

FYODOR PAVLOV
TAROT





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by Fyodor Pavlov

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★ ★ ★
INTRODUCTION
to Pavlov Tarot ★ ★ ★

I spent five years working on this deck, researching the history and the imagery of the cards, conceptualizing my own versions and interpretations, and then committing all this information to paper in this guidebook.

Throw it in the fire and do whatever you want. My intention as the artist only goes so far. I communicate with my images and my words as best I can, but the rest is up to you, the person viewing and interpreting them. These are your cards now, and I leave them open to interpretation and to enable each reader to find their own personal meaning.

I don't want to belabor this Introduction, but I do want to say that a great deal of love and care went into this deck. I hope it treats you well and brings you insight and inspiration.

Reversals: Some people consider reversals indispensable, while others are loathe to read them. I do both. I keep my deck in the upright order out of persnickety personal preference, but I trust the clues of the spread to tell me how to interpret the cards when I read with them. I do not believe that any one tarot card is inherently positive or negative, or that reversals alter the meanings to such a degree that reading with them is essential. The images of the tarot cover an incredibly wide expanse of negative, positive and neutral expe-

riences, and each card in and of itself holds a positive and a negative connotation. For some cards, I explicitly outline reversed interpretations if I feel strongly about them. With others, the interpretations are more nuanced, and the upright and reversed meanings are more tightly interwoven. Reading the tarot is an intuitive practice above all else, so, in my deck, I have done my best to illuminate all sides of the cards to enable the querent to read in a way that makes the most sense to them.

Gender: There is pervasive reliance on a narrow cis- and heteronormative binary gender representations and roles in many tarot decks and interpretation texts. Though most people agree that archetypically masculine and feminine aspects of the cards' meanings can apply to people of any gender and of any sexuality, there is still a dichotomy at work that feels untrue and incomplete to me. This model is something I tried to address in my own deck by switching the genders of certain cards, introducing non-binary identities, and including as many queer elements as I could into my imagery while staying true overall to the canonical tarot meanings.

Smith-Waite: Arthur Edward Waite commissioned the Rider-Waite deck and provided most of the modern interpretations of the cards. Pamela Colman Smith, a queer woman of color, is responsible for the illustrations. This includes the Minor Arcana which, before Smith, were known primarily through the correspond-

ing number of pips instead of representational illustration, and for which Waite provided very little guidance. As such, I chose to honor Pamela Colman Smith's contributions by referencing the Smith-Waite deck throughout my own guidebook.

MY HEARTFELT GRATITUDE GOES OUT TO:

Lawrence Gullo, my Magician

*Lauren Knowles, my editor whose prompting
whipped my thoughts into shape*

*My in-laws, Eileen Charbonneau
and Ed Gullo*

*Brigit Esselmont, whose website
www.biddytarot.com first taught me to read the cards*

*Rachel Pollack and her book
Seventy Eight Degrees of Wisdom*

*Kat Black, creator of the Golden Tarot,
my favorite personal deck*

*Lulu Black, Fancy Feast, Sebastian Crane and M. H.
McFerren, whose faces and energies appear in the cards*

*And to everyone who offered their help,
experience, and endless patience and
support throughout this endeavor.*



The Major Arcana





• O •

THE FOOL

One of the more ambiguous cards of the Major Arcana, the Fool is controversial in its meaning. The Fool can be reckless, immature, insecure and flighty—a recipe for future hardships when they take that leap off the precipice. The imagery of the card itself, however, is far less bleak. Many people I have discussed it with have personally identified with the Fool card and found it to be hopeful and positive in the joy and spontaneity it depicts. The Fool seems naive and careless, yes, but there is a kind of enlightenment and freedom in that. The card makes me think of the Russian cultural icon of the holy fool. This aspect rings truer to my interpretation of the card and is the quality I chose to focus on.

Rachel Pollack in her book *Seventy Eight Degrees of Wisdom* has this to say of the card: “[...] the Fool’s face [is] a mask, put there not by himself but by the outside world.” This description aligns with the popular image of the Fool as a court jester, disguising incisive truth with humor, wit and folly, which gave me the idea to dress my Fool as a pierrot at a Venetian Carnival. It also speaks directly to the conflicting images of the Fool and how this very conflict is woven into the interpretation of the card. Some impose a negative interpretation of the Fool’s recklessness and others see hope in his *joie de vivre*. And so my Fool has a mask, but is not wearing it. Instead, they are expressing their agency by willfully holding it before their face.

The cliff is still there and the Fool is dancing up to its precipice. Whether this is good or bad is up to the reader. But the sun still shines. The white roses are for both passion and purity, and the staff bearing the Fool’s bag (full of past experiences, which enrich but do not weigh them down) is meant to reference the wand of the Magician.

And finally, I chose a cat instead of the usual dog for the Fool’s companion because I love cats. Especially black cats. Also, cats can jump up to six times their own height, and almost always land on their feet. That’s some Fool energy for you.



• I •

THE MAGICIAN

The act of creating something is a kind of magic. I can think of something, and after years of practice, discipline and patience, I can make it appear on paper. It wasn't there, and then it was. It's practical magic, and like all truly magical things, it is the result of hard work. The Magician is the card of artists and makers, and I see him as a very practical, though playful, figure.

The Magician is not merely a conduit of creative energy. He is someone who can take inspiration and, with the application of skills and knowledge, manifest it into physical creation. In a reading, he is a beacon of creativity, signifying potent inspiration, curiosity and inventiveness. He invites the querent to harness the

power of their imagination. The pedestal is his work-space, the tangible everyday realm in which he creates. It is wreathed with blossoming flowers and fruit, and all around him, nature is in bloom. The Magician card reversed can indicate stunted creativity; a writer's block, a lack of inspiration, an inability to fully realize what we so vividly imagine. The important thing to remember in those times is that talent and inspiration are not the only things that make us into artists—the rest is hard work, dedication and muscle memory.

In my notes, I jotted down “18th century satanist” and “Prague alchemist” while brainstorming ideas for his clothes. In the end, I painted him wearing something similar to the robes of an Italian Renaissance scholar. The Magician is a creator, but he is also a learned figure. Knowledge is the foundation upon which he raises his masterpieces.





• II •

THE HIGH PRIESTESS

Otherwise known as La Papesse, the High Priestess is another one of those cards that, outside of some recurring symbolism, has been interpreted in wildly different ways. Pope Joan, the Virgin Mary, the goddesses Isis and Juno have all been pointed to as origins and inspiration for the archetypal figure of the High Priestess. Visually however, none of them sat quite right with me. Keeping them all in mind, I eventually settled on Pythia, the Oracle of Delphi, as the more accurate representation for me, of what the High Priestess stands for.

The black and white pillars that support the roof of the High Priestess's temple in the Smith-Waite illustration have become instead the tall legs of the curule that lift her up as she sits over the chasm. And instead of the

veil, she is enveloped in the intoxicating vapors that rise from the crack in the mountain to bear up her prophecy, knowledge and mysteries. The Virgin (specifically Our Lady of Guadalupe) is referenced in her starry cloak, and Persephone is also present in the pomegranate she holds (normally, the veil behind the High Priestess is embroidered with pomegranates). A crescent moon crowns her forehead, linking her to the Moon coming up later in the Major Arcana. Though I left out a more obvious depiction of water imagery from the card, it is implied in the white and blue color choice.

The cloistered aspect of the High Priestess was one thing that kept popping up in my research, and one that I had to wrestle with a bit in my interpretation of the card. Historically, the cloistering of women in nunneries and convents, in harems, in Russian *terems*, was a restrictive effort to keep them out of power. At the same time, many women used their cloistering to their advantage, joining convents in order to escape marriage and attain education and creative freedom, and forging entire communities within their own personal sphere. In that context, my High Priestess is a powerful, mysterious and self-sufficient figure who uses her seclusion to her advantage and goes into it on her own terms.

Reversed, the High Priestess suggests that there are outside influences clouding our judgement and blocking our inner voice. She points to self-doubt, confusion and mistrust. She urges us to seek meditative seclusion, go inward, and focus on trusting our intuition.



• III •

THE EMPRESS

The image for this card came to me very naturally, and my interpretation is quite straightforward and in tune with the traditional Smith-Waite portrayal—"motherhood, love gentleness [...] sexuality, emotion, and the female as mistress" (*Seventy-Eight Degrees of Wisdom* by Rachel Pollack). Again, I'm not exactly gunning for the gender binary with my deck, but the importance of this archetype spoke to me. I thought of all the women in my life who at one point or another embodied the Empress and the sensual pleasure she takes in life, the love she shares with others, and the pursuit of pleasure she encourages, and took inspiration from them when drawing my card.

Flowing water for the glory and creative force of nature, the star crown for wisdom and the universe—all of the Empress's traditional attributes are present. One significant departure is the heart. Instead of a shield with a heart and Venus emblem, I wanted to display the more passionate and dangerous side of the Empress. Like a gentle spring day, she can be nurturing and mild, but she is also a mistress of passionate sexuality and decadent excess. To quote Pollack again, "The Empress, along with such mythological counterparts as Aphrodite or Ishtar or Erzulie, represents something very grand. They signify the passionate approach to life. They give and take experience with uncontrolled feeling." And so she clutches and upholds the heart, that innermost symbol of our emotions.

A news clipping of an opera singer playing the role of Aphrodite in a Baroque Opera used to hang in our house. The Empress's costume was inspired by the costume the actress wears in that picture. I quibbled over whether the Empress should be nude, clothed, or clothed but bare-breasted, and the latter felt like the most powerful choice. Her chest is bare, but her dress and jewelry indicate the status and power she wields.



• IV •

THE EMPEROR

My Emperor is obviously inspired by the Romans. I was thinking of Hadrian when I settled on this design. I kept a lot of the traditional symbolism of the Smith-Waite Emperor. He embodies conventional binary masculinity, though he is by no means limited by it. The imagery of Aries and war is present in the ram's head on his breastplate, and the pedestal he stands upon symbolizes his elevated station. He wears a victor's wreath.

A lot of the imagery of the Emperor I have seen is severe to the point of barrenness. He embodies social law and structure, power, stability and force. However, I feel that all those aspects can be tempered in the Emperor with intelligence and restraint, and I wanted to include

indications of this in my portrayal of him to add more nuance to his meaning in readings. Yes, he is armed with a sword, but its blade is pointing down at rest. He can use force, but he can also judge when it is necessary to do so. The laurel wreath he wears can symbolize both victory and subsequent peace and security.

In his left hand he carries a scroll—another symbol of peace, law and knowledge, and a written testament of the Emperor's power. As in many similar depictions, he rises above jagged mountains. But the rocks are not entirely barren. The distant trees symbolize the potential for growth and prosperity that comes from intelligent, compassionate and steady governing. The color choice harkens back to the Empress, but where hers is softer in hue, the Emperor's red is bolder and more solid.



• V •

THE HIEROPHANT

This is a card I struggled with quite a bit because I don't really like what it stands for. The interpretations of the Hierophant that I've read relate to dogmatism, tradition, morality—a lot of things that I struggle to find a personal point of reference with. A short while after finishing the art for this card, I pulled the Hierophant as a signifier for myself in an end of the year reading. It was my first year immersing myself fully in the creation of the deck and diving deep into the lore and learning of the tarot. Sometimes you can't see the forest for the trees—that was how I saw the Hierophant then, and how he retroactively became more accessible to me.

There is definitely a religious aspect to my representation that harkens to Christianity, but I did my best to strip the art of direct references and symbols that definitively point to any one religion. The robes are simple, the palm frond stands for peace and progress, the tome is unidentifiable. My focus with this card was on knowledge and learning. The Hierophant is made wise by the experience of his years. His stole bears the traditional symbolic keys that unlock the path to knowledge, and in his hand he holds a book. A light shines upon him and his disciples.

The Hierophant is still representative of social and academic authority, and thus can be conservative, dogmatic and conformist. He can be interpreted as an educator, a religious figure, or a moral authority constraining the querent. But he can also be a positive influence, a seeker of enlightenment and a wise figure willing and ready to help and to teach, or he can indicate a journey of learning, self-improvement, and intellectual and moral advancement. My accent color choices were meant to support that bright, positive aspect of the card.



• VI •

THE LOVERS

The Lovers is a card of union in all its facets. Marriage, partnership, friendship and sex are all aspects of love, and I wanted this card to capture that. Albrecht Dürer's *Adam and Eve* was a visual inspiration for this card, which is already traditionally imbued with the Garden of Eden mythos. The trees and the fruit symbolize self-knowledge, virility and the fecundity of a rich companionship. The arrow and the burning heart stand for pain, pleasure, and the intermingling of the two.

While all of these strong elements can indicate a tumultuous kind of love and point to a lot of sexual energy, I wanted the body language and the nudity of the couple to hint at a maturity of feeling and vulner-

ability as well. The Lovers are handfasted with a red ribbon, and though they are bound together, they are there by choice.

Finally, these are the first explicitly trans bodies in the deck so far. I had considered making the couple cisgender homosexual or lesbian, but decided against it for two reasons. Firstly, I just wanted a positive and beautiful romantic representation of trans bodies. And secondly, I still wanted the card to read as queer and to subvert cisgender heteronormativity. Though the tarot frequently deals with binaries on the surface, it constantly reminds us that masculine and feminine aspects of its symbolism are interchangeable and applicable to persons of all genders. I felt that painting a trans man and trans woman would apply to couples (or triads, or any variation of romantic and sexual partnerships), as well as reflect my own lived experience in my creation of this deck.



• VII •

THE CHARIOT

The Chariot is a card of accomplishment and success. Though while the idea of victory implies a kind of finality, the chariot keeps rolling. Life is made up of victories and failures, and all that other messy business in between. For me, the Chariot is a card rooted in that physical realm. It is also a card of leadership and collaboration. As Kat Black, the creator of the Golden Tarot, puts it, “horses will only follow the reins if they want to,” to which I would add that they will follow if they are well and skillfully led. The charioteer represents emotional maturity, and strength of personality and will.

I wanted to unite these ideas with imagery that referenced both Apollo and Helios. Though I have simplified

the Chariot’s design from how it is usually depicted, I have included a lot of the esoteric symbolism that references the preceding seven Major Arcana cards to symbolize the journey so far. The experiences symbolized by those cards are the fuel that drives the Chariot. Look it up, if you want to. Or don’t bother and ascribe your own meaning—your journey is your own, and your experiences are personal.



• VIII •

STRENGTH

This card is a bit of a departure from the traditional representation of Strength, mainly in the choice of animal. It's a mix of a wolf, Barghest (the black dog of death), and a werewolf, and I had a few reasons for this choice. I love the social and cultural interpretations of Western lycanthropy lore. The werewolf is a powerful symbol of what is considered bestial in man. The lore surrounding it is a fascinating study of how people make sense of concepts like nature versus nurture, issues of mental illness, and the fear of the unknown. From the French beast of Gévaudan, to the loss of innocence represented in Angela Carter's *The Company of Wolves*, to contemporary pop culture representation of angry teen wolf boys, there is a connect-

ing thread of rage and untamed wilderness grinding up against social norm and urban safety.

Many "remedies" for lycanthropy are violent—physical labor to exhaust the human-turned-beast, exorcism, murder, the burning of a wolfskin. But there is a fascinating gentleness and strength of human spirit that can be found in werewolf mythology too. In the German lowland of Schleswig-Holstein, it was believed that a werewolf could be cured if one were to simply address it three times by its Christian name, while one Danish belief holds that simply scolding a werewolf will cure it. There is also a legend that claims the voice of its loved one can transform the werewolf back into a human being.

It is this idea that I wanted my Strength card to represent; that the bestial in man is natural and does not need to be cured. But it can be tempered with love and gentle strength. Whenever I am hurt or upset, I envision armor building itself up around me to protect me, but also to bolster me, because vulnerability is a strength. And so the woman in the card is armored. But she is also wearing a beautiful gown in gentle contrast, and both her and her wolf are garlanded with flowers. I wanted the card to represent ferocity and power, but also self-love and self-mastery.



• IX •

THE HERMIT

The Hermit is one of my two birth cards, and one I feel closely connected to. I value its message of self-insulation and solitary personal growth. I love its imagery and its peace. Yes, the Hermit has its negative implications of putting up walls, of cold detachment and of human disconnection. However, humans are social animals, and secluding ourselves entirely from the care and warmth of others is no better than continuous draining social activity. But I find the card comforting in its solitude and self-sufficiency.

Almost every Hermit card I have seen depicts a wise old white man. And while I recognize the cultural significance of that image, and the reasons behind its continued

perpetuation, it did not ring true for me. A woman, a witch, a midwife, a creative, a thinker—those archetypes felt more fitting for this card. Whether by choice or by ostracism, a feminine figure spoke more clearly to me of hermitage and otherness—removed from society, yet a self-affirming part of it. The raven on her shoulder, the book and the lit lantern she holds are all symbols of wisdom and knowledge, of an inner guiding light. She is not sorry to be without human companionship, but she is also not entirely alone among the stars, with her animal attendant and the company of her self-learning. She's climbing the barren rocky landscape willingly, and she can find her way back down again if she so wishes.





• X •

WHEEL OF FORTUNE

At the very beginning of this guidebook I said that all tarot cards contain a multitude of interpretations because they represent the vast variety of human experiences. No card is more emblematic of this truth than the Wheel of Fortune—the card of luck, chance and the pitfalls of fate.

The tarot imagery of the Wheel of Fortune invokes the notions of *rota fortunae* popular in the ancient world and medieval cultural thought. The heart of this philosophy is that the capricious goddess Fortuna spins the wheel of the world, doling out windfalls or misfortunes to mortals at random. Most tarot illustrations depict only the Wheel, but I wanted to include the goddess

herself to reference the esoteric and mythological history behind it. I also wanted to introduce a human figure into a card that does not usually include one as a nod to the fact that while sometimes our fortune can be out of our hands, we are also the makers of it. Our lives are our own, even when we do not feel in control.

Representations of the four evangelists, or their stand-in symbols, are common in most tarot representations of the Wheel, but frankly, they mean nothing to me. While I am not banishing Christian imagery from my deck entirely (in fact, The Hanged Man bears a striking resemblance to a certain very popular saint), this particular symbolism does not resonate with me and does not illuminate the card's meaning. Instead, I took a leaf from Robert Place's *The Alchemical Tarot*, and adorned the corners of the card with the four elements: air, water, fire, and earth. They serve the same function, and represent the whole of the world in a way that makes more sense to me.

The Wheel of Fortune is a card of cycles and change, and it is a card of constant motion. Thus, its interpretation is highly dependent on the cards around it. In its positive aspects, the Wheel of Fortune can point to unexpected success, good luck, or a positive turning point. In a negative position, it may mean luck running out, impending misfortune, or negative changes. But even when there are other cards around the Wheel, its meaning can be hard to divine—which I think is the

point. Life can be unpredictable. Sometimes, chance simply rules our lives and there is nothing we can do about it except go along for the ride. Fortuna teaches us to adapt, to not be afraid to take risks, to think on our feet. She wants us to wrestle with her, to forge our fate and our destiny against all odds, and to accept that we won't always come out on top. She reminds us that nothing in life is forever. The Wheel of Fortune wants us to get comfortable with chaos.



• XI •

JUSTICE

When I first started learning the tarot, I struggled with the difference between Justice and Judgement. As I learned more about both, the distinction that stood out the most was the practical application of the concepts they embodied. Judgement is personal and esoteric. An inward journey of self-evaluation, the individual dissected beneath the lens of the vast human experience. But Justice is social, cultural, rooted in the physical world we inhabit.

Many of the illustrative elements in my cards tend to break out of the frame—the Fool's left foot, Strength's wolf, the spear of the Charioteer and the Magician's staff all cross the black border that frames the image. These are the cards that

speak to our internal emotional journey as private individuals. However, most of the cards that represent our physical connection to society and the grounding elements of its constructs—the Emperor and the Hierophant—tend to stay more or less within the confines of the frame.

The same is true of Justice. The two pillars behind her hearken back to the High Priestess, and her raised sword to the Emperor. The banner wrapped around her is emblazoned with a quote from Cicero: “Justice renders to everyone his due.” While Fortune was free-wheeling and random, Justice calls us to account. In a reading, Justice encourages us to be fair, objective and compassionate. She wants us to take responsibility for our actions, seek the truth, and accept or pass judgment with a clear head and an open heart.



• XII •

THE HANGED MAN

It was only a matter of time until St. Sebastian imagery made its way into my cards. The Hanged Man—a card of personal sacrifice for the greater good and spiritual gain, of peaceful acceptance of the loss of power, and of transformation through suffering—felt perfect for it.

Enough has already been written and said about St. Sebastian's significance in queer cultural iconography, but I wanted to take the symbolism of the card further by representing a transmasculine body. His chest is draped with bandages that unwind, as if to release him from their trappings, and his face is that of divine ecstasy, to symbolize the euphoric point of personal freedom and acceptance.

The tree is also a nod to Odin's sacrifice upon the Yggdrasil, where the god hung for nine days, died and was reborn again. A sacrifice of the self to the self, made to gain knowledge of the runes—runes from which blossomed intellectual and spiritual knowledge, communication, and the magic of storytelling. St. Sebastian, it is important to note, never died upon the tree at all. The flowering green branches, bursting in sprays of cherry blossom, stand for this unstoppable life force that fades and lies dormant, and then springs forth again with the change of the seasons. It is a kind of transformation that feeds upon hardship, which teaches us that a worthwhile thing rarely comes easily, but that the pain is worth it in the end.



• XIII •

DEATH

What can I say about the thirteen trump that hasn't already been said so many times? It holds understandable sway over all others and looms grand in our collective consciousness and popular culture. Death is the one constant, sure thing that equalizes and unifies us all. And in the tarot, Death stands for more than dying. It reaches beyond that to transformation, a shedding of the self, a kind of baring and rebirth. It is the natural follower of the Hanged Man. And so I carried the imagery over. Death stands not alone, but with the figure who has been freed from his bonds. They are wrestling and embracing, pushing and pulling with and against each other. Change is difficult and does not often

come without a struggle. But change is also sought, it is transformative. In this card there is a hint of sex, which, to me, is inextricable from death.

At Death's feet are the classic trappings of *memento mori* and *vanitas* imagery, some of which also double for the four suits: a scepter (wands) and crown for power, a book for knowledge and wisdom, a dagger (swords) for strife, coins and chalices for earthly pleasures and wealth, and an hourglass for the relentless passage of time. Like on the Hanged Man card, the tree wrapping around the border is starting to unfurl its leaves. Sometimes Death is only the beginning.



• XIV •

TEMPERANCE

This one is a rather straightforward interpretation of the Temperance card. It features all the usual trappings of an angelic figure standing with one foot on land and the other dipped into a body of water, pouring the self-same water from one vessel to another, and an iris flower blooming nearby. I simplified the design slightly from Smith-Waite imagery to the older, more basic designs with a less elaborate landscape. I wanted the illustration to be less distracting to the eye overall, with just a few elements to really focus and tie the meaning of it together. To me, Temperance is a card that looks within, rather than without.

The only real deviation here is in the way the angel himself is represented. In most Temperance cards I have seen, the figure, being an angel, is meant to be interpreted either as genderless, or, more often, as feminine. There is a visual shorthand of assumed gentleness and mildness that comes along with a feminized image, which I wanted to change by making the figure explicitly masculine. I like the idea of gentle, tender, temperate and comforting masculinity, and I felt it suited the card.

The brook around the figure babbles wildly, yet smooths into a calmer flow along the edge of the card, the way our thoughts sometimes run ahead of us with stress and anxiety. We must be reminded to temper them lest we get swept away. Temperance calls for balance, moderation, patience and mindful intention in our behavior. What intention means to me is simply acting with purpose rather than on impulse. Temperance encourages us to take the time required to figure out what that purpose is, and then to go forward and act with conscious awareness of our motives.



• XV •

THE DEVIL

Like Death, the Devil as a concept is incredibly rich and laden with cultural significance and baggage, especially in Western canon. As such, it presented a challenge in articulating my vision of the card and its meaning.

Christianity is hard to avoid in a card like this, and this time I did not wish to because, as an idea, the Christian Devil is incredibly ripe for interpretation. My Devil is inspired by Lilith, Eve, and the concept of the demonized feminine. I also thought of Lucifer himself, and I wanted to honor him and the complicated concept of rebellion, self-determination, choice, and necessary darkness that he embodies. The art of Hieronymus Bosch was a big inspiration for the final design of the figure itself, and the tongue

of the beast between his legs a playful alternative for the genitalia that I wanted visible in the card.

To me, the Devil is a contradiction. It is a card of sexual freedom, but also of being beholden to our lusts. It is a card of treachery and entrapment, and of independence and liberation. Its meaning is difficult to parse out on its own, without the supporting evidence of surrounding cards and circumstances. But I think balance is one of the lessons it teaches. Self-determination is another. And I tried to convey both these concepts with the bound lovers who kneel at the Devil's altar. They are no longer handfasted with red ribbons, but are knotted up in crimson ropes. The Lover on the left is bound fiercely, her position precarious and entirely at the mercy of the leash the Devil holds. The lover on the right, however, has his feet unbound and can break free whenever he so chooses. In fact, he is already endeavoring to do so. The Devil himself does not look upon them, but looks out above them, haughty, yet benevolent. He is cruel and mocking, but ready to teach a lesson that will be burned into the flesh.



• XVI •

THE TOWER

The Tower is the card of ill fortune, material loss, and dismantling the ego. I wanted it to reference the Wheel of Fortune, and so once again all four elements are present. Waves slam against the rocky earth from which the Tower rises; fire blazes from the lightning-struck turret; and winds sweep away the crumbling edifice. Blue has been an accent color for a lot of the more peaceful cards and therefore an odd choice for such a tempestuous image, but I chose it for the Tower as a reminder that there is always a calm that comes after the storm.

The figure was originally conceived of as Icarus, a fitting symbol of hubris brought low. But Icarus was also a dreamer, a prisoner seeking escape. It feels cruel to



mock him for flying too close to the sun, when we know that what he flies from is the darkness of the labyrinth. The figure can also be seen as Lucifer in the midst of his fall, a proud angel defying God, and brought low by challenging the established authority. With both those figures we tend to feel kinship and sympathy despite what they are meant to represent in the dominant cultural narrative.

In my original sketch, the Tower was still intact, and my husband rightfully pointed out that it should not be able to withstand the calamity of violent weather that assaults it. The Tower must be broken down for its mettle to be tested, and for it to be rebuilt again stronger. Without calamity, we can't know happiness, and without surviving catastrophe, we would never know our own strength and endurance. What does not kill us makes us stronger.



• XVII •

THE STAR

This card brings peace after the storm. The Star is a card of healing, calm, and patience, of taking one's time to recover and of being open to the changes that the aftermath of a storm brings, physically or emotionally. It is not an active card, but rather one of reflection. The waters that so passionately beat against the Tower are now still. The figure sits pensively gazing into the calm pool beneath the stars.

Traditionally, the maiden pours water into the pool, but I drew her with her fingers interlocked. The work is done. She need not do anything more than to simply sit and exist, to observe and reflect upon her situation, to make sense of what has passed and what is yet to come.



The Star hearkens back to the High Priestess and Temperance and interweaves a lot of their symbolism and meaning—wisdom, balance, and retreat from worldliness. But there is a primal innocence and simplicity to the Star in particular. She is naked, her defenses stripped away. She is peaceful and content in her reflective solitude. The pool where she sits is a place out of time. Rather than a physical environment, I wanted it to feel more like taking a mental and emotional retreat inside of oneself to meditate and start anew.



• XVIII •

THE MOON

The Moon is another one of my birth cards, and one I feel very connected to. In the Smith-Waite deck, and in many others, the Moon tends to be one of the most visually intricate illustrations—there are dogs and wolves and lobsters, towers and landscapes and things raining from the sky with the big crescent or full moon looming over it all. I love it. It can certainly be helpful to many different readers to interpret that many different symbols, but at the end of the day, I find them more distracting than helpful. In my design, I sought to distill the meaning of the Moon while still upholding its subtleties. I wanted to visually break it down to its fundamentals while leaving enough room for interpretation.



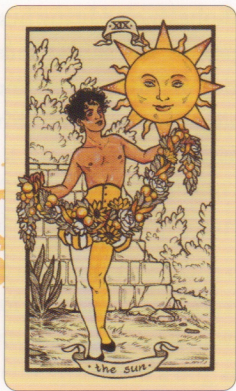
To me, the Moon is similar to the High Priestess and the Hermit as a card of retreat and introspection. But it lacks the formality of the High Priestess and the self-imposed discipline of the Hermit. The Moon is far more primal. It is a card of running wild with the best and the worst of ourselves. There is a darkness to it that makes us acknowledge and sit with our own darkness.

In this card two trees stand in place of the customary two towers. Instead of man-made structures, the Moon pours its light out onto a craggy forest in which we can get lost if we are not careful. Instead of a dog and a wolf, the werewolf from Strength reappears, embodying both the wild and domesticated aspects of our nature. An owl looks down upon him, a symbol of wisdom, predation, dreams and nightmares. I was thinking of Goya's "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters" when I decided to include it in place of the customary lobster. (That piece of art appears again in my Nine of Swords card.)

The Moon and the wolf are in communion. Her light is cold, but it is not unkind. The night is as necessary to achieving personal balance as the day. Under its cover we can see our innermost selves reflected in the Moon and come face to face with our own wildness. The Moon shows us our shadow self. She warns us against losing ourselves in the lunacy of our baser impulses and desires. She teaches us that it will not do to repress them, ignore them or turn a blind eye to them—doing

that will breed dishonesty and bring hurt to ourselves and to the people around us. So, we must confront the shadow self, practice self-awareness, and reconcile the inner animal with the person we must be in order to function and flourish in society.





• XIX •

THE SUN

Traditionally, I have seen the Sun represented in one of two ways: a happy dancing couple beneath the sun's rays, or a baby or young child riding out of a garden on horseback. The card's basic meaning is that of joy, obstacles overcome, freedom and bounty. It comes towards the end of the Major Arcana and right after the Moon, suggesting fruitful and radiant completion of another cycle.

I could not decide which direction I wanted to go in at first—the couple or the child—and my mother-in-law asked me what spoke to me most strongly when I drew the Sun for myself. I told her freedom. I liked the dancing couple, but what spoke to me more deeply was rid-

ing, or walking, out of the garden gate as the child does. Leaving behind an experience, good or bad, and coming out of it enriched and without losing one's joy. In my depiction, there is no horse; the youth walks out of an idyllic but overgrown garden, past a broken old gate onto an open lawn. In his hands, he holds the riches he has gathered on his journey—sunflowers and fruit—all woven together by one golden ribbon into an abundant arrangement. It will nourish his mind and body as he carries them on his continuing path.

The baby frequently seen on the Sun card is meant to symbolize innocence and the wisdom of children. While I like the innocent joy of the symbol, I do not agree with the wisdom. Let's be honest, babies don't know much beyond their immediate needs—while their judgement is unclouded, it is by definition nearsighted and undeveloped. However, children and young adults can be capable of shocking sagacity and insight. So I opted for a youth, not yet a man, no longer a babe. A cycle and a journey himself, passing through time and life's experiences and evolving as he goes.



• XX •

JUDGEMENT

This card developed a little differently from the rest. Before I drew the cards at their full size, I would sketch out the composition in a small thumbnail drawing with a bunch of notes. So, for Judgement, I had sketched out a relatively traditional Smith-Waite inspired design, complete with three figures popping out of their graves, tombstones and all, with parting clouds and beribboned trumpets crossed above them. It was a good design, very classical and attractive, and I was content enough with it. But when I went to bed that night, it just didn't feel right. The next morning, as I was cutting my paper down to size, I opened my sketchbook and drew a completely different thumbnail, which resulted in the card you see.



Simpler and somewhat different from the traditional Smith-Waite inspired cards, and, in the end, far closer to my reading of the card.

If Justice is the card of our accountability to society, Judgement is the card of our accountability to ourselves. It is intuitive and it looks within rather than without. It puts a mirror up to our nature, impassively, and lets us stand up to our own scrutiny and criticism. Our job then is to be honest with ourselves and be confident in having done our best to be able to withstand that self-evaluation. I did not want to include an explicitly angelic figure, because it implies the presence of a god. Our greatest judge should be ourselves, not some vague outside lofty power.

But I did include a figure that can be interpreted in many different ways. I was thinking of Charon, Hades's ferryman who gathers souls and carries them across to the underworld, holding a staff that could in fact be his oar. He is impartial and eternal, he cannot be bribed or cajoled, and he will always be there to do his job. But the figure can also be an angel to those who wish. They can be god, or death, or a personification of Judgement itself—all of that is up to the individual reader, and the figure's affiliation is left intentionally vague. The people around appear in distress, because self-criticism is difficult and frequently painful, but I chose light colors for the card as a sign of hope and newness.





• XXI •

THE WORLD

One of the most auspicious in the deck, the World is a card of achievement, abundance, creative fulfillment and joyful mystery. The World's dancer frolics with one foot planted in the material world and the other lifted freely. Instead of two wands, she holds a palm frond of peace and progress, and a torch to symbolize passion, creation and personal drive.

The four elements are all present, though more subtly than they were in the Wheel of Fortune. From earth and water spring the fruit, vegetables, grains and flowers of the cornucopia wreath. Fire blazes in the upheld torch, and the World's dancer is upheld in the air, her hair

blowing in the wind. The World completes the circle and puts our inner self in harmony with our intentions and their effect upon the outer world. She symbolizes that soul-deep satisfaction that comes with accomplishing our biggest goals and seeing our work bear fruit. The World is a card of closure.

It is difficult to find negativity in the card itself. But when we are struggling, the World may show up as the goal we are striving for but can't quite reach. The cards surrounding it can point to what is holding us back from reaching the harmonious resolution. In those times, the World can function as a beacon reminding us that the struggle is worthwhile, and that the rewards can be all the sweeter when we work hard and don't give up.



The Minor Arcana



Someone warned me once that as I work on the cards their meanings would enter and influence my life. They bid me to be careful and not let them overtake it. Tarot is a tool. I firmly believe that the cards do not put out anything that we do not put into them to begin with. So the comment did not worry me as a warning should. But I kept it in mind as I began work on the Minor Arcana, and over time, I noticed that the things happening in my life and the emotional journey I was going through was reflected in the suits as I went through them. Not because the cards were exhorting an influence over my life, but because I was in a receptive place to absorb their lessons. Magic, confirmation bias and apophenia walk hand in hand.

Work on the Wands started slowly as I transitioned from the heavy hitters of the Major Arcana. But cracking into the Minors after all that time finally cemented my commitment to see this project through. The Wands would not wait, and their energy was electrifying. They were like a firmly placed stake—a milestone on the journey of creating this body of work—and they kept me putting one foot in front of the other.

Cups found their way deep into my heart and cracked it open from a long self-preservational deep freeze. I started work on them during the spring of 2018, at a time of some deep soul searching and emotional recovery. I remember driving in upstate New York and staring

out the window, watching all this water come down the rocks that make up so much of the landscape there. It was as if the boulders themselves were weeping snow-melt. I took that with me into the art I made for the suit.

The Swords were my favorite suit to work on. I finished them very quickly as I had clear concepts for most of the cards from the start, and thumbnail to final art was a relatively easy transition for each design. I think there was only one card (the Four of Swords) that radically changed from sketch to final card, but even then, it stayed true to the heart of what I was trying to communicate. This was the suit I finished quickest—about a month for all fourteen cards. And I hope that the resulting art is as clear and incisive as the blade needs to be.

Like the harvest bringing the wheel of the year to an end, the Coins delivered me and the tarot project home. They were the final suit, the last ripe fruit upon the vine. Appropriately enough, I worked on them during the fall, finishing the painting of the Court cards in the last week of November. The fourth suit finished in the fourth year of the creation of this deck, the golden apple in the cornucopia.

The Minor Arcana of my deck are designed on the Smith-Waite model. The suits are Wands, Cups, Swords and Coins. Each suit contains an Ace, ten numbered cards and four Courts: a Page, a Knight, a Queen and a King. Like Pamela Colman Smith, I did not simply draw the

number of pips, but illustrated each individual card with a representational image that conveys its meaning. For the most part, I followed the canon of imagery developed by Smith, with some personal updates and deviations.

Some readers treat the Ace of a Minor Arcana suit as the beginning, a 1, while others regard it as the completion of the suit that follows the Court cards. Personally, I don't think it matters one way or the other. Depending on the reading, an Ace can be either the start of something, or its culmination, and each suit can be seen as a cycle of events without a defined beginning or end. However, I began my work on the Minor Arcana in a kind of numerical order, with Aces at the start.

While the Major Arcana is rich with many different colors, the suits each have a color assigned to them; green for the Wands; blue for the Cups; red for the Swords; and golden-bronze for the Coins.



Wands





ACE OF WANDS

With fire—a symbol of passion, creativity and action—being the element of the Wands suit, I depicted the club roaring up in flames. A little salamander, another nod to the fire element, crawls along the branch. Green leaves are opening up, springing forth from the wand despite the fact that it is cut down.

The Ace of Wands, to me, is one of the most positive cards. It represents optimism, confidence, hope and momentum. It takes action to see through whatever endeavor we embark upon, but the Ace gives us that drive and encouragement. And so I wanted the design to almost resemble the torch of victory being passed to the reader to carry them forward to success. The Ace of Wands stokes the fires of creativity, it pushes us to act on our ideas, it manifests our intentions.



TWO OF WANDS

If we are to continue with the notion that the Ace of Wands is the beginning, an auspicious symbol for the momentum to take action, then the Two of Wands is its natural follow through.

The figure in the card may be a merchant, an explorer, or a creative person of some kind. He is laying the groundwork and harnessing inspiration given by the Ace to lay his plans. He is not charging blindly, but approaching his future thoughtfully and with care. He reminds us that while inspiration and the drive to pursue our goals may be telling us to act right now, it is good to also take care and have a plan rather than set out blindly. We must invest thought and work in success rather than simply hope for it. Thus, the Two of Wands is a card of new endeavors, of discovery and decision-making, of creative pursuit and hope for the future.



THREE OF WANDS

The Two was the planning card; the Three is the card of implementation. The plans have been set in motion and the figure—a stand in for the querent—is watching their efforts go forth in the physical manifestation of ships at sea. Success is not promised, but the lesson of the Three of Wands is “nothing ventured, nothing gained.” I see it as a card of potential and of promise; of new creative, personal or financial endeavors—a card of hope and the excitement one feels when one finally acts.



FOUR OF WANDS

The influence in this particular card is that of joy and celebration. The castle can be interpreted as a restrictive, oppressive structure, which the dancing couple in the foreground are happy to leave behind for some fresh air and sunlight. Or it could evoke refuge and domesticity, and the women are simply enjoying the land surrounding it with their home in the background. The idea of domestic plenty and of the potential fruitfulness of the querent's endeavors is echoed in the garland of fruit and flowers that hangs above the dancers.

The Wands themselves, with their leafing branches and streaming ribbons, are meant to evoke Beltane and the Maypole—a celebration of joy, the coming of spring (even if a metaphorical one, a time of renewal in the querent's life) and emotional and spiritual awakening.



FIVE OF WANDS

I always think of this card as one of playful competition. Of course, the tonal interpretations of it can vary, but the struggle depicted between the five people never struck me as harmfully aggressive. A little competition is healthy. It's good to fight for what we want. There is something of the Rite of Spring in how I see these characters—bare, free and excited in their play fighting. Wild, unfettered and joyous.

Reversed, the card can show us this hunger for action and physical play turn nasty and violent. The combatants turn on each other in earnest, abusing the potent fire energy of the Wands. We must take care not to lose sight of consideration for our opponents when they are deserving of it, and not to let the excitement and thrill of the fight turn to bitterness and hostility.



SIX OF WANDS

This is a card of victory and optimism. In its upright meaning, I like to think of the Six of Wands as a journey to success that is just within reach, or, in its most positive aspect, a celebration of a recent victory. It reminds me of the Chariot, but being a Minor Arcana card, I think of it more as a representation of our small, daily successes. It's important to note that the knight's journey is not yet done. But it's an optimistic one, a battle won in a war.

Reversed, the card can be read as false optimism. Of celebrating accomplishments prematurely, counting our chickens before they hatch. But it's important to remember that while blind optimism may not win the day, and may in fact be detrimental to the outcome, believing in ourselves during a hard fight or a difficult journey is half the battle and can set us on the path to victory.



SEVEN OF WANDS

Less the playful sparring of the Five, and more of actual combat. A solitary viking warrior holds his own atop a hill against an onslaught of unseen forces. They could be human attackers, or he could be waging battle against more nebulous foes—inner demons, personal struggles, insecurities or an ongoing turn of bad luck. None of them are less real for being different, nor any less formidable or worthy of his attention. But the thing to remember is that he has the upper ground, and if only he maintains it together with his resolve, he will overcome.



EIGHT OF WANDS

One of my favorite cards! For meaning, certainly, but also just visually—almost every deck I've ever seen has such a beautiful Eight of Wands. There is something so hopeful and reassuring in this card. It's rife with the Wands energy of action and pursuit. Whenever I pull it, I get the feeling of hard work and the chase paying off.

In many Eight of Wands designs, the Wands are pointing down, as if they are about to land. To me, the ascension feels more important. The Wands have launched, but they are still seeking that pinnacle, the cresting point. It is a message to keep going, further reinforced by the Latin proverb emblazoned across the banner wrapped around one of the spears—"Fortune favors



the bold.” A lot of interpretations of the Eight of Wands favor the idea of things coming to an end (usually a satisfactory one), but I think the journey is important, and how the journey fairs can decide the outcome.



NINE OF WANDS

A card that's seen some shit! I am always moved by the bandaged warrior on the Nine of Wands. Whether resolute, tired, wary or peaceful, his expression and posture always belie the trials he has undergone. But I get the sense that, no matter what he went through and no matter what he lost in the process, he fought hard and he won. He is still here. And through surviving, he's gained something. If nothing else, he's attained dearly bought experience and the knowledge that he can make it through hardships and rise against overwhelming odds.

Whatever doesn't kill us makes us stronger, right? Or, as the joke goes, whatever doesn't kill us gives us strange coping mechanisms and makes us weird at parties. But

weird isn't bad, and hey, at least we're coping. The point of this card is that we can all handle a lot more than we give ourselves credit for.

And so the warrior stands leaning heavily upon his staff, his shield down now that he no longer needs it to defend himself. He is injured and one limb short, but he is just as strong as before. There is power in vulnerability, and once he has given himself time to heal, he will be stronger yet. Four staves protect him like a wall at his back. Four more point outwards, ready to stop any more oncoming foes. It's a balance of offense and defense. The card calls for courage and resilience. It also warns against paranoia and prejudice. When we've been attacked and hurt, it may become easy to expect ill turns and enemies on every corner even when there are none. The Nine of Wands reminds us to keep a clear head, learn from our experiences, and pick our battles.



TEN OF WANDS

When the Ten of Wands pops up for me, it tends to signal that I am somehow overburdened. Since Wands are a suit of action, creative doing and manifestation, I usually read the burdens as physical ones. Too many projects, commitments and obligations vying for my time and energy when there are only so many hours in the day.

To reflect this aspect of the card, I wanted to represent a journeyman, a person either traveling to hone a craft or complete a project, carrying the weight of all they wish to accomplish as they walk their path. The load may be heavy now, but the end of the journey, and with it the end of a creative cycle, is at hand. A town is on the horizon, heralding the completion of a mission. I also liked the idea of the wands looking like kindling. Wands are

a suit associated with fire, and though the staves may be a hard and tiring load to bear, they feed a creative flame that warms the hearth and stokes inspiration and continued progress.

There is an emotional aspect to the card too. The Ten of Wands can represent the emotional labor we do for other people, and the toll it can take when we have no energy left for ourselves. We owe it to our loved ones to take care of them—to be their safe refuge, to help them with the loads they bear—but we must be careful to balance those efforts with caring for ourselves, too. A journey can be emotionally taxing whether we are traveling alone or with companions. The Ten of Wands is a reminder not to get so bogged down that we can't go on—especially when we are so close to the finish line.



PAGE OF WANDS

I always think of pages as students or apprentices in whatever it is that the suit represents. And so my concept for them, when I started planning for the Minor Arcana court cards, was to have each page be an apprentice in a trade that could be represented conceptually by the suit.

The Page of Wands is a journeyman bard. The Wands are an active, practically creative suit. They represent an endeavor on the move, or a message reaching the reader, and a bard embodies all those things. He is youthful, full of inspiration, a traveling messenger with his wand staff at his back aiding him on his journey. Creativity and potential sprout in the form of foliage from the staff at his back, and he weaves that energy into song upon

his instrument. He is learning still, and his journey may bring him failures and successes, but that is the path of an apprentice. You have to suck at something before you can get good at it, and you can't let yourself be discouraged by fear of failure from making progress.



KNIGHT OF WANDS

The Knight of Wands is one of the most active across the Minor Arcana. She is an adventurer who harnesses the full energetic and impulsive potential of the suit. She is a doer in pursuit of her goal, a go-getter mounting obstacles and striving ahead. Her staff blossoms with greenery—a recurring visual in my depiction of the suit—hinting at success in her journey, the blooming of the potential she embodies.

She can be a herald of exciting change and an encouraging card to see in a spread when you are setting out on a new endeavor. But she can also serve as a warning not to be careless and scattered in how we go about our adventure. I wanted the bedroll and the saddlebag on her horse to remind the reader to prepare for what lies ahead

rather than charge blindly on faith alone. Her strong grip on the reins warns against too much haste and passion, lest she lose control of her wild-eyed stallion.



QUEEN OF WANDS

Imperious, energetic, exuberant and charismatic, the Queen of Wands is a natural-born leader and an attractive personality that draws others like moths to a flame. In the Colman Smith illustration she is represented seated upon her throne, but I wanted to stress her drive and purpose, and so she is standing, gazing up and outward and holding her staff. The leaves that normally sprout from the wands I've drawn throughout the suit are woven around her crown into a wreath to represent her great mental agility and creative force.

Just like the flame she represents, the Queen of Wands can warm others by her fire, or she can burn them. Hers is a very dominant energy, which can make for great leadership, but also for too much aggression in the pursuit of

her goals. The Queen of Wands is the sort of person who knows what she wants and how to get it. Her passions can burn bright and quick, and then temper to a steady glow of embers. She is a reminder to conduct ourselves with care, and to pay attention to the needs and passions of those around us.

She is also a figure associated with occultism and magic and is frequently represented with a cat. I liked the idea of adding a cat to my version too, as a playful reference to the Fool.



KING OF WANDS

To me, he is the most energetic and active of the kings. He is not a man to rest on his laurels and rule from the comfort of the throne, rather he is an active participant in his domain's affairs, an entrepreneur and a dynamic leader. In the Minor Arcana suits, the Court cards are particularly given to representing a specific individual—either the querent themselves or somebody exerting influence on their lives at the time of the reading. The king is no exception. He represents the driving energies of the Wands suit from a particularly authoritative perspective. He can symbolize accomplishment and a certain kind of leveling up within the querent, or the influence of a reliable, knowledgeable—or even commanding—person who embodies the spirited energies of the king.

I wanted to represent the king as someone who hasn't led the sheltered life you'd expect from a courtier. Rather, he is someone whose experience is hard won and who does not shy away from struggles or obstacles, ever keeping his intentions and goals in mind as he strives towards them. Hence, the prosthetic limb harkens back to the Nine of Wands and the warrior who has sacrificed something in order to achieve his vision.

The king is a card of determination, clarity of vision, and the pragmatic acknowledgement that if you want things in life you must work hard to get them. The journey is worth the prize. In his most negative aspects, the King of Wands can be dogmatic, unyielding and impulsive. His expectations may be too high, and he can have a tendency to punish himself and others for not meeting them. It is important to remember that even kings need help in achieving their goals, and it takes true strength of leadership to acknowledge that need and to ask for, and accept help when it is needed.



Cups





ACE OF CUPS

The Ace of Cups overflows with emotion, empathy, creativity and intuition. The waters from which the hand emerges are calm and nurturing to the water lilies that crowd the surface. Some of the flowers have yet to open up, while others are in full bloom. The waters in the chalice are flowing out of it in an intricate, frothing fountain. Like the other Aces, this card represents the highest potential of the suit. The Ace of Cups is a card of creative and emotional fulfillment, of intuitive understanding, of our heart guiding our actions, for better or for worse.

The Ace of Cups is also a loving card. In its most positive aspects, it encourages us to let our guard down, to be vulnerable, to feel our feelings and to feel them



deeply. It advises us to let the waters flow out, to offer ourselves to others and to the world emotionally, spiritually and creatively.

The Ace of Cups reversed, of course, reminds us that perhaps we have poured too much of ourselves out. Like a freely bleeding wound, the reversed Ace shows us at our most emotionally volatile and exposed, and advises us to look for calmer waters. It shows us where we are bleeding, and advises us not to hide our hurt from others, but to seek their help and support instead of bottling up all our feelings until the dam breaks.





TWO OF CUPS

The card shows a strong union supported by a steady emotional foundation. If the Majors are the heavy hitters, the representations of big ideas and overarching influences and situations that rule our lives and experience, then the Minors are those concepts showing up in smaller ways in our day-to-day lives. So, I like to think of the Two of Cups as the Lovers of the Minor Arcana. It's a card of partnership and attraction, whether that be romantic, emotional or perhaps even in business. The couple is toasting in reciprocity and clasp hands to signify two becoming one.

Traditionally, balance, partnership and communication are also symbolized by the caduceus, but I decided to replace it with a tree to represent the Tree of Life. If all



goes well, it will bear fruit and provide shelter, representing the positive outcomes of this union.

If neglected, fruit will wither on the vine. Reversed, the Two of Cups can indicate stagnation or the breakup of a partnership. Struggles in interpersonal relationships can arise from mistrust, miscommunication, or from a lack of self-love. The Two of Cups encourages us to look within and pay attention to the energy and the feelings we bring to a partnership, and to evaluate the social exchange we are participating in. If things are not going well, we must allow ourselves to open up and be vulnerable with the other person, to hear them and let ourselves be heard.





THREE OF CUPS

The Three of Cups is a card of community and celebration, of joint efforts bearing fruit, and of the joy of leisure after hard work. It represents a group of people coming together in harmony to aid each other in the pursuit of a common goal, and of reaping the successes of that work. It's a reminder that we must celebrate our victories, too. To take time to appreciate the hard work we've done and to rest on our laurels a bit when we've earned them, and not to simply skip on to the next task.

Reversed, the Three of Cups has a number of different meanings. Cups are a creative suit, so a reversed Three may mean repressed creativity. Cups are also bearers of our emotion so, along with stunted creativity, we may feel repressed or lacking in inspiration. Perhaps peer

pressure or group mentality is affecting our personal expression. The reversed Three of Cups may suggest overcrowding, too—perhaps there is a squeaky third wheel interfering in some personal relationships. The key, as with so many things in life, is in restoring balance.





FOUR OF CUPS

The Four of Cups is one of those tricky cards that's very open to interpretation in its imagery. It can be a card of meditation and necessary evaluation. When difficult situations present themselves in our lives, or when the world around us—our circumstances, our social circles, our obligations—becomes overwhelming and intrusive, we must retreat and mull things over before getting back into the fray. Sometimes those three cups are too much to balance as it is, and we simply aren't ready for the offering of a fourth.

But it can just as easily represent us at our most aloof and closed off. For me, it tends to pop up when I'm so lost in my own overthinking and introspection that I'm missing something obvious right in front of my nose.

Like a turtle in my shell, I'm so wrapped up in myself that I'm running circles. Meanwhile, the answer to my thoughts, questions or hopes is right there.

We must be careful not to become so self-absorbed that we become detached and defensive. There is a safety in putting up walls, especially when we feel vulnerable, dissatisfied, bored or overwhelmed. But we must be careful not to shut the doors so tightly against the world that we shut out the solutions to our troubles, or the world's gifts and opportunities that will enrich our lives and experiences.





FIVE OF CUPS

This is the card of loss, regret and mourning. Loss can come in many shapes and sizes, but there are some aspects of it that are universal and I think the sense of isolation is one of them. No matter how many people we have around us, no matter how much they want and try to help, no matter how much they can empathize, each loss is unique and only the person experiencing it knows how it truly feels. Whether by choice or circumstance, we stand alone in our grief, and that isolating solitude is the most frightening part of it.

Mourning cloaks the figure in a shroud through which they are difficult to see and harder to reach. The person swaddles themselves, tender and vulnerable and nursing themselves and the feeling of loss they are going

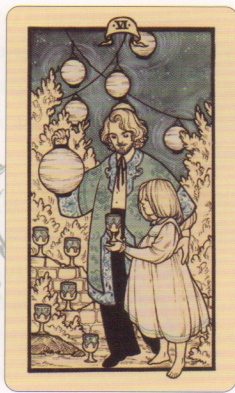


through. Water runs in the shape of a river, unchecked and unconfined by the vessels, like our emotions that bleed freely during a time of loss and pain. Three of the cups are spilled, their contents soaking into the earth at the foot of the cloaked mourner.

Grief is not something that ever truly goes away or heals, as we are so often told. Big losses are not something we “get over.” “Time heals all wounds” is a lovely adage on the surface, but it isn’t always true. However, comfort lies in the fact that our lives grow around our pains. In the immediate aftermath of loss, everything in our life has to do with it. But as time goes on, our world gets bigger, and though the pain is still there, we have more to focus on, more to keep us from despairing. New skin grows over the wound.

And so, two full cups wait in reserve beside the figure. A world and a home wait for them across the river for when the mourner finds the strength and the motivation to cross it.





SIX OF CUPS

This may be the most personally intimate card I have made for the deck, and it's a little funny that of course it is the Suit of Cups that has brought up such emotional introspection in me. Most of the cards have some kind of personal hook, something that I relate to in their meaning. It's a narrow, focused lens that helps me see the whole of the card and interpret it as I wish. And I'll be entirely honest, some cards I feel a lot more deeply than others, and some I understand a lot better, while others I'm still learning about even after having painted my own version.

But the Six of Cups had me stuck. None of the representations I saw really spoke to me. I knew more or less what the card was meant to represent—childhood

memories, nostalgia, dwelling on the past, innocence, naïveté—but I had a difficult time connecting with it. In that, I think, I discovered my own personal block. Like so many people, but especially queer and trans people, I have a complicated relationship with my childhood. Being an immigrant is another factor. I came to the U.S. when I was thirteen and my childhood was quite literally left behind with all the physical attributes of it that couldn't fit into the two suitcases I was allowed to take on the plane.

I have a tendency to overthink things in my life, but when it comes to the past, I tend not to dwell and to move on as a kind of safeguarding mechanism. I don't block things out and I do not repress—they're there, and I try to see them for what they are. But I've always prided myself on being able to just set things down and leave them there while I kept going forward, because I thought this was a sign of strength and maturity. Sometimes it's served me well, other times not so much.

Right around the time that I was trying to parse all this out and come up with some kind of idea for the card, one of my favorite witches and tarot readers, Angeliska Polachek, wrote a beautifully insightful series of posts first on Instagram (footnote 1) and then on her own blog (footnote 2) about the practice of finding and caring for your inner child. Her writing touched me on a profound level, and I went digging through my memory

box, which still houses the very few things I saved from when I was a child in Russia. I found an old blue plastic toy donkey that waddles across any smooth surface when you pull on his string very gently, my old homework book from 5th grade, and some old family photos. In one of them, nine-year-old me is standing outside on a sunny late summer morning in my orange flannel nightgown, hair ruffled with sleep, cradling a butterfly in my hands. I'm staring at it in open-mouthed rapt wonder. I remember that morning very clearly. I was staying with a friend of my mom's in her country house in the Ukraine (my mom was divorced and working all the time, so I got passed around quite a bit between friends and grandparents). There was a big pile of fruit and vegetables we just picked from the garden, and a butterfly landed in my hands. I look like a happy kid, all things considered, and I was.

This memory was ultimately the inspiration for this card. The practice of finding that child you were and being nice to them when it's hard to be nice to yourself—because they're young, they don't know any better and they need you. John Singer Sargent's "Carnation Lily, Lily Rose" is one of my favorite paintings, and this image of tender reflection on childhood and its purely magical moments was another inspiration. In the end, I am really happy with the resulting card. It speaks of childhood, nostalgia, reunions (whether they be bitter or sweet or maybe both), naïveté and innocence, of

looking back in order to move on. The garden that serves as the backdrop for the Six of Cups is similar to the one I drew for the Sun—also a card representing a child. There are some parallels between that Major Arcana and this Minor card, and I like that one represents the world in sunlight, while this one basks in the intimacy of twilight.

(Footnote 1: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BiuSCJPB-S7l/?taken-by=sisterteremperancetarot>)

(Footnote 2: <http://angeliska.com/2018/05/12/on-self-mothering/>)





SEVEN OF CUPS

The Seven of Cups is another one of those cards that has eluded me in its precise meaning and always made me pull my books out when I got it in a reading. It's a very versatile card, and while it can absolutely give the reader guidance on its own, I find that it makes the most sense to me in the context of a spread. I think it's because this card is about choices and options, all of them literally represented in the cups that float above the figure. So, it is the cards around the Seven—or the circumstances present in our life at the time of the reading—that help narrow down those options.

The Seven of Cups is a card that can help identify the push and pull of our different, maybe even conflicting, desires. It can also guide us towards what we really want.

Frequently, I will tell the querents I'm reading for that they have many options before them, but if they really think about it and listen to themselves, they'll know what the right choice, the right answer, is.

I changed the symbolism of the objects in the cups a little from the ones in the Smith-Waite illustration. Their interpretation is entirely up to the reader. But my thoughts on their meaning are as follows:

Pomegranates: growth, renewal, fruition, rebirth, transformation, desire, carnal drive

Skull: rebirth, change, vanity, transition

Books and scrolls: knowledge, new skills, exploration of talents, education, learning

Castle: home, hearth, comfort, aspiration, social improvement, security

Moon and stars: dreams, fantasy, imagination, inspiration

Mask: the self, different aspects of our persona, public and private faces, vanity, truth, self-expression

Crown: power, popularity, social circle



EIGHT OF CUPS

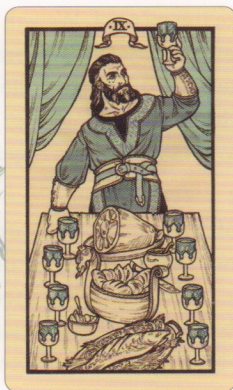
I have a streak of liking the “saddest” cards in the deck and being inordinately pleased with how they turn out. Once upon a trip to the Ren Faire, a fairy giving out sample candle wax massages took my hand and noticed, with some distress, the Three of Swords tattoo on my arm. The fact that the card was in its reversed position gave her some comfort, but I still couldn’t help laughing at myself for being that dark, broody guy.

I’m just kidding. By definition there are no sad cards in the deck. Yes, there are cards that point to hard times, painful situations, difficult transitions—but that’s life. And it isn’t that bad things don’t happen in life, or that it’s always about a lesson. Sometimes awful things happen for no reason at all and give us nothing but pain. But even that, in and of itself, is an experience that we, as humans,

will by nature make the most of. We will learn, we will grow, we will expand from the bad in our life sometimes even more than the good. Human resilience is an evolutionary tactic that has kept us surviving, and sometimes even thriving, for centuries with a vengeance.

The Eight of Cups is a card of change, of seeking and exploration, and of escapism in its more positive aspects, and of loneliness and aimless drifting in reverse. The traditional Smith depiction has the seeker leaving the cups behind them, a symbol of having to abandon all the person has learned in order to seek new meaning and fresh beginnings.

I don’t think personal progress works that way. There is no truly blank slate, and no matter how fresh a start we want to have, we never truly abandon everything we’ve ever learned or the habits we’ve built up. We carry them with us, for better or worse—the hard work is making it for the better. And so the cups are stacked across the treacherous terrain through which the seeker travels, among turbulent waters and steep rocks. They represent the foundations of their knowledge, talent, of their life, and the new lessons and gifts waiting to be discovered on their journey. I wanted the card to remind the reader of the Fool in the adventurous spirit with which the traveler takes on this new challenge, of the Hermit in her imposed loneliness or chosen solitude, and of the Moon in the darkness, mystery and uncertainty that surrounds the seeker.



NINE OF CUPS

A feast! This is a card of contentment and fulfillment. The cups represent the emotional state of satisfaction in attaining our goals and desires, while the feast shows its physical rewards. The Nine of Cups is known as the wish card, and I wanted to imbue it with the kind of peaceful joy that comes not from the fulfillment of our wildest desires and dreams, but from realizing, suddenly and quietly, that what we've strived for has come about. That the life we worked so hard to build—the relationships we fostered and the things we've wanted to surround ourselves with—has materialized. This is not about instant gratification but long sought-after security and well-being. Take care that you aren't the only one at your table, though. Lay it for your guests and share. A bounty is wasted on one.



TEN OF CUPS

This was one of the earliest cards I conceptualized when I was first starting the deck. The Smith-Waite deck is a product of its time, and all romantic relationships within it are depicted as heterosexual. Many writers of tarot books will remind us that of course the cards are not meant to be interpreted by the binary—a man can pull the High Priestess card and channel that energy in his life in that moment—but, at the end of the day, the visuals we see and take in matter. The visual is a shorthand, and while in my mind I can interpret the cards as freely as I wish, I also wanted to push the limits of how I visually represented the meanings of the cards.

Though each tarot card has so many meanings woven into it, each of which changes with every reader's inter-

pretation and the context in which the card is pulled, I always tend to think of one strong word association. "Family" is the one I think of every time I look at the Ten of Cups. There is more than one family card in the deck, but this one brings to mind very strong associations of familial love, harmony and stability for me.

The focus is specifically on the emotional life of a family unit. There can be as many family configurations in the world as there are people that make them up, and each person brings a different energy to the whole. Many of us are shaped by the generational struggles, the differences of personality, and the exchanges we have with our family members. Often, these relationships both nurture us and damage us as people. If Cups represent our feelings and the status of our mental health and emotional landscape, then the Ten of Cups shows us the tranquility and joy that can be cultivated through the pursuit of healthy, supportive, respectful and caring familial bonds. Reversed, it may show us that this is what is missing from our lives and it encourages us to seek it elsewhere if we cannot get it from our biological relations. Family is what you make it.



PAGE OF CUPS

This is a card of new creative opportunity, fresh inspiration, curiosity and possibility. I've mentioned it before with the Page of Wands, but all the pages strike me as the cards of apprenticeship. They take the lessons of the numerical cards of the Minor Arcana that preceded them and manifest their potential into growth in the areas of life that each suit represents. In the case of the Cups, it's emotion and creativity.

The fish reminds me of the Russian fairytale of the Golden Fish, leaping from the cup to commune with the human being and grant their wishes. The people asking for the wishes abuse the Golden Fish's goodwill, and one day the Fish runs out of patience and takes her magic away, leaving the humans exactly where they started.

Attaining our goals is not as simple as having a wish granted; it requires emotional growth, hard work and responsibility on our part. When opportunities present themselves, whether through our efforts on cultivating them or entirely out of the blue, it is still up to us to act upon them, to harness our inspiration, to follow our intuition and turn potential into reality. And so the page is already armed with tools for fulfilling her creative promise. It is up to her to use them.



KNIGHT OF CUPS

The Knight of Cups to me is the platonic ideal of a knight—not just a warrior and an adventurer, but a tender and sensitive protector. He is chivalrous in the historical meaning of the word—not just opening doors for m'ladies but using his power and privilege to elevate the vulnerable. Usually, all the knights in the Minor Arcana are depicted atop their horses, but I wanted my knight of Cups to stand beside his, on equal footing as devoted companions rather than rider and steed. They are both drinking at the stream, the horse wading into it to lead its master into the flow of imagination and creativity that the water represents. The knight takes the time in his journey to rest and appreciate the moment, to dream and to let his mind wander as he refreshes.

He should not linger there too long and risk being caught up in his contemplation and becoming distracted from his quest—the knight is still a card of action. But it is in his nature to dream and be guided by his creative vision.



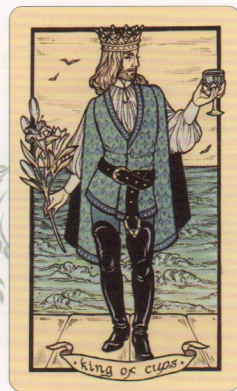
QUEEN OF CUPS

The Queen of Cups, to me, is one of the most emotionally intuitive and sensitive cards. She represents the energy of compassion, creativity, love and care. She reminds me of the Star in her gentle contemplativeness. She is not simply still, she is stable. Rather than being overwhelmed by or brimming over with emotion, she is part of the flow. That's why I wanted to put her in a natural landscape, and one that's reminiscent of my Star card.

The Queen of Cups is like a fairytale queen—ethereal, kind and mysterious. For this card, I drew stylistic inspiration from the Aesthetes, Pre-Raphaelites and Symbolists in how I portrayed her. She also always makes me think of motherhood. Her caring and creative nature is visually expressed in the fact that she is literally

pregnant—with ideas, with deep feeling, with some kind of deeply intimate endeavor. She is in control of this endeavor, but it's a gentle and caring kind of control. She is leading by being a part of it.

Reversed, the queen's emotions run unchecked. She is capricious, unpredictable, volatile. Her emotions bleed like an open wound. And when an injury is this grievous, a simple bandage may not be enough—the Queen of Cups wants us to get to the source of the problem, because only by identifying it can we treat it correctly.



KING OF CUPS

The dreamer, poet, artist king. The King of Cups is the sensitive ruler who leads with his heart, who funds culture and creativity instead of armies and border walls. He is an enlightened ruler, a leader who joins his people on festival days, one who builds magical castles, and elevates artists and craftsmen over generals and businessmen.

He is compassionate, tempered, diplomatic and inspired. He nurtures, just like his queen, and he guides with a gentle hand. Being the king of the suit, he is a mature figure who has mastered his emotions and found his equilibrium. He feels deeply and he listens to his heart, but his feelings do not overwhelm or overpower him. His intellect and his sentiment work hand in hand.

The King of Cups is the antithesis to toxic masculinity to me. He embodies a fatherly, caring gentleness and strength, a kind of steady, unwavering kindness, patience and understanding that comes from accessing one's feelings instead of shutting them off as if they were a sign of weakness. He is strength through emotion, support through empathy.

Reversed, he points to a need for all of those things, to an imbalance and an emotional blockage that needs to be pushed through. Reversed, he can point to a lack of paternal support and a lack of positive masculine energy in one's life—whether in ourselves or in our support systems. In a cruel and emotionally stunted patriarchal culture, the King of Cups encourages us to strive for a kind, sensitive, compassionate masculinity.



Swords





ACE OF SWORDS

Swords are about judgement and intellect, justice, truth, and hard lessons. For a suit concerned with mental clarity and sharp intellect, the Swords are still a highly emotional suit to me. Maybe that's not surprising—there is no separating our feelings from our thoughts at the end of the day. The trick is in learning to navigate the channels between them.

To me, Swords are also a very lonely suit—in the sense that, even in a crowd, each one of us is ultimately alone. This can feel isolating, but I think there is a lot to be learned in being alone and sitting with oneself, and each card in the Suit of Swords carries that lesson for me. There is strength to be had in facing yourself and your own issues and learning and growing from it.



And so, the hand gripping the sword is a powerful one. It is tense, and it holds the weapon upright, ready to strike. The blade is crowned and adorned with a laurel for success and rosemary for protection. The Ace of Swords represents intellectual energy—it may symbolize a personal breakthrough, a new way of looking at things, or fresh understanding. As with other Aces, it is the card of powerful beginnings that encourages the reader to take the first step on a new path. In this case, it represents the path of an intellectual pursuit, the seeking of truth, the pursuit of justice.

It is important to remember that swords are weapons—they can protect, but they can also destroy. So the reader must exercise judgement—of themselves and their own motivations, as well as the motivations of others.





TWO OF SWORDS

This is a card of choices, decision-making, confusion and resolution. Smith's illustration in the Smith-Waite deck shows a seated woman at the edge of still waters. The stillness of the image and the blindfold on the woman's face suggest a passivity that can be brought about by indecision. But even when the swords are stuck, their meanings usually have to do with taking control of the situation. I wanted to bring some of that energy into the Two of Swords in particular, because even when we are confused by outside influences and are stuck between two choices, the ultimate decision still lies in ourselves.

This card is about trusting your gut, and about how, when faced with a difficult decision, we usually already



know what the right choice is. Not everything that's right is easy, so we may cover our eyes and linger in that uncertain space for as long as we can manage, wandering in the dark and avoiding the right path. But we know what we must do, and we must trust ourselves enough to do it. Conversely, sometimes we need to cover our eyes to eliminate distractions and focus our thoughts in order to make the correct choice.

This is another card with Moon symbolism, hearkening back to the difficult deep dives we take into our thoughts and our emotions to grow and go on to the next step of our journey. So, here the woman is not seated and she is not blindfolded. She stands in the light of the moon, and when she is ready to uncover her eyes—better done sooner rather than later—the moonlight will help her find her way through the woods, with the swords to cut down obstacles in her path.





THREE OF SWORDS

This is a card of heartbreak, sorrow, grief and hurt. The Pamela Colman Smith design is so iconically simple and evocative that I could find little I wanted to change about it. The only major difference is that my heart is realistically anatomical rather than picturesquely symbolic. Aside from loving the fleshy gristliness of an anatomic heart, I think this representation lends literal rawness to the feelings the card is meant to represent. The wound is palpable when the blades sink into something this bloody. There is a sensuality there too. The Three of Swords can represent different kinds of heartbreak—not only sexual or romantic. But no matter what kind of heartache it stands for, there is an undeniable intimacy contained within this card.



I find bittersweetness in the Three of Swords, as well. When wounds heal, they often leave a mark and change us forever—physically and emotionally. And for better or for worse, they teach us something. No card is completely negative in the tarot, not even the often dreary Swords. These are the more challenging paths of our existence, but there is always something new around the bend. We just have to get through the difficult patch, and sometimes we have to take our time with it and let the lessons sink in even when they are painful.





FOUR OF SWORDS

For such an intense suit, there is a lot of sleep-related imagery in the Swords. It makes sense, because mental activity is exhausting, especially when it leads us down paths of self-exploration, problem-solving and mindfulness about the way we behave and how that affects the world and the people around us. Meditation is the counterbalance to overthinking, and the Four of Swords is a reminder to take that time so we don't burn ourselves out.

Traditionally, in the Smith-Waite deck, the figure is a knight laid to rest indoors. For me, the imagery was a little too tomblike; he looks like the figures I've seen upon the medieval stone tombs housed at the Cloisters. The rest the Four of Swords offers is not eternal—it is a

brief respite on a journey. So, the figure in my card is out in the world, taking a pause in their quest to recuperate before carrying on. They are protected by the swords around them, and the one in their arms signifies the efforts they will have to continue making as they forge their way onward. But for now, they must take a breather and gather their depleted strength back up in the quiet winter woods. The Four of Swords warns us against pushing ourselves mentally and physically beyond our limits.





FIVE OF SWORDS

Victory, but at what cost? At any cost? Or at a price that is too high? And perhaps the victory is hollow—what will you do with all those swords now that the dust has settled and the battlefield is quiet?

These are the questions and lessons contained in the Five of Swords for me. It is a card of conflict, and it represents the uncertain consequences of its outcome. Because even if there is a clear victor in whatever conflict has transpired—whether it be the querent or someone in their life—they do not feel good about the victory. Maybe the fight just wasn't worth it. Or perhaps they've lost more in the process than they've gained. I'm sure we've all felt the dissatisfaction of having the last

word but not feeling good about where that left our relationship with another person.

So, the Five of Swords advises self-awareness. It wants us to choose our battles wisely, to distinguish between fair competition and underhanded tactics. It urges us to consider other points of view, and to know when to concede or walk away. It reminds us that sometimes there is more to be learned from loss than from success, that the end does not always justify the means, and that it is more important to be a gracious winner than to be a gracious loser.





SIX OF SWORDS

This is a card of transition and change, whether it be physical, emotional or mental. Like so many of the Swords, it carries an emotional weight—transitions are rarely easy, and change can foster anxiety and uncertainty. It is difficult to leave the familiar for the unknown, because even when the familiar is painful we can at least find comfort in being used to it—the unknown is unpredictable and strange. But change is a necessary part of life, and it is often better to sail out into uncharted waters than remain in a stagnant pond.

Unlike a lot of the cards that signify transitional periods, however, the Six of Swords is neither turbulent like the Tower, nor dramatic like Death. There is a quiet peace to it, an air of melancholy and self-reflection. It



makes me think back on the lessons of the Three of Swords and urges the querent to look inward and address the emotional burdens and scars that they may be carrying with them on their journey. Like the swords stuck into the boat, these emotional wounds might be necessary reminders and tools that will help us on our way or at our destination. But they might also weigh the boat down unnecessarily and serve only as painful reminders of what we are leaving behind. Sometimes, it is better to simply let them go.

Again, Smith's representation is a heavy influence on my interpretation of this card. The one major difference is that in my version the figure is alone. There is no boatman ferrying her across while she sits passively and forlornly in the boat. She is perfectly capable of steering the boat herself and charting her own course through uncertain waters. This, to me, gives the card its focus and carries on the theme of individuality and personal strength that shows up throughout this deck.





SEVEN OF SWORDS

To me, the Five and the Seven of Swords echo each other. Both represent conflict with an uneasy result, both feature suggestions of a battlefield as their backdrop, and both portray a figure with more swords than they can potentially handle. But while the Five is the immediate aftermath of an altercation, the Seven is more covert and calculated. Thus, the meaning of the Seven of Swords is often highly dependent on the cards surrounding it. It is nuanced and asks for a heightened degree of self-awareness and reflection, as well as an in-depth inquiry into our current external influences.

The Seven is frequently read as a card of deceit and betrayal, of getting away with something. I've struggled a lot with my own reading of this card in the past. I'm

someone who, despite being grumpy and not easily trusting, tries to think the best of people. There was a time in my life when I would draw this card a lot and, when I did, I always thought it referred to me—that I was acting in an underhanded manner without realizing or acknowledging it, that my shadow self was showing through and I was just excusing it somehow. It took me years to realize that there were people in my life being represented by the card, and even longer for me to actually do something about it.

I think self-awareness when pulling this card is important. We should always look to ourselves and our own behaviors instead of immediately jumping to blame someone else. Sometimes, we may be the person sneaking away with our plans clutched tightly to our chest so that no one else may guess at them until we get what we want and it's too late for anyone else to do anything about it.

The tricky thing is. . .that's not always a bad thing. I do not disagree with the negative connotations implied in the reading of the Seven of Swords, but I think life and human motivation is a lot more complicated than that. What someone sees as a lie is someone else's means of survival. What one person considers a betrayal may be a way out from a harmful situation to another individual. Every person thinks they are right in an argument, and at the end of the day the only guide we have is our own

moral compass. Sometimes, we have to put ourselves first even if someone else considers that selfish, calculating or cruel. Sometimes, we have to sneak out the backdoor instead of openly charging the main gate in order to escape a situation that is harmful or no longer supports us.



EIGHT OF SWORDS

Sometimes our circumstances are bleak, and a lack of perspective makes them seem even more so. It feels like chasing your own tail; a loop of negativity that you can't find your way out of. The people or events around you aren't helping, and you get sucked down into the quagmire, unable to reach for the tools to get out.

That is the energy of the Eight of Swords. Whether by her own design or the ill will of others, it shows a woman bound, blindfolded and surrounded by a cage of swords. Each element represents a variety of influences that can make us feel trapped and victimized—unfortunate circumstances, depression, anxiety, self-criticism, the limiting and damaging influence of other people or power structures. It may be that you are embroiled in a

victim mentality, or it may be that you are entirely justified in feeling marginalized. Sometimes there are circumstances beyond our control, but in the wise words of (apparently) a character on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, “when nothing we do matters, the only thing that matters is what we do.”

Swords are a suit of power, specifically the power of the mind, and the power of balance. The woman is blindfolded—she is literally lacking the sight to see a way out of her predicament. But without sight to distract her and overwhelm her with the direness of her apparent situation, she can focus on the feelings within, on her intuition and the reserves of emotional and mental strength within her. And then, once she removes the blindfold, she will see that the swords do not enclose her completely. There is always a way out. What’s more, free from the blindfold, she can turn the weapons that entrap her into the tools of release.



NINE OF SWORDS

The Nine of Swords is the “nightmare card.” In our safest place we are vulnerable and prone to the problems that plague us. Sometimes all we want to do is crawl into the safety of our bed, away from our worries, anxieties, problems—only to have it all chase us there, too, amplified into bad dreams that won’t let us rest even in unconsciousness. On the very day that I sat down to write the description of this card, I had woken up from one of my recurring anxiety dreams of having to spend a holiday with my birth family, kept from my husband, unable to escape the obligation and forced to put up with all their passive aggressive disapproval. Certain things stick in our psyches and crawl out of the woodwork even after a long time has passed and we think we are safe.

Goya's "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters" was the biggest inspiration for my interpretation of this card. The title and the visuals are suggestive of the meaning I ascribe to this card too. Reason, logic, and an emotionally collected approach to our situation can usually assuage our worries or, at the very least, give us a clearer picture of our situation and help us find a way to make things better, to see that they are not as bad as we thought, to find a solution. It is when reason sleeps and anxiety runs rampant that we catastrophize. When my brain starts running ninety miles a minute with worry, I try to stop and ask myself "what's the worst thing that could happen?" and assess if that disastrous eventuality is actually realistic or not. Spoiler: it usually isn't. And even if it is, asking myself that question gives me mental preparation for the worst, and strategies to deal with it, in the highly unlikely event of it coming to pass. So, the Nine of Swords shows us the dangers that plague us, but it also reminds us that they may not be as substantial as we think. And when the monsters come, perhaps rather than hiding ourselves from their sight, we ought to sit with them in the dark and learn their nature to better understand them—and what they tell us about ourselves.



TEN OF SWORDS

The Ten of Swords is not my favorite card in the deck. Of course its meaning is rather dreary, but even visually I just find it dark and unappealing and, dare I say it, a little boring in its fatalism. Not that things can't be that bleak sometimes—life deals a harsh hand to so many people, and it's naive to pretend that there is a silver lining to all things. The cards can show us our darkest hours in stark relief. But in my design, I made a slight departure from the Smith-Waite standard.

The warrior is down, but he is not out. He is bleeding, and the red of his cape may hide yet more gore than he is showing—just as we do when we are hurting, grieving or struggling. His face is obscured but not entirely covered, and upon it is the resolute expression of a

person who needs time, who is gathering himself, who is downcast—but not yet defeated. He has one foot planted firmly on the ground, and he is managing to keep himself upright beneath a sharp and heavy burden of swords that make up fully half of the rest of the illustration. He may not be the same, and he will carry the scars for the rest of his life, but he will get back up in time.

Reversed, the swords are lifting. One by one, the blades are being pulled from his back. It's going to hurt like hell and he might lose a lot of blood in the process yet, but respite and recovery are in sight.



PAGE OF SWORDS

In the tradition of all the pages I've rendered so far, this one is an apprentice of sorts. A squire, in this particular case, has their foot upon the rung of learning this particular trade. The trade, on the surface, is that of battle, with the implements of it surrounding the figure. But of course, as with all the Swords, the struggle is a mental one. It is often a struggle between reason and emotion. The shield is there to protect from the world's blows, the assaults upon our mental clarity, our intellectual growth. It stands beside the page as if perhaps they have not yet had the need to use it. But it is ready to be lifted.

Similarly, the page is polishing the blade. It, too, is not quite ready for use. It must be tempered, cleaned, sharp-

ened—just like their own skills. pages are full of youthful energy and vigor that can sometimes make them act rashly and without thought. Running around with a sword and without direction is especially hazardous to this particular page. But this squire is being kept busy with work. They are made to take their time in becoming familiar with their weapon, in learning respect for it and in studying how to use it accurately, intelligently and thoughtfully. Just as we must with our own faculties—our minds can be weapons, and we must know them, and ourselves, before we use them.



KNIGHT OF SWORDS

At her best, the Knight of Swords thinks quickly, she is driven to succeed, and is focused on active ways of achieving her goals and ambitions. She harnesses the currents of the Swords' air energy, symbolized by the wind sweeping across the landscape and billowing her cloak and hair, and uses them to carry her to her destination. She is sharp, bold, and lets nothing stand in her way. Hers is the kind of energy that sends her diving into a situation with both feet, which can be very helpful in overcoming obstacles and difficulties in the pursuit of our needs and desires. However, it can also be extremely hazardous.

At her worst, the Knight of Swords is impulsive, restless, scattered and reckless. She is all energy without thought or plan of action. This can lead to stumbling into danger

without adequate preparation, to driving that horse head over heels right when an unexpected challenge rises up out of nowhere. Sometimes, motivation alone is not enough; we need careful consideration, an awareness of consequences, and planning to help us achieve our aims. The knight brandishes her Sword—a potent reminder of the intellectual force of the suit, which must be wielded with care and precision. Action must be supported by forethought, impulsivity tempered by focus, and passion harnessed by intellect.

(Fun fact: If you're familiar with Florence Welch's 2012 *Vogue* shoot, you will recognize the visual inspiration for this card.)



QUEEN OF SWORDS

The Queen of Swords is one of my favorite cards in the suit and in the deck. The sharp attributes of the suit are balanced in her by the maturity and sensitivity of her position. She is a clear and acute communicator, a perceptive judge of character, a quick thinker. She is honest, dependable and resilient. I've drawn her ready for battle, armored and armed—a warrior queen. Her penchant for activity is expressed through the unruly clouds and wind whipping up behind her—the air element of the suit at play. But she is sturdy and still, standing tall and unperturbed. Her gaze is calm, her mind and blade are sharp, and her stance is self-assured and proud.

The queen has a lot of lessons to teach. She is very incisive and can show us how to judge a person or a

situation fairly without being distracted by their flattery, wiles or confusing messages. She is level-headed, tempering flaring emotions with calm and collected intellectual evaluation. She is honest and does not stand for bullshit. She can teach us how to communicate clearly, how to prioritize our needs and desires, and how to stand up for ourselves.

But it is important to remember that leading from the mind rather than the heart is not always as objective as we think. And that even objectivity can be benefited by empathy and compassion—attributes especially important in an authority figure. So the queen must keep her head and her unclouded vision, she must not let the desires and opinions of others obscure her own judgement, and she must not let them exert their will over her. She must see, evaluate and consider all those influences clearly when wielding her blade and making her independent decisions.



KING OF SWORDS

The King of Swords is a tricky card that I often butt heads with. You know how a certain kind of person (usually a heterosexual, usually cisgender, usually a man) always wants to debate you, and then touts his intellectual superiority when the topic at hand does not emotionally affect him? Ignorant of the fact that being emotionally affected may mean that the person he is debating is actually better versed and more intimately familiar with the issue at hand?

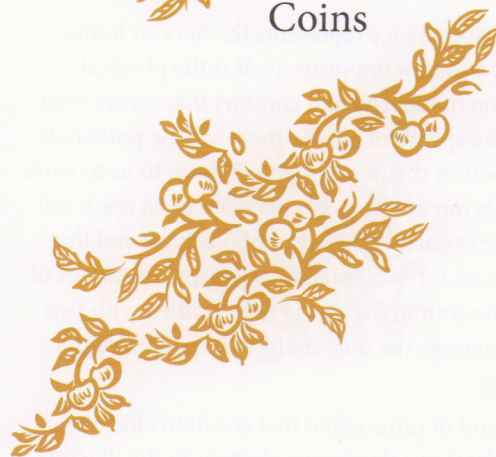
That's exactly the kind of energy I wanted to avoid in my King of Swords, while also focusing on the aspects of the card that deal with mental clarity, level-headed decision making and compassionate intelligence. I wanted my king to be younger than the ones I've drawn before,

because age does not always guarantee experience or wisdom. I also wanted him to appear firmly rooted, stable and secure. So even though he is outdoors, as an active man who connects with the outside world and takes it in in order to inform his mind, his throne stands heavy and touched with age behind him, a foundation from which he rules. His sword also points downward instead of skyward like in so many representations, its tip touching the soil—he is rooted to his foundation. The winds that swept across the landscape in all the other Sword court cards have calmed in the face of his self-possessed demeanor.

While it can be very beneficial to keep emotions in check and your head clear, true objectivity is nigh on impossible, and cold intelligence amounts to little without compassion. So, to me, the King of Swords must be an impartial judge guided by both his mind and his heart. He must be an advocate who uses his striking power judiciously. The gifts of his mind are valuable and unique within the suit and must be used wisely.



Coins





ACE OF COINS

This card of abundance represents the harvest home, enrichment and new opportunity. It is the physical manifestation of security and comfort that comes with success in the sphere of labor—these are the potentials contained within the Ace of Coins. It is up to us to work hard towards our goals, to stay the course, to reach out and grab the rewards. So instead of one hand holding out the coin, as is traditional in most representations of the cards, the coin in my Ace is fully cradled with two arms to encourage the querent in their pursuit of the Ace's bounty.

A celiac friend of mine joked that she didn't like the choice of wheat as a decorative element in the illustration. And I hear her point—wheat is not a friend to all.

But historically, its cultural significance and symbolism are impossible to ignore or deny, especially in the Western world. In Russia, where I come from, bread was and is life, a staple of our diet, and a touchstone around which community revolved. It is tradition to greet newcomers with a fresh loaf as a gesture of hospitality, and to break bread with them in goodwill. So, sheaves of wheat decorate the coins in my suit, and stalks of it appear in the cards throughout the Suit to symbolize all that the Coins stand for: wealth, abundance, the harvest, fulfillment, satiation, or the need for or absence of those things.





TWO OF COINS

You know those days when you've got to get to work, go grocery shopping, work on a personal project, answer piled up emails, meet someone for dinner, and then get home and do your laundry because you're on your last pair of underwear? And somehow you have managed to maximize the hours in the day and your own multi-tasking efficiency to manage all of it? You know the rare high you get from that sense of unstoppable accomplishment?

This is the Two of Coins. This card shows us juggling things in our life—priorities, choices, decisions—and lauds us for maintaining the balance. But it also cautions us as we tread upon that tightrope, and reminds us that catching things just before they crash to the ground is



all well and good, but perhaps we ought not to have overloaded ourselves to begin with. The Two of Coins teaches equilibrium and calls upon us to manage our time and priorities wisely, to maintain focus and adapt our behaviors and daily routines—lest stress and burn-out take over and we come tumbling down.





THREE OF COINS

The Coins are an industrious suit, and the Three in particular brings that energy to the forefront. It is a card of pragmatic creativity and of working with one's hands. A trade requires specialized skill and training, which must be taught and honed over a period of years. But the Three of Coins is not merely a card of apprenticeship; it is a card that represents collaborative effort and teamwork, and the accomplishments that can be achieved through unified efforts. The young man's work is being watched over by a more experienced craftsman, but in working together they are joining forces, with each partner bringing something unique to the project. The young man brings his energy and a fresh outlook to the table, while the craftsman has years of experience and training that can refine those fresh ideas.

Together, the two make a whole, and their joint efforts are capable of producing a result that is bigger and better than either could accomplish on their own. The work is not yet finished, but the plan is laid, the resources are collected, and success is within reach—as long as we heed the lessons of compromise, delegation, joint creativity and harmony in co-working contained within the Three of Coins.





FOUR OF COINS

If the Three was about pooling resources in pursuit of a shared goal, then the Four of Coins is about hoarding them. The card showcases a scarcity mindset. One of the coins sits squarely atop the woman's head, dominating all her thoughts, while the world grows dark outside. And that's not always bad. Sometimes, demands are made upon our time, mental or emotional energy, or even actual material resources, to such a degree that we are left depleted and with no recourse but to retreat behind some thick walls, locking the doors and keeping to ourselves until we can face the world again.

But Coins are cards of bounty. And with bounty comes a warning against greed. The Four calls upon us to evaluate, honestly and compassionately, not only our own



needs but those of the people around us, to be aware of who needs our help and whether it is help we can provide. It cautions us against isolating ourselves from others and sitting upon our treasures, whether they be spiritual or material, like dragons on a hoard, rendering them useless.

It is important to note that it isn't always others who are affected by our hoarding—sometimes we are too ungenerous with ourselves. Self-care shouldn't all be expensive shopping sprees and spa days, but that doesn't mean we can't treat ourselves with the same generosity of spirit that we afford other people in our lives. Quite simply put, you can't take it with you when you die.





FIVE OF COINS

The Five of Coins represents a fiscally difficult time in one's life, and the stress, hopelessness and isolation that come with the lack of physical means to not only survive but thrive. A lack of material means can shut us out of opportunities to improve ourselves, it puts us on the margins of society, and it makes our attempts to achieve a healthy and happy quality of life a vicious struggle.

In the Smith-Waite deck, these concepts are represented by a destitute couple seeking shelter outside the walls of a church. The warm glow emanating from the stained glass window implies that the church is a safe harbor, and that the couple will be welcomed and protected within its walls even if nowhere else will take them in. Cultural attitudes towards organized religion, and

Christianity in particular, have evolved drastically and in many different directions in just the last century, let alone all the ones that came before it. In the wake of these cultural upheavals, and with the context of my own lived experience, the idea of a church as safe harbor to all is not one that resonates with me, and not one that humanity universally accepts any longer.

So, in my card, the wall belongs to no church. It is simply a wall. A border, an obstacle, a divide that keeps the people in need separated from what they want and require. Four coins are set into the gates, implying the cost of getting to the other side, while the fifth rises like the sun beyond the boundary, full of promise and opportunity.

But the situation is not entirely without hope. The mother still has her child, and he consoles her, representing hope for the future and a reason to keep trying the closed door. And the fact that there is a door at all means that there is a way through. The Five card encourages us to seek out those who will stand by us in our darkest hour and to hold on to hope in the bleakest of times.



SIX OF COINS

The Six of Coins explores the concepts of charity, generosity, sharing, community and the obligations of class and wealth. In my version of the card, I wanted to approach these ideas through the Jewish concept of *tzedakah*—the moral obligation of every individual, no matter their social status, to partake in charitable giving. Charity fosters community, and, ideally, the purpose of community is to support each of its members to ensure the survival and success of all. *Tzedakah* specifically is not just about charitable giving—it is about justice and our obligation to our fellow human beings as a communal species. It focuses on anonymous giving, on giving proportionately in accordance with our means, and on giving in order to set those members of the community on a path to self-sufficiency.

In the Smith-Waite version of the card, a wealthy man holds a set of scales and distributes coins to people beneath him in social and financial standing. The presence of the scales hearkens back to Justice and implies that the wealth is being distributed fairly, according to each person's needs. However, historically, the richest among us are rarely generous, and certainly not the best or fairest of judges when it comes to distributing their wealth.

A rabbi distributes the coins in my card instead. I wanted to preserve the sense of hierarchy present among the depicted figures, but I wanted the leader to be a spiritual one, representing a faith that, generally speaking, encourages its believers to question its teachings, to have a healthy curiosity about the world, and to always be learning. The rabbi holds only two coins, which he distributes evenly among the supplicants. The rest hang in the air, accessible to those who would participate in the spirit of generosity and the cyclical exchange of giving.





SEVEN OF COINS

Usually, the man depicted in the Seven of Coins is shown as a weary gardener, still holding onto the hoe with which he tilled the earth, but already harvesting some of the fruits of his labor.

In my version, I wanted to stress the hard work and the investment of physical and emotional labor necessary to produce such fruitful results, so my Seven of Coins is not quite there yet. The riches of the field and garden come in cards Nine and Ten. The Seven has a lot of work yet to do, but he is on his way. The earth is tilled and receptive, with Coins lining the furrows. They are not yet the fruits of his labors but are representation of what is to come if he is patient, hard-working, and perseveres in his efforts.

The Seven of Coins stresses the importance of concentrated and focused effort. It advises us not to be distracted by small tasks that enable us to avoid that one big, hard thing we have to do. It encourages us to appreciate what we have achieved so far, and not to be frustrated by slow progress.





EIGHT OF COINS

The Eight of Coins card makes me think back on the Three of Coins. There, we saw an apprentice learning and contributing to a project under the tutelage of a master. In the Eight, we see a self-sufficient artisan working on a craft he has perfected over the course of many years. There is a stabilizing energy to the Eight of Coins—the man works in a familiar creative environment with tools that make up and sustain his life's work. His anvil is heavy and worn, and his clothes are practical but suggest financial comfort and success. A neat row of finished coins lines the wall while he works on creating more.

Each product of his labor is the same. Repetition can suggest stagnation, it can be boring, and it can point to the kind of perfectionism that stunts our creative



growth instead of feeding it. However, practice also makes perfect. Raw talent is only a small portion of any creative pursuit—the rest is discipline and hard work. The Eight of Coins advises us to diligently pursue the activities that make us passionate, even when the work required is not as exciting as we'd hoped. It is the work that perfects our skill, and that skill in turn enables us to expand our creative horizons. It fosters a work ethic that sees us through when inspiration fails, and gives us the tools to keep up with our creative impulses when they strike.





NINE OF COINS

The Nine of Coins is a card of wealth—a concept fraught and complicated by historical and cultural inequality and violence. In Western society, there is a plague of injustice when it comes to how wealth is distributed and who holds a disproportionate amount of it. In my Coins, I wanted to show that wealth is not represented only by our material riches—it can be measured in knowledge, comfort, happiness, community, creativity, and in personal fulfillment (whatever that looks like to you).

However, the Nine card in particular shows us the comfort granted by physical abundance. Money can't buy happiness, but it sure as hell can buy peace of mind, which contributes to a person's overall quality of life. And it is quality of life that this card of luxury, hard

work and self-sufficiency paying off focuses on. The Eight of Coins marked the progress of furrowing and seeding the field; in the Nine, the garden flowers and bears fruit.

It can be too easy to overlook the bounty of our success, to speed on to the next endeavor in the constant hustle of life under capitalism without taking the time to fully appreciate and enjoy what we have achieved. The Nine of Coins encourages us to slow down, to let ourselves rest, to enjoy the ripe fruits of our endeavors. We worked too hard for it to not indulge. This is a card of self-sufficiency, because independence is its own kind of wealth. It is the card of treating yourself.





TEN OF COINS

The Shoshone family depicted in the Ten of Coins represents wealth beyond money. The grandmother sits at the heart of the card, surrounded by the “three sisters,”—beans, squash and corn—the staples of an indigenous American diet. At her feet is a loyal family dog. Her daughter holds up an import grain, the wheat that has recurred through the Coins, and beside her is a loving father cradling the future generation of this family. There is a quality of accomplishment and harmony to the Ten of Coins that digs deep into the foundation that stabilizes us all—community, family, and generational support. This card shows us the roots upon which success grows.

Now, not all of us are blessed with the love of family or the support of our elders. Not all of us plan to continue our line in rearing children. Not all of us feel connected to a community or rooted to a place. But I think that all of these concepts and all of these feelings are accessible—the trick is in figuring out what that looks like to us. If the elder who can teach and shield you is not the matriarch depicted in this card, the Ten of Coins encourages you to identify who that is in your life. If who you love is not like the mother or the father who lean upon her chair, that’s okay—maybe your love and partnership take a different form. Or maybe you can find that love and partnership within yourself. Loving ourselves is a difficult, lifelong journey. The Ten of Coins reminds us that it is a worthwhile one. And as for your legacy, it need not be perpetuated in offspring. It can be a bounty of creative endeavors, or the impression you leave upon the lives of others.

The point is, this card represents security and satisfaction in life, pride and joy in heritage and tradition, a heartfelt and deep-rooted contentment we derive from where we are in life and how we relate to the people around us. The Ten of Coins teaches generosity, gratitude and an attitude of sustainability towards the future.



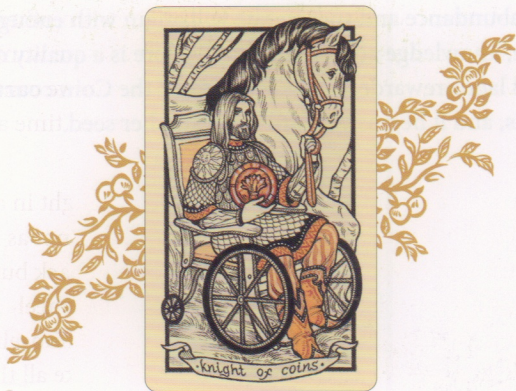
PAGE OF COINS

All the pages have been apprentices in whatever trade each suit represented, and the Page of Coins is no different. She is young and new to the field, but like the other pages, she is full of energy and ready to apply it to her advancement as she sows her seeds into the fertile soil. Since Coins are rooted in material manifestation, the Page of Coins shows us a laborer, a young entrepreneur, somebody who will build her homestead and raise her fortune by the work of her own hands. She represents the first step on the path of attaining the kind of skills and knowledge that will lead to eventual material success.

Behind her in the distance is a village, representing an experienced community that can guide her in her learning. In her apron is a single large coin, indicating

the abundance and success she will attain with enough time, knowledge and physical toil. There is a quality of hard labor rewarded that applies to all the Coin court cards, and it begins with the page and her seed.





KNIGHT OF COINS

Coins deal with the physical manifestation of abundance and the journey to its attainment. The knights are the energetic go-getters who are, quite literally, taking the journey and are therefore frequently portrayed on a horse that aids them in pursuing their goals.

The Knight of Coins is generally regarded as someone who embodies a more paced approach. He is a “slow and steady wins the race” kind of person. A little less rambunctious and headstrong than the others, the Knight of Coins is someone who, in a more negative interpretation, can be regarded as slow, conservative, stuck in a rut. More positively, he is someone patient and careful enough to take their time and get the job done right. The Knight of Coins reminds us not to



regard the circumstances that set us apart from others as obstacles. Just because we cannot do what we want the same way as other people, does not mean we cannot do them at all—we might just have to take our time and figure out a different approach.

Instead of a horse, I wanted to portray my knight in a wheelchair. I wanted to suggest a slower pace, not as a detriment or something that's holding him back but simply as just another facet of who he is. The wheelchair is an instrument operated by the knight himself, guided by him with thought and intention. Like all the other knights, he too has a horse, because, to a knight, his horse is both a symbol of his status and also a trusty companion that will aid him in achieving his goals.





QUEEN OF COINS

More than any of the other queens, the Queen of Coins embodies the ideal maternal figure. Warm, welcoming, expansive, nurturing, strong and steadfast, she is the kind of person who asks if you want seconds and insists upon dessert. She works hard to materialize the plenty that surrounds her and which she shares with her loved ones—and her generosity of spirit extends beyond her immediate circle. She is a queen who walks among her people, who champions those in need, who understands the value of work and does not take what she has for granted.

Whenever a person who supports the arts entered my life and financially improved it by purchasing something from me, the Queen of Coins showed up in my readings.



Hers is a practical yet generous outlook on material resources, their necessity and distribution. The Queen of Coins encourages us to take stock of what we have, mind our household accounts, and share what we can.

She is also a figure of hospitality. When writing about the Ace of Coins, I mentioned the Russian tradition of welcoming guests with a freshly baked loaf of bread. The queen bears it now upon a clean linen towel, and atop the bread sits a cup of salt—a symbol of wealth, status and generosity, and a highly prized commodity that she shares with the world.

Reversed, she can represent an overbearing, smothering energy in the querent's life or the querent's behavior. She can be like a mother who just won't let you leave the nest, who seeks to control every aspect of your life. In imposing her care, she focuses on what she thinks people want instead of paying attention to their actual needs. In this negative aspect, the Queen of Coins warns us against being selfish and controlling in how we show our love to others.





KING OF COINS

Expansive, boisterous, generous, reliable and hardy, the King of Coins is a people's king. He rules out of a large feasting hall, like a Norse Jarl, and its doors are thrown open to all. He does not hoard his wealth or shut his people out, but instead he is a faithful and dependable provider and protector, and he participates actively in the lives of those around him. His wealth is not inherited—it is hard won and he has the calluses on his aging hands to show for his labors. He forges community and uses his experience and wisdom to lift up the people around him to comfort and security.

He is practical, pragmatic and unafraid to get his hands dirty. The King of Coins warns us against judging or treating people unjustly or with prejudice, based

on their class or material means. He shows us that if you have wealth, resources or energy to spare, you must not greedily stockpile them but use them to improve the lives of others. He teaches us that even one act of charity is wonderful. But generosity is far more effective when integrated into our daily practice, serving as fuel in the economic and social cycle of bettering the community. In short, the King of Coins lives in a society—and so do you.

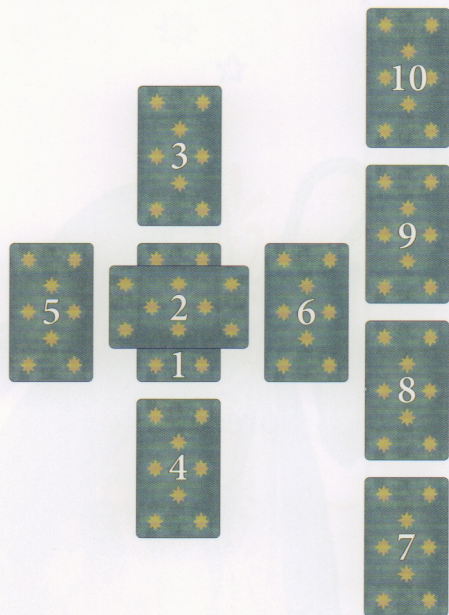




Spreads

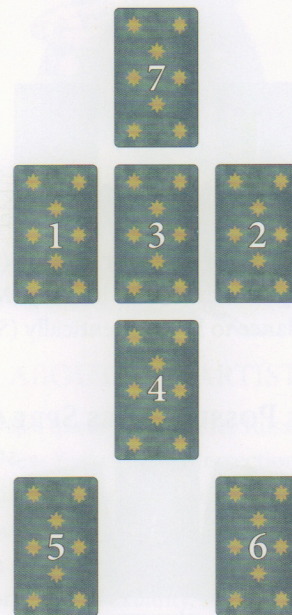


CELTIC CROSS SPREAD



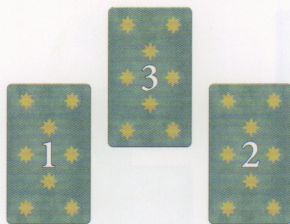
- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. The situation | 6. The near future |
| 2. The current challenges affecting the issue | 7. Your power in the situation |
| 3. The basis of the situation | 8. The effects of the people around you |
| 4. The past relevant to the situation | 9. Your hopes or fears |
| 5. The present | 10. The outcome |

RELATIONSHIP SPREAD



- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. My partner | 5. The resources of my partner |
| 2. Myself | 6. My resources |
| 3. The power that connects us | 7. The focal point. Our mutual goal |
| 4. Our common base | |

THE IDENTITY SPREAD



1. An aspect of my outer identity (Sun)
2. An aspect of my inner identity (Moon)
3. Guidance to live authentically (Stars)

THE POSSIBILITIES SPREAD



1. Where am I now
2. What will expand my horizons
3. What can I learn from my current situation
4. What can I learn from others



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Fyodor Pavlov is a queer transgender Russian émigré and longtime New Yorker. The intersection of all these complex identities informs his work as an artist. Working primarily through the medium of watercolor and ink, he maintains a strong portfolio focused on multicultural motifs of history, queer sexuality, and esoteric occultism. His goal is to create images that tell stories and contextualize queer identity in a past where it always existed, and reimagine it in a society liberated from suppression. He creates art that brings new life to the past for contemporary audiences and evokes a world in which the past is present, the present is queer, and gender is fluid.

<https://www.fyodorpavlov.com/>

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