

# MARCHETTI TAROT



COMPANION DOCUMENT  
LEE BURSTEN

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Forward by Ciro Marchetti	6
About the Author	10
Preface by Lee Bursten	10
Structure of the Tarot Deck	13
About Roman Numerals	14
How to Read the Tarot	17
Major Arcana	39
• 0 Fool	41
• I Magician	47
• II High Priestess	50
• III Empress	53
• IV Emperor	56
• V Hierophant	59
• VI Lovers	62
• VII Chariot	65
• VIII Strength	68
• IX Hermit	70
• X Wheel	73
• XI Justice	76
• XII Hanging Man	78
• XIII Death	80
• XIV Temperance	84
• XV Devil	87

• XVI Tower	90
• XVII Star	92
• XVIII Moon	94
• XIX Sun	97
• XX Judgement	99
• XXI World	101
Minor Arcana	105
• Ace of Wands	109
• II of Wands	110
• III of Wands	111
• IV of Wands	112
• V of Wands	114
• VI of Wands	116
• VII of Wands	118
• VIII of Wands	120
• IX of Wands	121
• X of Wands	123
• Page of Wands	125
• Knight of Wands	126
• Queen of Wands	127
• King of Wands	128
• Ace of Cups	129
• II of Cups	131
• III of Cups	133
• IV of Cups	134

• V of Cups	136
• VI of Cups	138
• VII of Cups	140
• VIII of Cups	142
• IX of Cups	144
• X of Cups	145
• Page of Cups	146
• Knight of Cups	148
• Queen of Cups	149
• King of Cups	150
• Ace of Swords	152
• II of Swords	154
• III of Swords	155
• IV of Swords	157
• V of Swords	159
• VI of Swords	161
• VII of Swords	163
• VIII of Swords	165
• IX of Swords	167
• X of Swords	169
• Page of Swords	170
• Knight of Swords	171
• Queen of Swords	173
• King of Swords	175
• Ace of Coins	176
• II of Coins	178

• III of Coins	180
• IV of Coins	181
• V of Coins	183
• VI of Coins	185
• VII of Coins	187
• VIII of Coins	189
• IX of Coins	191
• X of Coins	193
• Page of Coins	195
• Knight of Coins	197
• Queen of Coins	199
• King of Coins	201

### *Spreads and Sample Readings*

• The Prediction Spread	203
• The Stair Spread	210
• The Interaction Spread	215

# FORWARD BY CIRO MARCHETTI

Seventy-eight images, a collective ensemble. They enter the stage in varying configurations and numbers; a list of cast members that would do justice to the most imaginative theatrical production. Between them, this combination of heroes and villains, sinners and saints, perform and interact. Their costumes are unchanged, but with each performance they take a random variety of positions, rearranging both lead and supporting roles. They have no set lines to learn or recite, yet their dialogue flows freely, albeit with occasional pause for thought. They engage us, as members of the audience, with their interaction, offering an infinite number of plots, each performance unique and personalized. Tales of sadness and joy, failures and success, reviews of what has been and indications of what might become. They offer us a lens through which we provide both focus and perspective, and a mirror with which to ponder and reflect. So let's shuffle the pack, deal the cards and let the show begin.

A somewhat romantic theatrical analogy of a tarot reading, but one that nev-

ertheless summarizes how I envisage the process and how I approached the production of my various decks over the last 15 years. I acknowledge that most certainly a reading can be effective even in the most mundane of locations and manner of presentation, using cards of the plainest visual simplicity. However, I prefer to envisage a more idealized scenario, a reading where both reader and querent are participating in a mutual shared experience; to use the theatrical analogy again, a performance of sorts where the cards serve much as a set design enhancing the overall performance of the cast with mood and atmosphere.

Nevertheless a tarot deck cannot rely on decoration alone. To even be correctly defined as a tarot deck, as opposed to an unrestricted themed oracle or other divination system, a tarot deck needs to adhere to any number of possible criteria; factors such as numerical order, subdivisions of arcanas, and characters; elemental, astrological, and kabbalistic associations; and pre-established symbolism and meaning. To comply, if only in part, with such an array of preconditions would be challenging enough from a designer's perspective even if there were at least a commonality of precedence to follow; but the real chal-

lenge and inherent pitfall is of course the absence of any source deck and accompanying documentation. There is no de facto original or Rosetta Stone equivalent to provide us with a definitive translation. Instead we have an array of assumptions and deviations that have evolved over the centuries.

Despite the charm of earlier historical works of this genre, the reality is that in terms of draftsmanship and detail they are often unclear, and their intended meaning obscure. From earlier woodcuts to turn-of-the-19th-century pen and ink, poses, facial expressions, and gestures are often vague. While arguably this can be utilized positively, as it allows for more flexibility of interpretation by the reader, I am of the opinion that it also allowed for much guesswork in the past, guesswork that once again became accepted as fact over time.

Conjecture, even when based on dedicated academic study, can still be tainted by the personal but possibly incorrect conclusions proposed by influential figures throughout tarot history. Such conjecture, reinforced by both reputation and with sufficient retelling, evolved into variations of accepted fact. We are subsequently left with an essentially faith-based entity that embraces a wide number of variables to ponder



or disagree with. This lack of consensus creates a dilemma—or opportunity—in deciding how they should best be re-portrayed in any new project.

In many cards of this deck I have incorporated the use of closeups of faces. I consider that this encourages a relationship of sorts with the characters, to get to know them better, inviting us to question who they are and what they are feeling or expressing. As with previous projects, when I do this, I tend to depict them with neutral expressions, the objective being that they can better adapt to whatever tone is appropriate for any given reading.

In the cards where I have indulged in adventurous artistic license and deviation from more traditional depictions, I consider there remains sufficient conceptual association that you will still find yourselves in familiar territory.

*Ciro Marchetti 2018*

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lee Bursten is the author of *Tarot of Dreams Guidebook* for U.S. Games Systems, and *The Marseille Tarot Companion*, *Zodiac Tarot* and *Gay Tarot* for Lo Scarabeo. He contributed to *Ciro Marchetti's Gilded Tarot Royale* and *Gilded Reverie Lenormand: Expanded Edition*. He has contributed articles to *Llewellyn's Tarot Readers* and was technical editor of *Absolute Beginner's Guide to Tarot* for Que Publishing. He served for several years as a forum moderator for the *Aeclectic Tarot Forum*.

## PREFACE

In late 2019, I was asked if I would be interested in writing the accompanying book for the mass market edition of the *Marchetti Tarot*, which *Ciro Marchetti* had already published in a limited edition. I hadn't written a full book for *Ciro* since 2005, when I wrote the *Tarot of Dreams Guidebook*. We had stayed in contact during the intervening years and I contributed some suggestions for his subsequent projects here and there, and wrote some text for *Ciro's Gilded Tarot Royale* and *Gilded Reverie Lenormand: Expanded Edition* decks.

Ciro sent me a copy of the limited edition Marchetti Tarot, and I was impressed with Ciro's continued ability to travel farther and deeper with each successive deck. I don't mean to diminish his earlier decks at all; in fact, I still have a fond affection for the original version of Ciro's first deck, the Gilded Tarot, although his knowledge and understanding of tarot has grown since then.

For the Tarot of Dreams, after much discussion, Ciro decided to place on the cards indications of the astrological and kabbalistic correspondences, created by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (a late-19th-century British secret society), and in the book I delved into these attributions. For the Marchetti Tarot, Ciro had worked astrological glyphs into many of the images, but for the mass market edition Ciro decided to remove many of them, a decision I wholeheartedly agreed with. I found the images so suggestive, so insightful, and in some cases so profound that I felt the astrological glyphs could only get in the way.

For me, the most striking feature of the deck, besides the lushly beautiful artwork, is the focus on faces. Many of the people in the deck are shown in closeup, and this adds a new way for

a tarot deck to communicate with us, through the features and expressions of the closeup faces.

In this book we'll discuss the structure of a tarot deck, explore the Marchetti cards one by one, and finally, discuss methods of reading. Throughout, the focus will be on allowing the artwork on the cards help us access our thoughts, our feelings, our relationships, our environment, our past, and our future. Less emphasis will be placed on traditional esoteric references. Likewise, the chapter on reading with the deck will favor intuitive approaches rather than logical systems and correspondences.

Of course, a tarot deck can be interpreted and used any way the user likes. The ideas and suggestions in this book are meant to serve as guideposts and examples, and I hope they will prove fruitful for beginners and experienced readers alike. Ultimately, the cards themselves are your best guides.

*Lee Bursten 2019*

# STRUCTURE OF THE TAROT DECK

The Marchetti Tarot conforms to traditional tarot structure. It is comprised of two sections, the Major Arcana and the Minor Arcana (“arcana” means secrets). The Minor Arcana are basically a playing-card deck, with the following differences:

1) Instead of Clubs, Hearts, Spades, and Diamonds, the suits are Wands, Cups, Swords, and Coins.

2) Instead of three Court Cards (Jack, Queen, and King), there are four (Page, Knight, Queen, and King), and thus the tarot’s Minor Arcana has 56 cards, while a playing-card deck has 52.

3) In most modern tarot decks, including this one, the numbered cards Ace through Ten contain scenes rather than simply the requisite number of suit symbols.

The Major Arcana is a set of 22 cards which belong to no suit (or we may think of them as comprising a fifth suit). They show allegorical scenes, archetypal characters, and celestial bodies; for example, respectively, the Wheel, the Hermit, and the Moon.

# ABOUT ROMAN NUMERALS

For the benefit of beginners who may not be familiar with Roman numerals, you only really need to know three things:

X = 10

V = 5

I = 1

The letters are additive: I means one, and II means two. Each letter can be used successively up to three times: III means three. When a letter would need to be used four times, the next higher letter is used instead, with the lower letter in front of it to indicate “less”: we use IV to mean four (one less than five), rather than IIII. XVIII means 18 (X is ten, V is five, and III is three; ten plus five plus three equals 18). XIX means 19 (X is ten, and IX is one-less-than-ten, i.e. nine).

Here are the 21 Roman numerals used in the Major Arcana:

I (1) - Magician

II (2) - High Priestess

III (3) - Empress

IV (4) - Emperor

V (5) - Hierophant

VI (6)	-	Lovers
VII (7)	-	Chariot
VIII (8)	-	Strength
IX (9)	-	Hermit
X (10)	-	Wheel
XI (11)	-	Justice
XII (12)	-	Hanging Man
XIII (13)	-	Death
XIV (14)	-	Temperance
XV (15)	-	Devil
XVI (16)	-	Tower
XVII (17)	-	Star
XVIII (18)	-	Moon
XIX (19)	-	Sun
XX (20)	-	Judgement
XXI (21)	-	World

The numbers II through X (2 through 10) are also used for the numbered Minor Arcana cards. The first in the sequence of numbered Minor cards is called Ace instead of I.

The only non-Roman numeral used in the deck is for the Fool, numbered zero. The earliest known references to the concept of zero and the use of a circle to represent it are from India.

If you're not already familiar with the Roman numerals, it's worth your time to take a few minutes and run through them and test yourself with them until you can easily read them. For the remainder of this book, we'll be using the Roman numerals, which will make it easier for you to navigate through the book and the deck, since the cards themselves show Roman numerals.



# HOW TO READ THE TAROT

## **Introductory remarks**

How do we read the tarot? Simply put: ask a question, shuffle the deck, lay out a series of cards, and use the cards to determine the answer to the question.

We can ask any question we want to. We can ask about a consequential life decision or whether we should take a walk. That said, many readers will agree that there are some methods that are more effective for certain kinds of questions. For example, if your question involves two possible options or paths, you are more likely to get a coherent answer if you lay out two groups of cards, one for option A and one for option B, and then compare your reaction to them, rather than laying out only one grouping.

## **Fortune-telling or divination?**

Many people are interested in tarot reading because they want to be able to predict the future. Some readers refer to themselves as fortune-tellers, focusing on predicting events. Others feel they are performing divination, with an em-

phasis on psychological motivations. In reality, it's not an either/or thing. If we imagine a scale, labeled at one end "Completely Psychological" and at the other end "Completely Predictive," the great majority of readers fall somewhere in between those two extremes.

Even a very psychological reading will have some elements of prediction in it, as long as the question deals in any way with the future. And, because of the broad and vast inner landscapes illustrated on the cards, it's virtually impossible to answer a very mundane question without at least alluding to deeper concerns.

Experienced readers know that a tarot deck is a rich tapestry of mythology, history, and art, and thus is often better suited for questions that have some psychological depth to them. If you ask a very mundane question, you may get a good answer or you may not. For example, if you ask, "Should I go to the store now or later," and you draw one card and get the Hanging Man, then you have a clear answer that you should wait. The Chariot or the VIII of Wands, on the other hand, would tell you to go now. But other cards would have a more ambiguous response. In the context of that question, what would the

Hierophant mean? How about the III of Swords? I for one would be hard-pressed to come up with an answer from those cards.

So, although you can certainly ask any question you want, my advice would be to avoid very simplistic questions that need a “yes” or a “no”. For that kind of question, you would probably be better off flipping a coin.

Most of us who read the tarot have experienced uncanny readings where the cards seem too on-the-nose to be the result of coincidence. Does this mean the source of the information we get from the cards is supernatural? Not necessarily. Many readers do in fact believe the source to be supernatural. Others believe that the process is strictly a psychological one; we get the information from intuition, from educated guesses, and from the subconscious.

Personally, I believe that the supernatural versus psychological distinction is really just a semantic one. Some of the information seems to come from a source unknown to us. Whether that source is outside of us or within our own brains is ultimately unknowable.

## How it works, and best uses

I believe the best way to use tarot is as a mechanism to shake our thinking out of its well-worn ruts, to help us consider a situation in ways that we ordinarily wouldn't have. And why should a deck of cards from the 15th century (and with the Minor Arcana's tradition of meanings from 1910) be able to help us in this way? Because the images form patterns of psychological resonance, especially when combined randomly, that are particularly helpful in gently shaking a mind out of its usual way of thinking.

It all hinges on the talent we humans have of stringing together meaning and telling stories from random patterns. Divination with cards or lots is one example; seeing constellations in a grouping of stars is another. The creative act of telling a story using randomly-chosen cards somehow bypasses our usual filters, and the result is a vivid, numinous story, like a dream, which gives us an answer or presents a possibility that wouldn't have otherwise occurred to us, allowing us to gain insight by thinking outside the box. Again, the question of whether the new insights have been transmitted to us by supernatural means, or dredged up from our own subconscious, is interesting but ultimately irrelevant.

## A note on ethics

Another factor in the equation, especially when reading for others, is ethics. Many readers have written a statement of ethics which governs their reading practice. These can vary according to the individual reader. I think we would all agree that finding a curse or an evil spirit in the cards and offering to fix it for a fee would be unethical (to say the least, not to mention criminal). Giving melodramatic, doom-laden predictions in order to terrify the querent and boost the ego of the reader would be another universally-agreed-upon no-no.

From a practical perspective, despite the long history of some tarot readers and astrologers giving medical or financial advice, it seems prudent to refer such questions to certified professionals; among other reasons, it will protect you from liability for practicing without a license.

Other ethical considerations are more subjective. Is it unethical to read for someone who isn't physically present, for example by phone or email? Is it wrong to read for a third party without their knowledge? The answers to these questions will be governed by your beliefs about how tarot reading works and what you want to accomplish with your readings.

The most important thing to understand about reading for others is that the querent, no matter how skeptical they may appear, is to some degree placing their trust in you. Often, people will put you on a pedestal and receive your words as if they were handed down on stone tablets. That means you have to be careful about what you say and how you say it. People are suggestible, and if you predict a bad thing, it may start a psychological domino effect in the querent's mind that results in the bad thing actually happening. There is no need to start prophesying doom when you see gloomy-looking cards. The "bad" cards in the deck might easily be referring to mental states and anxieties, or may be serving as warnings, not predictions.

That's why we should never predict death or physical harm. Planting that seed in the querent's mind could result in a self-fulfilling prophecy. And as we'll discuss in the text for the Death card, that card does not refer to physical death; in fact, the tarot doesn't seem to be concerned with physical death at all.

When I read for others, I try to maintain a positive and helpful attitude. If I see something negative in the cards, I say so, in a gentle and tactful way, but I also look to other cards in the spread that offer counsel on how to ameliorate

the negative effect, so that the querent leaves the reading empowered rather than depressed. I also emphasize to the querent that our future is determined by ourselves, not dictated by the cards.

The most important part of a reading is what we learn from it. For that reason, my last step in any reading is to ask myself questions like, “What did I learn?” “What choices or options were shown to me that I hadn’t been aware of before?” “What’s the next step?” This ensures that the reading ends on a positive and practical note.

## **Down to business**

Now we can get down to business. How exactly does one read tarot? Tarot divination a very individualistic art. Every reader reads in their own way, usually developed over years of reading the cards and reading books about reading the cards. Finding your own way of reading is a sometimes frustrating but ultimately rewarding process. Along the way you’ll learn a lot about human nature and about yourself.

Many people who are new to tarot come to it with the idea that it’s like a language; all you have to do is learn what the cards mean, and then you can read a string of cards like words in a

sentence. Tarot is like a language, but it's not comparable to what we normally think of as language. The images on the cards are symbols, not signs. A sign has only one meaning, for example the road sign with wavy lines on it, meaning a curving road ahead. A symbol has a constellation of meanings, but the ultimate meaning is what it means to an observer in the particular time, place, and context in which the observer is viewing the symbol.

Tarot images and titles are fluid; the Wheel card, traditionally titled the Wheel of Fortune, might mean good luck in one reading, bad luck in another reading, gambling in a third reading, cycles in a fourth reading, and a car tire in a fifth reading, all depending on what makes sense to you, the reader, in that reading's moment and context.

When interpreting a specific card in a reading, you'll need to fit it, like a jigsaw puzzle piece, into the larger tapestry of meaning you're creating. When interpreting a card, sometimes you'll use one of the meanings given in this book; sometimes you'll use a different meaning from another book; sometimes you'll make an intuitive leap based on the card's title or something you see on the card.



If you're an experienced reader, you'll probably read through all or parts of the card descriptions in this book and decide which can add to your present knowledge and experience, and which you can safely ignore. If you're brand new to tarot, by all means read through the card descriptions, but don't feel as if you have to memorize them. A more productive activity would be to start immediately reading small layouts. See what you can glean from the cards without looking them up; then look them up and see if any of the meanings or suggestions you find in this book adds to your conclusions. If you look at a card and are completely stumped, that's perfectly all right, just go ahead and read the card description and then continue on to the next card in the reading.

First let's look at two cards: High Priestess and III of Wands. Search for them in your deck, and lay them out side by side, with the High Priestess on the left and the III of Wands on the right. I'll give you a question to get you started, but after reading the following, feel free to ask these two cards your own question and see what you can come up with.

So let's ask the cards: "Tell me something about my job that I don't know." For the purposes of this exercise, we'll

regard the two cards as succeeding one another in time; so, first the High Priestess happens, and then the III of Wands happens.

Now let's explore two different methods of interpreting the cards. The conclusions I reach in the following examples are my own, no better or worse than what you could come up with. In fact, after reading through these examples, try using these methods on the High Priestess and the III of Wands and see what different but valid interpretations you can come up with.

## **By the book**

First we'll look to the card texts in this book. Of course, each card has several meanings listed, so we'll try to find meanings that seem relevant to the question.

High Priestess: "Hidden or modest charity, anonymous philanthropy."

III of Wands: "You've made a good start toward implementing your plans, now you need to make sure that you don't have unrealistic expectations. If your imagination outruns reality, you may end up stuck in the sand like the three wands in the picture."

Now we can simply put them together to tell a story that relates to the question (which was, “Tell me something about my job that I don’t know”). How about this: “You’ve made a good start on a particular project at work, but you’re in danger of being tripped up by your unrealistic expectations. However, although you’re not aware of it, one of your colleagues or superiors is keeping their eye on you and will step in to help if they see there’s a problem.”

So, I’ve taken the book meanings and kind of shoehorned them together so that they make sense in the context of the question. The layout positions establish that the High Priestess happens first, followed by the III of Wands; however, in my phrasing of my interpretation I actually started with the second card because it seemed to flow better that way. I could just as easily (if less mellifluously) have said that one of your colleagues or superiors is keeping an eye on you, which you’re not aware of, in case you’re tripped up by your unrealistic expectations on a particular project at work.

## **Find the symbols**

If you’re more visually oriented, you might like the second card-reading

method we'll discuss, which is to find, compare, and contrast individual symbols or image elements on the cards.

First let's look at the yin-yang symbolism of these cards. In Chinese symbology, yin energy is thought to be receptive and contemplative, while yang energy is active and outgoing. I picked the High Priestess and III of Wands cards at random, but they happen to contain several examples of yin and yang, with the High Priestess representing yin and the III of Wands representing yang.

As noted earlier, the gender of the figures on the cards bears no relevance to the gender of the querent or the people in the querent's life. Nevertheless, in the tarot, gender itself is used as a symbol of yin and yang energies, with yang energy shown as masculine and yin energy shown as feminine.

Other yin-yang symbolism on these cards are the moon of the High Priestess (specifically seen hovering over the scroll towards the bottom of the card) and the rising or setting sun on the III of Wands. The High Priestess takes place at night, while the III of Wands is a daytime scene (albeit early morning or early evening). Stillness reigns on the High Priestess card (the candle flames are steady, the water is still), while the

III of Wands shows blustery action (the waves are splashing, the ship is sailing, the flags and sails are catching the wind). Colors are muted on the High Priestess but vivid on the III of Wands.

So, what's the significance of all this yin-yang stuff? There are clearly two opposing energies present, one passive and receptive, one active and initiating. In terms of the question posed, we might easily imagine that the yang energy on the III of Wands represents the querent, who is fully engaged in their job and is eager to make a good impression, and that the yin energy on the High Priestess stands for an ally, a calm and wise mentor who offers advice or is simply present and available for help if needed.

How do we know that the High Priestess person wants to help? If we go back to the card text, we learn that the crown of candles represents St. Lucy, a symbol of charity. Or we can simply rely on the card image which shows the Priestess offering gifts.

The III of Wands is a good card for someone trying to do well at their job. The three wands stuck in the sand makes me think of an adventurer staking their claim to land by planting a flag. The person's hopes, plans, and

dreams for the future are symbolized by the fanciful ship growing out of the man's head. Meanwhile, an actual ship, representing commerce, navigates the ocean. Together, the two cards represent someone well-positioned to take action in the job environment, based on the calm and secure wisdom and counsel of a colleague or superior.

This is how tarot reading happens. In a richly-illustrated deck like the Marchetti Tarot, there are a large number of individual symbols and image elements that can be interpreted, and each symbol or element has a nearly infinite number of possible interpretations. A beginner might well ask, how do we choose between them? The answer is, we engage in a creative and intuitive process which begins by seeing what symbol or aspect jumps out at us, and assigning an interpretation based on what makes sense given the context of the question.

By making that first interpretation, we've begun a narrowing process. When we come to the second card, the range of possible interpretations is narrowed by our interpretation of the first card. Thus you build a chain of associations which, as you read your way through the card spread, takes on a life and momentum of its own.

We can also look to the individual elements on the cards and compare them. If two elements are vaguely similar, then we can look to see how they are similar and how they differ. We can also do this with two elements that may not be similar but which occupy the same spots on the two cards. If we want to add a time element, we can look at the two symbols and imagine how the element on the first card has changed or morphed or grown into the element on the second card.

For example, in our two cards, the High Priestess and the III of Wands, the two largest and most obvious non-human symbols are the crown of candles on the Priestess and the ship-crown on the III of Wands. We might say that the animating feature of the Priestess' crown is a solitary, gentle illumination, while the animating feature of the III of Wands is the wind which fills the exuberant sails of the ship-crown. Relating this to the querent's question, we might say that the wise and gentle counsel of your mentor will transform into the energy and confidence needed to fill your sails as you act on your ideas.

The Priestess holds a pomegranate in her hands, and if you look carefully, you can see some pomegranate seeds falling into the water below. In roughly

the same position as the pomegranate, on the III of Wands there is a ship seen in the water. The seeds scattered by the Priestess have resulted in the physical action shown by the sailing ship.

## **Intuition versus book meanings**

Some tarot readers are very literal. They go by the meanings of the cards as set forth in a book (or, more likely, assembled by the reader from several books and from experience), linking each card concept together to tell a story. For these readers, for example, the Lovers card always relates in some way to the concepts of love, romance, and relationship.

Other readers are completely intuitive. They eschew book meanings altogether and simply begin from scratch for each new reading, creating meanings on the go from what they see on the cards. For these readers, the Lovers card simply shows two people dancing.

The best way to read is to use a combination of the two. And if you weave the tapestry of interpretation as I've described, you'll find that both intuitive insights and book meanings are useful to use as threads in that weaving.



## Combining cards

The most common way of reading is to use a spread where each spread position has its own meaning. Then you lay each card in a spread position, and interpret the card in light of the card's position in the spread, then move on to the next spread position and the card occupying it. In this method, each card is considered separately from the other cards. For example, the King of Wands in a spread position labeled The Past would mean that sometime in the past, you were placed in a position of authority in a specific project or endeavor.

But cards can also be read in combination. This is more akin to how playing cards or oracles such as Lenormand decks are read. Here we read cards as subparts of a sequence, or like words in a sentence, and spread position meanings, if present at all, are deemphasized. In this style of reading, you might lay out a line of five cards and interpret the story they tell sequentially, as if each card were a panel in a comic strip.

In this kind of reading, groups of two or three cards are often combined to form one concept. Adjacent cards are often used as adjectives or adverbs to describe a person, thing, or action.

For example, pull from the deck the X of Cups and the Page of Swords. As before, set them side by side. Instead of considering them as separate points in time, we're going to combine them. The easiest way to do that is to consider either the X of Cups as describing the Page of Swords, or the Page of Swords as describing the X of Cups.

**X of Cups = joy**

**Page of Swords = curiosity**

In this case, it doesn't much matter which card is the noun and which the adjective; in either case, we end up with something like a joyful curiosity or a love of learning.

Let's try another duo, this time the Moon and the Queen of Wands. This time, the meaning is different depending on which card is the noun and which the adjective.

**Moon = hidden**

**Queen of Wands = passion**

If the Queen of Wands is the noun, then the combination means a hidden passion. If the Moon is the noun, the combination means a passion for hidden things.

Let's try three cards: Judgement, VII of Coins, and VII of Swords. Suppose you're having a disagreement with

someone because they're not honoring a commitment they made to you. These three cards together can mean: "You have a plan to wait for the right moment to remind them of their promise." Can you work out how I arrived at that interpretation?

**Judgement = unearthing memories**

**VII of Coins = patience**

**VII of Swords = diplomacy, strategies**

You have a plan (VII of Swords = strategies) to wait for the right moment (VII of Coins = patience, VII of Swords = diplomacy) to remind them of their promise (Judgement = unearthing memories).

Don't worry if it seems like my interpretation is something you would have never come up with on your own. The point isn't to read the cards as I would read them, but rather to learn to read them as you would read them. Think of it as if you were a sculptor. The ideal is to feel as if you're chipping away at the marble to free the shape which you sense within the stone, rather than imposing a design on it from the outside.

The combination method can be used in any spread by simply laying out two or three cards for every card position in the spread. It would probably be more practical to use this technique on

shorter spreads. If you used a 15-card spread and laid out three cards for each position, that would be 45 cards, which might make for an unwieldy reading. If you want to incorporate combinations into your reading, I would suggest using spreads of three to five positions, and laying out two to three cards per position.

## Reversals

A reversed card is one that is upside-down. To use reversed cards when reading, you would shuffle the deck in such a way that some cards are randomly turned around. Ideally, when you lay out the cards, some cards will be upright and some reversed.

A reversed card will modify the meaning in some way. There are different schemes and methods for determining the reversed meaning of a card. The easiest method is to simply say that a reversed card's meaning is the exact opposite of the card's upright meaning. For example, if the Star means calm, the reversed Star would mean the opposite of calm, or disruption. If a negative card like the III of Swords is reversed, the reversed meaning would be positive. In this method, the reversal is used as a way to modify the upright

meaning. It's an easy method to use as it doesn't require learning a whole new set of meanings.

On the other hand, some tarot authors create entirely new meanings for reversed cards, which must be learned.

Whole books have been written about using reversed cards. These authors suggest a whole series of different ways that reversals might modify the upright meaning, and recommend the reader use several of them at once, modifying each reversed card in the way that seems best for that card in that context. Personally, I feel that this makes the reading process very complicated. For people who are new to tarot or are still in the early stages of their tarot explorations, I recommend using either no reversals, or using reversals with a simple modification scheme, such as the one outlined above where reversed cards mean the opposite of the upright card. Another simple scheme casts the upright cards as conscious and action-oriented, while reversed cards would relate to inner thoughts and feelings.

I would avoid considering reversed cards as negative. Some of the card meanings are already somewhat negative, so using the reversed-means-negative scheme would result in a deck in which over half the cards are negative.

That means your readings would lean toward the negative, which seems to me to be a pessimistic and unpleasant way to read.

The standard advice in tarot books is to try reading with reversals and see how you like it, and I think that's good advice. Many readers read with reversals, and many read with no reversals. Some readers will read either way, simply deciding beforehand whether a particular reading will include reversals and shuffling accordingly.

To read with reversals, simply make sure when you shuffle that some cards are turned around. If you riffle shuffle, for example, when you cut the deck into two portions, turn one portion around before riffling the two portions back together. If you want to read without reversals, try not to get the cards turned around while shuffling. If a card does turn up in a layout upside-down, simply turn it upright.

# MAJOR ARCANA

The 22 Major cards (Fool, numbered 0, through World, numbered XXI) are the most well-known cards in the deck, due to the mythological, allegorical, and religious references depicted.

The modern tradition is to treat the Majors as major psychological or spiritual forces acting on a situation, in contrast to the Minors which are supposed to represent the less momentous but more immediate events, thoughts, feelings, concerns, and relationships which make up our daily lives. In readings, you may find that this rule isn't always applicable.

Over the years, tarot authors have postulated various scenarios and patterns in which to arrange the Majors. It can sometimes be helpful to see the Majors through the lens of a predetermined pattern, but since our focus is on intuitive reading rather than logical systems, in this book we'll consider the Majors as individual forces rather than as parts of a set. We will, however, often compare cards with each other to clarify the differences between them.

You will notice that meanings frequently overlap between cards, or that different aspects of a single concept are

spread between several cards. No matter how we try to measure and divide the cards into a perfectly rational system, at its roots the tarot is a wild and untamable thing.





[Index](#)

## 0 Fool

In most tarot decks, the Fool is a carefree figure, smiling or laughing, or simply expressing a cheerful mood as he sets off to find his future, with a dog either pouncing on his backside or barking a warning as his master steps off a cliff.

Traditionally, the Fool has meant foolishness or folly, impetuosity, a mistake. More positively, he can stand for having the courage to step into the unknown. More simply, the card can mean a beginning.

The Fool in this deck is different in several respects. He holds a masquerade or carnival mask, suggesting the

merriment he provides king and courtiers as a court jester. But he's lowering the mask, and, despite his clown make-up, he wears a serious expression as he gazes at a Fool card of his own.

The Fool card he holds belongs to an older version of tarot called Tarot de Marseille, a pattern produced since the 17th century and still available today. The Marseille Fool features a somewhat harsher and starker character, who combines the archetypes of the court jester and the vagabond. The older card leans more towards the negative characteristics of folly, madness, and homelessness.

Our Fool invites us to consider the range of meanings from positive to negative, and the tension between them. Perhaps he wants us to consider the older Fool as a warning against foolish behavior. Or maybe our Fool is showing us the older, starker Fool to remind us of the superficiality of conventional standards of security and respectability.

The Fool's canine companion is likewise seriously considering his counterpart on the older card, perhaps pondering the damage said counterpart is inflicting to the older Fool's pants.

Modern tarot authors often see the dog as the Fool's animal nature which assists him on his journey, but the older deck suggests a more destructive force that can annoy or injure the Fool if he doesn't pay attention. Here again, we have a contrast and a tension between positive and negative extremes.

However serious our Fool appears, he retains his subversive nature—notice how he's actually a disembodied head and pair of hands. He exists more as an idea or a feeling than as an actual personality. He reminds us to constantly question the conforming effects of society and whether we're being supported or stifled by our surroundings.

### **In a reading:**

Throwing caution to the winds. The impulse to embark on a new endeavor regardless of risks. Undermining or subverting an oppressive situation. Carefully considering the continuum between recklessness at one extreme and too much conformity at the other. Negatively, doing something you'll regret; a mistake.

## *Some Foolish Thoughts*

*by* **Ciro Marchetti:**

If we use the analogy of the “Fool’s Journey” to describe and provide a rationale for the characters and scenes of a tarot deck, then clearly this figure is the main participant. He represents us, the reader or querent. Through his “travels” we can relate and draw comparisons to our own. Between the Marseille and Waite-Smith decks, we have somewhat contrasting depictions. Pamela Colman Smith’s rendition, so we are told, suggests the Fool is stepping off of a cliff, accompanied by his (or her) companion dog, the two either blindly or innocently unaware of the inherent dangers that their act might represent. This I find too fanciful a concept, and on a personal level I consider the Marseille Fool to be the more appropriate analogy. I consider the “Fool’s Journey” not as some innocent first journey, but rather a wary start to yet one more of the many that has preceded it. In this manner the numerous journeys provide a more relevant comparison with multiple readings.

Unlike Pamela’s theatrically attired figure, the older Marseille clothing seems worse for wear. In historical terms the fool or court jester can be viewed in several ways. Certainly in

the more fortunate cases, he may have enjoyed a steady employment of sorts, even one of relative privilege, such as in the case of King Lear, where he may have even had some sway and position in court via his access to the king. However, for the majority, it must surely have been a tenuous position. It seems highly unlikely that even the funniest or most talented of fools would have had a sufficient repertoire of tales and performances to have kept their royal employers amused on a constant basis. Although I have no specific historical reference to support my views, I consider it more probable that fools would have been hired for specific occasions, celebrations, birthdays, and so on, and somewhat like our contemporary stand-up comedians, may have travelled from “gig” to “gig”. If so, then one can extrapolate that while they may have been welcomed upon their final arrivals, between venues they may have encountered unpredictable receptions along the way.

In many cases this foolish profession was not one of choice but rather lack of alternatives. Often due to either physical or mental abnormalities, the humor may well have been fundamentally of a derogatory nature rather than comic, but presumably at least a source of in-

come, even if a minimal one. The Marseille dog is clearly no pet; it's shown aggressively tearing at the Fool's legging, a symbol that for me suggests the lack of welcome he may have encountered on many occasions upon arrival, unannounced, at each village or town along his way. Each of his journeys represents (as with a tarot reading) its own experience and outcome. This foolish contradiction is portrayed in this deck, where we have a Fool and his dog looking at their historical precedents. One might imagine them comparing and contemplating both the similarities and differences between them, before they set off like us on another journey, another reading.



[Index](#)

## I Magician

Like the Fool, this Magician differs from traditional depictions. Usually he's a street magician, standing at a table with the tools of his trade., or a ceremonial magician performing a ritual with a wand, a cup, a sword, and a coin, representing the four suits of the tarot. In both cases, he appears as a young man.

In the Marchetti Tarot, we see an elderly man gazing at us with an amused and knowing expression. He shows us his open hand upon which appear magical symbols. Around his head we see a halo containing more magical symbols.

The symbols we see on his hand and in his halo perform the same function as the traditional ceremonial magician's or street magician's tools. They show us that the Magician accomplishes anything he wishes by first arranging and organizing the relevant thoughts and concepts. This is the Magician's power, and it's a power available to all of us in our lives, to make things happen by formulating plans (represented by the symbols) and then taking action to implement those plans (represented by the hand).

The Magician's expression is important. He seems to be gently challenging us—"If I can do it, you can too!"

One of the most striking features of the Marchetti Tarot is the relative maturity of several of the Major characters. Fool, Magician, High Priestess, Hierophant, Chariot, Strength, Death, Devil, and Tower all show people who are older than the young adults we usually see in tarot decks. This is a welcome innovation. While prior decks use youth to symbolize naiveté or inexperience, age can be used as well to represent emotional maturity, wisdom, and capability.



## **In a reading:**

Capability; the power to make things happen. Making a difference by inspiring others to learn and to make use of their learning. On a more mundane level, writing and languages. Negatively, someone who uses charisma to bend others to his or her will.



[Index](#)

## II High Priestess

The High Priestess offers us gifts while wearing a crown of candles. If we wish, we might identify her as St. Lucy, a Roman martyr who was put to death in the year 304, and who is celebrated on St. Lucy's Day (December 13th). A legend states that she offered bread to persecuted Christians hiding in the Catacombs of Rome, wearing a crown of candles so that she could keep her hands free to distribute the food.

As sustenance, she offers a pomegranate and a book. Before her, a scroll is spread open, revealing text. Hovering over the text is the triple moon symbol.

Let's consider the symbols one by one. The crown of candles can represent illumination, inspiration, or philanthropy. The pomegranate can have many meanings, including life, eternal life, rebirth, fertility, and abundance. The closed book indicates knowledge, hidden knowledge, secrets, and privacy. The open scroll suggests an older form of knowledge, one which is available to everyone. The triple moon symbol floating over the scroll tells us more about the kind of knowledge it contains; that pertaining to cycles of time, indicated by the waxing, full, and waning moon, and specifically relating to the three phases of womanhood (traditionally considered as maiden, mother, and crone).

Two owls grace the card with their presence; since ancient times, owls have served as a symbol for wisdom. Because owls are most often active at night, they are also connected to the moon and feminine mystery.

Behind the High Priestess we see sunlight shining on dark waters, suggesting sunrise or sunset. Water in the tarot always signifies emotions, deep feeling, and the subconscious. We may also relate it to Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, a vast sea of in-

instincts and archetypes that is shared by all humans.

**In a reading:**

Instinctive knowledge, ancient wisdom. Illumination, a light in the darkness. A deep understanding that explains the cycles of life while also standing outside them. Hidden or modest charity, anonymous philanthropy.



[Index](#)

### III Empress

A young woman cups a floating Earth in her hands. An exuberant ecosystem of flora and fauna blossoms around her. She is the quintessential Mother Nature, an earth goddess who personifies the entire planet.

How can we bring such a vast and awesome spiritual concept down to earth, so to speak, so we may interpret it in readings? Well, we all have mothers. And we are all mothers ourselves, whether literally or figuratively. We all have nurtured projects and brought them to fruition, given care and comfort to a loved one or friend, and nurtured ourselves. The variety of

species seen on the card can symbolize the myriad ways we can relate to it.

To understand this card fully, it's necessary to contrast it with the following card, the Emperor. They are like opposite sides of the same coin, seemingly at odds but each completely dependent on the other. The Empress draws up no legislation and executes no battle plans. Instead she gazes lovingly, raptly, at the Earth, establishing her dominion solely through the force of her love.

The Empress does more than simply rule the Earth. She actually creates it, as we can see from the abundant life which emanates from her head. The Emperor takes the life energy created by the Empress and molds it according to his vision. Without the Emperor's structures, the Empress' world would soon be overrun by excessive and competing growth. But without her raw materials, the Emperor would have nothing at all to work with.

### **In a reading:**

Nurturing, caring for, healing. Nurturing oneself. Bringing something into existence in an organic fashion, whether it be an endeavor, an idea, an emotion, or a child. An emotional

approach. Negatively, the Mother can be overwhelming, ultimately stifling and handicapping that which she has brought into existence. An overemotional reaction.



[Index](#)

## IV Emperor

A young man, wreathed in triumphant laurel, looks out at us from a vaguely Greco-Roman setting showing columns, a circular hall, and statuary. He holds a globe showing the ancient Roman Empire. Beneath the Emperor's face we see a ram's head, symbolizing Aries, the traditional astrological correspondence for this card. Aries symbolizes independence, aggression, and a pioneering spirit.

As with the preceding card, the best way to understand the Emperor is by comparison to his consort, the Empress. Her card is awash in stunning color; his is only half in color, the oth-



er half in black and white. The Emperor's reality, the colorful upper half of the image, is based on a foundation of rational thoughts, plans, and laws, represented by the black-and-white lower half. The Empress holds the actual, physical, living Earth, while the Emperor holds a manufactured representation of the Earth, a globe depicting the Roman Empire. Her Earth floats, supported from underneath by her cupped hands; he grasps his globe from above. His hands touch the globe; literally, he is more hands-on than she. His grasping from above establishes his dominion; her supporting from below protects and encourages growth.

The fact that the lower half of the card is in black and white suggests that the Emperor's achievements and glory are ultimately temporary, because they were achieved by force of will and military domination. *Ciro* says, "On a grander scale of time, the power and the glory is destined to fade, whereas the Empress as *Gaia* perseveres. Well, I would like to think so, at least."

Like several of the characters in the Major Arcana, both Emperor and Empress are disembodied. Her head seems to coalesce organically out of the mists of space, while his head sits atop and emanates from a column.

The Empress nurtures, protects, and loves us, but she doesn't intellectually engage with us. In contrast, the Emperor, like the Magician, gazes at us, challenging us to discover and emulate his qualities. "Here," he says, "is my Empire. How would you rule it?"

**In a reading:**

Command. An authority figure. Building something—for example, your life—from nothing. Setting rules and boundaries, or obeying someone else's. Negatively, the Emperor can be tyrannical, or perhaps the querent has a problem with authority.



[Index](#)

## V Hierophant

In older versions of the tarot, this card is called simply the Pope (Il Papa in Italian decks, Le Pape in French decks, meaning “the father”). The Marchetti Tarot shows a traditional Pope, wearing atop his head a gilded and jeweled mitre (specifically, a pretiosa, meaning “precious”).

With one hand he gives the traditional papal blessing. The other hand holds a rosary, consisting of beads, cross, and medal. The medal on this card is unusually elaborate and includes symbolism commonly seen on Hierophant cards: the three-tiered papal tiara and two crossed keys. The keys symbolize St. Peter’s keys to heaven.

The name “Hierophant” was first used for this card by Antoine Court de Gebelin, an 18th century author and encyclopedist who was the first to see the tarot deck as a repository of ancient esoteric and occult wisdom. A hierophant was a priest in the Eleusinian Mysteries, a ritualistic cult in ancient Greece.

There are several cards in the deck which, along with this one, represent spirituality. The Hierophant stands for a very specific way of interacting with the divine; that is, a rational, intellectualized approach, focusing on rules and dogma. Such a focus can have a positive or negative effect, depending on the context of the reading. For many people, dogma can help them attain the highest spirituality. The Hierophant might be thought of as similar to the Emperor, but in the spiritual rather than the earthly sphere.

The Hierophant is pictured as a Christian leader, but the concept can relate to any religion. All religions have rational, dogmatic aspects as well as esoteric, emotional ones. The Hierophant rules the rational and dogmatic aspects.

For the purposes of divination, the Hierophant doesn't necessarily refer to religion. The card may refer simply

to societal, social, and cultural norms (as opposed to actual laws, which fall under the jurisdiction of the Emperor, and the adjudication of those laws and resolution of disputes, represented by Justice). More simply, the Hierophant can refer to faith, whether spiritual faith or faith in a person or an idea or an institution.

### **In a reading:**

Spirituality or religion, specifically their rational and dogmatic aspects. Faith in a spiritual principle or in any person, idea, or institution. Conforming with societal or cultural norms. A trusted advisor or counselor. Negatively, a repressive and dogmatic spirituality may inflict suffering on those who disobey; likewise with restrictive cultural norms. The tendency of organizations and institutions to gather power to themselves, shown by the Hierophant's rich clothes.



[Index](#)

## VI Lovers

Who doesn't love a good love story? Two people meet, having been seemingly brought together by fate. After various adventures and complications, they declare their love and commitment to each other and proceed to live happily ever after. The End.

Of course, this story is an imperfect, sometimes an extremely imperfect, depiction of real life, however satisfying it may be on page, stage, or screen. While romantic scenarios can inspire us, we can find ourselves in trouble if we try to use them as a road map for real life.

Lovers cards in tarot decks generally fall into one of three categories: a

man and woman celebrating their love, sometimes with Eros or Cupid above (for example, the Visconti-Sforza deck, the oldest known deck in existence); a young man standing in between two people with Cupid above, typically interpreted as a man choosing between two women or between Vice and Virtue (for example, the Tarot de Marseille); and a Biblical scene showing Adam and Eve, the Tree of Life, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the Snake (as in the Rider-Waite-Smith Tarot).

The Marchetti Tarot image returns us to the earliest version of the Lovers, and shows romantic love in all its theatrical glory. The passion they display is extravagant and superficial; after all, they are only dancers portraying lovers, not the lovers themselves. And yet, paradoxically, their love is, in a sense, more real than mundane reality. Does Cupid actually exist, or is he only a *deus ex machina* lowered from the rafters by stagehands?

### **In a reading:**

Romantic love; an affair; a relationship. Any relationship between you and another person or thing. It could be a cause, a career, or a hobby, but there must be passion involved. A commitment, whether a marriage or a business

contract. Stagecraft, artificiality, the theatre, dance, the performing arts. Negatively, you may be more concerned with creating an impression than with expressing true feelings. You may be in a relationship where one or both parties expects the other to conform to their expectations (in other words, put on a show).





[Index](#)

## VII Chariot

Here is a battle-hardened warrior, his determination and drive for survival and victory symbolized by a chariot drawn by two horses, one black and one white. The image here is more abstract than literal, and relates more to the charioteer's state of mind than an actual charioteer driving an actual chariot.

In the Marchetti Tarot, we can get a lot of information by looking to hats, headdresses, or anything floating over or emanating out of someone's head. Such objects tell us what that person is concerned with, and reveals their inner landscape. In this case, materializing above the charioteer's head is a fanci-

ful rendition of a gilded and bejeweled chariot. On the chariot's roof sits a large winged jewel. Wings can symbolize protection and also the desire to attain a more spiritual outlook, both of which can be motivations to take up arms in war. The winged jewel also brings to mind the winged sun symbol of Egypt which denotes divinity and royalty.

The chariot also bears banners emblazoned with double eagles and crabs. Double eagles are a heraldic symbol used by emperors, and crabs indicate the astrological sign Cancer. Among other things, Cancer symbolizes the home, which the charioteer goes to war to protect.

The most important symbols on the card are the black and white horses at the top. These horses lack harnesses and reins. They represent two different desires of the charioteer. Sometimes the desires can pull together, but sometimes they are in conflict and threaten to pull the chariot apart. Which exact desires are depicted will depend on the context of the reading. They could be two selfish desires in conflict (for example, the desire to dominate and the desire to be loved). They could be a selfish desire in conflict with a virtuous desire. They could represent the competing person-

alities seen in the previous cards (the action-oriented Magician versus the private High Priestess, or the Emperor versus the Empress).

There are times when even the mildest of us must learn to stand up for ourselves to avoid being taken advantage of. Without the Chariot's aggression, we would all be like sheep, waiting for the sheepdog to tell us what to do. At the same time, overaggression is the chief tragedy of the human condition.

### **In a reading:**

Aggression, both positively and negatively. The energy and determination needed to reach a destination or accomplish a goal. Protection of oneself or others. Sticking up for oneself. Triumph. Negatively, a domineering or controlling personality; overaggression. Having conflicting desires.



[Index](#)

## VIII Strength

In the Marchetti Tarot, several cards focus on interactions between humans and nonhuman animals. On the Moon, the moon maiden appears with a dog and a wolf. On the World, the world dancer is joined by her traditional companions: humanoid angel, bull, lion, and eagle. The Knights all commune with their mounts. In the IX of Swords, a hooded hunting bird is held by a woman in a bird mask.

In Strength, we see the ultimate human/animal interaction. The woman seems to be either riding the lion or is actually a part of him. The woman wears a wolf head hood, carries an animal-skull-topped scepter, and animal

teeth dangle from her necklace. She appears to be part of an indigenous culture which kills and uses animals but which also honors and respects them.

Strength is about coexisting with your animal nature, honoring it, and respecting it. It's instructive to compare this card with the Chariot and the Devil. In the Chariot, the horses are conflicting desires, and the emphasis is on controlling them and using their energy. In the Devil, one's animal nature dominates. Strength is the middle ground between the two. The lion isn't controlling, nor is it controlled. The woman and the lion coexist, each supporting the other.

The qualities most often mentioned in regard to this card are patience and fortitude. The woman teaches the lion patience to temper his tendency to overreact or act impetuously. The lion teaches the woman fortitude, the strength to persevere in the face of adversity.

### **In a reading:**

Patience. Inner strength. Persevering in adversity. A healthy balance between caution and desire. A reciprocal relationship.



[Index](#)

## IX Hermit

In contrast to the Marchetti Tarot's emphasis on faces, the Hermit card focuses instead on the Hermit's lamp, indicating that the card is representing a concept, a feeling, or a tone, rather than suggesting a personality trait.

The Hermit himself actually does appear, as a small figure traversing a floating road. This reminds us of those Japanese paintings in which humans are but a small element in a landscape. The floating road leads directly to the large lamp.

We might see the large lamp as an abstractly multiplied and magnified view of the lamp held by the Hermit,

thus showing us that the Hermit provides his own guidance (I use “his” because the traditional image is of a man, but in this deck the gender isn’t shown and it could just as easily be “her”). Like the Greek philosopher Diogenes, he is searching for knowledge and virtue, and the emphasis is on relying on our own efforts to find enlightenment.

Or, more literally, we might see it as a giant hand emerging from the sky to provide both a light and a destination to the traveller. In this interpretation, the Hermit sets out to search and a higher power meets him halfway, to help him in his search. Here, the emphasis is on faith and trust that if we ask the universe, the universe will answer.

The Hermit as a source of illumination can be contrasted with the High Priestess’ crown of candles. The Priestess’ light is an instinctual power which radiates love, care, and an inner, subconscious, non-rational knowledge. The Hermit’s lamp, on the other hand, lights the way for a conscious, rational search for answers.

We can then look to the Hierophant, which also concerns a rational approach to life’s mysteries. The Hierophant has a system of rules and dogmas and structures to serve as a foundation for

knowledge, while the Hermit's approach, although rational like the Hierophant's, is more solitary and more flexible, relying more on experiential knowledge than the Hierophant's accepted wisdom.

**In a reading:**

A search for knowledge. Relying on oneself to find the answers rather than relying on input from others. Faith that the Divine will provide the answer. Solitude. Providing illumination for others (by teaching, counseling, or giving advice, for example). Negatively, loneliness; taking oneself too seriously.





[Index](#)

## X Wheel

In many decks this card is called the Wheel of Fortune. Its basic meaning is that life consists of a series of cycles. It shows cycles within cycles and wheels within wheels. It presents us with a view of the universe as a set of interlocking gears, all bound together by implacable spiritual forces.

The degree to which we are bound by these forces is a matter of contention. Older philosophies claim that everything that happens is preordained and there is nothing we can do to change it. Nowadays we tend to see ourselves as having much more agency, although most would agree that there are some

things in life that we can do little or nothing about. We may row our little boats in whatever directions we like, but larger forces—waves, winds, tides—determine the ultimate direction we travel.

This may seem like a stark view of life, but approaching the cycles with thoughtfulness and vision will allow us to dance on, between, and through the interlocking rings to arrive at a more fulfilling life, rather than simply floating with the tide. The vision of the Wheel is ultimately freeing, because it allows us to live more consciously.

Astrology is the study of cycles. On the card, we see several celestial belts or bands; the wheel of the signs, the wheel of the houses, and the orbits of the planets. The entire design suggests an orrery, a mechanical device that simulates the movements of the sun, moon, and planets. The three animals show the effects the spiritual forces have on those living on Earth. At any given moment, some of us will be on their way up, some will be king of the jungle, and some will be on their way down. The good news for those on their way down is that in short order they'll be on the upswing again. There is also the suggestion that while animals have less individual choice and are thus bound to

the Wheel, humankind has the capacity to transcend it.

**In a reading:**

The cycles of life. Being aware of larger forces so that you can maneuver through life more effectively. Change.



[Index](#)

## XI Justice

The figure of Justice embodies one of the most important aspirations of humans—the desire for and belief in a uniform standard of fairness and equitable treatment for all.

On the card, the woman's eyes are closed (because justice is blind, i.e. impartial). Before her floats a set of scales, in which she weighs the evidence before her. She holds a dagger, symbolic of her authority to decree punishment. She holds it by the blade rather than the hilt, suggesting that impartiality and fairness always comes at a cost (for example, punishing the criminal necessarily inflicts punishment on the

criminal's family as well, who are innocent). The dagger's winged hilt recalls the card's traditional elemental association with Air.

Surrounding the woman are the austere and beautiful lines of classical architecture, including columns, lintels, and pediments. Architecture is a fitting analogy for Justice's foundation, which is rationality. In the precise lines and serene harmony of classical architecture we may find a reminder of the supreme heights of intellectual clarity which enable us to faithfully and equitably render justice.

The card can refer to an actual legal proceeding, but more often stands for the concept of fairness. It can mean receiving fair treatment or treating others fairly. Because Justice weighs evidence and judges those who come before her, the card can mean the querent being judgmental of others or being the recipient of judging, whether fairly or unfairly.

### **In a reading:**

A legal proceeding. Being judged, or judging others. Giving or receiving fair treatment. Avoiding making value judgments based on biases. Negatively, judging unfairly or being too judgmental.



[Index](#)

## XII Hanging Man

In this striking image, a dancer in fool's motley is suspended by one foot from ribbons tied to the branches of a leafless tree. The dancer is experiencing a reversal, and so is the tree, whose large humanoid head is also upside-down. The tree's branches might just as well be roots, adding to the dreamy absurdity of the card.

The dancer's predicament seems to be a voluntary one, as if he is performing a dance or an acrobatic feat. Perhaps he has agreed to undergo a ritual designed to disorient him, a symbolic "death" that awakens him to an awareness of realities beyond our everyday concerns. By turning himself topsy-turvy and entrusting

himself to the branches—or roots—of a great tree, he is abandoning the rat race, at least temporarily, and is content to wait patiently and simply be one with his environment. His hands are bound with ribbon behind him, suggesting that for now he is being, not doing.

**In a reading:**

Patience. Inaction. Accepting with good grace a pause or delay dictated by circumstances. Willingly sacrificing something for a larger goal. Negatively, a martyr complex.



[Index](#)

## XIII Death

There is a wonderful duality in this image. On the one hand, it's frightening. It seems we are hardwired to experience a few shivers when we see a human skull. This skull is particularly creepy because we see it peeking out from beneath a perfectly healthy human face. Generally in Western society we don't like to be reminded of our mortality, and we recoil in horror at the perfectly true statement that a skull and skeleton are intrinsic parts of each one of us, hiding in plain sight.

On the other hand, the image is ultimately a positive one. It tells us that we must maintain an awareness of the



reality of death before we can be fully human. When we fail to acknowledge death as a part of life, we can get ourselves in all sorts of trouble. In Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham lives like a ghost in her mouldering mansion. Having been left at the altar by her fiancé, who also stole her fortune, she has lived ever since in her wedding dress, with the clocks stopped and the wedding cake laid out on the table. Her fiancé didn't literally die, but it was a death to her, and her inability to process it emotionally leaves her in a kind of self-imposed death-in-life.

On the card, the woman explores with one hand the contours of the skull she has discovered beneath her beautiful features. With the other hand she holds a white rose, symbolizing purity and life. Her hands are literally on the pulse of existence—life and death, two necessary sides of a single coin. She wears a purple shroud. The color purple suggests sacredness, due to the fact that this color rarely occurs in nature.

At the lower left we see a scorpion, suggestive of the astrological sign Scorpio which is traditionally assigned to this card. The scorpion means unexpected death, but can also mean rebirth. Perched on her shoulder is a winged angel, symbolizing spirit. Behind the

woman, church spires and a celtic cross are seen against the sky, suggesting rebirth and the transcending of earthly distinctions of life and death. The wrought iron gate toward the bottom of the image tells us that the wisdom of the card remains hidden from our everyday concerns. It takes some contemplation to penetrate its mystery. It also suggests a transition from one realm of experience to another.

For the purposes of divination, we take the concept of death metaphorically, as we do with all the cards. Sometimes people leave us abruptly, as in the case of Miss Havisham. Sometimes we lose a job, or a relationship ends, or a child leaves for college. Each of these is a kind of death and each must be processed and mourned in order to move on with life. The best way to approach this card is to see it not as an overly negative card (oh no, something is dying!), nor as an overly positive one (oh good, transformation!), but rather as a balance between the two. Allow for the inevitable sadness that such a “death” brings, but also allow for the new life, new situation, or new opportunity that will inevitably take its place.

Needless to say, because we are vulnerable to suggestibility, it's very unwise to predict physical death for one-

self or for a querent. The Death card is one of 78 cards. Statistically, this card will appear in a reading far more often than someone known to you dying, so it would be quite silly to assume that it means someone will die.

If one actually wanted to predict death, the tarot would be a poor tool for that. I believe the tarot—if I may be forgiven for anthropomorphizing a deck of cards—isn't interested in physical death and probably regards it as simply a transition from one mode of being to the next, and not a very significant transition at that.

### **In a reading:**

Something is ending, causing sadness or melancholy. An old situation or environment comes to a natural end, to be replaced by an exciting possibility or opportunity. Transformation. Deliberately cutting something from your life because it no longer works for you. Being comfortable with change. Negatively, being too eager to jump to a new situation.



[Index](#)

## XIV Temperance

For centuries, angels—supernatural entities superior to humans but subordinate to God—have been illustrated in art or referred to in sacred texts as humanoid figures bearing avian wings. The Torah, the Christian Bible, and the Quran all contain references to winged angels. The ancient Greek goddess Nike is shown in sacred art with wings.

A human with an animal body part is a zoomorphic hybrid. Another example is the Egyptian god Anubis, shown as a man with the head of a dog, wolf, or jackal. An animal body part suggests divinity in two ways—first, it inspires

awe due to the otherworldly strangeness of the image, and second, the animal part itself is symbolically significant.

In the case of angels, the wings refer most directly to flight. All of us have experienced freedom and joy when imagining or dreaming of flying through the air under our own power. Wings also stand for spirituality, due to the age-old association of height with divinity (the Sky God, “Nearer, My God, to Thee,” and so on). Angels use their wings to transcend humanity and approach divinity.

Temperance, meaning moderation and self-restraint, is one of the cardinal virtues. On the card, the angel holds red energy in one hand and blue energy in the other. The red and blue could represent opposing desires or fears. The energies arc upwards and meet over the angel’s head, suggesting that the precise balance of the two energies confers spiritual benefit.

We are all locked inside the prisons of our own minds. The angel stands before a window, suggesting that restraint and the proper balance of energies are the best ways to transcend the brick walls of our prisons and view the

vistas beyond our individual perspectives.

The image also speaks to the combination of energies. If leading a group, for example, it might be wise to solicit and combine several approaches.

### **In a reading:**

Differing or opposing energies held in balance. Avoiding extremism. The ability to perceive the value in another's viewpoint. A spiritual practice involving quieting or tempering desires and fears. Combining energies. Negatively, being too wishy-washy or non-committal, too eager to see the other's side; being so openminded that one's brains fall out.



[Index](#)

## XV Devil

There are a few tarot decks where the Devil is shown in a positive mien, signifying fun and letting one's hair down. In most decks, he's a scary monster, suggesting materialism, obsession, addiction, and all manner of unpleasant things.

The Marchetti Tarot's Devil travels a different path. Neither terrifying nor mischievous, he gazes at us with a neutral expression. His large pointed ears and his elaborately bejeweled horns make him seem otherworldly. While not immediately alarming, he does seem a bit sinister. Perhaps it's the unhealthy red glow under his eyes, or the creepy pointed fingernails. Or maybe

it's just his resemblance to actor Christopher Lee.

The Devil is very obligingly offering us a key. Now, anyone who's seen a vampire movie knows that it's a very bad idea to accept a vampire's hospitality. We can look at this image in one of two ways. Either he's enticing us with ersatz spiritual knowledge and freedom, only to entrap us in the chains dangling from his hand, or he's genuinely offering wisdom.

We can navigate between both interpretations if we recognize that the Devil, like Jung's Shadow archetype, represents those parts of ourselves that are so repugnant to us that we refuse to acknowledge them and instead project them onto other people. Thus, we can use the key the Devil offers as a key to wisdom, to help us understand the negative parts of ourselves that the Devil represents. In this way we can stop repressing those parts, thus depriving them of the psychic energy that gives them strength over us. The card tells us that accepting knowledge of our Shadow can give us strength and backbone, just as the Devil's horns are reminiscent of spinal columns.

We still have to be wary, though. It only takes an instant for the Devil to



pull us back into self-destructive patterns, without us even realizing it. We must always remember the chains spilling out of his hand.

As with Death, it's worth remembering that the cards are interpreted metaphorically. Some religions regard the Devil as an actual external force, but for the purposes of divination with a tarot deck, the Devil refers to parts of our own psyche, not malign influences external to ourselves.

### **In a reading:**

We start with the usual associations given for this card; materialism, obsession, hatred, addiction, overindulgence. On a deeper level, awareness of our tendency to project onto others that which we dislike in ourselves. Gaining strength through awareness of the parts of ourselves that we reject, and using that awareness to free ourselves of the Devil's tyranny.



[Index](#)

## XVI Tower

Here is the traditional image of a lightning-struck tower, but superimposed on the tower is a man's face. To me, the man has a regal, haughty expression, making me think of Lear, Shakespeare's elderly king who, in his arrogance, gives away his kingdom to his most flattering children, to his later regret.

The Tower represents our own view of ourselves as wise, experienced, and capable. Of course, just as we've settled into this fatuous complacency, the lightning strikes and we find ourselves once again hurtling to the ground. The card can stand for any situation in which we suddenly experience unwelcome

disruption. On a more philosophical level, what seems like a calamity may ultimately prove to be for the best. The lightning flash may be seen as a flash of revelation or inspiration, blasting away the ruts in our thinking and providing fresh new perspectives, or as the proverbial kick in the rear to propel us out of a stagnant situation.

We see wildfires raging in the hills behind the tower. While wildfires can be highly destructive, they can also under certain conditions have ultimately positive effects on an ecosystem.

**In a reading:**

Calamity. Unwelcome disruption. A flash of inspiration or revelation. A suddenly-revealed truth which destroys a previous misconception. A blasting away of an unhealthy complacency, clearing the way for a healthy new start.



[Index](#)

## XVII Star

I have said that we would consider the Major Arcana as individual entities and not as part of a sequence, but I'll make an exception here. I think it's safe to assume that the peace of the Star follows directly from the destruction of the Tower. Rising up from the waters are a series of towers similar to those seen in the previous card, now half blasted away by that card's lightning. Often in the aftermath of some calamity, we experience a moment of peace, when the hurricane of fate has moved on and we now have a moment to catch our breath and adapt to the new reality.

A woman comes into being from the mists of space, holding two scepters or columns, reminiscent of those seen on the Wheel, the Sun, and the World. Starlight pours from the scepters onto the scene below. This shows the grace of nature or divinity, bestowing upon us a moment of calm after the storm. The woman might be Astraea, a Greek goddess of justice, purity, and innocence. She was the last of the deities to live among humans, finally fleeing in dismay at our wickedness to inhabit the sky as the constellation Virgo.

The woman might also be appropriately identified as Asteria, another Greek goddess, this one identified with falling stars, dreams, and astrology.

**In a reading:**

The calm after the storm. Our innate optimism which allows us to begin rebuilding after all seems lost. Hopes and dreams for the future.



[Index](#)

## XVIII Moon

This card contains all the standard imagery found in Moon cards of traditional decks. We have a crustacean climbing out of water; two canines (a dog and a wolf); two towers; a moon; and a face.

The face is presented in an unusual way, a detailed, realistic portrayal of a woman's face floating in the sky. The towers are also unusual, in that we see two sets of parapets or arched walkways rather than entire towers.

The crustacean, here shown as a crab, represents our base or primordial impulses, struggling to emerge from the vast sea of instinct that we first discov-

ered in the High Priestess. The High Priestess showed us messages flashing and flickering at us from the dream-world. In the light of the Moon we gain greater awareness of the bottomless sea of the collective unconscious. We sense it floating just under the surface, but it still remains mysterious. The crab shows us the precise instant when unconscious material, in an inhuman and disturbing form, begins to become conscious.

The two canines represent a stage between the crab and the fully-conscious human. They are at a higher stage of evolution than the crab, but can still be aware of and excited by the pull of the Moon's mystery. The crab seems totally alien to us, but the canines are more easily identified as parts of our minds (appropriately, they seem to emerge from the woman's head). The combined fear and anticipation that we receive from the Moon is a reaction felt both in ancient times and right now, as evidenced by the wolf (for the ancient reaction) and the dog (for the modern one).

The two towers suggested by the parapets could signify the complex structures of the mind, which can either clarify or obscure the Moon's mysteries.

On this Moon card we also see a Madonna and Child. There is a longstanding association between the Virgin Mary and the moon in Christian iconography. This association has been interpreted in different ways. Like some other Christian symbols, it may be a remnant of pre-Christian religions, in this case referring to virginity, fertility, changing seasons, and moon goddesses such as Artemis. In Christian art, a common motif is Mary, now symbolizing the Church, standing on a crescent moon, which represents the Old Testament, showing that the Church stands on the foundation of the Old Testament but is (from the Church's perspective) superior to it. Accordingly, both the New Testament and Christ would be identified with the sun.

For purposes of divination, we might see the Madonna and Child as symbolizing yearnings and ties that transcend rational analysis, such as religious faith, or simply the bonds between family members.

**In a reading:**

Something unseen and mysterious, lurking just under the surface but not yet revealed. Something you are struggling to understand. Wilder or more primordial desires that transcend rationality.





[Index](#)

## XIX Sun

Appropriately for this card, the symbolism is proudly front and center: Louis XIV of France, known as the Sun King (le Roi Soleil). Louis consolidated power and ruled as an absolute monarch. His reign lasted 72 years, longer than any other monarch in European history. Besides declaring five wars, he also found time to perform in ballets (playing such parts as Apollo and the Sun).

Louis holds two scepters, topped with the symbols for Fire and the Sun. In astrology, the Sun represents the ego, the rational decider, and the most basic perception of ourselves as individuals. Just as the Sun is the center of the solar system, and just as Louis made himself the

center of European politics, art, and philosophy, so our egos are at the center of our experience. Each of us lives our life as the star of his or her own movie. A healthy ego is important to a healthy life, but the ego can get carried away. When elevated to Louis-like proportions, we may be seen by others as egotistical and arrogant, and ultimately inspire contempt rather than awe.

The elaborate frame behind Louis may be a window, but I prefer to see it as the mirror in which he admires himself.

Above the figure of Louis floats the actual Sun, suggesting that no matter how godlike our egos seem, there may be another plane of existence in which our egos are but pale reflections of larger realities.

### **In a reading:**

Knowledge; rationality. Something is revealed which was previously hidden. Something which is plainly obvious and “in your face.” Warmth, illumination, heat, energy. Negatively, arrogance and selfishness. Something is too hot to handle.



[Index](#)

## XX Judgement

An angel blows a triumphant horn as Throughout the Marchetti Tarot's Major Arcana we've seen several instances of Christian symbology, but for the Judgement card, the traditional Christian image of an angel blowing a trumpet, drawing the dead from their graves, is abandoned in favor of a more direct metaphor—a hand reaches upward from below, grasped by another hand that reaches down from above. Below, a dancer is impelled upward by an unseen force.

The significance of the moment is underscored by the whirlpool of clouds out of which the upper hand emerg-

es. Something outside of our everyday concerns reaches down to pull us into a new awareness, a new goal, or a new opportunity. The wrought iron gate, in a return engagement following its debut on the Death card, shows that we are transitioning to a new phase of existence. In the more mundane context of a reading, perhaps we have spent years thinking of ourselves a certain way, but a new interest or new goal makes us realize that our lives can change.

The dancer's pose contains an important clue to our reaction to this card. He gives himself up wholly to the new idea or new reality, and allows himself to be borne up by the invisible wave.

### **In a reading:**

Reevaluation of our current situation in light of a new goal or opportunity, and an openness to a new paradigm. Unearthing memories of choices and events that have led you to where you are today. Experiencing a calling, a summons from outside yourself that urges you to act. Reaching down to help someone who can use the help; likewise, reaching up to accept help from others.



[Index](#)

## XXI World

The World Dancer is here shown in close-up. Her hair is done in braids, forming an almond shape. She holds two scepters or wands, and above her head are the four creatures who are standard for this card. Behind them all floats the Earth. All of these symbols are seen on traditional versions of this card, with the exception of the Earth.

Taking our cue from the golden cross at the top of the card, let's delve into the Christian symbology. There is a centuries-long tradition in Christian art of depicting Jesus surrounded by an almond-shaped border called a mandorla ("almond" in Italian) or vesica piscis (literally "fish bladder," which it

resembles) with four creatures occupying the corners: angel, bull, lion, and eagle. This image is called “Christ in Majesty”.

The symbolism of the Christ in Majesty has different levels of interpretation, but it all points to the primacy and supremacy (from a Christian perspective) of Jesus or God. The four creatures are primarily Biblical references to the Four Evangelists—Matthew (angel or man), Luke (ox), Mark (lion), and John (eagle)—referred to collectively as the tetramorph. They also represent the four facets of Christ. The four creatures are symbolic in their own right, as rulers of their various domains—man as king of earth, ox as king of domesticated animals, lion as king of wild animals, and eagle as king of the birds.

The symbology of the creatures goes back earlier than Christianity, however; they were mentioned by the Jewish prophet Ezekiel in 6th century BC. And even before that, they were Babylonian symbols used to represent the fixed signs of the zodiac: Aquarius (angel), Taurus (ox), Leo (lion), and Scorpio (eagle). By extension, they also represent the elements associated with these signs: Air (angel), Earth (ox), Fire (lion), and Water (eagle).

The mandorla as a Christian symbol indicates the holiness of that which it surrounds, as a kind of halo. If you lay the mandorla on its side and add a tail, it becomes the fish symbol of early Christianity.

How did the Christ figure in the Christ in Majesty become the female dancer of the tarot? Some early decks, such as the Jacques Vieville deck from the mid-17th century, actually do show Jesus, a clearly male figure with a halo. We might speculate that the rough woodcuts used to produce early tarot decks created enough ambiguity that the identity and even the gender of the central figure became obscure over time, resulting in the gradual evolution of the figure into a woman. Another theory is that she represents Sophia, a feminine personification of wisdom as it illuminates the material world, which is represented by the four creatures.

The World Dancer's scepters can be seen as the culmination of the duality symbols we've seen throughout the Major Arcana (columns, wheels, horses, the pans of Justice's scales, gates, wands). The World card shows them in their smallest versions, because she represents a stage of existence where dualities are transcended. To her they

are tools or playthings, used to manifest her will.

How do we bring all these lofty ideas into the realm of readings? The basic thrust of the classical imagery is to show two concepts: rulership and expansiveness. In essence, the world is at your feet and you are king of the hill, at least in the context of the specific question or situation.

On her brow the World Dancer wears the symbol of Saturn, which shows her maturity. Hers is not a pie-in-the-sky fulfillment; rather, it's a realistic, down-to-earth one, accompanied by an understanding and acceptance of limitations. She succeeds in spite of limitations, perhaps even because of them.

### **In a reading:**

Completion of a project or endeavor. Attainment of a goal. A large number (if you're asking if it will be a little or a lot, the World indicates it will be a lot). High hopes, great expectations. Negatively, too much; an overwhelming amount, more than you can handle. Unrealistic expectations.



# MINOR ARCANA

This is the part of the deck that evolved from playing cards. You could actually use the Minor Arcana to play card games—just remove the Knights, and you have a standard playing card deck (Wands=Clubs, Cups=Hearts, Swords=Spades, and Coins=Diamonds).

The four suits have symbolic significance, derived from elemental associations.

Wands are associated with Fire. Their symbol on the Marchetti Tarot is a rod, topped with a glowing crystal. Wands cards tell stories of adventure, desire (including sexual desire), projects, and endeavors. Wands are about wanting and doing.

Cups are associated with Water. Their symbol is a crystal goblet. Cups cards tell stories of emotion, relationships, happy times, pleasures, and memories. Cups are about feeling.

Swords are associated with Air. Their symbol is a sword. Swords cards tell stories of planning, strategizing, evaluating, judging, projecting, and justifying. Swords are about thinking.

Coins are associated with Earth. Their symbol is a coin or disk. Coins cards tell stories of manifesting, materializing, creating, saving, investing, and growing. Coins are about having and making.

When discussing the Major Arcana, I mentioned that cards can overlap in their range of meanings, and sometimes different aspects of a single concept can be seen as encompassing several cards. Likewise, the Minor Arcana cards will frequently cross boundaries between suits, rather than always staying in their own lanes. Thus, for instance, a Coins card can exhibit some aspects of the suit of Swords in addition to its own inherent Coin-ness.

The Court Cards (Page, Knight, Queen, and King) have caused heartburn for many tarot readers. How should we interpret them? Do they represent other people? If so, do Kings and Knights represent men, and Queens women? What about the pages? Or should we ignore gender? Or should we interpret them as symbolizing inner aspects of the querent rather than other people? Some readers overthink it to such a degree that they get completely flummoxed.

I recommend a simple scheme. Court Cards always represent aspects of the querent (or yourself if you're reading for yourself). Pages are curiosity and learning. Knights are searching and taking action. Queens influence others by indirect methods such as encouragement (positively) or manipulation (negatively). Kings, for better or worse, are leaders who take charge and tell others what to do. The gender on the cards doesn't have any relevance to anyone's gender, nor is the age of the figures on the cards relevant to the querent's age. At various times and in various ways, all of us are sometimes men and sometimes women; all of us are at different stages of development, or "ages," depending on the circumstances at hand. All of us are experiencing the energies of all four suits throughout the day.

We might consider the Court Cards of each suit as literally members of a court—specifically, a court devoted to the theme of that suit, with each member of the court representing a facet or component of that theme. For example, the theme of the suit of Wands is an inspiring, arousing, or combative energy. The Page shows that energy in its youthful, curious phase. The Knight is the hard-charging, get-it-done component. The Queen keeps the home fires

burning, a slow and steady ember that reminds us of our goals and lights the way home. The King uses dearly-won experience to guide and focus the energy efficiently.

A Court Card in a reading can represent either that card's qualities, or a personality that describes us in a particular situation. For example, the Knight of Cups may represent your desire to explore a relationship, or it can mean that in a particular situation you're embodying a Knight-of-Cups-like personality.



[Index](#)

## Ace of Wands

A dragon lizard investigates an elaborately-carved and jeweled wand while mountains glow in a sunrise or sunset.

Aces always signify beginnings. In the suit of Wands, this would mean the start of an endeavor, a desire, or an action. The lizard is reminiscent of a salamander, one of four mythical beings associated with the elements. Salamanders are associated with the element of Fire.

The Ace of Wands represents that stage of a cycle when you feel a surge of energy or interest. Some examples might be a sudden interest in a change of career or a new hobby, or a desire for a material object.



[Index](#)

## II of Wands

A young man reaches for two floating wands, one topped with the sun, the other with the moon.

After the surge of interest or desire shown in the Ace, you haven't yet decided what approach to take toward attaining your goal. It might be a choice between a direct, obvious, aggressive approach (the sun) and an indirect, subtle, circumspect route (the moon). You should consider carefully what route or mode of action to employ.



[Index](#)

## III of Wands

A man with a voyage on his mind watches a ship arriving or departing. Meanwhile, the surf is breaking on three wands stuck into the sand.

You have begun putting your plans (the whimsical ship above the man's head) into action (the realistic ship in the waves). Whether things go according to plan remains to be seen. You've made a good start toward implementing your plans, now you need to make sure that you don't have unrealistic expectations. If your imagination out-runs reality, you may end up stuck in the sand like the three wands in the picture.



[Index](#)

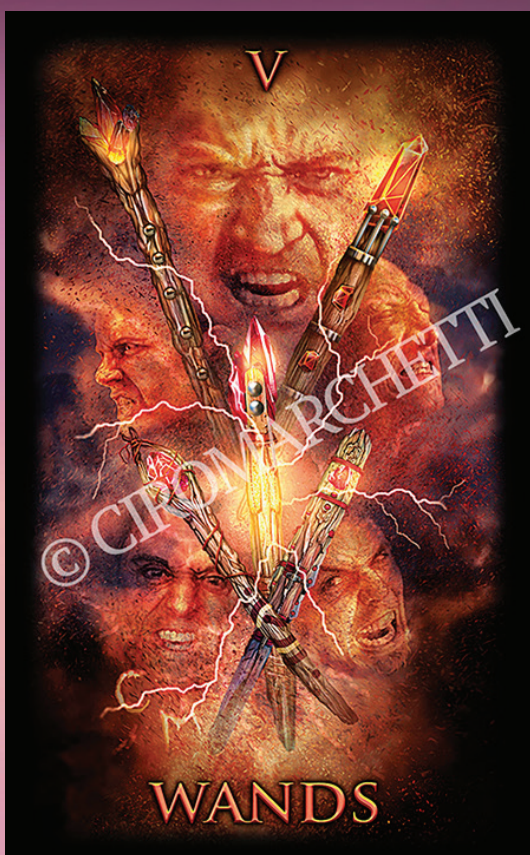
## IV of Wands

The inspiration and planning of the previous cards now has a physical result. Two robins watch over a nest containing two eggs. The birds have built the nest between four wands. Vines growing on and between the wands and nest suggest domesticity and growth, but everything—wands, birds, nest, egg—is floating untethered in the sky, suggesting that any permanence we achieve is only relative.

This is a good time to settle down and enjoy a period of domesticity. Be aware, though, that eventually fate will intrude in one way or another, even if only by the natural processes



of growth. For example, at some point those eggs will hatch!



[Index](#)

## V of Wands

Throughout the Wands suit, the wands are shown as wooden rods which are forked at the top, with the separated sections bound together with cord to contain a crystal or jewel. On the V of Wands, the upper left wand's cord seems to have come undone, and the energy of the crystal is flaming outward or escaping. Likewise, the crackling energy in the card is volatile. We see five men's faces. They are very expressive, although what they are expressing is ambiguous. They might be athletes, totally involved in their efforts to win the game; or they might be involved in an argument or debate.

In the worst case scenario, their faces can be seen as twisted in hatred.

You find yourself fully engaged in something which arouses your passions. To discern whether it's healthy competition or unhealthy vitriol, you'll need to examine the surrounding cards and the context of the question.



[Index](#)

## VI of Wands

Here we see the Colosseum, an architectural marvel from ancient Rome that still survives today. It was built as an amphitheater in the first century AD and was used for, among other things, gladiator matches.

Continuing the theme of testosterone-fueled competition from the previous card, the VI of Wands is about victory. This isn't the completion and fulfillment of the XXI World card. Rather, this is a triumph that is very much of the moment. We might imagine a gladiator who wins his battle but will have to fight a similar fight the next day.

While your victories may seem temporary and fleeting, it's worthwhile to remember that they may have a more profound and lasting effect. After all, the Colosseum itself has lasted, more or less intact, despite the ravages of time, earthquakes, and scavengers, for almost 2,000 years.



[Index](#)

## VII of Wands

In what could be a scene from a larger story, a band of warriors in search of treasure stands at the entrance of a cave. The treasure's guardian is seen above, grasping a wand in its talons and hoarding the treasure, which, not coincidentally, consists of cups, swords, and coins.

The VII of Wands is about courage in adversity and about success against the odds. The band of intrepid adventurers—heroes from their own perspective, thieves from the dragon's viewpoint—may end up fabulously wealthy, or incinerated, but the important thing is their willingness to

confront the dragon, to take the bull by the horns, to seize the day.

It happens at least a few times in everyone's life that an opportunity comes to seize the moment and take the risk, with potentially life-changing repercussions. This card says "go for it".



[Index](#)

## VIII of Wands

Hang on to your hat, the VIII of Wands is about to take you into the stratosphere. This card signals that the pace is about to speed up dramatically. The proposal is accepted, or you get the job, or the project takes off like a rocket with a life of its own, and you'll soon find yourself in the middle of a whirlwind. If XII The Hanging Man represents a pause requiring patience, then the VIII of Wands shows a sudden end to the phase of inactivity.





[Index](#)

## IX of Wands

We might easily see this scene, of a man leaning on his wand in a cave, as being a continuation of the VII of Wands. Perhaps he's one of the band of treasure-seekers who have invaded the dragon's lair. We can see from his expression that things are not going well. He seems to be resting and drawing strength from his wand, while eight other wands form the stalactites and stalagmites of the cave. They block his way both behind him and before him, suggesting that he can't see how to continue but has come too far to turn back. The sign of Sagittarius is tattooed on his face, indicating his commitment to his goals.

This card represents the stage of an endeavor where you are almost at the end but the outcome is in doubt. After all the time and effort you've invested, turning back is unthinkable, so the only option is to forge ahead.



[Index](#)

## X of Wands

The Ten of each suit shows the essence or energy of the Ace, taken to its logical conclusion. In the X of Wands, the fire that inspired us in the Ace has by now burned itself out. You have changed, or the circumstances have changed, or both, and the project has now become a burden. This card suggests that interests, passions, and endeavors have a natural life span and cannot be expected to remain at the same level forever.

The man on the card is brought to his knees by the weight of his obligations and commitments. He's flanked by two columns, whose capitals or tops resolve into the heads of dragon lizards. The

lizards are gazing at each other rather than outward, perhaps indicating the later stages of an organization, when its members have become more interested in power struggles with each other rather than their shared goal. Even the wands' crystal tops seem depleted and are leaking energy.

Your interest or project has reached the end of its natural lifespan. Perhaps you're losing interest, or conditions aren't favorable. It may be time to substantially change it, or let it go and focus on something new.



[Index](#)

## Page of Wands

The Pages are all young women, shown with an animal indicative of its suit. The Page of Wands is draped in a garment whose golden scales echo the golden lizard she supports on the back of her hand. As the curious and studious phase of her suit's energy, she represents the desire to investigate and learn more about the new interest that exploded onto the scene in the Ace of Wands. She is childishly adventurous and impetuous. Negatively, she can be churlish, selfish, and insensitive.



[Index](#)

## Knight of Wands

Knights are shown with their mounts; in this case, an equine sort of dragon. Here we see the Knight of Wands fascinated by, or perhaps taking his orders from, the crystal atop his wand. Having investigated and studied the object of his attention, he's now ready to go out and get the job done. His dragon mount suggests that he may not always be delicate or diplomatic as he carries out his mission. Negatively, he might run roughshod over others. Romantically, he could be a love-'em-and-leave-'em type.



[Index](#)

## Queen of Wands

This Queen stands on a high parapet, looking out over her domain. Her Wands energy has manifested as an elemental being, a small dragon wrapped around her wand's crystal. She reminds us of what is important about our cause so that we don't burn out prematurely in our enthusiasm. Negatively, she can be pushy and too eager to tell others what to do.



[Index](#)

## King of Wands

He sits in a huge hall as six Fire elementals pay their respects. He wears an elaborate crown of petrified wood. His vast experience allows him to direct and focus the energies of the Knight, like a laser beam. He is the quintessential leader and may be thought of as the Emperor expressed at a lower order of magnitude. For example, if the Emperor is the CEO of a company, the King of Wands might be an employee of the company who is put in charge of a specific project. Negatively, he can be overly judgmental or even biased.





[Index](#)

## Ace of Cups

Salmon leap from a stormy sea, while a crystal goblet decorated with seahorses rises from the waves. Water in the tarot always represents the emotions and the subconscious, and the Ace of Cups symbolizes our first awareness of an emotional attachment or an important insight arising from the depths. The image is full of vitality and drama, as are the emotional aspects of life. When you see this card, think of new people in your life, or new emotional reactions to people you already know. There could also be important insights or realizations which have incubated in your psyche before emerging into consciousness. resistance to a new relationship, or not currently being

in a relationship. Perhaps we are unable to show affection, or our emotional overtures are rebuffed.



[Index](#)

## II of Cups

In the Major Arcana, the Lovers card tells the story of a full-fledged relationship with all its passion and depth. The II of Cups has passion as well, represented by the wave, but this is a more casual situation, a first date rather than a wedding. And it needn't be a romantic relationship; the two glasses coming together in a toast might suggest a business relationship or an agreement. The two hands might be clasped in love or in fellowship. If you look carefully at the two eyes "wearing" the glasses, they could belong to two different people, suggesting that two people or entities who interact together can make a stronger whole. If you are one of the entities involved, the

other may not even be human, but rather a job or a subject or interest.

You are experiencing common cause and an amiable relationship with another person or thing. It's relaxed and casual at present, but there is great potential for future development.



[Index](#)

## III of Cups

A mermaid dances, leaping from the waves. Two extravagantly-colored fish dance with her. It's easy to look at this image and feel a surge of exuberant celebration and love. This card stands for parties, milestones, anniversaries, and good times in general. It might simply be a get-together of friends, or meeting co-workers for a drink or dinner after work. It could also mean friendship itself, particularly a group of friends. It could be a private feeling of accomplishment and celebration. It might suggest that you shouldn't keep your light under a bushel. Negatively, there could be overindulgence or addiction.



[Index](#)

## IV of Cups

A man sits under a tree, drinking from cups. He has drunk the contents of three glasses and doesn't seem inclined to bestir himself to reach for the fourth cup, which stands some distance away.

Here things have reached an uneasy equilibrium. You have what you thought you wanted, but there will always be a cup untasted, a road not taken. You don't want to miss out on new opportunities, but on the other hand you don't want to be the person who is always leaving your current situation for something that might or might not be better. The scene pulses with pos-

sibility. Will you stick with what you have or will you reach for something new? The situation will be resolved by other cards in the spread.



[Index](#)

## V of Cups

We all have bad days. Things don't go as planned, an unpleasant surprise pops up, or there is no reason, we're just in a funk. The woman is clearly dissatisfied with the cup in her hand. Another cup lies broken before her. Two intricate towers loom behind her. Emanating from her head is a third tower, which shows us that her gloom is a function of her mental state more than anything else. Also rising from her head are three more glasses, unseen by the woman. This suggests that while her problems originate from her state of mind, the potential solutions are to be found there also.



If you're experiencing disappointment or sadness, consider how it may simply be a function of the natural cycle of your emotions. Soon the wheel may roll on and the feelings will fade. The solutions to your problems may be right in front of you, or right above your head. The tarot is a great tool for digging ourselves out of our ruts and opening us up to new possibilities. Of course, we may need to reach out to others for assistance if the sadness runs too deep.



[Index](#)

## VI of Cups

In this wonderful evocation of imagination in childhood, a young person and a cat are reading from a picture book. A vivid wonderland surrounds them—stuffed animals, a unicorn, a gingerbread house, colored blocks, a snow globe, a flying carpet with two passengers, and a candy-colored castle.

This card can have several meanings. The situation may call for some creative thinking. You may be nostalgic for memories from the past. Perhaps you've been concentrating too hard and it's time for some purposeless daydreaming to recharge your batteries. Negatively, you may be acting

childishly (and not in a good way), or you're living in the past.



[Index](#)

## VII of Cups

Too many choices! How many times do we find ourselves with multiple options and not enough information to choose between them? The images in the goblets are compelling but also disturbing—they have a feverish sharpness to them. They seem to be trying to tell us something, but we can't quite make it out.

The contents of the seven goblets could be different goals, or they could be different approaches to reaching a single goal. The card might be telling you that you're daydreaming too much, without taking any action. Perhaps the goblets and their contents are

illusory, and you will regret following them. The correct response to all of these possibilities is to clear your head and decide where you want to go and how you will get there.



[Index](#)

## VIII of Cups

In this underwater scene, a merman swims away from eight glasses and slowly approaches what appears to be a giant mechanical jellyfish. The metal framework surrounding the jellyfish is shaped like the sign for Pisces, indicating intuitive knowledge.

The fact that we are beneath the waves indicates that we're witnessing a psychological process taking place under the surface, deep within. You have slowly, carefully, and diligently collected your glasses, but now, for mysterious reasons, you find yourself drawn to a new interest. It could be that the glasses represent something that

has run its course and now it's time for something new, even if you don't consciously realize it yet. Or, negatively, perhaps there's still remaining value to be gained from the glasses, but you've allowed yourself to be distracted by the proverbial shiny object.



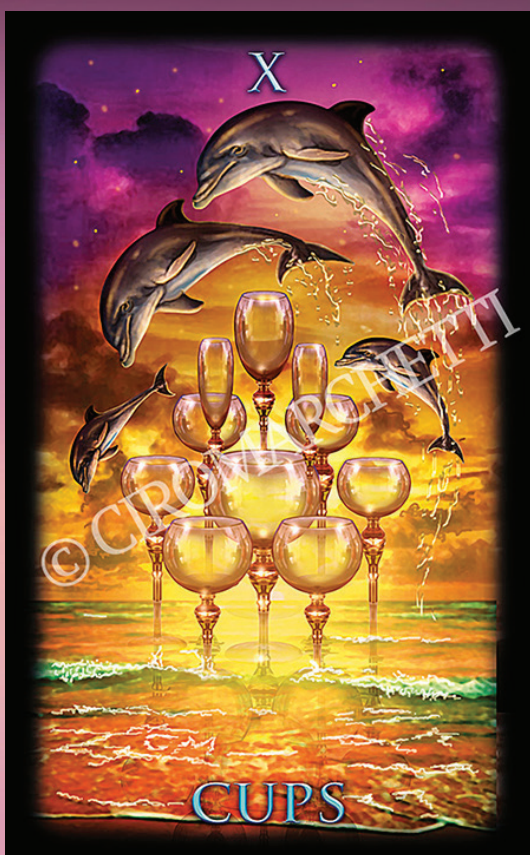
[Index](#)

## IX of Cups

A perfect illustration of contentment and physical wellbeing, the IX of Cups shows a dog who couldn't possibly be more satisfied. He's full (his food bowl is empty), he's tired (his red ball is evidence of his activities), and he's loved.

This card calls you to remember the simple pleasures of life, and to remember as well the importance of down time and "me" time. Traditionally, IX of Cups is the Wish Card. Depending on the context of the question, it could stand for what you wish for, or it could mean you will get your wish.





[Index](#)

## X of Cups

This card shows the apex of joy. The apex is literal—the dolphins are at the uppermost point of their leap. The rising or setting sun lends brilliant color to the sky. Below, the tide pulls the waves across a sandy beach.

Like many cards in the Marchetti Tarot, the best way to understand this card is to simply look at it and allow yourself to feel the plain message of the image. Note that the joy isn't permanent—in no time at all, the dolphins will have begun their descent. But even if it soon ends, the moment of joy will repeat itself. Negatively, the card can indicate unrealistically high expectations of yourself or of others.



[Index](#)

## Page of Cups

Jellyfish abound on this card, a perfect metaphor for the mysterious feelings and dreams that arise from the Page of Cups' subconscious. She represents the very moment when we become aware of these creatures from the depths, and our first reaction to them; intrigued, we want to know more. Around her neck she wears the elemental symbol of water, the eternal medium in which our deepest desires hide.

These denizens of the deep can be disturbing if we lack the experience and maturity to know how to engage with them. In such a case, it may be wise to wait for further guidance or informa-

tion before plunging headlong into the deep end. with the powerful intention that can eventually be realized in the rest of the tarot cups court. There is a gentle energy to the pink and blue of the sea anemones that speaks to the possibility of a birth; to determine whether that of a child or a relationship look the surrounding cards. A reversal of this card may denote inability to open up emotionally to a new situation.



[Index](#)

## **Knight of Cups**

The curious but tentative Page has grown into the brave and adventurous Knight, and is now ready to brave the deeper waters of emotion and relationship. With his seahorse mount, he's ready to embark on his mission to plumb the depths to explore his psyche or to explore a relationship—perhaps at the same time. With his newfound bravery comes confidence and perhaps overconfidence. He wants to be the proverbial knight in shining armor, and he can place unreasonable expectations on himself or others if he takes that role too seriously.



[Index](#)

## Queen of Cups

This Queen majestically gazes at us as the waves crash around her. She represents the part of us that is most skilled at establishing bonds with others. She is fluent in the language of love, whether for lovers, family, friends, or simply compassion for humanity. Her ability to strike these deep emotional tones can make any situation a more profound experience for all involved. Negatively, the same ability can be used for emotional manipulation.



[Index](#)

## King of Cups

The King has tentacles for hair, reminiscent of an octopus. Octopuses are very interesting animals. They are very intelligent, and their brains contain organs that enable them to orient themselves in the water. Their tentacles provide them with an unusually sophisticated sense of touch.

Like the octopus, the King is a highly sensitive, intelligent creature. His emotional wisdom and maturity allow him to navigate relationship issues, and his skill at sensing what is going on within another person, and himself, allows him to orient himself in the situation so as to maximize the benefit for both

parties. A born diplomat, his adaptability may be just what one is looking for in a lover or a confidant, but he can be frustrating in his reluctance to state plainly his own wishes and desires.



[Index](#)

## Ace of Swords

All the objects on this card—sword, dragonfly, clouds, and dandelion seed heads—are symbols for the mind’s activity. The sword represents the mind’s keenness and ability to cut to the heart of a matter, but also the mind’s potential to harm itself and others. The dragonfly can propel itself in six different directions and change direction instantly, symbolizing the mind’s quickness but also its distractibility, while the dragonfly’s shimmering wings can show the beauty of the mind’s creations. The dandelion propagates itself by setting loose its seeds, which are equipped with sails to catch and ride the wind. Likewise, we spread our ideas to oth-



ers, often without even realizing it, and thus change the course of the world. Clouds are a familiar symbol in tarot decks; like thoughts, they quickly come and go and are constantly changing. Clouds can act to block clear thinking, or they can suggest rain which will clear the sky of smog.

The Ace of Swords tells you that some action or reaction of the mind is an important factor; the most common possibilities are ideas and words. A new thought or idea may significantly change the situation, or words spoken by you or to you may inspire change.

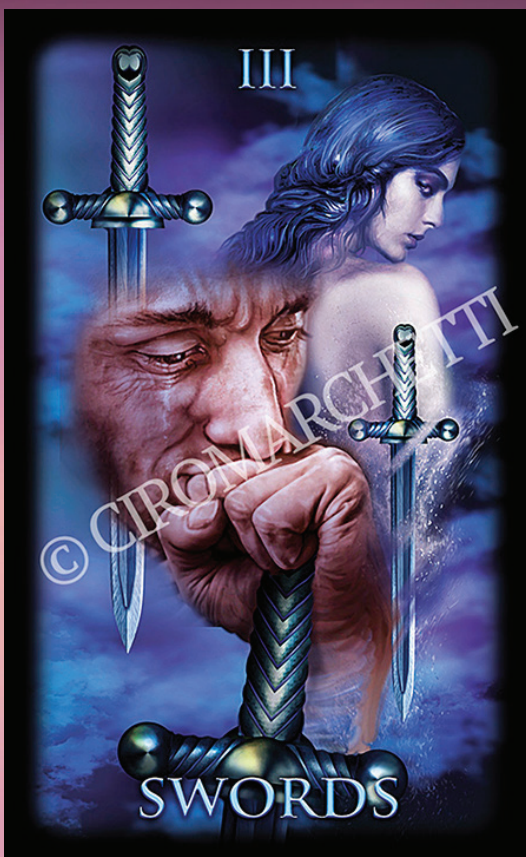


[Index](#)

## II of Swords

The woman's eyes are both closed and blindfolded, and she holds two swords crossed before her. There are two popular interpretations of this card. In one, she is choosing between two different ideas, symbolized by the swords. She weighs them in her hands to gauge them, while covering her eyes so as to remain unbiased by appearances, like the figure on XI Justice.

In the other interpretation, she's in denial. She closes her eyes and covers them with a blindfold so that she doesn't have to see what's in front of her, and uses her defensive posture and weapons to ward off the truth.



[Index](#)

## III of Swords

Here we see the personification of betrayal, told in a story of a shattered relationship. Under dark clouds, a man has driven away his lover. We don't know his reasons but he clearly isn't happy about his actions, which for some reason he felt were necessary.

Our egos can sometimes lead us down dark paths. Our chattering monkey mind wants above all to control us, and would happily ruin a relationship with lies to avoid ceding control to such an unpredictable emotion as love. Any time there is unhappiness and strife between two people, you will undoubtedly find that projection,

defensiveness, and fear—on the part of one or both parties—is at the heart of the problem.



[Index](#)

## IV of Swords

Even the chattering monkey mind must rest sometimes. Whether a formal period of meditation or simply taking a break to daydream or think of nothing, everyone needs to take some time periodically to recharge their mental batteries.

The scene—a knight lying down in a church—suggests a memorial service or a tomb effigy (a sarcophagus lid carved with the reclining image of the deceased). The monkey mind, of course, regards any ceasing of mental activity as a kind of death and reacts with horror, continually pulling our resting mind back into its normal

everyday frenzied thinking. Patiently, like leading a dog on a leash, we gently bring the mind back to some chosen focal point, such as the breath.

For readings, we may take this card to mean the necessity to take a break from mental activity, or simply the need for rest in general. On a deeper level, the sleeping knight could symbolize the common mythological theme of a leader, such as King Arthur, who dies or otherwise vanishes from the scene but will one day return.

The knight grasps his sword by the blade instead of the hilt. Perhaps he seeks to ground himself in reality by maintaining contact with the sharp blade, so as not to lose himself in his mental travels.



[Index](#)

## V of Swords

The bald eagle is a fearsome bird of prey. Eagles are apex predators, considered at the top of the food chain; eagles eat their prey but no one eats eagles. An eagle is included with the other royal animals on the XXI World card as king of its domain.

This eagle is shown with talons which are simultaneously dagger blades, reaching for a sword embedded in the landscape, under a stormy sky. This is a situation where someone is predator and someone is prey. If you are the predator, you may want to think about whether this is really the kind of interaction you want to be having with oth-

ers. If you are the prey, then discretion may be the better part of valor. It may be time to withdraw from the field so that you live to fight another day.





[Index](#)

## VI of Swords

On this moody and atmospheric card, a woman sets off on a solitary journey across a lake, beneath the moon. She lights her way with a pole set with candles. She sits alone in the boat, which is too small to carry anyone else. She must steer around and through the swords which emerge from the water. Her gaze is downcast; she appears melancholy. Her boat is decorated with the sign for Aquarius, denoting unorthodox approaches. She has had to leave behind the status quo, and she isn't entirely sure of what she will find at her destination.

The VI of Swords betokens a sad but necessary separation from something;

she is leaving a bad situation. The drama is over and the stormy clouds have dissipated, and a more positive environment awaits her, but for now she is quietly maneuvering through the transition period, on her way to a happier shore.



[Index](#)

## VII of Swords

Crows are members of the Corvid family, which also includes magpies, ravens, and jays, all of which have a reputation for stealing shiny objects and other bird's eggs. This crow (or raven—they look very similar) is, rather boldly, stealing someone's sword (it was probably stuck in the ground with the other two swords seen at a distance).

Simply, this card represents any situation where someone is utilizing theft or deception to attain their goals. It could be something as benign as a white lie, or the protocols of diplomacy. It could also be something more sinister like

an outright lie or theft. Because we're in the suit of Swords, we're probably dealing with deceptions, strategies, and theft of intellectual property rather than physical objects. Even if there is an ultimate good involved, one must ask whether the end justifies the means.



[Index](#)

## VIII of Swords

This scene seems to be a later development of what we saw in the II of Swords. There, a woman kept reality at bay by choosing to close her eyes and wall herself off from it. Here, a woman is also guarded by swords, but there is a sense that she isn't entirely responsible for her predicament. Either some outside person or agency imprisons her, or perhaps she started out as the woman on the II of Swords, fending off reality, only to find that through force of habit, she's now truly imprisoned. The chains that weave through the image show us that the imprisonment is no longer voluntary.

Beneath the woman, we can see a flash of lightning in the night sky and reflected in the water below. Perhaps, like the lightning in XVI The Tower, this shows a flash of revelation that will burst asunder the chains and swords that entrap her.

In a reading, this card means you or your querent is imprisoned by something, most likely by an attitude or a justification that has outlived its usefulness. The first step to winning freedom is to become aware of your shackles.



[Index](#)

## IX of Swords

The IX of Swords is the anxiety card, plain and simple. It's that time of night when you should be sleeping, but you can't because your mind keeps racing around like a hamster on a wheel, going over all your problems and probably making them sound worse and worse with each retelling. It's obvious that the person on the card isn't seeing things clearly—they're only looking with one eye, and not even really looking, but rather peeking around a pillow. The swords resemble prison bars.

We may be genuinely experiencing a serious problem, but sleepless nights won't help. Surely, by the light of the

sun, our difficulties will seem more manageable, or at least we will be better able to come up with potential solutions. In a reading, this card doesn't necessarily mean you'll be overcome by anxiety. It might be a simple caution to not worry too much.





[Index](#)

## X of Swords

If the IX of Swords is anxiety, the X is despair. My gut reaction to this card is laughter. No matter how down in the dumps I may be, the imagery on this card in most decks is so extreme that it makes me laugh at myself. I see it as the deck's way of making me feel better.

Such an approach to this card works well for self-reading, but when reading for others, it may not be appropriate. The querent may not appreciate you making light of a genuinely difficult situation. You may want to express sympathy, and then to gently point out that behind the figure on the card is a beautiful sunrise.



[Index](#)

## Page of Swords

Traditionally, this card can denote gossip and spying. Certainly there is a curiosity and a newfound facility with words, suggested by the various birds that have alighted on the Page. The casually-held sword suggests that she has not yet learned from experience how hurtful words can be if wielded unwisely. The card might simply mean beginning to explore a new idea, or beginning a course of learning simply for the pleasure of engaging the mind in something new.



[Index](#)

## **Knight of Swords**

When we combine the Knight's orientation toward action with the Swords' focus on words and ideas, we have a person who uses words as a weapon in service to a cause. The end result can range from the most admirable (for example, the social justice warrior) to the most destructive (for example, the Internet troll). The courageous energy of the Knight can give us the wherewithal to fight against the odds for others' benefit. But that same energy, combined with the sharpness of his sword and the dangerous-looking beak of his bird helmet, can lead to a domineering, bullying attitude.

When reading, we can bring the Knight of Swords energy into mundane tasks like writing a letter to the editor in support of a cause, or sticking up for someone else at work or school.



[Index](#)

## Queen of Swords

This Queen is a perfectionist. Above all else she worships the truth, and expects others to follow her lead. She uses her sword not as a weapon but as a mental focus, which helps her in her never-ending quest to improve her mind. Others may find her standards exacting but are usually grateful for the presence of someone so dedicated to excellence. The Queen would never expect of others what she isn't prepared to do herself.

The cherry blossoms behind the Queen symbolize the fleeting nature of life. The Queen is determined to make the most of her time on this earth by

setting an example for others. The Libra sign on her shoulder symbolizes balanced and harmonious thought.

The Queen of Swords invites us to explore where we can set higher standards for ourselves and gently encourage excellence in others. Negatively, she can expect too much or come across too strongly.



[Index](#)

## King of Swords

Here we have the ultimate strategist. The intricacy of his helmet points to his high degree of mental activity. We see columns made of sky on either side of him, echoing the hilts of his two swords. The double-edged swords of his mind support his world. He is the long-range planner. When others are playing checkers, he is playing chess. Some may feel that he uses people like game pieces, but from his perspective, he's using the power of his mind in the most effective way possible to accomplish his goals.



[Index](#)

## Ace of Coins

The suit of Coins refers to material organic and inorganic objects—in other words, the world around us that we can perceive with our senses, and concepts related to it. Here we find the things, plants, and animals that make up our surroundings, along with concepts such as security, acquisitiveness, and manifestation. Coins play a part in creativity as well. All the suits are involved in creativity: Wands stand for the creative urge and the determination and energy to see the project through; Cups provide emotional and psychological depth; Swords lend rationale, strategy, and structure; and finally, Coins represent the finished ar-



tistic creation as a physical object, as well as the tools it took to make it.

On the card we see a huge golden coin, disk, or platter, in a woodland setting, surrounded by various animals. Nature is a rich symbol of creation. When you see this card, be ready for manifestation. Coins also symbolize themselves, that is, money. The Ace may mean the beginning of financial activity, whether a raise at work, a bank account or investment, or seed money to start a business. Incised in the disk is the elemental symbol for Earth, the ground of our being.



[Index](#)

## II of Coins

A stack of stones, or cairn, is surrounded by water. The stones themselves are precariously balanced, and a small tree is even more precariously balanced on the stones, clinging to them with a few roots and with a ballet-shoe-clad foot. Despite its seemingly unstable existence, the tree is thriving.

Often we long for stability; yet who can deny that the most creative and fruitful endeavors thrive on instability? Insecurity and risk motivate us to do that which we thought was beyond our capability. We can look to the example of large companies that succeed through innovation and adaptability.

ty, only to fossilize and collapse when their quest for stability makes them incapable of the out-of-the-box thinking that made them successful in the first place. This card can serve as a warning that you have become too complacent. Perhaps you need to welcome some instability and change into your life.



[Index](#)

### III of Coins

An artisan wields a hammer and chisel in a sumptuously-appointed hall. The disks laid out on the floor are presumably his or her handiwork.

This card celebrates excellence in any endeavor, a job well done, and pride in accomplishment. It's also a celebration of the decorative arts. It's human nature to want to beautify our surroundings, and this card can signify building interiors, artwork, renovation, or any kind of decoration or beautification. In more general terms, it speaks to the desire to work hard to improve something, whether by crafting one's words carefully, or behaving graciously, or acting diplomatically.



[Index](#)

## IV of Coins

Here is a man who sees himself in terms of financial success. He appears on the card as a two-dimensional portrait to show that this is the image he has of himself. His hands reach through the canvas to touch his coins.

This image challenges us to ask ourselves how we may be over-identifying ourselves with a particular role, such as breadwinner, caregiver, or artist. A more balanced self-image is preferable to putting all our eggs of self-esteem into one basket. That way, if we experience a setback in our chosen role, we don't have to see it as a failure of our entire being.

Alternatively, the traditional interpretation of this card as showing a miser can still be used. Or perhaps a deceased ancestor, as shown in the portrait, is figuratively controlling the pursestrings from beyond the grave. In a reading, that might mean that when being offered an opportunity, you should first investigate and consider the offer's history and whether unstat-  
ed commitments might be hidden behind the offer.



[Index](#)

## V of Coins

On this sad card, a woman stands in falling snow, gazing through a shop window at the fruit and bread inside. We can interpret this image in different ways. Perhaps she is poor and hungry, and can't afford what the shop sells. Or maybe the card illustrates a spiritual poverty, where she could walk through the shop's door any time, but instead stands outside, not believing she has the ability or the right to enter. More generally, it may represent someone who holds themselves back because of a lack of confidence.

When this card appears, there is some kind of perceived poverty. Whether the

poverty is real or self-inflicted will depend on the context of the other cards and the question. Remember that the distinction between actual poverty and self-inflicted poverty can be ambiguous.





[Index](#)

## VI of Coins

Five coins are attached to cables which hang down from an automaton emblazoned with a bull's head. A sixth coin is held by a robotic hand which has presumably plucked it from one of the cables.

This image raises the question of what really goes on in our minds and hearts when we give or receive. If I give you something, is it out of the goodness of my heart? Or is it because I expect something in return? Giving isn't an isolated act; it's part of a whole machinery of cause and effect.

Generally this card means something positive; simply, the querent is giving

or receiving. If you feel the reading calls for a more subtle interpretation, you might consider whether there are ulterior motives or if by accepting the gift, the receiver will now become part of a larger scenario that may not be in their ultimate best interests.

The bull refers to the card's traditional astrological decan, Taurus, suggesting someone who can be generous yet at times possessive.



[Index](#)

## VII of Coins

A gardener tends his garden. The coins are sunflowers, and bees and a butterfly hover industriously nearby.

In the Swords cards, the world of thought, things happen as quickly as we can think of them. In the world of Coins, nothing happens instantaneously. It's all about process and evolution. The suit of Coins is where we experience the dimension of time most completely. The VII of Coins is the process card. Of what value would flowers be if we could instantly will them into existence? Beauty would lose at least some of its value if it came at no cost of time or effort.

The bees and butterfly are helping out by spreading pollen; the sun envelopes all with its golden glow. They tell us that if you do your part with diligence and commitment, the universe will respond by meeting you more than halfway.

The words *sette bello* on the leftmost sunflower refer to a card game, *Scopa*, that *Ciro* played with his mother. He says, “The seven of deniers was special and trumped every other card. This card is referred to as the *settebello* or beautiful seven, a term that is part of Italian culture. Numerous restaurants, even an express train were named after it.”

When you see this card, time and process are an important factor. Patience is required, but your steady efforts will be rewarded. Alternatively, the card could be a suggestion that you should enjoy the work for its own sake. Negatively, you might be moving too slowly and deliberately when a more aggressive strategy is called for.



[Index](#)

## VIII of Coins

In some ways the VIII is similar to the preceding VII. Like that card, this one concerns time, effort, and process. But the mood is very different. In the VII, the work was enjoyable and you felt part of the rhythm of life and nature. The VIII, in contrast, shows the coins as gears in a vast machine. Our friend the Fool is young and vigorous here, but he seems trapped in a soul-deadening mechanism. His efforts are productive (hence his musculature) but uninteresting. His jester's cap is pulled down over his eyes, symbolizing lack of vision. In this particular task, vision isn't required—just brute strength and repetition.

It's difficult to write about this card without making it sound awful, but the truth is that any worthwhile endeavor will have uninspiring, repetitious components. Attaining any creative skill requires laborious practice of one kind or another, one example being the scales and other exercises that a musician must master. In fact, much of the success one attains in life is dependent on having the self-discipline to faithfully perform such tasks. As Thomas Edison said, "Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration." Put another way, in 1911 the writer Mary Heaton Vorse gave the following advice to Sinclair Lewis: "The art of writing is the art of applying the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair."

In a reading, the context of the other cards and of the question will determine whether the card refers to necessary discipline in service to a goal on the one hand, or soul-deadening tedium on the other.



[Index](#)

## IX of Coins

On this card we see three birds—a hooded bird of prey, a woman in a bird mask, and a more abstract bird with rainbow colors and coins for feathers. Here the birds are a symbol for the talent and creativity needed to make anything happen in the physical world. Thought is involved as well, and birds also inhabit the suit of Swords as a symbol for mental activity.

The woman has successfully combined self-discipline (symbolized by the bird's hood) with inspirational creativity (shown by the bird mask) to bring something new into the world (the rainbow bird), a perfect illustration

of the balanced relationship between discipline, creativity, and creation.

When this card appears, it can mean that you're on the right track in your efforts to manifest something, or it can be a suggestion of what you should be aiming for.





[Index](#)

## X of Coins

As on the VII of Swords, here we see another Corvid, this time a magpie. All Corvids have a reputation for stealing shiny objects. The VII of Swords was a dark card, occurring at night, with the implication of deception and sneaky strategies. On the X of Coins we see a sunlit scene in a verdant forest, and rather than the ominous tone of the Swords card, the mood here is more serene. Perhaps we can see the magpie as collecting found objects rather than stealing others' belongings.

The coins in this card can stand for material comforts that come with success, or they can represent earned wis-

dom on how to get along in this material world. Notice the thin chains attached to the coins. Whichever interpretation we use, comforts or wisdom, we need to be aware of the chains that come with them. When you complete an endeavor, you don't just drop it and float to the next one. Instead, you're still attached to it by a thin cord of affinity and responsibility. You've created something, but, in a mysterious way, it now helps create you. You're different now than you were, and that difference will remain for the rest of your life.

In a reading, this card can simply mean success and the rewards of success. On a deeper level, it asks you to contemplate how you have been changed by that which you've created.



[Index](#)

## Page of Coins

At first glance this young girl appears to have flowers in her hair, but the explosion of greenery and her mantle of leaves make it clear she is in fact a younger or newer version of the same energy we saw personified in the Empress card. She represents all growing things in their early stages. With an intent look, she holds out to us a young rabbit, encouraging us to engage with the processes of nature and growth.

Traditionally this card symbolizes someone who is learning about the physical world around them, or, more generally, a student of any subject, manifesting the same energy as a child ex-

citedly exploring a new environment. Negatively, there might be too much studying and not enough playing. We sometimes forget that we can learn as much, if not more, from play as from work.



[Index](#)

## **Knight of Coins**

This Knight carries out his mission with diligence and commitment. Loyal to a fault, he will do as ordered, until given new orders. His scar attests to his bravery and dependability in battle. He is the ultimate symbol for those who work to their utmost to provide a comfortable environment for themselves and their loved ones.

This is one of the easiest cards in which to see both positives and negatives. We obviously welcome the Knight of Coins into our lives, either as a person who helps us, or as a character to emulate ourselves, in situations that require faithful diligence. And

we've all seen examples where loyalty and dutifulness have led to someone's downfall.



[Index](#)

## Queen of Coins

The Queen of Coins is the embodiment of the archetype of motherhood. By the way she lives, she sets an example for how to interact with one's environment to create a safe and comfortable space for living. She celebrates the joy of everyday tasks which nurture those she loves or herself. Those tasks do at times seem like drudgery, but the Queen reminds us to remember why we do them.

Of course, this card may come up for someone who isn't literally a mother. Like all the cards, gender and age are irrelevant. Negatively, it may refer to someone who escapes into everyday

tasks as a way to avoid larger issues in life. Another possibility is someone who places too high a priority on comforts and finery.





[Index](#)

## King of Coins

This King is a master of the material world and money. Traditionally he represents businesspeople and financiers. The card can stand either for financial and business knowledge and experience, or for the rewards that come with success.

In a reading, the King of Coins can be used as someone to emulate. For example, if you're wondering whether to ask for a raise, you might ask yourself, "What would the King of Coins do?" More simply, he can mean success, and the knowledge and experience that brought it about. Negatively, he might overemphasize financial suc-

cess while diminishing the importance of other values.

# SPREADS AND SAMPLE READINGS

## *The Prediction Spread*



This is a simple spread you can use to tell you what will happen. Because the spread is short, feel free to use one, two, or three cards per position.

### *Position meanings:*

1. What will happen.
2. A harmonious aspect of what will happen.
3. A challenging aspect of what will happen.

Please note that position 2 is not necessarily positive and position 3 is not necessarily negative. Depending on the circumstances of the question, you might actually prefer a challenging aspect, which

inspires you to take action, rather than a harmonious aspect which leaves you lazy and passive.

### *Sample Reading 1 for the Prediction Spread*

For this reading I'll use one card per position. For each of the sample readings, I recommend pulling the cards out of the deck and laying them in their positions so you can follow along as I interpret them.

The question: How will my literary project turn out?

1. IV of Wands
2. VI of Swords
3. Strength

At first glance, I'm glad to see the IV of Wands. The preparation involved in the project has paid off and there will be a successful outcome—my birds have laid their eggs. The harmonious aspect of the project is the VI of Swords, seemingly a melancholy card for this position. But the quiet, solitary, and reflective setting is actually the perfect environment for writing, allowing me to easily navigate the obstacles (i.e. the swords) which I encounter along the way.

The challenging aspect is Strength. It has been a while since my last creative project,

and so I must accustom myself once again to the challenges of channeling creativity and the realities of the publishing industry. Doing so will take patience and inner strength.

What specific symbols on the cards can I look at? Let's start with the boat on the VI of Swords, which "becomes" the nest on the IV of Wands. (Since the IV of Wands is the "what will happen" card, the timeline in this spread goes from right to left, so the VI of Swords and the Strength card can be considered the present trends, culminating in the IV of Wands which shows us the future.) This suggests that my solitary efforts have carried me forward toward the success of the project and new opportunities. The six upright swords on the VI of Swords become the four upright wands on the IV of Wands, which tells me that the very things which I considered obstacles during the writing process will provide security and protection for the project in the future.

Each card has its own version of wands or rods. The wands on the IV of Wands are elaborate and complex. The pole held by the woman on the VI of Swords is elegant and much simpler in design. The scepter held by the woman on Strength, topped with an animal skull, is more primitive in design and decoration. Thus, we

might say that any sophisticated creative endeavor (IV of Wands) needs a combination and balance of pure animal spirit (Strength) on the one hand, and a civilizing influence (VI of Swords) on the other. Perhaps the elegance of the woman's light pole suggests the craftsmanship of a writer's inner editor, who polishes the raw output shown in Strength.

Finally, I can't help but imagine that the birds on the IV of Wands would be quite alarmed by the canine and feline energies of Strength! However, the protective environment shown on the IV of Wands is only made possible by the raw energies of Strength, as shaped by the civilizing influence of the VI of Swords. Perhaps the two eggs shown on the Wands card contain a lion and a wolf, so that the creative cycle can begin again.

### *Sample Reading 2 for the Prediction Spread*

For this reading I'll lay out two cards for each spread position, as mentioned in the discussion on combinations in the "How to Read the Tarot" section earlier in this book.

The question: I'm going to spend Thanksgiving with my significant other and his family. How will it turn out?

1. Lovers and Hanging Man
2. Star and VI of Wands
3. Page of Wands and III of Cups

Thanksgiving dinner with someone else's family could certainly be compared to a dance, one in which the choreography of etiquette and interaction is important. The Lovers suggests you'll be quite successful at navigating this dance. The Hanging Man, however, tells us that you'll feel somewhat constrained much of the time, and it will require some patience and forbearance on your part. You may even find yourself at times having to sacrifice your integrity or dignity, at those times when someone expresses personal, political, or religious views with which you disagree. For the sake of your significant other, you'll feel the need to not react.

For position 2, the Star and the VI of Wands say that it will take some initiative on your part (VI of Wands), but you'll succeed (VI of Wands) at establishing a peaceful and harmonious (position 2) connection (Star) with your partner's relatives, and also at projecting a calm (Star) demeanor.

Now, while you do want to appear calm and laid back, you also don't want to overdo it and come off as completely bland and colorless. The cards in position 3, the Page of Wands and the III of Cups, speak

to the challenge of maintaining a balance between calm and politeness on the one hand and being a lively and interested (Page of Wands) conversationalist on the other. You still want to show off your personality to its best advantage (III of Cups). Thanksgiving is, after all, a celebration (III of Cups).

As I take a deeper dive into the card symbols, the first thing I notice is that the Cupid on the Lovers is holding a heart suspended from a cord or cable. This looks very much like a smaller or younger version of the suspended dancer on the adjacent Hanged Man card. Perhaps one indication of the love you feel for your partner is your willingness to subsume your identity to a certain degree, at least for one evening, in an effort to please your partner and his family. (Of course, the evening isn't entirely about self-sacrifice; you'll still have a good time, as indicated later by the III of Cups card.)

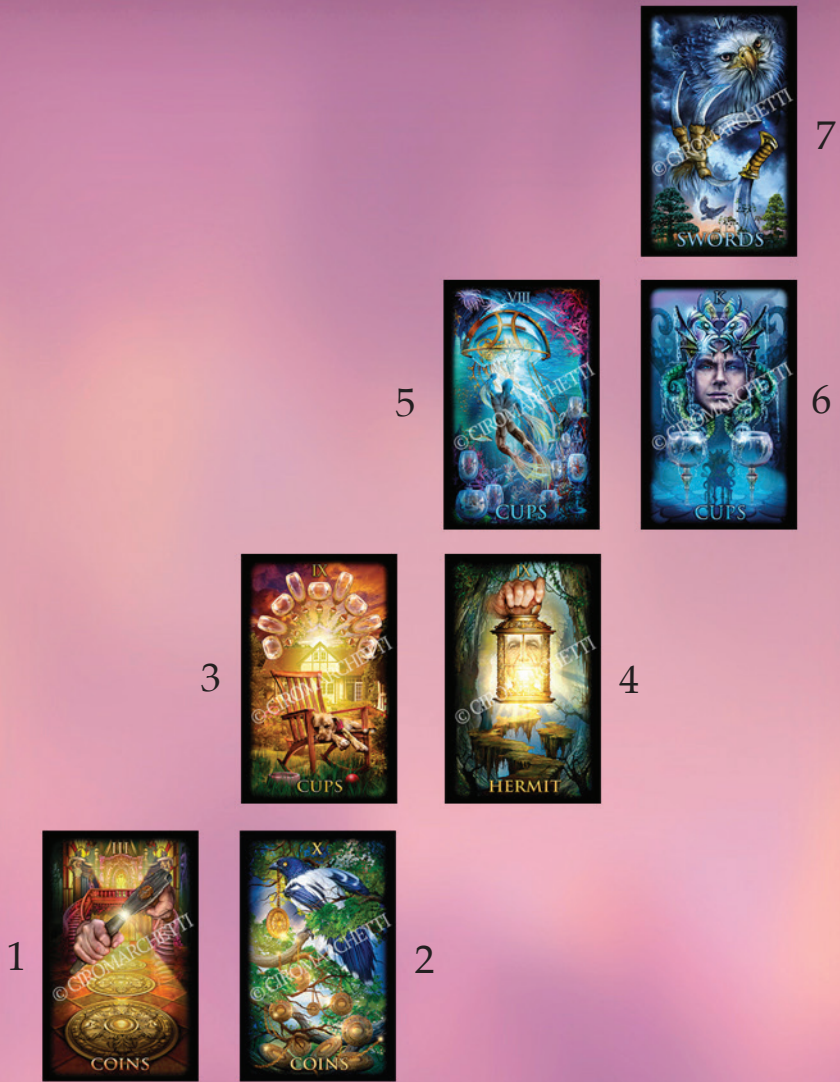
We can also contrast the carefully-carved proscenium arch on the Lovers with the gnarly tree branches/roots on the Hanging Man. The arch represents the show we put on for other people, while the tree branches/roots stand for a more interior, private experience. In other words, outwardly you'll be gracefully "dancing" but inwardly you'll need to suspend your own desires, at least to some extent.



In the Star and the VI of Wands, we see rod shapes used in different ways. The VI of Wands is definitely a yang card, with the wand held aloft victoriously. But like the Hanging Man, that's an inner experience; paradoxically, the thing you're victorious at (i.e. being yang) is being low-key (i.e. being yin, the Star). The Star maiden uses her rods to sprinkle starlight on the scene below. In the context of a family meal, the starlight-filled rods make me think of salt and pepper shakers!

In this reading, with positions 1 and 2, we've established a pattern of the first card of each pair being an outer experience while the second card is an inner experience. For position 3, we can keep that pattern going. In polite conversation, you want to appear curious and lively (Page of Wands). Probably the best way to do this is to have an inner awareness which celebrates your own confidence in the value of your inner self (III of Cups), while of course not broadcasting it too plainly to your conversation partner. If you're able to do this successfully, you may even manage to make a few new friends (III of Cups). And we can in fact see this play out in the small, homely golden lizard which the Page offers, which in our inner experience shows itself to be the extravagant beauty of your inner self.

# The Stair Spread



This spread is designed to explore a goal. An interesting feature of this spread is that the number of cards used is optional; you could use fewer cards than seven, or more, as desired. Any of the odd-numbered positions can be the final card.

1. An action I can take to reach my goal.

2. How that action helps or hinders reaching my goal.

3. A new action I can take in response to position 2.

4. How position 3's action helps or hinders reaching my goal.

5. A new action I can take in response to position 4.

6. How position 5's action helps or hinders reaching my goal.

7. A new perspective on my goal based on the previous cards.

To shorten or lengthen the spread, simply give the final card the meaning I've given for position 7.

### *Sample Reading for the Stair Spread*

The question: My goal is to pass a certification exam which will allow me to get a better job.

1. III of Coins
2. X of Coins
3. IX of Cups
4. Hermit
5. VIII of Cups
6. King of Cups
7. V of Swords

1. The first action I can take is the III of Coins, which suggests that I work hard to improve my skills in the areas of knowledge covered by the certification test. The III of Coins speaks of excellence, so I must keep my standards high as I apply discipline and commitment. The hammer blows on the chisel make me think of the necessity of rote repetition in learning and internalizing the basics.

2. How does the card in position 1 help or hinder? The X of Coins stands for earned rewards, so it appears that the effort I put forth in the III of Coins is now paying dividends. The chains attached to the coins suggest that the rote learning has formed a secure foundation of knowledge that won't easily come undone.

3. In response to the X of Coins, we have the IX of Cups. Here I have an emotional reaction—a surge of confidence inspired by my successful study efforts shown in the previous cards. Like the puppy, I can rest assured that I've brought myself to a safe and secure environment. The position description speaks of an action, so in this case the action is to allow myself to feel the confidence of someone who has studied hard and has a good grasp of the necessary foundations.

4. What are the positive and/or negative effects of that confidence as I move toward my goal? The Hermit says that my knowledge and my confidence in my knowledge are an excellent foundation but are still not enough. I must go off the beaten path to search for deeper and more sophisticated aspects of the knowledge and skills involved. What these are will depend on the particular field. Are there larger philosophical, moral, or ethical considerations to be studied? Or perhaps I need to read case studies of difficult examples faced by more experienced practitioners in the field.

5. The new action in response to the Hermit seems to follow very much in the same vein. Perhaps in opening myself up to the deeper factors suggested by the Hermit, I'll find myself fascinated and intrigued, inspiring me to delve yet deeper into these subjects.

6. The King of Cups serves to remind me not to follow the Hermit/VIII of Cups subjects too far. The merman on the VIII of Cups abandons his cups to follow the object of his fascination, but the King advises that I stay oriented in my overall goal and, while researching deeper subjects, remain cognizant of the foundational skills and knowledge

that brought me to this level in the first place. In practical terms, if the foundational skills required daily practice, then I should still maintain my daily practice even while exploring the more advanced subjects.

7. What new perspective have I gained from all this? The previous cards' focus on commitment, discipline, practice, and balance are an indication that in endeavors such as this, a certain amount of ruthlessness is necessary. I have to go beyond my comfort zone and think of myself, to use a cliché, as a warrior. At times I will need to cut away or reduce other obligations, commitments, comforts, and distractions (such as social time with friends or family) that could prevent me from reaching my goal.

The symbols that stand out to me in this reading are the close-ups of hands—human hands on the III of Coins and the Hermit, and the avian claws on the V of Swords. To me they stand for the major themes of the reading—the disciplined repetition needed to gain foundational knowledge and skills; the contemplation and study needed to gain deeper knowledge; and the ruthlessness needed, at least temporarily, to cut away distractions to allow me to reach my goal.

# The Interaction Spread



This spread describes the interaction between two people. The cards on the left side of the spread describe person A. The cards on the right side describe person B. Cards 11 and 12 describe the nature of the interaction.

There are two options for reading this spread. The first option is to use the de-

scription in the last paragraph to read the cards, without precise position meanings, other than the left-side cards being person A, the right-side cards being person B, and cards 11 and 12 describing the interaction.

The second option entails using precise meanings for the positions, as follows:

- 1 and 2: How person A thinks.
- 3: What person A does (an action they take).
- 4 and 5: How person A feels.
- 6 and 7: How person B thinks.
- 8: What person B does (an action they take).
- 9 and 10: How person B feels.
- 11 and 12: The nature of the interaction.

As you can see, cards 1, 2, 6, and 7 relate to thoughts. Cards 3 and 8 describe actions. Cards 4, 5, 9, and 10 describe feelings.

When interpreting the spread, first interpret all the cards for person A, then the cards for person B. Then you can start comparing the cards in each horizontal category for both people. For example, you can compare the thoughts of A and B in cards 1, 2, 6, and 7. You can compare their actions in cards 3 and 8. You



can compare their feelings in cards 4, 5, 9, and 10. For positions 1 and 2, 4 and 5, 6 and 7, and 9 and 10, you can read the cards as combinations if you wish.

### *Sample Reading for the Interaction Spread*

The Question: Miriam wants to explore her interactions with her boss, Ann.

1. Judgement
2. Wheel
3. Page of Swords
4. King of Coins
5. King of Swords
6. Strength
7. II of Cups
8. Queen of Swords
9. King of Wands
10. Page of Wands
11. III of Wands
12. World

Miriam, the querent, is person A (cards 1 through 5, left side of spread). Ann, the boss, is person B (cards 6 through 10, right side of spread).

For the rest of the reading, I'm going to give my basic interpretations without listing which cards they relate to. As an exercise, see if you can figure out which cards I derived each element of my inter-

pretation from. And remember that my interpretation is only one of many possible interpretations. While following my interpretations, also think about how your interpretations might differ.

Miriam is thinking that she's been feeling stagnant at her job lately. She feels she has changed since she was hired, and would like a different or more challenging position, or one with more status or higher pay. She has begun inquiring about and investigating other positions both within the company and with other companies. Miriam feels like she may want to explore leadership positions in either finance on the one hand, or research or strategy on the other.

Ann, as a boss, approaches one-on-one relationships with her employees with a gentle authority and patience. She encourages Miriam to set high standards for herself and her work. She feels that Miriam is ready to explore leadership positions, and in fact feels that Miriam will make a good boss herself one day.

While Ann is caught up in her newly-found broader perspectives and experiences of change, Ann offers quiet support. Miriam can count on Ann to mentor her through this period of change. Both women agree that the sky is the limit for Miriam's potential. The future looks bright for Ann.