

# TAROT *of the* ABYSS

By Ana Tourian

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# INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## THE COURT CARDS

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

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

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

day. Here are the categories to look for:

**Water Signs**—Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces

**Fire Signs**—Aries, Leo, Sagittarius

**Air Signs**—Libra, Aquarius, Gemini

**Earth Signs**—Capricorn, Taurus, Virgo

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

## ABOUT THIS DECK

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

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

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

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

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

## WHAT IS DIFFERENT

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



THE MAJOR ARCANA



## 0 • THE FOOL

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

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

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

## 1 • THE MAGICIAN

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

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

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

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

The Magician represents the symbiotic

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

## 2 • THE HIGH PRIESTESS

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

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

### 3 • THE EMPRESS

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



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

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

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

## 4 • THE EMPEROR

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

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

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

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

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

## 5 • THE WISE ONE

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

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

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

## 6 • THE LOVERS

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

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

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

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

## 7 • THE CHARIOT

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

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

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

## ♁ • STRENGTH

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

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

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



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

## 9 • THE HERMIT

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

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

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

## 10 • WHEEL OF FORTUNE

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 11 • JUSTICE

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

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

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

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

## 12 • THE HANGED ONE

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

If the Hanged One appears in your

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

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

## 13 • DEATH

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

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

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

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



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

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

## 14 • TEMPERANCE

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

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

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

## 15 • THE DEVIL

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

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

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

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

## 16 • THE TOWER

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

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

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

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

## 17 • THE STAR

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

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

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

## 18 • THE MOON

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

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

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



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

## 19 • THE SUN

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

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

needed to develop the eyes to see it.

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

## 20 • AWAKENING

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

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

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

## 21 • THE WORLD

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

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

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





THE MINOR ARCANA



## ☯ SUIT OF SWORDS ☯

### ACE OF SWORDS

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

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

## TWO OF SWORDS

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

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



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

## THREE OF SWORDS

(TRADITIONAL VERSION)

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

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

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

# THREE OF SWORDS

(ALTERNATIVE CARD)

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

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

## FOUR OF SWORDS

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

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

## FIVE OF SWORDS

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

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

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

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

## SIX OF SWORDS

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

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

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

## SEVEN OF SWORDS

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

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



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

## EIGHT OF SWORDS

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

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

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

## NINE OF SWORDS

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

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

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

## TEN OF SWORDS

(TRADITIONAL VERSION)

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

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

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

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

## TEN OF SWORDS

(ALTERNATIVE CARD)

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

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

## COURT CARDS SETTING IN SUIT OF SWORDS

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

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

## PAGE OF SWORDS

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



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

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

## KNIGHT OF SWORDS

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

When the Knight of Swords appears in your spread, she may represent an aspect of you, someone else in your life, or the atmosphere in general. The Knight of Swords is the piercer of mysteries; she will deliver the answers you seek, but take care, for she is known to be tactless and frank to a fault. If you are uncertain as to how to proceed with regard to the issue in question, the Knight of Swords is telling you to be direct and act decisively. However, remember that it is not only what you

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

## QUEEN OF SWORDS

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

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

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

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

## KING OF SWORDS

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

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

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

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

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

## ☞ SUIT OF WANDS ☞

### ACE OF WANDS

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

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

The Suit of Wands is associated with the



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

## TWO OF WANDS

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

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

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

## THREE OF WANDS

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

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

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

## FOUR OF WANDS

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

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

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

## FIVE OF WANDS

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

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

## SIX OF WANDS

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

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

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

## SEVEN OF WANDS

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

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

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

## EIGHT OF WANDS

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



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

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

## NINE OF WANDS

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

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

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

## TEN OF WANDS

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

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

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

## COURT CARDS SETTING IN SUIT OF WANDS

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

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

## PAGE OF WANDS

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

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

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

## KNIGHT OF WANDS

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

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

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

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

## QUEEN OF WANDS

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

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



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

## KING OF WANDS

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

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

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

## ☞ SUIT OF CUPS ☞

### ACE OF CUPS

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

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

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

## TWO OF CUPS

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

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

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

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

## ABOUT ANA TOURIAN

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

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