the Death card does not signify an ending, but rather a transition. It bears much in common with actual death, bringing fear of the

unknown, the stripping down of the old, the preparation of a way for the new.

Death comes to all; none of us is immune to it. Often it can come suddenly, without warning. That is something we should remember when this card appears in your reading. It most certainly is not a card that takes its time. Death, or rather transformation is an active process; there is nothing static about it. In these situations, it is wise not to get too attached to things that are no longer suited for you. Very often, they will be washed away in the process of change.

14 • TEMPERANCE

Two elemental cups hold the key to inner balance. One holds the element of fire, its flames dancing and intertwining with the element of water, springing from the second cup. Together, through their fluid movements and acceptance of each other, they form the perfect balance

of opposing forces. Fire is that inner creative drive that ignites us to move and act. Water, as our emotions, is sometimes turbulent, full of power to create or destroy. However, when brought together in the perfect blend of balance and harmony, they bring about stability, much as the forging and formation of new land when molten lava collides with the cool sea.

The presence of the Temperance card in your spread is a call to moderation and harmonious relationships. If your reading is especially active in terms of events, this card urges you not to take extreme actions, but rather to take your time and not rush. Be calm and centered as the eye of the storm; ponder your responses. Certain situations may require you to compromise in order to reach a resolution. Don't allow yourself to be provoked; losing your temper will only push the process further from the balance and stability you seek.

15 • THE DEVIL

The winged man hovers over an endless wasteland, shackled to the machinations of his own heart. He is an image of despair in the midst of absolute isolation. His wings are spread wide open, ready to take flight, yet he is unable to do so. Perhaps all that is needed is the will to remove himself from the lashings of his own design. No one holds back his wings, no one roots him in his cares; it is through his own attachments that he is confined.

The Devil card speaks of our internal vices, those parts of ourselves that we keep hidden. It is reflective of the indulgences, addictions, and excesses that we permit into our lives. These are weaknesses that make us vulnerable and perpetually keep old wounds open. This tends to happen if we've strayed too far from our spiritual side and focused more on the materialistic aspects of life. Have you overindulged in the fruits of the world, eschewing those of the soul? This is something that only you can

answer through reflection and introspection. You see, the Devil is not an external perpetrator; it is the shadow of our own selves. Look deeply within and be truthful. If this card should appear in your spread, is there anything in your *life that is making you feel trapped or bound*? What is making you feel powerless and out of control?

Remember that the Devil card is not about subjugation without end. It is a card that calls you to be active in achieving your freedom; to take action and free yourself from burdensome attachments. You only need to choose to do so.

16 • THE TOWER

The storm rages on, the thunder and lightning tearing through the night, destroying everything in their path without mercy. The idyllic treehouse once poised tall, is now torn and rent. Constructed on the hopes of childhood dreams, the treehouse now lies shattered, clinging to life as the man

dangling dangerously from its foundations. One person has already fallen. With no more strength left, she has let go, surrendering to the abyss. If the house were built on sturdier ground, could it have prevented this situation? It is not likely. The storm was bound to arrive sooner or later.

The Tower card is not a card we love to see in readings. It is unsettling to say the least. When it reveals itself, we cringe at its potential ramifications. There is no sugar coating it; it is a card that augurs a time for drastic transformations that will force you to move out of your comfort zone. If you are a person who doesn't enjoy change, this card can signal a potentially challenging time. Tower doesn't bring small changes—it produces major shifts. Things that appeared stable and constant are now uprooted and abrupt. You may have to sell your home, relocate, or seek new employment. As stressful as this period can be, remember that you are not your job, or your house. Do not identify with the things that you do in

life or the place where you reside. These are supporting elements in your life that bring stability and comfort. However, they are not always fixed and static, and it may be necessary to relinquish them to open up new possibilities. The *one who stays constant in the sea of change* is your true nature; see that you nourish, safeguard and keep it well.

17 • THE STAR

The journey was long and arduous, and through it all, the wanderer has encountered many obstacles and setbacks. Still, her inner drive has proven resolute and has never waned. Throughout her journey, she has relied on a constant presence that has guided her home—the North Star. It is ever present, ever faithful, a silent friend in the endless sky. The Star nourishes her and feeds her hope. Now, safe at last from the perils that once threatened her very existence, she reaches out in gratitude.

The Star card is a symbol of hope. It is fitting that it follows the Tower, as

even when all hope appears lost, the Star shines forth, reminding us with its beacons of light and *warmth that a new day will soon follow*. If there have been any major changes in your life recently that have threatened to throw you off course, the Star card is here to provide you a sense of peace and security. Have faith in what the future will bring and try not to dwell on the problems of the past. There is something that stills the mind when we look at a night sky; it helps us put things into perspective. Time and experience have made you more resilient and capable.

18 • THE MOON

Near the edges of two cliffs two figures stand, wrapped in rays of luminescent moonlight. The male stands upon the right cliff, while his female counterpart stands upon the left cliff. They represent the primordial active and passive energies, spirit and matter, light and dark. There is only a small gap between them, making it easy for them to cross

and unite. Yet, one false step could be their undoing. The Moon governs the tides. Its ever-changing phases exert a constantly shifting influence upon the waters of the Earth, as well as upon our emotional lives. Each one of us is connected to the Moon through occult energies that shift our emotional bodies. In contrast to the Sun, which shines constantly and reliably, completely illuminating the world—the Moon provides only intermittent and indirect light. The Moon provides general impressions but cannot be relied upon to reveal the whole truth. There is something mystical to its permanence, its stillness and silence. For this reason, it is important to proceed with caution.

When the Moon card appears in your reading it signals a period of fluctuation and change. For most of us, the inability to clearly distinguish our surroundings instills a sense of fear and anxiety reminiscent of childhood fears of the dark. Moonlight dances lightly at nighttime, it hints but doesn't reveal all, and what we see by moonlight can turn out to be

quite different in daylight. Therefore, it is not at all difficult to misperceive objects or intentions. Beware then of false impressions throughout this period, as it's quite easy to lose your step and be deceived. It's also wise not to make any major decisions or changes during this time.

19 • THE SUN

The Sun rises faithfully in the East, its rays swirling and dancing with vitality. It is an energetic life force that activates all it touches; it awakens flora and fauna alike. In the Sun card, a portal to a world of bounty and plenty can be seen. Unlike the Moon card, there's nothing hidden here; there are no crossroads or obscured motives. This journey upon this golden road will be like no other, for the Sun is here to guide you.

If the Sun card appears in your spread, life will soon be infused with vital energy and new hope. There is a whole world out there that's yet to be discovered. It has always been there, we just

needed to develop the eyes to see it.

The Sun card is one of the best cards to get in a reading, signaling confidence, success and fulfillment. It's a card that calls for leadership and empowerment; if ever there was a time to take charge, it is now. Any projects or undertakings currently in progress will be achieved effortlessly. Often, simply through a shift in perspective and perception, what was once hidden shall soon be revealed.

20 • AWAKENING

The woman rises as a phoenix from the ashes, having completed her arduous journey of metamorphosis and growth. Her outgrown former self, lying empty beneath her, is nothing more than an empty hollow husk. She bears no more guilt or burdens, she has risen victorious to a new phase of life. The woman is still exhausted from having completed her journey of change and growth. She embraces a new self, exploring her wings in freedom and liberation. She

is poised, gathering her strength for whatever challenges and opportunities lie ahead.

The Awakening card (formerly Judgment) invites you to take note of your life objectively; to step back and consider how much you've grown and learned. You may be getting to the point where you've outgrown certain relationships or jobs and certain chapters of your life may be drawing to a close. Perhaps you are reluctant to complete the final metamorphosis. No doubt comfort and stability can be appealing, however, sometimes life has other plans for us when we try to cling to the past. You may be reaching an important milestone and as is often the case, it comes with major decisions or changes. If you have been feeling down or in need for forgiveness, the Awakening card will bring solace and reintegration. Be prepared and be as the butterfly, take your time to regenerate, but get ready to fly and soar!

21 • THE WORLD

This is the last card of the Major Arcana where we find the *filius philosophorum*, the alchemical child, or child of wisdom. He has been formed under the careful, watchful all-seeing eye of life, infinite in creative potential. The karmic events that have taken place, all lead up to this moment of fulfillment and dynamic balance. The child of wisdom rests safely and securely within the womb of infinity, his creative forces boundless and unlimited. He has retained the ideal state of being, having been raised lovingly in the vessel of creation—his potential realized.

The World card is the final stage of the Major Arcana. Each of the cards that have preceded it represents a step in our spiritual, emotional, mental and physical evolution. We are all creators of our reality. If the World card should appear in your spread all your energy and efforts, your dreams and passions that you've worked so hard for will be rewarded. What you have sown through

this journey will now be reaped. Take time to enjoy your newfound success, for as with all things, this ending shall soon reveal a new beginning.





THE MINOR ARCANA



☞ SUIT OF SWORDS ☞

ACE OF SWORDS

The Ace of Swords is a card that speaks to mental force; it is the seed of the mind. Its roots are strong, connecting to all aspects of life, home, family, work and love. These experiences weave connections and divisions into our lives, and create pathways to different patterns of thought. The woman in the card is holding the sword of truth. She grips it, poised to cut through and dispel any adversity or confusion that might hold her back.

When the Ace of Swords appears in a reading, it bids you to use your intellect, to apply logic and reason. Perhaps a new opportunity to shine is coming your way, something that will require a focused mind. If there are any issues that have been giving you trouble, attempt to look at the situation objectively. Now is the time for clarity of mind, and anything that was once obscured will soon become sharp and evident.

TWO OF SWORDS

Traditionally, the Two of Swords is depicted as a blindfolded woman holding two swords crisscrossed in front of her chest. I chose to go a slightly different way artistically, but the card still retains its original meaning. Day in and day out, we present different aspects of ourselves to the world, and even those closest to us. Each of us wears so many masks that sometimes we are in danger of forgetting our own true nature. The woman has no facial features, she has yet to choose what parts of herself she will reveal to the world.

The Two of Swords card draws attention to a tense situation, one in which you are unable or simply don't want to make a decision. You are at a stalemate, an impasse of the mind. So, I ask you— which aspect of yourself is creating this impasse at this time? A choice needs to be made, and hiding behind any masks will prolong the discomfort. Sometimes no action is an action and avoiding the truth only delays the inevitable. Is there

a situation you're unwilling to accept?
Maybe we should try to first distinguish
the clear features that we have, the ones
that have always been there in order to
help us choose.

THREE OF SWORDS

(TRADITIONAL VERSION)

There is nothing harder than losing
someone we love. Sometimes the pain
can seem enough to break the human
spirit. The Three of Swords is not an easy
card to receive, because it can forecast
emotional pain and suffering. In the
card, we see a woman ready to set free
the caged bird that was once her heart.
It once beat within her chest, in perfect
synchronicity with *her*. *But, with time,*
her heart took on a different role; it
became something alien from her—a
distinct being looking for a way out of
the darkness that caged it. It was not an
easy decision to make, since her liveli-
hood could depend on this. Could she
continue without it? Maybe she realized
that keeping it locked within would not

remove the pain or sadness. Instead, she set it free and hoped that with time the cracks would heal. Remember the saying “If you love something, let it go free. If it comes back to you, it’s yours forever. If it doesn’t, it was never yours to begin with.”

The Three of Swords is a grieving card. That does not necessarily mean loss through death. In order to interpret such a meaning, you’ll need reinforcing cards such as *Death*, the *Tower* or the *Five of Cups*. Even then, such an interpretation must be made with care. In most cases, on its own, the arrival of this card in your spread indicates grief due to separation, divorce, or any other form of severance. Whether you like it or not, you may need to let go of a relationship. It can even be referring to actual surgery or physical incision of the body. In any case, something or someone may be removed from your life. However this card might affect you, remember that pain is transient. As the saying goes, “This too shall pass and you will be stronger for having survived it.”

THREE OF SWORDS

(ALTERNATIVE CARD)

Some people have a different way of interpreting the Three of Swords, based on the numerological properties of the number 3, the Triad. Because the Suit of Swords deals with the element of air, and therefore the mind, the suit as a whole can be interpreted as a progression from unknowing to knowing. Since the Ace of Swords, associated with number 1 (also known as the Monad), is a card that brings the discovery of truth, the number 1 is the creative 'big bang' of the mind. The Two of Swords, associated with the number 2 (the Dyad), is all about duality and the choices of the mind. We've now reached the number 3 (the Triad), in the Three of Swords, where what we've learned from the Ace of Swords (1= truth and creativity) combined with the Two of Swords (2= the ability to make choices and proper discernment), brings us to the growth and expansion of the mind through multiplicity, new ways of

thinking and seeing things. It calls for harmony and equilibrium between the two forces that once were opposing. For this reason, the card portrays the image of a young man in the midst of gaining knowledge. Three swords stand upright piercing the Book of Thought, unlocking the living knowledge as it flies off the pages. They take flight and enter the receptive grail of the mind, a fertile ground where their seeds can germinate and develop fully if properly tended to.

FOUR OF SWORDS

Four swords rest on a rock wall. There is no sign of the knights that possess them, nor the battleground that required their presence. It is a picture of tranquility and calm, so much so that two small songbirds have decided to take refuge here. We can't tell if the swords have been used in bloody battle or if they soon will be. Nevertheless, the message they carry is clear; it is time for a complete and utter rest from the battle.

The Four of Swords is a good omen. The time has come for quiet preparation and retreat from the *daily grind*. It's a welcome and much needed respite that perhaps we've been putting off for a while. Often, the best way to get relief from stress is to take the time to listen to your body. Heed the small voice that's calling you to consolidate your energy. We're so used to being in motion, to keeping active whether it's in a job or at home, that we tend to forget that we are not invincible. Shifting our focus, cares and woes from the external world to the needs and wants of our inner world is important if any type of healing is to take place.

FIVE OF SWORDS

A young man is playing God with a defenseless, trapped butterfly. He lords a pin over the powerless insect, knowing he could pierce it in a moment. He taunts it with his haughty air and domineering attitude. A sense of superiority is easily distinguished in his features, in

his smirk and nonchalant posture. We don't know exactly what his choice will be. However, it is clear that he is not to be trusted.

The Five of Swords is a card about ethics in our choices. Are you or is someone else in your life acting in an ethical manner? Of course, we know based on the principle of karma that if you hurt the people around you, your victory will be short-lived and incomplete. Building your happiness on the suffering of others will never spare you from the unflinching judgments of time and reflection. Is your sense of ego and selfishness effecting the situation? Winning at all costs is not winning at all, as it leaves the playing field scattered with dashed hopes and dreams. Perhaps you should take a different approach to your current circumstance; being a one-eyed king in the land of the blind does not make you righteous or truly powerful. If you are not the one who is acting in such a manner, sometimes this card can come up when you need to put yourself first. In cases where you're

being mistreated, it's crucial to remove yourself from that abusive situation. Is there someone *working against your* best interests?

SIX OF SWORDS

The mother holds her child close, yet her gaze is focused forward, unwavering. She flies through the sky on the wise, knowing raven. Below, the turbulent waters rage on, ready to engulf them in an instant should they lose their grip. The raven is strong; its wings span the skies. Like an arching arrow, it's aimed high, avoiding the grave dangers below. There is a definite sense of movement in this card; things are progressing and certainly not standing still.

The Six of Swords is a card all about moving forward. If you've had any health issues in the past, you may start to see a turnaround in that regard. This is not a card that promises perfection, but it does signal a beginning. Your frame of mind is changing, and with that, positive changes or perhaps even physical

moves are on the horizon. Perhaps a trip approaches. The Six of Swords reminds you to leave the stress of the situation behind through this transition. In the process, peace of mind will follow. Old patterns of thinking are no longer useful and will only drag you down.

SEVEN OF SWORDS

In general, the Seven of Swords is all about hidden dishonor. For this reason, I chose an image that shows the idea of a person who is more or less suspicious. A man is lurking in the dark, with one hand on a dagger and with the other turning a door handle. We don't really know if he's sneaking off or trying to break in. Regardless, he appears to have some ill-intended plans. There is a sense of deception and mistrust in his demeanor.

When the Seven of Swords shows up in a reading it is worthwhile examining the situation from multiple angles. If we read the card as someone sneaking off, it might indicate an attempt to avoid some obligation or commitment. Ask yourself

if this is something that is going on with you, or someone else in your sphere. Another possibility is to see the card as someone breaking in. With this interpretation comes deception, manipulation, or even in some cases an actual theft of some sort. Similar to the Five of Swords, the Seven of Swords deals with ethics or the lack thereof. Are you feeling guilty over something that you have done or are thinking of doing? If you have a clear conscience examine your surroundings to make sure no one is trying to exploit you or tarnish your hard-earned reputation.

EIGHT OF SWORDS

The Eight of Swords deals with the idea of perception and perspective. I chose to illustrate this card as if you're looking from above, because seeing an objective point of view is particularly important with this card. We see a young girl wrapped in ribbons, so much so that she can only see out of one eye, where the ribbon has fallen away. The only

part of her that is without constraint is her wild, flowing hair. Or at least this is how it appears at first glance. A closer look at her situation reveals she's not as tightly bound as she might feel. The swords that at first appear to fence *her in are in fact lying flat on the floor* around her. To extricate herself, all she needs to do is step around them.

The Eight of Swords speaks to the idea of feeling trapped and powerless. It can show up when we feel lost, alone, and with no way out of a situation, whether it's a dead-end job or a loveless relationship. Regardless of the situation, one fact remains the same. You have become conditioned and complacent, so much so that you are no longer seeing things objectively. Acting the victim won't get you out of it, nor is waiting for someone to rescue you a good course. Scan your surroundings for an exit point. You may very well realize that all you have to do is remove your blindfold and choose to step out of the situation.

NINE OF SWORDS

This is the card of nightmares and unfounded fears. We all have been there, struggling to deal with the anxieties that bubble up unrelentingly from our subconscious. Our nightmares can leave us so terrified that we are afraid to go back to sleep. Even worse, we may actually start to believe that there is some truth to them—is it a warning, perhaps? The Nine of Swords depicts that moment when we are imprisoned within a dream world, a world so vivid that we actually believe it to be real. Yet, we all know that the woman will awaken and realize that it was simply a bad dream. She is in no real danger, and she still has ample opportunity to shape her reality in the here and now.

Are you feeling worried or overwhelmed? Drawing the Nine of Swords tells you that you're making yourself sick with worry. Your thoughts are whirling round and round, provoking anxiety and destroying your resting hours. While the Three of Swords

represents external sorrow, the Nine of Swords speaks to internal despair. Imagining the worst is not the way to go. Our fears are very often unfounded and even if they have basis in reality, worry and anxiety only compound the *situation*, making a solution more elusive. Seek stillness; discover your inner peace through prayer and meditation, and take one moment at a time.

TEN OF SWORDS

(TRADITIONAL VERSION)

In the Rider-Waite Tarot the figure depicted is shown stabbed in the back, lying upon the earth. I felt there should be room for a different ending to the tale of the Ten of Swords. In my point of view, the Ten of Swords is the ending of a mental cycle. However, it doesn't necessarily mean an ending that culminates with death of the mind. Rather, it is the death of a particular period or state of mind. For this reason, in the *Tarot of the Abyss*, the man stabbed in the back attempts to raise himself from the

path. He reaches out his hand pleadingly. Who is this figure? Has he come to aid the man, or is he the enemy, guilty of placing him in his current circumstance?

The Ten of Swords is not an easy card to receive. It has a number of interpretations that can be more clearly determined based on the cards surrounding it. Illness or being stabbed in the back by a loved one or friend are some of the possible interpretations of this card. It indicates an ending of some sort; one that has been forced upon you and that you're not particularly happy about. Whether it's an illness that you are battling or some other *unhappy circumstance*, it is presently impacting your life significantly. You may feel that you have little say in the matter, but unlike the Death card from the Major Arcana, where change is almost karmic, the change indicated by the Ten of Swords is forged with mental, not physical pain. You may feel like you've hit rock bottom. In such a situation, it's easy to get disheartened, but if you step back a bit,

you may realize that your negative attitude is aggravating the situation. Have there been any warning signs lately that you simply ignored? Lastly, as this card has multiple possible interpretations, I suggest that you consider its position and placement within the reading. As with all cards presented, context and content help us to more clearly discern the significance of the reading.

TEN OF SWORDS

(ALTERNATIVE CARD)

For those who read numerologically, I've again provided an alternative version of the Ten of Swords. This variation considers the Ten of Swords and its association with the Decad. Therefore, it represents the realization and completion of mental progression, going full circle. However, in this case, it is viewed in a positive manner—as an increase in mental power and knowledge as opposed to a loss of mental power and depletion. It's all about mastering the element of swords, air and mind, and

learning from all that you've experienced. There is a reason why we look up to our elders for wisdom and guidance. They have seen more moons and suns, and if they have walked wisely, they are further along on the path of life. The owl is an ancient symbol of wisdom. Its lock stares with the old sage, the years clearly etched within his features, for they are the many paths his soul has taken, and represent the footprints of time. The man is a figure full of thoughtfulness and intelligence and he meets the gaze of his totem equal in spirit and wisdom.

COURT CARDS SETTING IN SUIT OF SWORDS

All of the Court Cards in the Suit of Swords are presented as existing within a common setting—the maze of the mind. It is my hope that this setting will accurately depict the process of the mind in its quest for knowledge. In this case, the Page, Knight, Queen and King are all actively engaged in their goal of

investigating and discovering greater knowledge as represented by the orb of light that is common to all the cards. Their missions are different, yet always complementary. They seek an ever more *direct relationship* with the light that illuminates and guides their footsteps through the maze. Even though they are separate in their missions, they do not act alone.

PAGE OF SWORDS

The Page of Swords is all about the search for knowledge and truth. She is the avid seeker who has just reached the point of epiphany and awe in the presence of pure knowledge, as depicted by the Sphere of Light. She represents the child-like state of the element of Air. Therefore, even though we see the discovery of wisdom or the realization of its presence, the Page is not yet able to process its full meaning; she is but a child with a keen intellect and a strong will. Since the Pages in general possess this child-like energy, she is tireless and

enthusiastic—essential qualities that most often work in her favor.

In general, Pages are the suit messengers. They are the ones who signal the challenges to come. Since we're dealing with the Suit of Swords (i.e., the mind), we can assume that the issues that arise will be of a more intellectual nature. The messages she forebodes will not always be easy to confront, however, they always represent opportunities where one can apply the characteristics of the Page to the matter at hand. The presence of the Page urges you to embrace her qualities. Be relentless in your search for wisdom and truth. Use all of your mental acuity to pierce through the fog of the mind and move decisively toward your goal. Rely on your wits and acumen to seek and discover the root of the problem. The energy of the Page is straightforward and direct; she doesn't beat around the bush in her progress!

KNIGHT OF SWORDS

The Sphere of Light has been passed to the Knight of Swords from the Page.

The Knight carries her tried and true blade, a tool that allows her to pierce the veil, revealing truths the Page could only guess at. The Knight of Swords is known for her ability to create clarity out of confusion. It is very clear from the look in her eyes that she is serious, sober, and above all, direct. She is rugged and fierce, determined and logical; she seeks the truth at all costs.

When the Knight of Swords appears in your spread, she may represent an aspect of you, someone else in your life, or the atmosphere in general.

The Knight of Swords is the piercer of mysteries; she will deliver the answers you seek, but take care, for she is known to be tactless and frank to a fault. If you are uncertain as to how to proceed with regard to the issue in question, the Knight of Swords is telling you to be direct and act decisively. However, remember that it is not only what you

say or do, but how you say or do it. Take care that you do not exacerbate the situation by putting off the very people you need to rely on to get the job done.

QUEEN OF SWORDS

The Queen of Swords rests her head contemplatively upon the hilt of her sword, allowing its metallic coolness to center and still her. She makes use of that stillness to channel the knowledge emanating from the Sphere of Light affixed to the sword's pommel. She is introspective and reflective, characteristics indicative of a *strong queen*. There are times when she must be as still as the night, yet as swift as an arrow in her decision-making. The Queen of Swords rules with her head first and her heart second, reason trumping her emotional yearnings. Yet, she bears a certain wistfulness; hers is the burden of leadership, of making the difficult, often unpopular decisions that nobody wants to make, yet everyone expects of an effective ruler. Hers is the burden of putting her

public responsibility above her private desires. It is no easy burden to bear, and there are times when it leaves her feeling very alone. In those moments of despair and despondency, she returns to the safety and security of her faithful blade, the keen and piercing intellect and indomitable will that have always safeguarded her on her journey through the twists and turns of the mysterious labyrinth.

Regardless of how unpleasant it may be, the Queen of Swords must always face the truth in a situation with dignity and poise. Many people find this to be too much, preferring instead for the truth to be shrouded or silenced, in order to spare their feelings. The Queen is afforded no such luxury. Likewise, there are times when we have to harness the energy of the Queen of Swords, revealing truths to others that they don't want to hear or are presently incapable of seeing. Alternatively, there are times when we ourselves may have someone in our own lives who is embodying the energy of the Queen, showing

us aspects of ourselves that we don't particularly wish to acknowledge. True friends are there to comfort and care for us, however, they also play the essential role of pointing out our poor choices or faulty judgments. If you are being called upon to play the part of the Queen of Swords, remember that it's not just what you say, but how you say it. By phrasing and framing your critiques constructively, you are much more likely to have your message heard. Alternatively, if a dear friend or trusted companion is presently pointing out possible lapses of judgment on your part, have the courage and trust to at least consider their point of view.

KING OF SWORDS

He stands alone atop a craggy cliff,
perched above the maze of the mind.
The King of Swords has endured much
hardship and struggles to arrive at his
present vantage point. He's applied
logic, reason, and intelligence, but he's
also learned to balance them against

an even higher form of knowledge and wisdom, his intuition. He has learned to balance the directions of his mind against the compass of his heart, and the result is a pure and majestic form of leadership. In his right hand, he *leans upon the Sword of Truth*, and he knows well how to wield it should he have occasion to. However, for the time being he holds it in abeyance, a further sign of his confidence and courage in his abilities to lead. He is guided directly by the Sphere of Light, which has settled in the crown of his head, a sign of his direct communication with the realms of light and knowledge.

Should the King of Swords present himself in your reading, he often represents individuals in positions of power or authority. From his summit, he views the events and experiences of life from a very different perspective, giving him a more objective view of the world. In contrast to the Queen of Swords, he does not communicate with quite so much directness. Rather, the King of Swords acts as a gentle guide on

The Way, absorbing and analyzing the circumstances of the matter, should you seek his counsel. His strength is in his silence; his greatest value is not in his words, but rather in his example.

This card calls you to meditation, to seek, to be collected and balanced in your judgments. With time and reflection, you'll be able to see clearly the solution to the problem at hand. As the majestic King, if the situation calls for it, be prepared to stand alone in your wisdom and rectitude. Don't allow yourself to get corrupted or stray from the heart of the matter, and let your actions speak for themselves. Try to embody the qualities of the King of Swords, take the challenges that are presented and find solutions through a clear and collected mind.

☞ SUIT OF WANDS ☞

ACE OF WANDS

In the Ace of Wands, we see a young woman clutching her lone wand, raising its energy, her gaze intensely focused on the branch that is beginning to sprout new buds. On her shoulder is perched a phoenix, its wings raised aloft, poised to take flight.

The phoenix is a bird that has long been associated with the cycle of the Sun. Legend recounts that it can live for hundreds of years before bursting into flames and dying in a brilliant blaze of color and light. Then, just as suddenly as it fell, a fledgling creature rises from the ashes, reborn and renewed. The Ace of Wands is the card of inspiration and burgeoning activity. When this card presents itself in your reading, it signals a period of creativity and fresh ideas. This is a propitious time to begin new projects that require dynamic energy.

The Suit of Wands is associated with the

element of Fire. Fire is the most difficult of the elements to tame, yet it can be used for great constructive use, such as cooking our food or powering our societies. On the other hand, fire can utterly decimate civilizations and societies if it is mishandled or not respected. Now is a terrific time for launching a new enterprise, however, take care to effectively harness the energy and enthusiasm you presently feel. Allow your talents to take shape and expand. The Ace of Wands represents the seed of confidence that you need to embark on that new project you've been dreaming of. The Ace encourages you to take the risk, and not be afraid. Nothing great is ever easy.

TWO OF WANDS

A merchant peers out into the distance. His facial expressions and clothing are rugged and shrewd; he is not one to be trifled with. He appears to be deeply concentrating and far thinking. Perhaps he is planning his strategy, or

considering the potential pitfalls he will have to guard against to bring his plan to fruition. From his many years of experience, he knows that the success or failure of his plan depends heavily on how carefully he lays out his strategy, *how detail-oriented he is*, and how well he anticipates and guards against the inevitable challenges his plan will face.

The Two of Wands is a card about taking risks and moving your plan forward. Ideas are a great place to start, but now you need to plan carefully in order to put them into action. Whereas the Ace of Wands represents that initial spark of creativity and inspiration, the Two of Wands symbolizes the active force that is needed to put it into motion. Many people have great ideas, but it takes a very special person indeed to go through the hard work of planning, preparation, and laying the groundwork for the successful realization of those ideas. Should the Two of Wands appear in your reading, get serious about planning and preparing to bring your dreams into reality.

THREE OF WANDS

The Three of Wands shows the same merchant from the Two of Wands standing on a dock, his gaze fixed on a sailing ship. If you examine the card carefully, you will realize that it is possible to regard the ship from two distinct vantage points: from one point of view, it appears to be arriving. On the other hand, it can also be perceived as setting sail. We aren't sure if the ship is coming or going, but what is very clear is that the merchant is deeply concentrating on its activity. His back is turned away from the viewer and towards the ship, towards his goal.

In the Ace of Wands, inspiration and creativity won the day. Then, in the Two of Wands, planning and preparation prevailed. Here, in the Three of Wands, it is time to put those carefully laid plans into action. The ship in the card could even indicate the need for travel in connection with your plan. Regardless, one thing is clear: the time has come to actively implement your

plan. Rely on your energy, enthusiasm, and careful planning to launch your ideas in the here and now.

FOUR OF WANDS

The Four of Wands is a happy card, one I'm always eager to receive in a reading. It's a card that signals stability and a sense of completion. In drawing the Four of Wands for *Tarot of the Abyss*, I wanted to somehow capture that moment of pure, unbridled happiness when you celebrate a major milestone. Reflecting on those moments when I have felt happiest and most celebrated as a person, I came upon the idea of a birthday party. The woman in the card is seated before a birthday cake, with a look of sheer joy on her face. The cake has been prepared to her taste, especially for her. We can almost hear the off-tune chorus of her loved ones singing "Happy Birthday" in the background. In a moment, she will close her eyes, make a magic wish, and blow out the candles to seal her wish's success.

Regardless of how old we are, it is a moment of pure, almost child-like joy and jubilation.

The Four of Wands calls out to you to savor your success and take a moment to reflect on your accomplishments. There are different ways this can come into play; it may be an actual celebration, or it can come in the form of an unexpected event, one that will usher in a new period of your life.

FIVE OF WANDS

Have you ever seen two birds fighting? Their wings flap wildly and violently as they fall through the air. They look as though they're going to come crashing to earth, but at the last minute, they spread their wings and take flight again. Similarly, the Five of Wands is the card of competition and strife. It most often predicts that some sort of disagreement is about to enter your life. It can also indicate a competition of some sort. If it is the latter, the Five of Wands will stir something inside of you, a need to

rise to the challenge and prove yourself worthy of the prize. It will drive and motivate you to push through. As this card is still part of the Suit of Wands, the disagreements it signifies are typically external arguments, as opposed to internal conflicts that might be indicated by the Suit of Cups. Regardless of the specific form of conflict that it represents, know it will be one that will certainly stir you in some way.

SIX OF WANDS

The graceful prima ballerina featured in the card bows, holding a large bouquet of flowers. She is humbled by the wild standing ovation she is receiving. Her performance looks easy and effortless, yet anyone who has ever attempted to do what she does knows that her level of excellence is only won through hours, years, and even decades of hard work and discipline.

The Six of Wands symbolizes praise and recognition. After putting in much effort, you are finally getting the

recognition you deserve! This recognition might occur at work, or any other place where you've recently been applying diligent effort. If you are a student, an award or scholarship could be on the way. Regardless of the success you achieve, however, be like the humble ballerina: in the instant that you believe you are the best, you no longer are. Keep your healthy ambitions in place, but keep your unhealthy ego in check. There is still much work to be done.

SEVEN OF WANDS

This is one of my favorite cards of the Suit of Wands. For me, it symbolizes that regardless of the challenges facing us, we have the courage and strength we need to stand our ground. The image shows a man surrounded by several spears. Though he is obviously outnumbered, he bears absolutely no sign of fear, neither in his facial expressions nor his posture. He stands strong, utterly focused on defending himself at all costs. He accepts and embraces

the battle. He is not one who will go down without a fight. And notice that he holds the high ground; though he has several foes, there are still forces working in his favor.

When the Seven of Wands presents itself in your spread, it augurs a period that will require you to stand your ground and defend your position. The forces arranged against you are not insignificant; you may feel as if you are being attacked from all sides. However, just as the man in the card, you possess the inner drive and determination, the courage and stamina to beat back your attackers. The battle will not be easy, but look to your inner fortitude, your outer aptitude, and any natural advantages you can exploit to fight your way through.

EIGHT OF WANDS

The geese are flying south for the winter in their classic “V” formation, sharing the burden by working together. The journey that began so long ago is now

making significant headway. Still, there is not a moment to lose in their odyssey. The cold chill of winter edges them on, icing their very bones should they linger too long. They are pushed ever onward by their desire for freedom and their memories of greener climes.

The Eight of Wands is all about speed, forward motion, and *even possible* travel. If projects have been stagnant for a while, know they will now start moving again. If you've been awaiting some pertinent news to come through, know it's soon to arrive. Since the Eight of Wands is all about the active force of fire, you yourself might be feeling more energetic. Your project has now started to gather some steam. Keep it in motion by doubling down with renewed enthusiasm.

NINE OF WANDS

The wounded warrior pictured in the card has seen the worst life has to offer. His head is bandaged, his arm wrapped in a makeshift sling. He leans

on his staff as a crutch. He is left alone in his suffering. His eyes are weary and mistrustful. He has spent too much time in the dark, and yearns once more to feel the healing light on his face. Even so, though he may be battle worn and bone weary, he is still alive, and if he can just find a bit of respite, he will emerge stronger, smarter, and all the wiser for his troubles.

The Nine of Wands is the card of defense. Are you guarding yourself? If you've been hurt in the past, it makes sense that you'd be more suspicious and want to protect yourself. Old wounds are not yet healed, physically or psychically. You could be recovering from an illness or some experience that has left you feeling depleted and even a little depressed. As the saying goes, however, half the world's ills are cured by activity, the other half by rest. Now is the time for the latter. Seek resiliency in respite and relaxation. You will emerge the stronger for it.

TEN OF WANDS

The Ten of Wands depicts a young boy carrying a large, heavy basket of wood on his back. His journey is not an easy one; the terrain is rocky and the steep stairs make his task all the more toilsome. Still he makes progress step by step at a slow, steady pace. While most tarot decks show this card from the back or in profile, I decided to draw the boy ascending towards the viewer to highlight even more his sheer exhaustion, and so that we might *identify* more personally with him.

The Ten of Wands hold challenges in store for those who receive it in their spread. It speaks of burdens and feeling the weight of heavy responsibilities. It may be that you have taken on too many commitments and overextended yourself. While each independent activity might be enjoyable, it is hard to enjoy any of them when you are exhausted from carrying too onerous a load. In other cases, we may not have a choice as to the load we bear. Perhaps

a job feels too demanding or overly taxing? Regardless of the specific source of your stress, the Ten of Wands warns you to be careful, as such burdensome responsibilities can have real impacts on your health. If at all possible, try to cut back on your activities. This is a card that reminds you to shift your focus and think more about yourself for a change.

COURT CARDS SETTING IN SUIT OF WANDS

As with all things, fire has a dual nature. In its most constructive sense, it literally lights and heats our world, forming the basis of every food chain on Earth. If it were not for the fiery orb we call the Sun, life itself would cease to exist! On the other hand, if fire is not respected and controlled, it quickly becomes a destructive force that can consume everything in its path. As an element, fire fuels our imagination with inspiration. It is an active element, with the potential of expansion if it is fed.

In the form of a bonfire here on Earth, fire nourishes our bodies and souls. It allows us to see in the deepest pitch of night, warms our chilled bodies, wards off dangerous predators, and sustains our bodies with life-giving food. For this reason, I chose the idea of tending a bonfire in a clearing in the woods as the main theme for the Court Cards.

PAGE OF WANDS

The Page is diligently gathering the wood and kindling necessary for the bonfire. She is young and still a student, tasked with the job of finding the best kindling. While hers is a straightforward task, nevertheless it is crucial for their survival, and she takes her role to heart. She painstakingly selects the best, driest wood that she knows will create a magnificent blaze. She then carries the wood lovingly into the circle of stones in the clearing. The Page is curious, young, and spontaneous, eager to receive more responsibility. For now, she dutifully plays the part she's been

given, excitedly anticipating the flames that will soon leap forth.

The Page of Wands, as any other Page in a tarot spread, can represent someone in your personal sphere. This person is typically full of optimism and energy, and is often young and quite enthusiastic. In general, the presentation of the Page of Wands in your spread brings with it a quick response if it regards problems or issues in your life. She is the bringer of new ideas, opportunities and messages. When the Page of Wands appears in your reading, it is a call to optimism. She is telling you to take the initiative—to fan the flames of your talent and creative energy.

KNIGHT OF WANDS

The Knight of Wands cradles in his hand an intriguing creature, a Fire Elemental. We can see the Page of Wands in the background, who stands ready with the wood and kindling she has collected. She has prepared the base for the fire, but without the

creative spark the Knight of Wands has harnessed, no fire can exist. The Knight tends to the Fire Elemental carefully, shielding and protecting it from the wailing winds of the forest. His is the essential task of presenting the Fire Elemental to the Queen, that she might then ignite the bonfire.

The Knight of Wands can sometimes appear when an important event will come to pass. It is a good card to receive in a reading, since it also brings with it a period of great creative potential. As an individual, he can be the personification of someone who is full of life and never afraid of a challenge. There is something disarming about him, and he knowingly uses this to his advantage. The Knight of Wands is a passionate individual who involves himself completely in any situation that he deems exciting. In the extreme, he can be a daredevil who recklessly throws caution to the wind, endangering himself and others. If you receive this card in your reading, ask yourself if you or anyone around you is exhibiting the

characteristics of the Knight of Wands. If so, be sure that they are the positive aspects, as his negative aspects can portend danger and even injury.

QUEEN OF WANDS

The Queen of Wands sits meditatively in front of a growing fire. Having received the fuel from the Page of Wands and the Fire Elemental from the Knight of Wands, she bears the all-important task of igniting the fire. While the Court Cards before her provided the raw materials for the fire, her function is to bring the fire into being. As a Queen should, she tends to the fire with great care and ability, seeing that it remains lit, sharing its vital warmth and light with all.

The Queen of Wands in a reading indicates a warm, outgoing individual in your life. She is one who is dedicated, and will give her total attention to any task she undertakes. It is her ability to focus her energy inward that allows her to harness the creativity energy of the

Suit of Wands. Like any Queen, she is confident in her abilities and optimistic in nature.

KING OF WANDS

The King of Wands represents the ultimate stage of the creative process that began with the Ace of Wands. He is the final energetic key. He is now able to harness the full energy of the flame, keeping it tame and constructive. With the expertise that comes only from the coming together of experience and reflection, he raises the flame to its full height. Recall that this is no ordinary flame; it is the flame of creativity, passion, inspiration and aspiration. Fire without a master to control it runs amok, consuming and destroying everything in its path. The King of Wands appreciates and understands the dangers and pitfalls of the creative process, and sees that it remains constructive and ultimately successful.

In general, when you receive the King of Wands in your reading, know it is

a good omen. He will usually bring with him some form of success. As an individual, the King of Wands is creative and has innate artistic abilities. He can be an innate leader. Therefore, don't be surprised that others will naturally gravitate towards him. He has a charismatic personality, and he can be charming and funny. He radiates confidence and is drawn to action.

☞ SUIT OF CUPS ☞

ACE OF CUPS

The Suit of Cups deals with emotions and matters of the heart. The Ace of Cups is about that initial burst of emotions when a relationship is fresh and new. In drawing this card, I wanted to capture the idea of that emotional rush, its wild and untamed nature. The waters of the soul explode forth from the woman's solar plexus, the core of emotions in the body. They wing their way towards the goblet held in her outstretched hand, but they could

easily miss their mark. This energy is still young and new; it is primitive and unpredictable. Who knows where it could lead, or if it will flow for reward or ruin?

The Ace of Cups shows up in a reading when we are in the process of getting in touch with our feelings. It can also be referring to a strong attraction that is developing or about to come into your life. This is the time to let your heart be heard; logic will not help you in this situation. The Ace of Cups sets the stage for establishing a deeper bond in a relationship, whether romantically or platonically. In order for this to happen you need to let down your walls and let your feelings be known. You will also have to invest yourself and your time for this to become a reality.

TWO OF CUPS

A meaningful relationship can add color to our days and light to our nights. It can paint a once dreary sky in hues of vermillion and gold. The lovers

depicted on the card have discovered such a relationship. They are locked in an intimate embrace; their bodies pulled close to each other, their serpentine tails interwoven. They breathe one breath, they speak with one voice. As *interconnected* as they are, however, they still remain two distinct beings with two separate bodies. At any given moment, one or the other could swiftly and effortlessly move away. They are interdependent, but not co-dependent.

The serpentine tails of the two lovers are reminiscent of the caduceus. Known as Hermes' staff, the caduceus is an ancient symbol of healthy balance and negotiation. To keep their tender relationship fresh and vibrant, the young lovers will indeed have to rely heavily on these essential qualities.

Should you receive the Two of Cups in your reading, know that there is a strong connection forming in your life. This relationship will go beyond simple romance or a quick romp. If you've had any issues within your current

relationship, the Two of Cups speaks to reconciliation, or at the very least, a resolution of past issues.

THREE OF CUPS

Yes, of course you are invited to the party! The Three of Cups is one of the most welcoming cards in a tarot deck. The card depicts two women, one young and one older, toasting with you, the reader. A toast is a moment of happiness and storytelling, of humor and hope. The idea of toasting is one that is familiar in most cultures, and it speaks of celebration and calling in those things we wish to have in life. Whatever the structure of the toast one thing is always true; its joy is multiplied by the number of people sharing it with you in the room.

Now is the time to have fun and enjoy social gatherings. The Three of Cups is a card of community. It speaks to feeling like you are part of the crowd, about feeling embraced by your community. You may soon attend a party or event.

This is not a humdrum work event; rather, it is a gathering of the heart. If you have nothing like this planned, this card may be trying to tell you that you need a little bit more fun in your life. Spice it up! Take some time to decompress and enjoy yourself in the company of good friends. Cheers!

FOUR OF CUPS

We've all been there at one point or another. We're being offered something, yet for some reason, we're simply not interested. The art on this card shows a man reclining comfortably on a tree, being offered a cup filled to the brim with possibilities. Yet it is crystal clear from his posture that he is indifferent and uninterested.

The Four of Cups is the card of apathy. For some reason or another, you don't seem to notice that there are gifts being offered to you. This card can also indicate ignoring opportunities that could potentially benefit you. Perhaps you're too much in your own world to

notice what you're missing. Are you too wrapped up in your emotions to notice others? If you're in a relationship, make sure you're devoting the attention to it that it deserves. The Four of Cups may be warning you to take time to ask how the other person is doing. To understand for sure if this card is about you or someone else in your life, look to surrounding cards.

FIVE OF CUPS

The Five of Cups is a card of loss, regret, and sorrow. That feeling that is raw and cuts to the core so deep that we can't breathe. The figure in the card is slumped over, holding his head in his hands. He is overwhelmed by his grief and loss, isolated and alone. Three cups have been knocked over, their precious contents dashed over the cliff. Even so, there are still two cups left for him to drink from. If he can just muster enough energy to raise his head, he will see that there is still hope of recovery. The two full cups bear the runes of Dagaz, symbol of hope and

achievement, and Eihwaz, symbol of rebirth and endurance.

The Five of Cups is one of the hardest cards to be dealt in the tarot. The depth of emotional distress it indicates can sometimes even point towards bereavement of a loved one. Perhaps you or someone you love is grieving. There is deep sadness that comes with this card, however, all is not lost. This is the moment where you choose whether to see the glass as half empty or half full. It's all a matter of perspective and dwelling on things that cannot be changed will only fix you in your suffering. Loss of any kind is hard, but just as the figure in the card, there is hope and opportunity to move through it if you just pick up your head. You do not have to remain alone, and you can focus instead on hope and recovery.

SIX OF CUPS

Memories form a large part of who we are. The people we've met and interacted with in the past, our childhood,

all of these and more, strung together form the picture of who we are as individuals. The Six of Cups is the card of review. We're reviewing things from our past relationships, childhood memories, or a love from the past, but now through a more objective lens.

The Six of Cups can bring with it some nostalgia. Perhaps a reunion or a person from your past is making you think of all the things you thought were forgotten. And it's ok to think of the past as long as you don't start living in it. Memories are sometimes fickle, and we tend to remember *things in a much better light than they truly were*. So use the past to better your future; use the emotional lessons, but don't let yourself dwell too much in the past. If you're reading this card as a follow-up to the Five of Cups, where we had sorrow and regret, here we've moved beyond the sorrow. We are now reviewing things from our past relationships and can have a more objective stance.

SEVEN OF CUPS

The woman in the card floats above the earth with her head literally in the clouds, her thoughts swirling about as so many images. The Seven of Cups is a card I've always associated with wishful thinking and fantasy. There is a gullibility that comes with the Seven of Cups; we tend to think we have all these imaginary options that aren't necessarily true. In order to be able to see clearly, we need to bring our feet back down to earth.

The Seven of Cups is the card of fanciful and ungrounded thinking. It shows up in a spread when we may be letting our imagination run wild and disregarding key facts. We can certainly do that, for a time. Avoiding the truth sometimes can protect us to a degree. However, eventually we have to come back to reality. This is the time to be honest with yourself and examine your situation objectively. If serious decisions need to be made, now is not a good time to make them.

EIGHT OF CUPS

She's had enough. The woman pictured in the card is tossing her cup and leaving it all behind. She is moving on, leaving behind a rundown cabin and all of her belongings with it. There is no sadness in her eyes, only determination and courage. A sense of freedom grows inside her with every step she takes.

The Eight of Cups is the card of moving on from a situation or place that is no longer bringing you joy. It's the start of a new journey, one that will not be easy since you're now starting from scratch. Nonetheless, it can be an interesting one, full of new possibilities. Whether it's an actual trip or an inner journey is for you to decide. One thing is for sure, an old cycle is closing and a new one is beginning.

It takes a long time for us to admit when something is not working for us. Perhaps we've outgrown a career or a relationship. Change is never easy and the unknown is scary. However,

you know very well that this change is inevitable and it is coming.

NINE OF CUPS

The art on the card shows a woman *bending her head down* to smell the flowers that bloom from nine cups. She seems happy; there is a faint smile on her lips and she bears a sense of calm and contentment. I wanted to capture a moment that shows the sheer joy a person can experience from the simple things in life.

If you've received the Nine of Cups in your reading, it means that there will be a period of pleasure and satisfaction in your life. All your hard work and investments are now paying off, and that brings with it a sense of peace. The Nine of Cups is also known as the wish card—what you've wished for may well come to pass. But as with any wish, make sure you've chosen wisely. As the saying goes, be careful what you wish for—you just might get it. Make sure it is a wish that is truly worth having, lest

your wish instead becomes a lesson to learn from.

TEN OF CUPS

We've now reached the Ten of Cups, having passed through several different stages of emotional lessons. Now we arrive at a point where harmony and joy are at their peak. A woman carrying a child stretches out her hand, inviting the viewer to their future home. A path with ten cups leads to a small house on a hill in the distance. After a long and tiring journey, they've reached the place where they can now settle down and enjoy their life together.

The Ten of Cups is the card that brings with it a sense of well-being, a happy family and simple joys. It speaks of harmony in relationships, an almost idyllic state, if you will. It's really a wonderful card to receive, and if you've had any family problems in the past, the Ten of Cups brings clarity and blessings to those relationships. Just like the Nine of Cups, the Ten of Cups brings harmony

and joy, however this is a shared joy, not just one felt by you. It's something that can only be experienced with those you love.

COURT CARDS SETTING IN SUIT OF CUPS

Water is absolutely essential to our well-being. It is literally a nutrient that we can't survive without. It is intensely powerful, and even when it appears calm, it can be swirling and tumultuous below the surface. So it is with our emotions; they are fluid and astonishingly powerful, just as the restless sea. For this reason, the common setting chosen for the Court Cards is a ship at sea.

PAGE OF CUPS

The Page of Cups is aboard a large ship. Behind him, the turbulent sea crashes and churns. He is not fazed by it, however; instead, he intently studies a map of the heart. His task is to ensure that the course of the ship has been properly

charted. Regardless of what the journey may bring—whether waters calm or stormy—he must safely and skillfully navigate his craft through it.

The Page of Cups represents pure emotion. He is innocent and wears his emotions on his sleeve. He is led by his heart, whatever the tangles and snarls that may entail. When the Page of Cups is present in your reading, it calls to you to be pure of heart and approach things with a sense of that same innocence. You can see things now that in the past you may have missed or considered unimportant. Channel your inner child; try to see things with a beginner's eyes. If you think back to your first love, it will give you an idea of how the Page of Cups sees the world.

KNIGHT OF CUPS

The Knight of Cups is the active force of emotion. In this card, we see the Knight as a sailor, hoisting the sails, taking control and actively directing the ship. His focus allows him to constructively

channel his emotions into navigating the ship successfully through the turbulent waters.

The Knight of Cups can represent the active force of emotions, or an actual individual with the qualities of the Knight. The person can be sensitive and temperamental. It can be someone who is aware of his or her feelings, a true empath who can easily identify with the moods and emotions of others. However, just like he's seen here pulling the ropes to control the ship, the Knight of Cups can and will pull the strings of the heart. Should this card present itself to you, it can also signal the need to start acting on your feelings, to embody the qualities of the Knight of Cups.

QUEEN OF CUPS

She gazes serenely at the sea, knowing that she can calm the wild waters with a silent whisper or a thought. The Queen of Cups is the mother of the sea, controlling the tides and waves to suit her journey. She bears a loving nature

and is naturally psychic. Without her, the journey would be much harder and the ship could easily find itself in a dire situation.

The Queen of Cups is a sensitive individual and has abundant patience when it comes to others. You might find her in a good friend or mother figure. She has a natural ability to bond with people, perhaps because she is so in touch with her own subconscious self. Her only downside is her lack of practicality. When the Queen of Cups shows up in your reading, know that you may go through a period during which you will be able to sense the currents of the heart, and for this reason people will find themselves drawn to you.

KING OF CUPS

Though the ship lists dangerously to one side, the King of Cups stands tall and majestic, assured in his ability to safeguard his crew and their craft. Though the murky waters swirl and thrash about him, he remains poised

and self-controlled. While the heaving waters are not to be taken lightly, he and his trustworthy crew have navigated harsher seas before. He stands as one who has ridden the waves of the emotions timelessly, and understands *their strengths and weaknesses* intimately. He is lord over his feelings, master of his emotions.

When the King of Cups appears as a person in your life, he can take the form of someone who is caring and thoughtful. He may show up as a wise counselor or an emotionally intelligent friend. This person naturally knows what to say and when to say it; he can comfort others with a well-placed word or a gentle, loving touch. When this card appears in the oracles of your spread it can also bring a period when you yourself will demonstrate certain qualities that the King of Cups possesses. For instance, you might be less reactive under pressure and better able to keep things in perspective.

☞ SUIT OF PENTACLES ☞

ACE OF PENTACLES

The Suit of Pentacles corresponds to the element Earth. Wanting to form a bridge between the soil that sustains us and all living things, I chose an image that focuses on the absolute dependency of man upon the Earth for sustenance and survival. The card depicts a branching tree in the shape of a man. Its roots tunnel deep underground, drawing nourishment and life from the earth's fecundity. The branches are heavy with ripe fruit, signifying prosperity and abundance.

The Ace of Pentacles is all about building a strong financial foundation. When the Ace of Pentacles surfaces in your reading, it often brings with it some sort of financial opportunity. Since it is the first card of the Suit of Pentacles, we need to understand that this only demonstrates potential; you will still have to put in the work to actualize it. This is the time to launch new financial

or commercial opportunities. The Ace of Pentacles may also indicate a career change or promotion. If however, your question was about a romance, the Ace of Pentacles points to a serious, long-term relationship.

TWO OF PENTACLES

In this card, we see two different perspectives of a person swinging a pentacle-shaped pendulum. There is an effort to maintain a steady pace, and the person is very focused on their task, their eyes intently fixed on the object. The Two of Pentacles speaks to the idea of managing several responsibilities at once. Sometimes, in order to do that, we have to be able to adapt and evolve with the changes that come.

When the Two of Pentacles appears in your spread, you'll soon be juggling multiple commitments at the same time. You may feel as if you're being pulled in many different directions. This doesn't mean you won't enjoy the process. However, you will have to remain

focused to balance and attend to all of your responsibilities. You have the ability to take on the challenges that face you if you maintain your focus and rhythm.

THREE OF PENTACLES

The artwork for this card is self-explanatory. Three hands work together to pull a rope in a seeming game of tug of war. Each individual is strong on their own, but together, they are much more likely to overcome the forces against them.

The essence of the Three of Pentacles is teamwork and the idea that together everyone achieves more. If this card appears in the layout of your spread, expect to be placed in a situation where you will have to work together with others to achieve your goals. Now is not the time to go it alone; while that may work sometimes, the situation before you calls for a team effort.

FOUR OF PENTACLES

The Four of Pentacles is about planning for the future and making sure you have the resources you need. However, at the same time, if we place too much value on accumulating material things, ironically, we can become owned by the very things we seek to own. Rather than us owning and controlling them, our psyches are “owned” by the desire to accumulate and possess wealth.

The card illustrates a man coveting his coins; he holds onto them very tightly, terrified of losing them. The coins are far larger than any real coin might be, indicating the value and importance he places upon them. He's become too focused on the coins. He has lost sight of the fact that they are intended to serve him, not the other way around.

Are you going through a financial hardship at the moment? If so, the Four of Pentacles is warning you to be conservative with your spending and focus instead on saving. However, if that's not

the case, the Four of Pentacles can take on a different meaning. Perhaps you are focusing too much on the money. Let go of the purse strings a little; it's ok to have fun here and there! After all, you can't control everything. Being in control of our finances is very important, however, remember that material possessions ought not be the focus of our lives.

FIVE OF PENTACLES

The Five of Pentacles shows two people, their expressions full of grief and pain, as they're cast out into the cold, unforgiving night. One of them appears unwell, barely able to stand. There is no room for them, and now they must try to find some other place to take shelter.

The Five of Pentacles is a card that implies some form of financial loss or hardship. In some cases, it can even mean illness. Since the Suit of Pentacles deals with the material aspects of life, we need to make sure we're not only looking at the financial aspects, but

also physical health. More often than not, this card relates to financial strain, however, make sure you're also paying attention to your physical well-being. Just as you take care of the house that shelters you, your body also needs to be maintained and cared for.

SIX OF PENTACLES

A kind-hearted person is seen offering aid to someone who is in need. Hers is a selfless act, born out of genuine concern and care. The Six of Pentacles is a card that focuses on the idea of giving and receiving. This can come in many forms—through offering your skills or financial support. The main point, however, is that the help is offered selflessly without expectation of gain or reward.

In this circumstance, you may be the giver or the receiver. Ask yourself whether you are the one who lacks, or the one who is fortunate enough to be able to give. If you've reached a point of comfort and contentment, you can now allow yourself to be generous. If

you presently find yourself in a financial bind, this card is telling you there is a light at the end of the tunnel, however dim it may appear at the moment. Help is on its way. In terms of the type of material gain you can expect, it can be anything from money to the pure, unprompted assistance of a friend. Every action has value and can impact a person positively or negatively. Regardless of whether you are on the giving or receiving side, remember that it is in giving that we receive, and that when we receive earnestly with an open heart, we also bless the giver.

SEVEN OF PENTACLES

The baker has labored all day, using her training and experience to transform simple, everyday ingredients into a wholesome, hearty meal that will nourish and sustain her patrons. She proudly displays two beautiful loaves of artisanal bread, while several others are still in the process of being prepared. Nothing is ever achieved without hard

work, and once she has completed her task, she will take a moment to enjoy the fruits of her effort.

When the Seven of Pentacles appears in your reading, it's time to pause *and evaluate* your progress. Consider everything you've achieved thus far. If you are interpreting this card in light of your profession, the Seven of Pentacles may indicate that you will soon be recognized for a job well done. It has taken you many years to get to this point, and soon you will be rewarded for your efforts.

EIGHT OF PENTACLES

The master mason is meticulously laying down his stones to erect a structure that will last hundreds or even thousands of years. He is in no rush; his goal is not haste but excellence. He must ensure that the stones are placed in such a way that the edifice he is constructing will endure. It has taken him a lifetime to master his craft; he approaches it as a calling. Just as he

was taught his trade by someone else, he also will pass down what he has learned when the time is right.

The Eight of Pentacles is the card of work and industry. It also often indicates the process of learning a trade or skill. This is the perfect card to get if you are considering further training, schooling or education. Whatever your goals may be, know that hard work, diligence, and attention to detail will be needed. You will have to dedicate yourself tirelessly to this effort if it is to succeed. However, just like the master mason, if you are passionate about your profession, you needn't worry; *it will* feel less like a sacrifice and more like an opportunity to shine.

NINE OF PENTACLES

A silver-haired woman of dignity and grace stands surrounded by life and plenty in her garden. She cradles a delicate finch in her hands, a Native American symbol of joy and happiness. On her head she wears a silver band of

nine pentacles. The peace and equanimity she radiates indicates that she is someone who has achieved her goals in *life*. The warm smile on her lips shows that she is not afraid of what tomorrow will bring.

The Nine of Pentacles speaks of self-reliance and goals achieved. Most often, we gain this confidence and success with age. The woman in the card has earned the right to be exactly who she chooses to be. She may or may not be wealthy, but it doesn't matter either way. Hers is not so much a material wealth as a spiritual one. Her goals accomplished, she can now focus on more personal, spiritual pursuits. You too can be like her—discover the simple joy in what you have achieved, and the fact that you don't have to worry at this time.

TEN OF PENTACLES

Two generations draw together with a simple handshake. This gesture transcends time and unites them in the passage of knowledge and wisdom,

an embrace that offers counsel and protection. A spiral staircase winds its way from the older hand to the younger one, communicating the many lessons learned. The younger hand bears the fruitful tree from the Ace of Pentacles, while its roots reach back to the wizened hand of the older generation. What began so long ago as a seed has now bloomed and borne fruit.

The Ten of Pentacles has at its core the concept of legacy and the impenetrable familial ties that bind. Therefore, when it appears in your reading, it indicates a renewed focus on these values at this time. The heritage of wisdom is our most valuable gift from our ancestors, sustaining us through times of trial and adversity. And just as it was passed down to you, either directly through your family line, or sometimes through your “extended family” of friends and respected elders, so too must you pass down what you have learned, along the spiral staircase to the next generation.

COURT CARDS SETTING IN SUIT OF PENTACLES

Since the Suit of Pentacles represents stability and the principle of groundedness, I wanted a backdrop that conveyed those ideas for the Court Cards. Nothing speaks to me more of groundedness and the majesty of the earth than mountains towering in the sky. For this reason, I have placed all of the Court Cards in a mountainous setting.

The element of Earth moves at a slower pace than the elements that have come before it. It is constant, diligent and meticulous. Much as if a person were to hike through the mountains, they must proceed carefully, slowly, one thoughtful footstep at a time. If they attempt to rush to their destination, that person may not get there at all! Theirs is the unique joy of savoring not only their ultimate arrival, but even more so the journey that brings them there.

PAGE OF PENTACLES

The card focuses on the journey of the quiet, reflective Page of Pentacles. Having passed through the treacherous mountain range looming in the background, he has unearthed a magic key that will unlock a great treasure. He does not know what the treasure is; he is but the dutiful messenger, sent on a vital mission, yet not fully comprehending the scope of his assignment. Still, it is because of his careful, meticulous nature that he has been entrusted with this undertaking. He does not take it lightly.

The Page of Pentacles, just as any of the Pages, can be the bearer of good news and opportunity. In this case, it relates to material or financial matters, so don't be surprised if you are offered a chance to prove yourself. However, like the Page, take your opportunities seriously; there is no telling when the next one will come along. If you've been expecting news regarding finances or property, it will soon arrive. Since the

Page of Pentacles is of a studious and pragmatic nature, if you are presently a student, the Page may alternatively signal news regarding your education.

KNIGHT OF PENTACLES

The Key of Pentacles has now been passed to the Knight of Pentacles, who will embark on the second phase of the journey. His role is to guard the key zealously in his quest to convey it to his queen. Curiously, he has a magnificent horse, yet he chooses to walk on foot. This indicates his slow, plodding, dutiful nature. The Knight of Pentacles is not one who will rush. He takes his duties seriously. He is methodical in his tasks and proceeds with prudence. Haste does not matter to him, only efficacy.

If your reading was geared towards career aspects, the Knight of Pentacles intimates that your goals will be reached if you remain tenacious and focused. In matters of the heart, the Knight of Pentacles signifies a strong, stable relationship built on trust and honesty.

If we were to personify the Knight of Pentacles, he would show up as a very hard-working individual, someone who is conservative and cautious by nature, and a bit of a perfectionist. This individual never leaves things half done and won't waste time. If you don't know anyone in your life with those traits or characteristics, this card may actually represent the cautious aspect of yourself. Perhaps you are the one who needs to harness the energy of the Knight of Pentacles. Or, if you are carrying his traits to excess, perhaps it is time to ease up a little.

QUEEN OF PENTACLES

The Knight of Pentacles has dutifully delivered the magic key to his queen, who has used it to unlock a mystical treasure of tremendous import. No one except the nurturing Queen of Pentacles would have known where to find it. She carefully removes the earth and unlocks the wooden box. Then with care and reverence she takes out

the Heart of Pentacles, rooted within the earth and forged through patience and perseverance of time. As its name clearly implies, the pentacle is a coin with an image of the five-pointed star, or pentagram, which is an ancient symbol of life. The lower four points represent the elements of earth, water, air and fire. The top-most point symbolizes the intellect or reason. When the star is right side up, as it is pictured here, it indicates that reason has dominion over the physical, emotional, mental and inspirational urges. It is indicative of the life perfectly lived. This is why it was a mystical secret so great that only the queen could unlock it, and which only the king, with the support of his court, can properly wield. In order to live most fully, we must master our lower urges, and direct them all lovingly and carefully under the guidance of Spirit.

When the Queen of Pentacles appears in your reading, it can represent a person in your life who is nurturing and down-to-earth. This person, often but not always a woman, will have a big

heart and is very welcoming, always greeting others with a warm smile. She is the archetypal mother who can make anyone feel at home. If she appears in your reading, ask yourself if you are presently embodying her qualities, or if perhaps you need a bit more of her nature in your life. Are you bringing in comfort and warmth? Are you caring for and looking after those in your life fully? She brings a soft, almost forgotten energy that we all the more crave for its rareness. Mind you, however, that while she may be caring and kind, she is far from a fool. She is a queen, and has all the manner and dignity befitting her office. She is also a resourceful and grounded person, independent and confident in her nature, and she can confer those qualities to you.

KING OF PENTACLES

The King of Pentacles bears the mystical Heart of Pentacles on his breast. He has attained the highest levels; he is master of the elemental forces before him. His

eyes communicate peace, constancy and love. In his hand, we see the mountains, symbol of his domain and kingdom.

In a reading, the King of Pentacles can represent a person who has the Midas touch. He can take any business and make it successful. This individual is dependable, determined, and honest. For this reason, people often seek his counsel. And like the illustration in this card, he has an open heart, willing to lend a hand wherever and whenever he is needed. The King of Pentacles is an active force; he'll never simply wait around for someone else to do a job for him and he certainly doesn't wait around to be rescued.

When the King of Pentacles shows up in your spread, he is there to encourage you to take an active role in the design of your life. Since he represents the element of Earth, and therefore the material aspect—you should look to your finances or physical health and act accordingly. If you're thinking of applying for a new job or starting a new business, the King of Pentacles is telling you to stop thinking and start acting.

➔ First, I like to create a nice space where I will conduct the reading. This doesn't have to be a permanently committed space, but I do like to remove clutter, books, or whatever is around that could otherwise take my attention away from the messages I'm receiving. Turning off your phone, TV, or other things that might draw you away from your inner concentration is essential. You can add anything to your space that can bring in more focus. A candle, incense, or crystals are some of the things that can further elevate the energy of your space. I leave this up to you, and remember that all of these are but "helpers" and although are great to have, we shouldn't be dependent on them.

➔ Since every object can hold energetic imprints, I like to clear my deck. If the cards are new, they've been handled by many hands. Just as you wash your hands before you sit down for a lovely meal or simply when you enter your home, so should your cards be clean of any potential energies that could affect your reading. My preferred method is

to pass them through some cleansing incense a couple of times, and recite a chant:

*“Cards of light, cards of fire,
Let your message shine through desire.
May your truth be held in sight,
May the path be clear and bright.”*

➔ This is just an example, which you are free to use, or you may form your own. I like to say something at the beginning of each reading. I can say it in my mind or whisper it. It's not meant for the querent but for the reader.

➔ Once I've established a physical space clear of clutter and noise and cleared the cards, I turn my attention to my mental space. If you have multiple questions, try to focus on one at a time. If you are scattered, so shall your reading be. Clearing your mind of clutter is just as important as all the previous steps, so try to set aside all your problems, at least for the duration of your reading.

→ Clearly state your question and stick to it. Don't switch around or try to ask multiple questions at once. It will make for a very chaotic reading.

→ Shuffle the cards thoroughly. You can also restate your question mentally, as you're doing so. In terms of when to stop, that's something that I believe is felt, there is no set time. I was taught that when the cards start getting stuck and feel a bit heavier, it means they are done. If for whatever reason some cards start slipping or falling, those cards need to be read then and there, since they are "rushing" to give you the information and not waiting for the spread.

→ Lastly, pick a spread style that you feel is right. You can choose a traditional spread or as you gain experience, create one of your own. The key is to establish what each position means ahead of time.

In my experience as a tarot reader, I've found that in readings it's also important to look at the big picture, not just the individual cards. Understanding the cards and their meanings is essential,

however, there is often also a larger message that can get missed. Let me give you an example.

Imagine someone comes to you for a reading regarding their current relationship. They'd like to know how to proceed, perhaps they feel that something is off or missing. You draw the cards and all you see are Swords. What does that mean? Did your reading go totally off? You were expecting Cups and here you are on the opposite end of the spectrum.

This is where the bigger picture comes into place. Those Swords didn't just pop up for no reason. They signal a very important message. If we apply the premise that the Suit of Swords deals with the mental aspect, and the Suit of Cups with our emotions, then, in this particular case, the larger message might be that the querent is all thought and no heart in the matter. They are missing the element of Water, and now would be a good time to bring more emotions, more fluidity to the relationship.

Hence, in order to better understand the tarot and its messages, we should approach it not only by analyzing its individual card meanings and symbolologies, but by viewing it as a living system. Treat your cards like old friends, see how they interact, where they fall. Do they appear happy, angry, curious or sad? Look for the subtle cues, the glances that the cards seem to give each other, the way they face. Slowly you will begin to see a narrative, a unique story unfolding right there before your eyes, something you will not be able to read in any book.

Discover your own language with the cards and form your own personal relationship with them. I've found that each deck has its own personality and just as with any individual, it takes time to get to know them. Don't rush your journey, just like you wouldn't rush any meaningful relationship.

SPREADS, GLORIOUS SPREADS

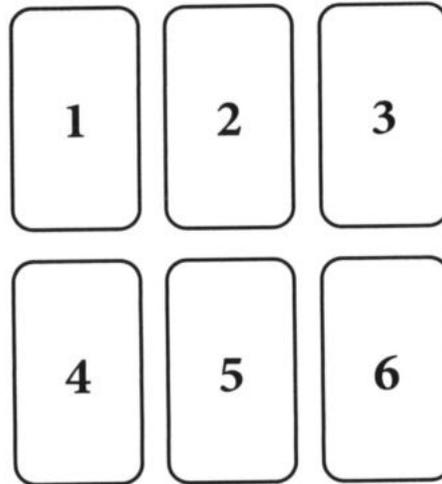
Spreads can seem intimidating; but they don't have to be. The easiest way to bypass this growing pain is to start with spreads that are simple, yet accurate. Here are a couple of spreads I use on a regular basis.

DAILY DRAW

This is a single card draw that can be done every morning. It will give you a good sense of how the day will progress, and at the same time give you an opportunity for clear validation by the end of the day. You state the question as simply as possible, "What will I learn from today?" Doing this every day will let you see and understand the subtle nuances of the cards and their messages. It is also helpful to have a notebook handy to keep track of your readings.

SIX CARD SPREAD

This is a great spread when you're trying to get to the root of a problem. It's a little more complex than the single card draw, but still not too complicated. I especially love to use this spread when I am having trouble being objective. In this spread you shuffle the cards, state your question, and then draw six cards. The reading of the cards in order are:



1. What do I know of the problem at hand?
2. What am I unaware of presently?
3. What do I secretly wish?
4. What will the future bring?
5. What shall be revealed?
6. What will I learn from this?

THE ABYSS SPREAD

The Abyss Spread was created especially for this deck and is unique to it. Its basic structure has at its core a simple, yet profound symbol—the spiral. The spiral is an ancient symbol of change, evolution, and growth over time. Whereas the circle traces out the same shape endlessly, a spiral repeats on itself, however, every time that it does so, it is a little different, somehow progressed or changed. Similarly, it is my hope that your journey with *Tarot of the Abyss* will lead you endlessly towards greater light and wisdom. Though the process of reading the cards may be repeated hundreds or even thousands of times, each reading is unique, and you will grow and develop with every reading. The shape of the Abyss Spread and the meanings of the positions are as follow:

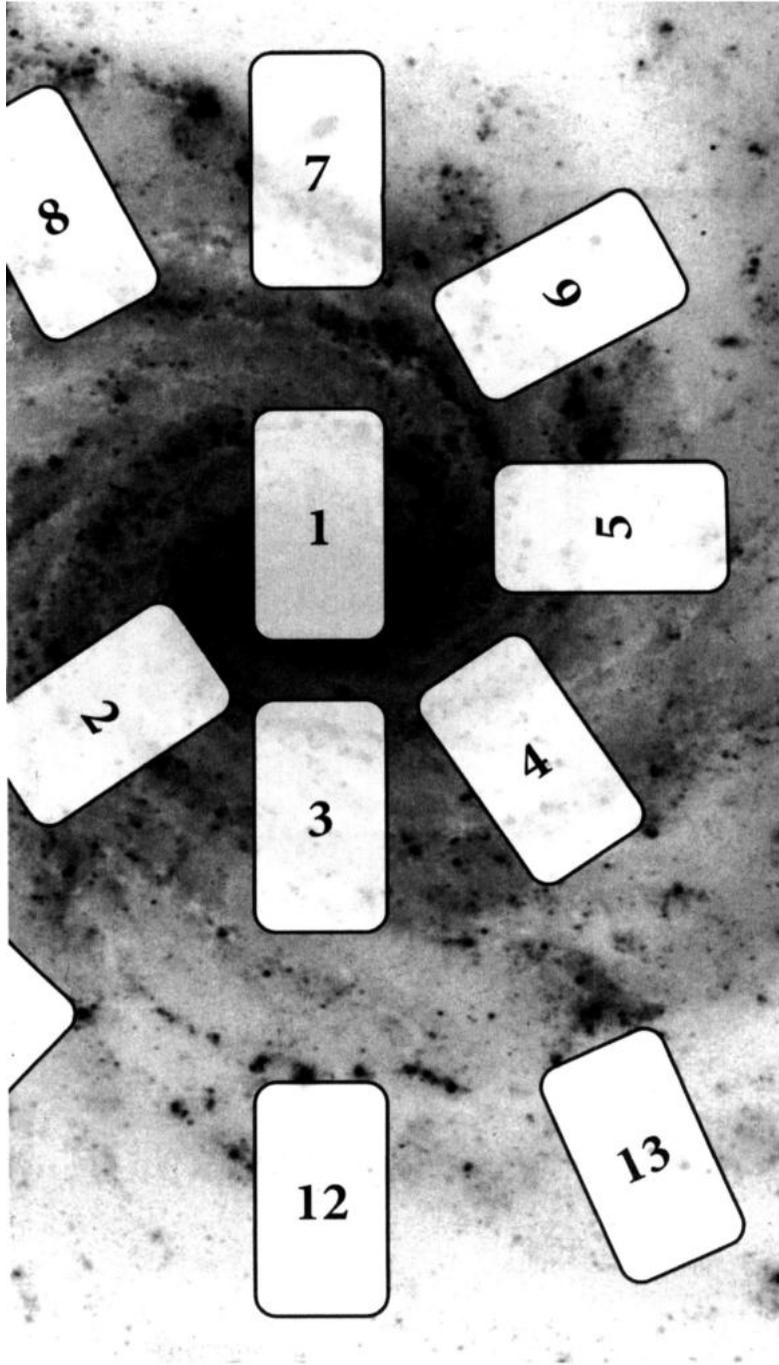
1. Who you are
2. Where you are at in your life
right now
3. What your spirit wants
4. Your doubts and fears
5. The past that has influenced you
6. What you need to focus on
7. What you should be grateful for
8. What you need to let go of
9. What does the universe want you
to know?
10. What some of your strengths are
11. What you can accomplish
12. What have you learned?
13. Potential future outcome

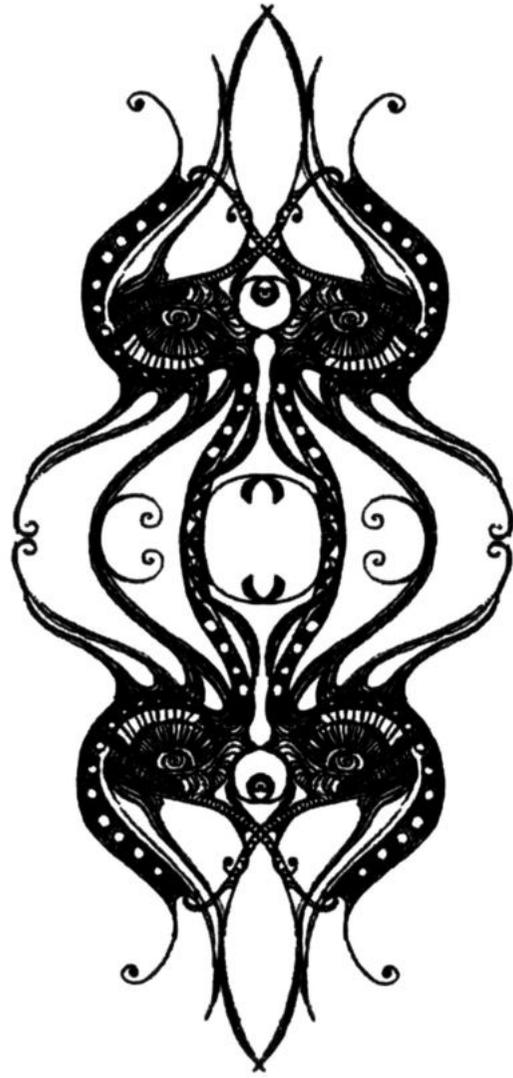
THE ABYSS SPREAD

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ABOUT ANA TOURIAN

Ana Tourian is an artist, illustrator and art director. After years of working in a creative agency she was called back to sculpting and illustrating. She is the creator of multiple decks that have gained international acclaim such as the *Hidden Waters Tarot*, *Oracle of Echoes*, *Clair de Lune Lenormand* and the illustrations for *Bonestone & Earthflesh Tarot*. Ana is an avid tarot lover and has been reading tarot for over twenty years. When she's not creating new divination decks, Ana can be found sculpting or hiking. She lives with her two children, her husband, and her dog, Charley in New Jersey.

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