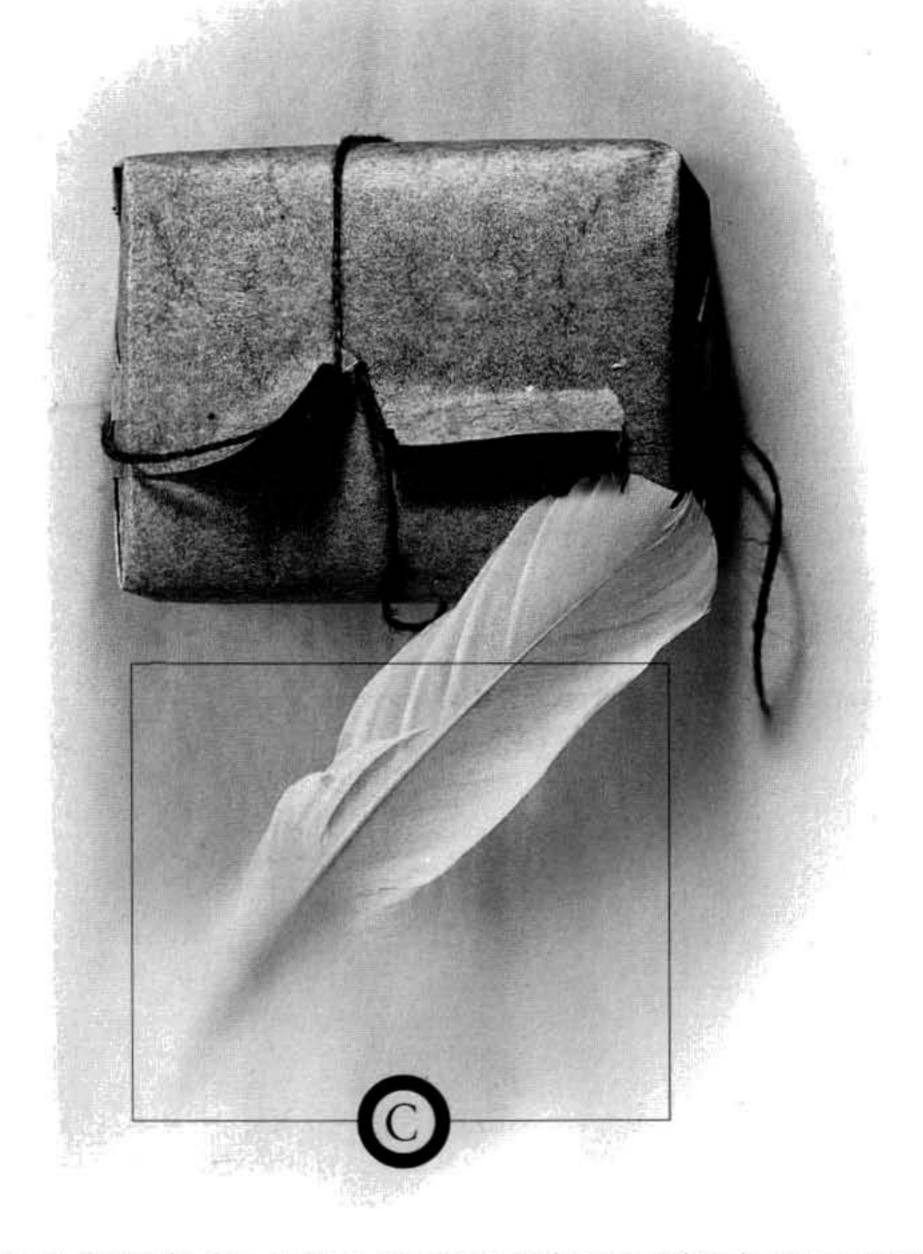




ILLUSTRATED BY DAVE MCKEAM TEXT BY RACHEL POLLACK

іпткорисер ву <mark>ПЕЇ L G A İ In A П</mark>

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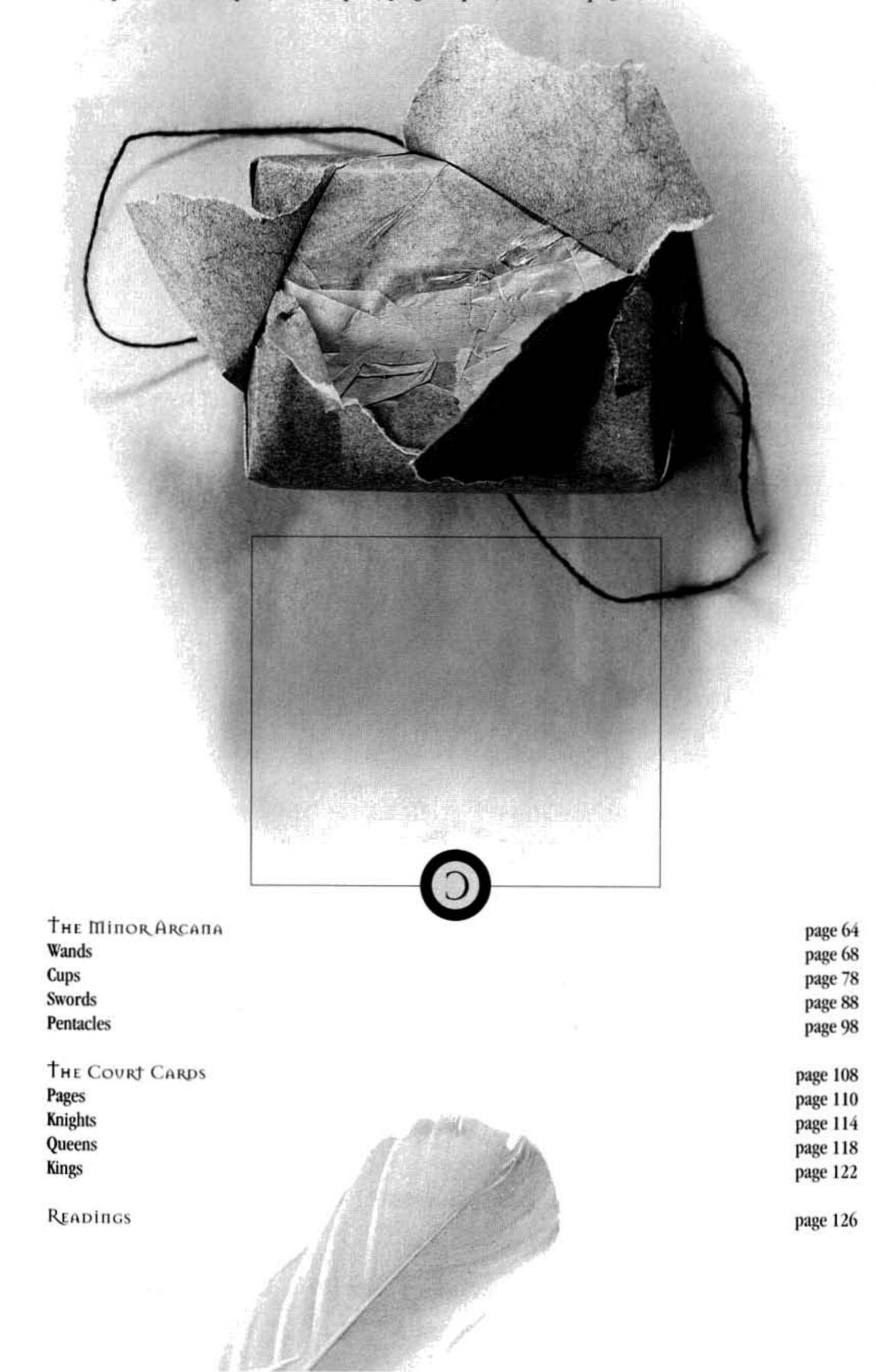
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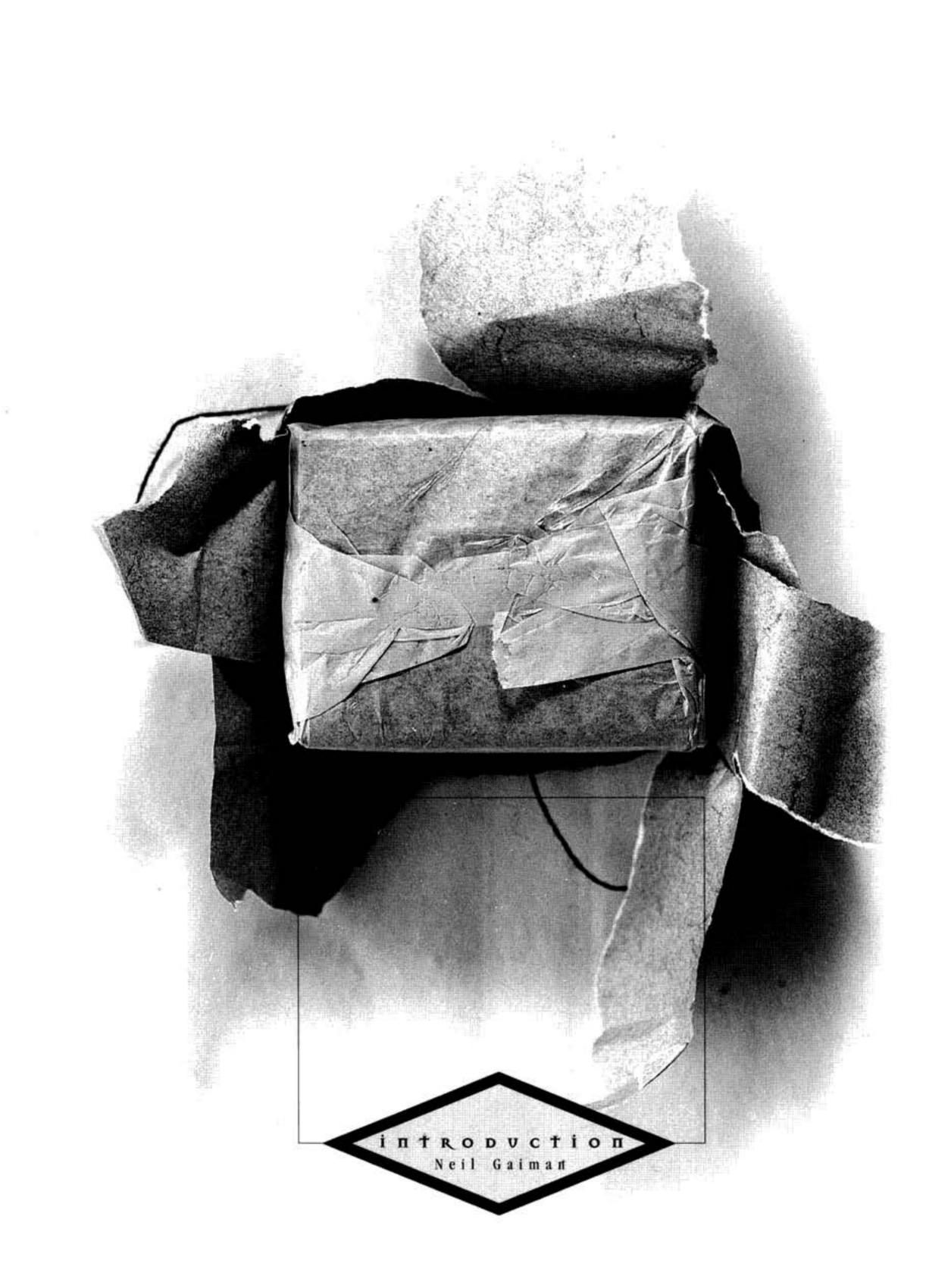
THE MAJOR ARCANA

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Shuffle the cards. Lay them out. Turn them over. Find a place to begin. Let's see...

The year was 1985, and I think we all felt a vague sense of anticlimax of the kind we shall probably not see again until 2002, and I didn't know very much about the Tarot.

I was in Birmingham, England, which is an odd place for anything to begin; after all, Birmingham is one of my least favorite cities in the world. I like the people well enough: but it was in Birmingham, several years before this, that the madman tried to strangle me; it was on arriving in Birmingham on this 1985 trip that I'd stepped over the knifed body at the top of the escalator, coming out of New Street Station. It's a rare trip to Birmingham that doesn't have a small disaster connected with it. It was September, and I was attending the British Fantasy Convention, and I had with me a small hardback copy of *Salvador Dali's Tarot*. I was going to interview the author of the text that accompanied the Tarot.

The author was a lady named Rachel Pollack: tall, fey, husky and elegant.

Pick out the card for Rachel: the Priestess, perhaps, or the Empress.

It was at that same convention that I met Alan Moore. He showed me Xeroxes of the first four issues of a comic he was doing with Dave Gibbons, called WATCHMEN, and I was stunned. I got Alan to show me what a comic script looked like, an action that was, in retrospect, going to have many ramifications for my future.

Lay down a card for Alan. Still somewhere in the Major Arcana: the Hermit, or the Magician.

I went, with Rachel, from Birmingham to Milford-on-Sea, a little English seaside town with no distinguishing marks or features, for a week-long writers' workshop. And it was there that I had my first Tarot reading (not by Rachel, but a year later, from author Mary Gentle), and it was there that I learned most of what I know that made me any kind of halfway decent writer, and it was there that I got to be good friends with Rachel. We had a common fondness for really weird arcana. She was the only other person I'd met who knew the details of what happens when the Messiah comes back (all the Jewish men have a party in a huge tent and eat Behemoth and Leviathan) and she knew details I'd never heard of (all the Jewish women are out the back doing the washing up and having baby boys). She told me the coolest necrophilia joke I'd eyer heard. She read comics, and we talked about the relationship between comics and the Tarot. She was also, in company with critic John Clute and author Gwyneth Jones, the person from whom I learned the most, about reading and about writing, over the course of that week.

Milford ended. Rachel returned to Amsterdam. I went home, to my wife and my toddler and my baby. And 1985 moved from environment into memory.

1986 was a year of odd coincidences and strange meetings. In the summer of 1986 I met an artist named Dave McKean. (He was still at art school, but he was, no doubt about it, an artist.)

Dave is, and was, dark-haired, bearded, pony-tailed, with sharp eyes and a sharp sense of humor. He's a gentle person, very practical, very funny, who does not suffer fools, gladly or otherwise.

A card for Dave? That's a hard one. Dave is, without any doubt, The Artist, if ever there was one, in archetype and reality. Perhaps The World...

We got on well, Dave and I, and began to work together.

In 1986 Rachel returned from Amsterdam for the next Milford writers' workshop, and I brought a story I was working on which would wind up being called Violent Cases when Dave drew it. More Tarot conversations; a Bill Sienkiewicz Superman pinup in, if memory serves, ACTION COMICS #400, prompted a conversation about doing a Tarot of DC Comics characters.

Rachel spoke of doing a Tarot of her own, with artists she admired — Bill Sienkiewicz, for example, or Dave McKean. A few years later she spoke to Dave, but nothing ever came of it — her vision was too personal, and she eventually wound up realizing the only person who could draw it was her. (It's called The Shining Woman Tarot.)

Flip the cards. Feel them in your hands. Sandman turns up in 1988. Dave paints — or builds — or photographs — the covers. Mike Dringenberg drew the first Sandman Tarot card, one of the illustrations for the text piece in SANDMAN #8.

Rachel came to England from Amsterdam while I was working on the BOOKS OF MAGIC limited series, and she helped me with Madame Xanadu's four-card reading in Book Two. (We went into a small Tarot & Suchlike Esoterica shop in Camden, to pick out a card set for me, and I found myself feeling like I'd just gone into a record shop with someone who, to my surprise, turned out to be one of the Beatles, as Rachel modestly admitted her identity to the lady behind the counter, and signed autographs.)

I designed four Tarot cards for BOOKS OF MAGIC, which Scott Hampton painted beautifully in the comic, and I discovered the joy of designing Tarot cards, a bug which bites and never quite lets go.

Every now and then, people would send me letters, physically or electronically, suggesting that we do a Sandman Tarot — some people would even list their suggestions for characters. I'd pass their suggestions on, but nothing came of it.

Moments of convergence and confluence. Cards stirred, and brought together. Events and actions and people...

Rachel wins the Arthur C. Clarke Award for Best SF Novel of the Year (for her remarkable book *Unquenchable Fire*), moves from Amsterdam to New York State, and, through a series of odd coincidences of her own, becomes the writer for DC's DOOM PATROL, a title in the nascent Vertigo line, succeeding the irreplaceable Grant Morrison. People at DC know that Rachel is an award-winning writer of mythic science fiction. Nobody knows that she is a goddess of Tarot.

Sharon Kattuah, in charge of generating DC's own merchandising program, is a Tarot reader of old a dark-eyed lady who, dressed appropriately, would not look out of place in a Romany caravan. We met for the first time in Atlanta in 1993 at the Diamond Distributors conference, where we sat on high stools and drank squashed fruit drinks. We talked about Stuff We'd Love To See — a statue based on P. Craig Russell's drawing of Dream in SANDMAN #50, a Death Temporary Tattoo, the silver ankh (with a long thin Death minicomic in the box), and then I mentioned the idea of doing a Vertigo Tarot...

I did not know that Sharon was a Tarot person, although I found out very quickly. I certainly didn't expect her to go into high, dark places, and persuade some very skeptical people in suits that a Vertigo Tarot really would be a cool, practical idea, and really, people honestly would buy it. But she did. (She also made all the Atlanta Suggestions except the ankh into reality, even the Death Temporary Tattoos.)

I mentioned to her that Rachel was an honest-to-goodness Tarot Authority, and sent a pile of books on the Tarot to Karen Berger, Vertigo Empress (which gives us Karen's card); and in the autumn of 1993, the four of us, Karen, Sharon, Rachel and I, found ourselves in a hotel suite in New York, surrounded by a strange collection of Tarot Cards — the Shakespearian Tarot, The Mythic Tarot, The Amusing Cats Tarot, The Nouvelle Cuisine Tarot and suchlike, saying things like "Well, if we're going to do it, I hope it'll be better than this one. I like their packaging job, though."

The room was on the 24th floor, and I was astonished to find that the windows opened all the way, something which seemed deeply unlikely in suicidal high-rise New York. (Two weeks later I read in the newspaper, with a grim told-you-so satisfaction, that someone had just thrown themselves out of that very selfsame window.)

We all immediately agreed that John Constantine was the Fool. After that our opinions were spirited and varied...

The actual process, of deciding which of the Major Arcana should be which character, was one it would be impossible to describe without destroying the sense of magic and mystery which is essential to all true Tarot decks. It is possible that wing-footed Hermes, in his guise as Thoth of the Egyptians, revealed himself to us, and suggested strongly that, for example, Black Orchid should be Strength. It is equally possible that some cards were only agreed upon after one or more of the four of us threatened to throw him-, her-, themselves-, out of the only functional 24th-floor window in New York. Let your imagination be your guide here.

Rachel took our notes and conclusions, and sent them, together with background of her own, across the wide Atlantic Sea to Dave.

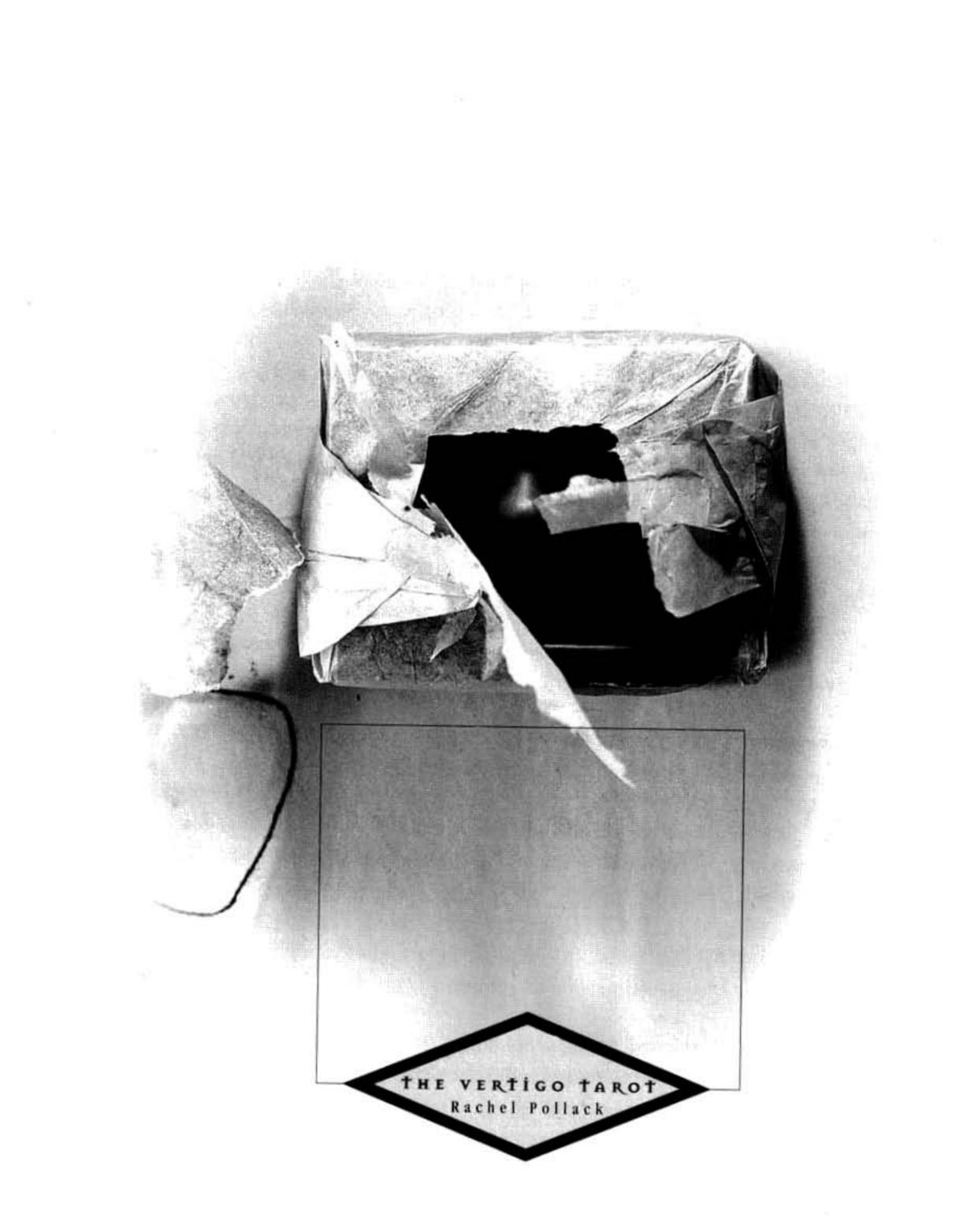
Dave McKean began work on the cards. He was fascinated by the idea of creating Tarot images using the computer — the blending of streams and traditions, the mixture of old and new. And, as printouts of the cards began to appear, the rest of us became increasingly excited. What we were getting was indeed a Vertigo Tarot, but, more important, it was a contemporary Tarot. A Tarot perfectly appropriate for the cold and lonely end of the twentieth century. They were as strange, as beautiful, as detailed and as accessible as we had hoped.

Rachel's text is entertaining, informative, and educational — a perfect accompaniment to the cards themselves.

And it would never have happened, at least, not in this form, were it not for a succession of odd coincidences and confluences, of convergences and characters. Of whom, I suppose, in retrospect, I am also one. As, now, are you...

Pick a card. Any card.





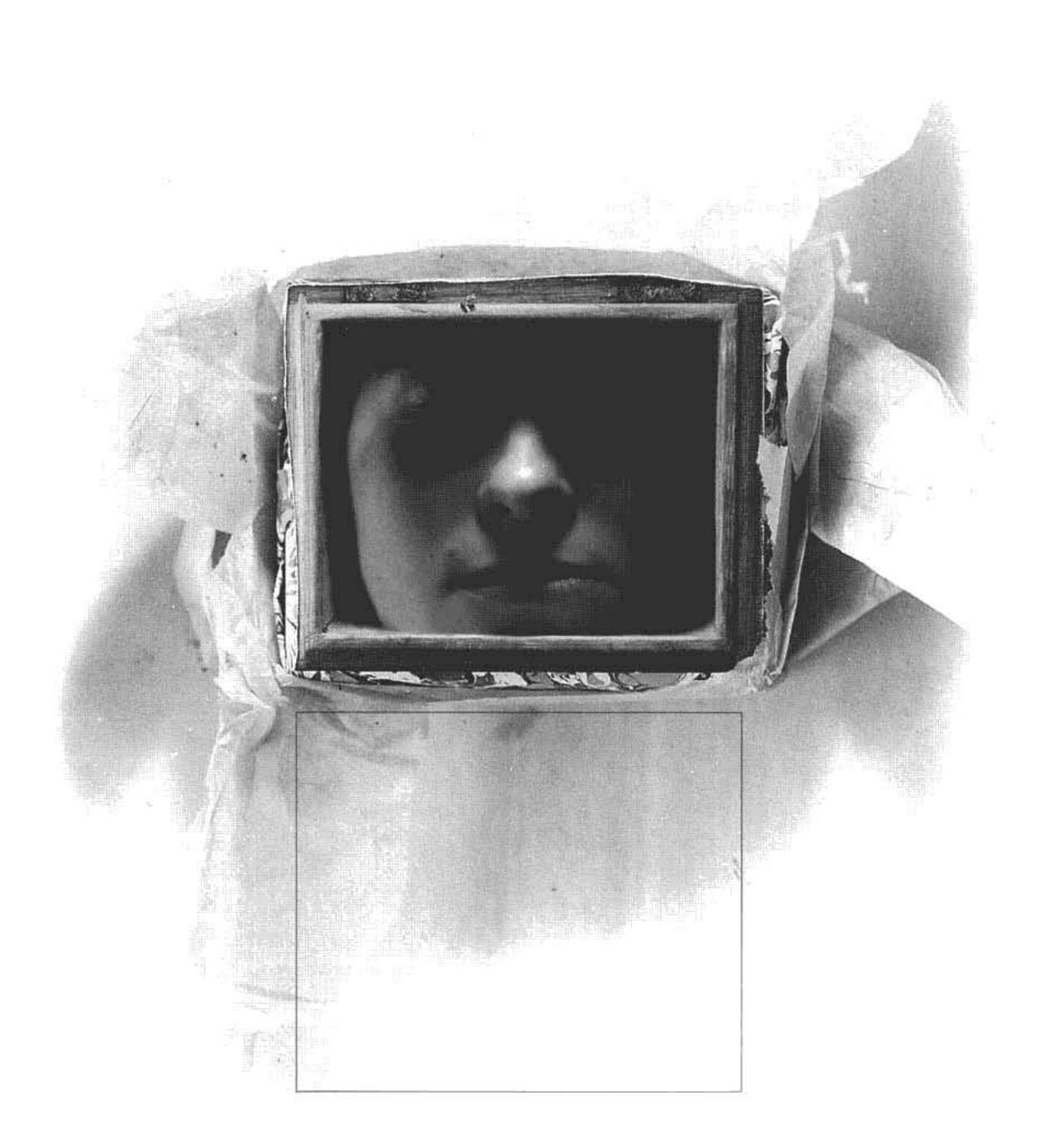
The Tarot is an ancient teaching disguised as a game. The Tarot is a fortune-telling device based on universal symbols. The Tarot is an art form used for fortune telling. The Tarot is a game disguised as ancient teachings...

People studying the Tarot love to debate its origin. Hardline rationalists insist that the Tarot is nothing more than a card game, and only a fool (the first card in the deck is called the Fool) would fall for the idea that it comes from some secret source. Most people, however, prefer to think of secrets. Since the late eighteenth century, many sweeping theories have arisen regarding the Tarot's beginnings (how fitting for a Tarot based on comics, a medium where every character has a "secret origin"). People have claimed the Tarot originated in ancient Egypt, Atlantis, or with a secret convocation of spiritual masters in the Moroccan city of Fez in the year 1200. Some have suggested that the Tarot comes out of matriarchal witchcraft, Tantric Goddess worship, Romany (Gypsy) lore, Jewish mysticism, Chaldean astrology, as well as many other sources.

Unfortunately for these theories and their supporters, very little evidence exists to support them. What we *know* about the Tarot is that it first appeared in Italy around 1450 (playing cards of any kind are mentioned in Europe around fifty or so years earlier). The earliest known Tarot decks are handpainted cards presented as a wedding present between the Sforza and Visconti families (the Viscontis ruled Milan).

Whether or not it was anything else, the early Tarot certainly was a game, the ancestor of bridge and whist. The Italians called the game *tarocchi*; when the French adopted it they named it *les tarots*. People still play it in southern Europe and North Africa.

And yet... Certain images in the Tarot seem to cry out for a symbolic, even an esoteric, interpretation. Death, the Devil, Judgment-these all suggest religion. The Magician implies occult wisdom and practices. In another way, so does the Hermit. And what of the image of a Female Pope (predecessor of the modern card, the High Priestess)? Does that ring of heresy? In the 13th century a sect called the Guglielmites predicted that Christ would return in the year 1300 and usher in a golden age, led by women popes. As the new century approached, they elected a woman named Maria Visconti as the first woman pope. The church put down the heresy and burned Maria at the stake. Some 150 years later, the first known Tarot deck appeared at a wedding of that same Visconti family. And the Hanged Man, that mysterious image of a man dangling by one foot-he may have originated in the Italian practice of hanging traitors upside down, but if so, why does his face appear so radiant? The evidence for mysterious sources for the Tarot lies primarily in the symbolism. For example, The Hindu god Vishnu is often shown with four arms, holding a disk, a lotus, a club, and a conch. At least two of these, the disk and the club, correspond to two of the four suits in the early Tarot deck. Something more directly Europeans many myths and allegories exist around the image of the Holy Grail, Christ's cup from the Last Supper. Often the stories also tell of a sword, a lance, and a disk. These four objects are exactly those of the four suits (the lance and the club are variations of the same suit, now called Wands). Did the Tarot designers borrow them from the Grail stories, or did both derive from secret symbolism that has been lost to us? The most compelling connections for the Tarot lie with the complex system of Jewish mysticism known as Kabbalah. Along with the four suits, the Tarot contains twenty-two trump cards. Kabbalah bases much of its ideas on the secret meaning of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Those four suits also find a reflection in Kabbalah. Kabbalah describes four "worlds," or stages, by which God created the cosmos. Each Tarot suit contains ten numbered cards, Ace through Ten. In each of the four Kabbalistic worlds we find a Tree of Life with ten energy centers known as sephiroth. The suits also contain four Court Cards: Page, Knight, Queen, and King. Kabbalah (and Judaism in general) places a great deal of emphasis on God's four-letter name, known in English as the Tetragrammaton.



There is only one problem with all these examples of symbolic links between the Tarot and esoteric systems. No actual evidence exists to support any of the theories. In all the many thousands of pages of Kabbalistic texts we find no mention of anything resembling the Tarot.

The Tarot deck emerged at the time of the Renaissance. The intellectuals and artists of this time were very taken with esoteric ideas and symbolism. We find images similar to Tarot in alchemy and allegorical street processions. Possibly, the cards began as a game, but the designers found it natural to base the game on spiritual and even secret ideas. And maybe the Tarot does not belong to any particular system. Maybe this lack of any hard ideology is what gives it its stunning resiliency, so that all systems, all traditions, all mythologies—including the growing mythology of a certain line of comic books—can shine so wondrously in this simple pack of cards.

The Kabbalistic interpretation of Tarot, and in fact, the entire occult tradition, began in the late 18th century when a French occultist named Antoine Court de Gebelin proclaimed that the "Book of Thoth," the supposed book of all knowledge from ancient Egypt, had not been lost after all, but existed in plain sight—as the lowly Tarot. In the late 19th century, another French occultist, Eliphas Levi (originally Alphonse Louis Constant) carried de Gebelin's ideas further, with more complete links to Kabbalah.

The links became fully established at the end of the 19th century with the work of a secret occult group called the Order of the Golden Dawn, based on Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism. A group of ritual magicians, the Order used complex ceremonies and magical devices to raise themselves to supposedly godlike levels. William Butler Yeats was the most famous member, but there were many other artists, writers, politicians, and even scientists. The Golden Dawn lasted for about fifteen years, but its influence continues even today, not just in its actual ideas and practices, but also in its very image. When we see groups in robes casting mysterious spells in comics, or movies, we really are looking at a debased version of the Order of the Golden Dawn. As part of their work, they developed a vast system linking every Tarot card with Kabbalah, astrology, angels, demons, names of Gods, etc. The astrological attributions on the trump cards of the Vertigo Tarot are based (with variations) on the work of the Golden Dawn.

Today, the Tarot draws on this complicated occult tradition, but the uses and ideas have expanded. Modern Tarot creators have linked the cards to various cultures (Native American, Persian, Mayan, Celtic, Voodoo, and many others), specific mythologies (Arthurian, Norse, etc.), abstract pictures designed to induce psychological states, art for art's sake, goddess worship, alchemy, nature, herbal medicine, and science fiction-to name a few. Once we separate the Tarot from fixed ideologies, we can begin to look at it as a special work of the imagination. Our culture has a certain bias against images and fantasies. We believe in systematic intellectual constructions; we look doubtfully at stories. But stories and images carry a power that can outlast the most complex philosophical systems. That power is the ability to touch us at a deep level we cannot explain in normal terms. We feel it in a tingling throughout our bodies, in a sense of pleasure, or fear, or simply awe. We recognize a truth we cannot pigeonhole or explain. The Tarot works because when we take away all the books, and theories, and linkages, what remains are the pictures. Provocative, mysterious, making use of all those traditions without ever getting stuck in them. And something else about the Tarot. We can shuffle it. The Tarot resembles a comic book in that it contains pictures showing characters doing things. Turn them over one by one, or set them down by number, and a story may emerge (this is particularly true of the trump cards, but it can hold as well for the four suits). Unlike a comic book, however, the cards are not physically attached to each other. We can create a whole new book just by rearranging the cards.

We can learn a great deal about the cards by looking at their sequence. For example, the fact that the Devil, card 15 of the twenty-two trump cards, follows Temperance, number 14, and precedes the Tower, 16, tells us something about the Devil's "meaning."



This book, like most others, examines the cards one by one. But once we have done all that, we can take the deck^{*}, mix the cards, and then look at them in a whole new way. And new relationships, new stories, will spring to life in front of us.

The great Italian writer Italo Calvino called the Tarot "a machine for telling stories." He described it this way in the afterword to his book *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*. The narrator of the novel tells how he and a group of travelers, all unknown to each other, find themselves stranded in a castle. A curse prevents any of them from speaking, but a Tarot deck lies at hand. Choosing certain cards and laying them down one by one—like the panels of a comic—each traveler tells his tale. Only, we do not actually learn what each traveler wanted to say. Instead, we get the narrator's *interpretation* of the pictures.

Longtime readers of the Vertigo comic *Sandman* may recognize a resemblance to the *Sandman* story "Worlds' End." There, too, a group of stranded travelers tell stories to each other. There is one important difference, however. The travelers in the *Sandman* story can speak. By using words, they can make their stories more precise (though in fact, like all stories, these may convey messages the speaker never consciously intended). Comic books have words. Tarot cards do not. The situation of Calvino's travelers in itself resembles a Tarot reading. No one can say definitively just what message a Tarot reading is telling us. We can only point to certain interpretations— stories—implied by the pictures. Thus, the truth of a Tarot reading does not depend on any absolute set of meanings. Instead, we create that truth, through the play between the pictures, the facts of our lives, and the instincts of our imaginations.

Vertigo too explores the possibilities of story. Many of the Vertigo titles have their roots in mainstream super-hero comics, with characters who sometimes go all the way back to comics' so-called "Golden Age" of the '30s and '40s. But just as Dave McKean's art is more complex and sophisticated than the kind of pictures we're used to seeing in standard comics, so Vertigo has opened the way for contemporary innovative approaches to fantasy and characterization.

Any thoughts that comics and Tarot cards make an odd mix, or that a comic book Tarot somehow belittles the Tarot's ancient wisdom, would probably stem first of all from the habit of not taking comics seriously. Of course, we also should remember that many people will dismiss the Tarot itself as trash, and see a comic book Tarot as a strange alliance of two kinds of nonsense. Happily, these kinds of assumptions have begun to change. One of the great openings of our time is the willingness to look at despised parts of our culture, especially those considered childish, or ignorant. It's no coincidence that the modern blossoming of Tarot has taken place in exactly the same time period, the last thirty years, as the resurgence of comic books. Both Tarot and comics affect us so powerfully because of the immediacy of their form. Whether they're used for storytelling or symbolic ideas, pictures impress their intensity on us. This is partly why many religious traditions have used sequential pictures to educate or inspire. Hindu comic books teach the stories of the gods, a group of characters very similar to American super-heroes. Religious groups in America publish comics from the Bible, often with more of an emphasis on mighty deeds (Noah leading the animals, David killing Goliath, Jesus raising the dead) than any moral teachings. In France some years ago I went to look at a small country church dating back to the Middle Ages. All around the walls a series of sequential pictures—comic-book panels—told the gospel story of the life of Jesus. There was no narration or dialogue, but we can imagine the priest supplying the missing elements. The legend mentioned earlier of the Tarot's origin in Morocco in the year 1200 tells us more about the power of pictures than it does about history. According to the story, a group of spiritual masters from around the world met in the city of Fez. Despite their various nationalities, they shared a great esoteric system of knowledge, originally from Atlantis according to some versions. Unfortunately, the sages knew that this universal knowledge was in danger. The world was fragmenting, and soon the splits between all the different cultures would make it impossible to retain the genuine teachings. Every society would adopt its own version. Each tradition would get some things right,

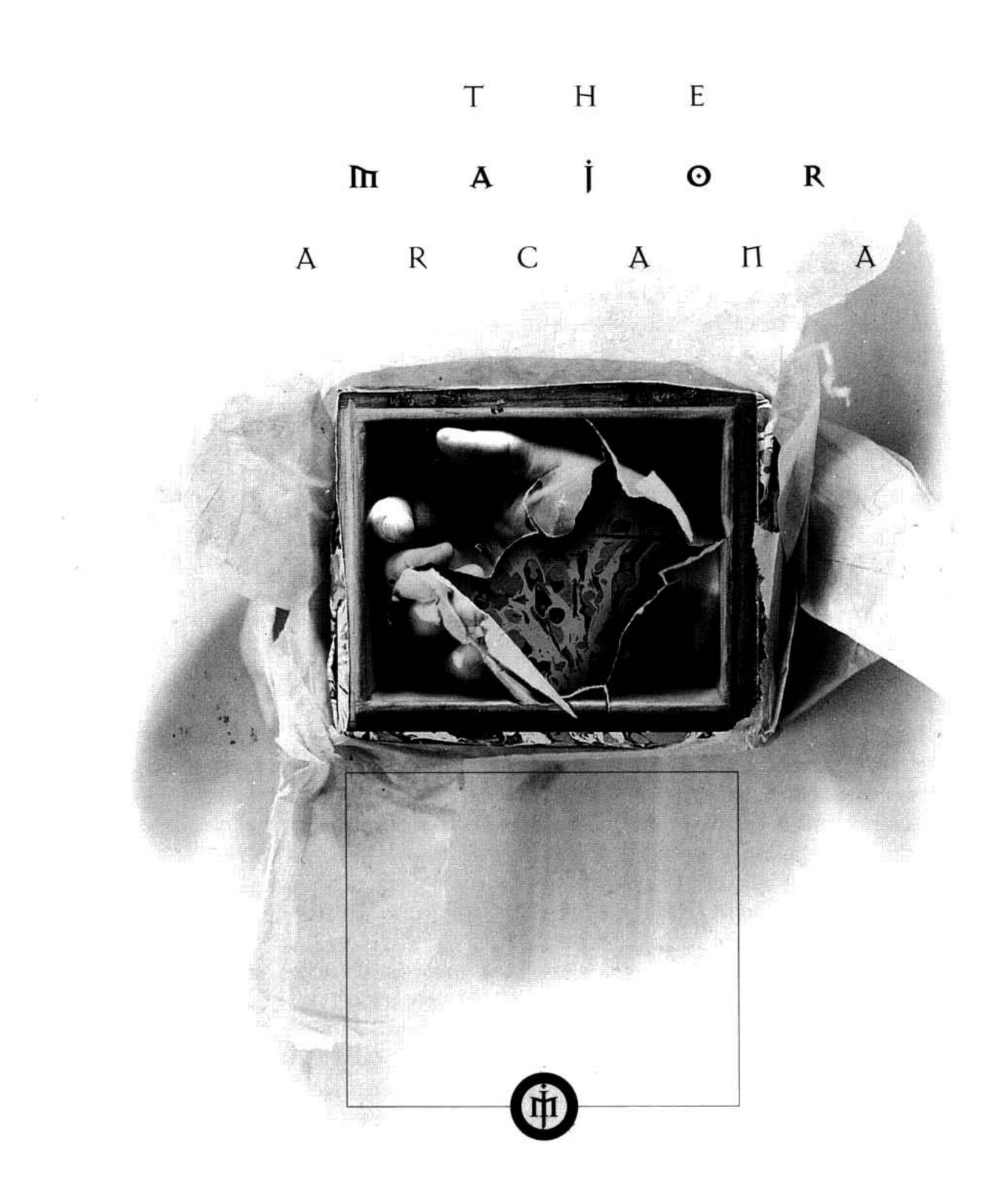


but other things wrong, and still other things would become covered over by local superstition. The sages debated what to do and finally came up with an answer. They would encode their wisdom into pictures, using precise symbols disguised as a card game. The uninitiated would play the game, but wiser people would know to look at the symbols. And when all the teachings had become lost, or confused, the card game would carry the true knowledge forward, available for those with the wisdom to know, and to understand.

The links between comic books and myth, even religion, are much greater than many people realize. Many people studying mythology or mysticism might trace their interest back to such "cosmic" comic books as Jack Kirby's *New Gods*, or some of the early versions of *Dr. Strange*. Many of the Vertigo titles have deliberately mined esoteric ideas and images for their storylines. For example, *The Sandman* is famous for its arcane lore from many countries. The writer, Neil Gaiman, has said that he is not an esotericist, that he simply reads widely. In other words, he does not follow any ideology or system. He follows stories.

Another Vertigo writer, Grant Morrison, often uses esoteric ideas in his storylines. In particular, he borrows images and concepts from the same Kabbalah which Court de Gebelin, Eliphas Levi, and the Order of the Golden Dawn, described as the secret origin of Tarot. Morrison has, in fact, used Tarot cards in a number of his comics. We can find similar examples in the work of any number of other Vertigo writers.

The deepest connection between Tarot and comics may stem from a common source, that of shamanism. Probably the oldest form of religion, shamanism is a loose term (the actual word "shaman" comes from the Tungus people of Siberia) for very direct experiences of ecstasy and magic. Shamans are found all over the world. They go into trances and travel to the realms of the spirits, where they get help from the gods, battle demons, and return with special powers and tools to help their tribe or community. Often, shamans will use various devices for divination. Many people believe that esoteric systems and teachings originally begin with shamanic ecstasy. The resemblances are strong. Like shamanism, esoteric religion stresses direct encounters with God. Jewish mysticism, for example, is filled with techniques for journeying to the "palaces of heaven." As an outgrowth of the esoteric tradition, Tarot teaches us to follow our own path to salvation. It begins with a Magician, shows images of death and rebirth, and moves through the darkness of the unconscious to the light of revelation. In short, it gives us a blueprint for our own shamanic journeys. What is "heretical," and dangerous, about the Tarot is the implied idea that we don't need priests to intercede between us and divine experience. In recent years, a whole range of comics have drawn on shamanic traditions and images. These have included Vertigo titles as well as more conventional super-heroes. The shamanic connection, however, goes much deeper than a series of storylines. The shaman dresses in elaborate costumes. He travels to other worlds. He gains miraculous powers, sometimes based on the qualities of animals. Using his powers and magical weapons, he fights monsters and malevolent beings with equally fearsome powers. He further uses his powers to help and protect the community of ordinary humans. Does all this sound familiar? I am not suggesting any historic connections between tribal shamans and super-hero comic books. Instead, it seems to me that some of the same human impulses have given rise to both creations, that some of the people who first brought up the idea of the costumed hero may have been tapping into a kind of sublimated version of the energy that in other times and places has drawn the shamans into their trances. The Tarot can serve us as a tool for our own journeying. Maybe we will not make actual trance visits to other worlds, but we can let these strange and magical images trigger our own imaginations. The Tarot cards carry a complex set of symbolic meanings from their long tradition. If we bring to the cards a whole new group of images, with their own collective history, the effect can make the journey deeper and more intense.



The standard Tarot deck consists of seventy-eight cards—"seventy-eight degrees of wisdom," as Charles Williams called them in his novel *The Greater Trumps*. The seventy-eight further break down into two parts, the four suits, each with fourteen cards (fifty-six in all), plus the twenty-two trump cards. People using the Tarot for divination (readings), or simply studying them for their symbolic meanings, refer to the twenty-two as the Major Arcana, and the fifty-six suit cards as the Minor Arcana. "Arcana" means "secrets," so that "Major Arcana" implies secrets of greater importance and power.

The distinction between the two parts of the deck carries through in the card game. Charles Williams's expression "greater trumps" derives from the rules of *les tarots*. In each hand, one of the players gets to designate a particular suit as "trump" (the same as in bridge). However, if someone plays one of those cards, and someone else can follow with one of the twenty-two Major Arcana cards, then this greater trump will triumph over the lesser one (the word "trump" derives from *trionf*).

This rule from the game says something about the relationship between the two parts of the deck on the esoteric level as well. The Minor Arcana signify the daily experiences of life. They show us our joys and our pains. At one time or another, each of the suits will take precedence—in other words, the qualities symbolized by Swords may dominate our lives at a particular time, but then a few weeks later, the qualities associated with Cups will take over. The Major Arcana, however, represent something deeper, something more spiritual, more archetypal. When these kinds of experiences appear in our lives, they take precedence over the more mundane issues that usually will occupy our attention. They overtake the mundane in the same way that the World card will trump the King of Pentacles. The titles of the cards themselves have always made clear the distinction between the two parts of the deck. The mysterious or majestic names, such as the Magician, the World, or the Hanged Man, all belong to the Major Arcana. The Minor cards have had to make do with titles as straightforward as Five of Wands, Seven of Swords, Queen of Cups.

The pictures too have always separated the Major and the Minor, even in the days before Court de Gebelin, when almost no one thought of the deck as a symbolic message. In virtually all Tarot decks before the twentieth century, the artist painted elaborate, fascinating pictures for the twenty-two trump cards, but only the simplest patterns for the suits. For example, the Chariot might show a powerful warrior in a decorated chariot drawn by magnificent horses, one black, one white. Or the Wheel of Fortune might show an ornate wheel surrounded by animals, including a bear turning the wheel by a crank on the axle. By contrast, the Five of Cups would show little more than five cups arranged across the card. The Court Cards, the Pages, Knights, Queens, and Kings, carried more elaborate pictures, but they tended just to strike formal poses, like an official portrait of the monarch. They could hardly compete with the Hanged Man, suspended by one foot from a tree branch, or the naked people rising from their coffins in the card of Judgment. To this day, many Tarot readers have the most difficulty interpreting the Court Cards, simply

because the pictures appear so static.

Just as the card game gives prominence to the twenty-two Major Arcana, so have most writers on the Tarot's esoteric symbolism. Until very recently, books on the Tarot have tended to go into great detail interpreting the trump cards, only to add on a very short chapter at the end describing the suits. It is not unusual to find a three- or four-hundred-page book going into the tiniest details of the Major Arcana, with no mention at all of the Minor. What do we mean when we say that the Major Arcana represent "spiritual," or "archetypal" experiences? First of all, we do not mean that they preach any particular religious doctrine. We have seen how different people have put forward different theories for the Tarot's underlying message. But the Tarot eludes all these attempts to pin it down. Instead, it teaches something more fundamental.

The cards show us a vision of the universe as alive and vibrant at all levels. And they show our progress through life as a journey of joy and mystery. The Major Arcana tell a story, a tale of adventure. It begins with the Fool and takes him through a series of tests and revelations, until he becomes transformed. He goes out in quest of something and discovers that he himself is the prize.

The term "archetypal" refers to images, or story elements, that appear throughout human history, in many cultures. Each place will give the archetype a local flavor, but the underlying image will remain the same. Examples of these archetypes include the wise old man, the benevolent mother goddess, the demon monster, and the miraculous rebirth. Each of these, as well as others, appear in the Tarot (in order, they are the Hermit, the Empress, the Devil, and Judgment).

One very powerful archetype is the Trickster. Some cultures even bring this figure to life, as well as including him in their stories. A person, or a group, will take on the behavior (and wild clothes) of the sacred clown, playing tricks on the priests or officials, or else undercutting the rigid roles of society with their outrageous jokes. In the Tarot, the Trickster appears as the Fool, the wild card (many card historians believe that the joker in the modern playing deck descends from the Tarot Fool). Those people who try to establish a fixed set of symbols for the Tarot find themselves arguing over the place of the Fool. Does he go at the beginning? The end? Somewhere in the middle? Like the Vertigo character John Constantine, the Fool does not belong anywhere. He is an outsider,

subverting the established order of the deck. We can call the Fool the hero of the Tarot precisely because he cannot be pinned down. He travels through all the other cards.

There are archetypal stories as well as images. Think of all the fairy tale stories we read as children. Remember how in so many of them the hero, usually the youngest brother or sister, is described as a good-for-nothing, a simpletona fool.

Just as we can find a vast range of religious and esoteric teachings within the structure of the Major Arcana, so we also can find a wide variety of stories. The Tarot writer Mary K. Greer has taken the Oedipus story, as laid out in the plays of Sophocles, and shown how we can map it onto the Major Arcana, card by card. Others have done the same with King Arthur. One of the stories I have followed through the Tarot is that of the Greek Goddess Persephone, who was kidnapped by the God of Death, and returned to the living world through the struggle of her mother Demeter. Demeter is often linked to the Empress, while the Star can represent Persephone. In Vertigo, Persephone makes an appearance in the Sandman story of the Dreamlord's son, Orpheus. In the Vertigo Tarot we see hints of her in the Empress, the card usually connected to Demeter.

The Major Arcana matches so many myths and fairy tales for the same reasons that it matches so many religious and esoteric teachings. Its underlying structure comes from deep in the human imagination, the same source for all those different tales and traditions. As we follow the Vertigo characters through the various cards, we will see how these figures too, with their many different stories, match the images and symbols of the Tarot. Each card in the Major Arcana acts in (at least) two ways. First, they teach us individual lessons. The Magician tells us something about power and consciousness. The Devil exposes our fears and desires. The Empress arouses our passion for life. But they also form a sequence. This is the great story in which all the smaller, individual stories take part.

Here is an overview of that great story. The Fool (card 0)sets out on his journey. He has to be a fool to give up a normal life and venture into this dangerous unknown world. He encounters the Magician (1) and the High Priestess (2). Each of them possesses power, but they also represent the great principles of existence: light and dark, male and female, conscious thought and the deep well of the unconscious. The Fool encounters nature and society in the form of the Empress (3) and the Emperor (4). The Hierophant (5) attempts to teach him traditional ideas, but, being a Fool, he falls in love instead. He emerges from his Lovers (6) experience seemingly more mature and in charge of his life, able to drive his own Chariot (7). But he knows there are adventures he still hasn't experienced. He finds the Strength (8) to give everything up and become a Hermit (9). Now he seems to have gotten older and acquired wisdom. But at heart he remains a Fool. He sees a vision of his own destiny in the Wheel of Fortune (10). Fearlessly (another aspect of the Fool is his wild courage), he accepts the Justice (11) of who he is. For really the first time, he makes the move from unconscious instinct to conscious self-awareness. Now comes a turning point. The Fool offers himself on the Tree of Life. Reversing everything society has tried to teach him, he literally turns himself upside down by hanging by one foot. The Hanged Man (12) is crucial to the Tarot's blueprint for enlightenment. He represents all the different kinds of initiations devised by all the world's esoteric traditions, from the ordeals of Siberian shamans and Tibetan Buddhists to the vision quests of the Lakota Sioux to young Aborigines meeting the spirits in the vast deserts of Australia. In the Vertigo Tarot, the Hanged Man is Shade, the Changing Man. In his comic book, Shade is attached to a power called the Madness. To the outside world, the Hanged Man does appear mad, as well as foolish, for he reverses his whole life to find an inner truth. The Fool appears to die. Hanging on his tree, he shows his willingness to sacrifice his very life. Instead, what dies are his fears and defenses. After Death (13), he sees himself reborn as the powerful angel of Temperance (14). Now he faces his greatest test. With his new powers, he descends to the underworld and confronts the Devil (15). An explosion destroys the Devil's fortress, the Tower (16). But in fact, the Devil is really himself, his dark shadow, and the lightning bolt that destroys the Tower is his own divine energy. He finds himself in the dark night, with only the Star (17) to guide him and give him hope. He must pass through the strange dreamworld of the Moon (18). When he emerges into the Sun (19) he finds himself reborn yet again, not as a powerful angel, but simply as a child. He hears the horns of Judgment (20), telling him to take up his new life. Finally, he returns to the World (21). One way to organize our understanding of the Major Arcana is to see it in groups. If we set the Fool aside as the wild card, this leaves twenty-one cards, or three groups of seven. Three is a sacred number in many cultures. We might think of such trinities as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost in Christianity, or Maiden, Mother, and Crone in Goddess worship, or Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva in Hinduism. Seven in many ways symbolizes the physical world. Yoga teaches us of the seven chakras in the human body. Each chakra glows with a color. These colors match the colors of the rainbow, but only when the body is upside down, another clue to the importance of the Hanged Man. There are seven openings in the human head. Our week contains seven days because the naked eye can see seven planets, including the sun and moon. Three, therefore, represents the power of the gods, while seven symbolizes human experience.

The three groups are 1-7, 8-14, and 15-21. Each of them ends with a kind of victory over the challenges of that line. The first ends in the strong will of the Chariot, the second in the calm angel of Temperance, and the last in the World, with its vision of the whole universe as a living organism.

We can learn a lot about the cards by comparing them to the ones above and below them. That is, the Magician, Strength, and the Devil each occupy the first position in their lines—cards One, Eight, and Fifteen. What do these three have in common? How are they different? In what way does each of them start a line of development? We also can compare cards by their numbers. Five and fifteen suggest a relationship. When we look at the Hierophant (High Priest) and the Devil, definite associations might come to mind. In the Vertigo Tarot these two are old enemies, Morpheus and Lucifer. But they may be more alike than either one would want to admit. Another number relationship: the number fifteen is written as a one and a five. If we add these two we get six. This gives us a connection between the Devil and the Lovers. Traditionally, the two cards signify two sides of sexuality, "pure" relationships versus dark lust. In the Vertigo Tarot the connection becomes reinforced when we learn that the Lovers card shows an angel from heaven in a love affair with a demon from hell.

Another way people have approached the Major Arcana is to compare it to other symbolic systems. People have linked the cards to Hebrew letters, alchemical signs, Runes (the Runes are a German/Scandinavian alphabet that was used for divination and magic as well as ordinary writing), I Ching hexagrams, and in particular, astrology. The astrological links which most Tarot people consider traditional derive from the Order of the Golden Dawn, with some modern revisions to bring in the discovery of the outer planets.

On the Vertigo Major Arcana cards we can see the astrological symbol along the bottom margin, laid over the name. Dave McKean has mostly followed the Golden Dawn system, but with some interesting variations. Several planets appear on two cards, suggesting a special link between them. The Empress and the Star are both Venus. The Emperor and the Wheel of Fortune are both Jupiter. Death and the World are both Saturn. In each case, the higher card (the Star, the Wheel of Fortune, the World) displays an extra flourish on the planetary symbol. If we wish to think about what connections these links establish, we might think first of all about the two cards, what they have in common, how they differ, in what way could the second one represent a "higher" version of the first. And then we can think as well about the planet and what that symbolizes. For instance, the planet Saturn signifies limits. Death might mean reaching the limits of our ordinary way of living, while the World might symbolize a transcendence of all our limitations.

The most interesting astrological "link" in the Vertigo Tarot comes between the Hierophant and the Devil. Neither one bears any astrological symbol at all. We already have seen a connection between these two cards from their numbers, their traditional meanings, and their Vertigo characters. Now we can think about what it means that neither one is linked to any of the stars and planets.

So far, most of the ways we have looked at the Major Arcana come from their traditional symbolic images. But what makes this deck unique is the source material for the characters on the pictures. Each card linked to a particular Vertigo character gains a whole new range of meanings from that character's history and qualities. At the same time, the Vertigo line as a whole gives a special quality to this particular Tarot deck. There is no single Vertigo style, but there is a kind of shared Vertigo sensibility. The qualities involved include dark fantasy, sophisticated characterization, a sense of irony, and self-aware wit. The Vertigo Tarot brings many of these same qualities to Tarot tradition. The pictures themselves are physically dark. The characters seem to half emerge from intense blackness. Often, they are partially lit by sharp golden light. Sometimes the light becomes red, as if turning to blood. Another feature running through these cards (Minor as well as Major) is the use of text. We have seen how one difference between the sequential pictures of Tarot and those of comics is the fact that comics have words and Tarot cards do not. In many of these pictures, Dave McKean has added fragments of letters or lines of type. In almost every case, the surrounding images obscure the actual words, making the text unreadable. The effect emphasizes the cards' mystery and the inability to pin them down to specific meanings. The Vertigo sensibility also comes through in the choice of characters to match the particular trump cards. While in some cases the character and the card fit perfectly-most obviously, with the use of Dream's older sister, Death, for the card of Death-often the two seem like extreme opposites. For the all-powerful Emperor, who in most decks sits rigidly on his throne, we find the Geek, a living rag doll, who can hardly sit upright. For the angel of Temperance, majestic in his calm and moderation, we see Delirium, totally swept up in her own intemperate nature. These mismatches are not just perverse. By undercutting the traditional trump figures, the Vertigo Tarot allows us to see them in a new way, in much the same way that Vertigo comics show us fantasy from a new perspective. They subvert the standard images in order to give them fresh life. The various Vertigo characters do something else for the cards as well. They give them a new life, the life of their own stories. When we look at the Hierophant we can think of all the symbolism associated with the card. We can think as well of the various traditions of high priests, from tribal elders to popes. But now we also can think of Morpheus, the Lord of Dreams, of all his tales, of the magical worlds of the Dreaming, and of all our own dreams and fantasies inspired by reading Sandman. The Major Arcana, repository of so many traditions, has opened itself once more, absorbing and adapting a whole new mythology.



THE FOOL--JOHN CONSTANTINE, from "HELLBLAZER" (Uranus) Think of the Major Arcana as a comicbook story. After all, it is told in pictures. Like the best comic books, the Major Arcana begins with a hero, a wild outsider with strange powers. He is a lone mystery man, thumbing his nose at the universe, looking for adventure. Eventually, he will confront his deepest fears and weaknesses. He will go beyond his personal needs to encounter the wonder and strangeness of existence. He will rediscover the childlike freedom which has always been his driving force. Finally, he will return as something greater than he himself could ever have predicted. And yet, he will remain himself, with his own rebellious wit. This is the story of the Major Arcana, and the Fool is its hero. It is also the story of John Constantine: the cynic who cannot resist a call for help, the outsider who battles against all authority, even including God and the Devil. The Fool's most important symbol is his number, 0. He moves outside the sequence of all the other cards, with their set places. The Fool remains free because he is nothing, no thing. He does not occupy any hierarchical position. John Constantine has no titles, and no followers. His refusal to settle down costs him his lovers and his friends. Constantine and the Tarot Fool are archetypal

tricksters, getting into and out of trouble recklessly, just for the experience.

The most famous image of the Fool shows a young man about to step off a cliff. A dog or a cat dances beside him, and he holds a flower in the sunshine. Here, the sun becomes a kind of nuclear explosion, the flowers have wilted, and the animal has become a skeleton penetrating his body. We are seeing the dark side of the Fool, the price he pays for placing freedom above all other values.

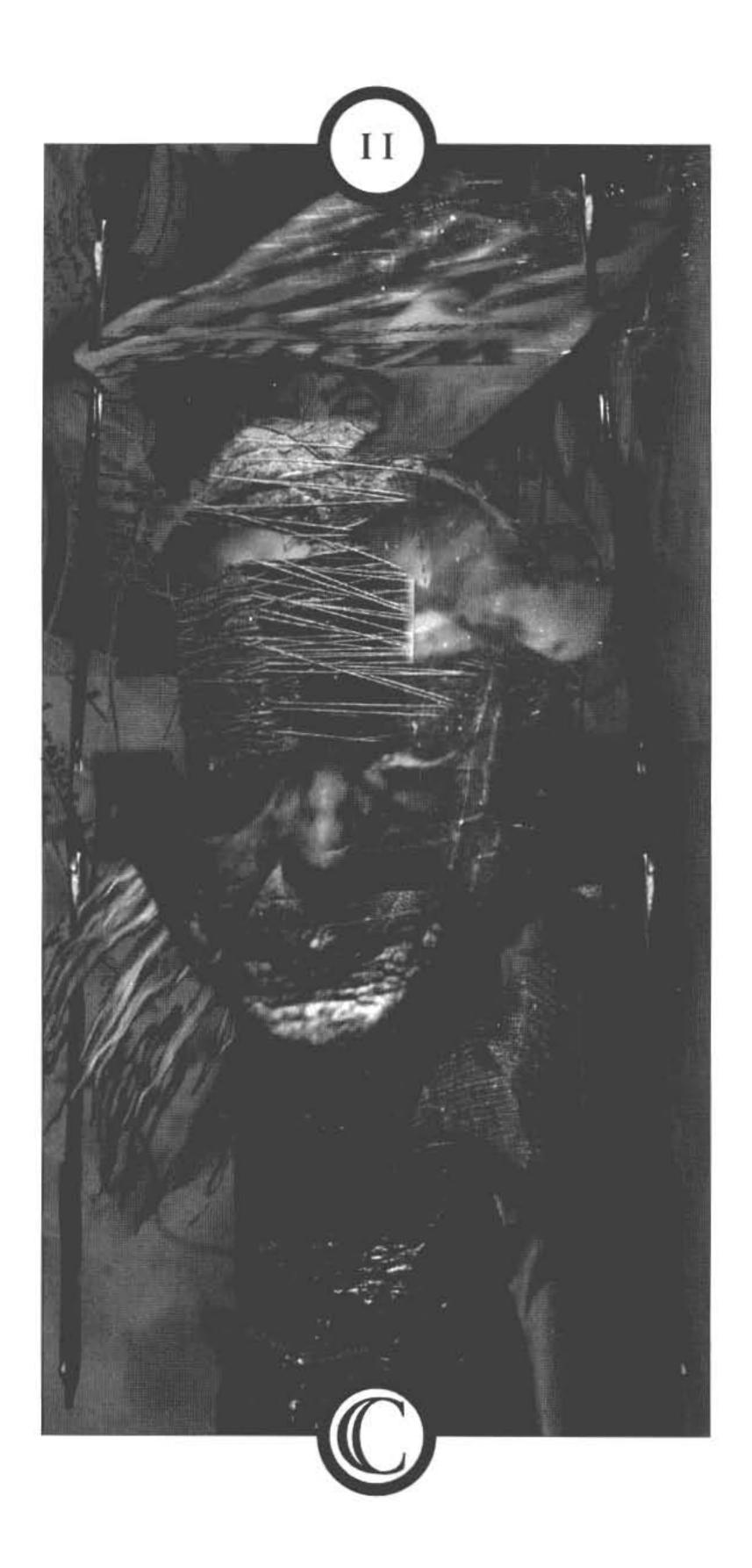
Divinatory meanings--Wildness, taking risks. Some kind of leap of faith. Resisting authority, following your own path. Reversed--Hesitancy, caution. Difficulty trusting your own instincts.





THE MAGICIAN--TIM HUNTER, from "BOOKS OF MAGIC" (Mercury) Traditionally, the Fool shows a child or youth, while the Magician depicts an all-powerful adept. In this Tarot, the Fool is one of the most powerful magicians in comics, while the Magician shows a young man who has just begun his studies. Just as the Fool showed us the price of eternal innocence, so this Magician gives us the fearsomeness of taking on responsibility. In the original four-part "Books of Magic," Tim Hunter did not seek out magical training. The archetypal world had to lure him away from his ordinary reality. The Magician begins the numbered cards. If the Major Arcana represents the Fool's journey, the Magician is the first thing the Fool encounters. Traditionally, he symbolizes the active principle. We associate this principle with light, action, will, creativity, consciousness and masculinity (though not necessarily men; a woman can embody the Magician, and in fact, each of us experiences these qualities at different times in our lives). Here, the light shines in Tim's face and reflects off his glasses-the classic image of the nerd. Behind the glamor of magic (or any creative activity) lies a lot of hard work. The book in front of his forehead suggests all the tedious study it takes to become a mage. The Tarot Magician often is depicted standing with one arm pointing a magic wand up to heaven and the other channeling the energy down to the Earth. Creative energy does not come from inside ourselves, but moves through us. Virtually all writers and artists will tell you that when the work goes well, it seems to come from outside, and they just set it down on paper or canvas. Tim Hunter repeats the famous gesture here, but with a certain hesitancy, or shyness, as if awed by the power involved. John Constantine has the knowledge but not the responsibility to become the Magician. Whatever he touches he destroys. Tim Hunter will take the responsibility to study and develop himself. But because he can focus the energy around him, he may become far more dangerous than Constantine ever could be.

> Divinatory meanings--Power, knowledge, creativity. A sense of life as magical, when everything goes right. Reversed--Weakness or suppressed energy. Alternatively, the need to use power responsibly.



THE HIGH PRIESTESS--MAD HETTIE, from "DEATH: THE HIGH COST OF LIVING" (The Moon) The Tarot High Priestess (sometimes called the

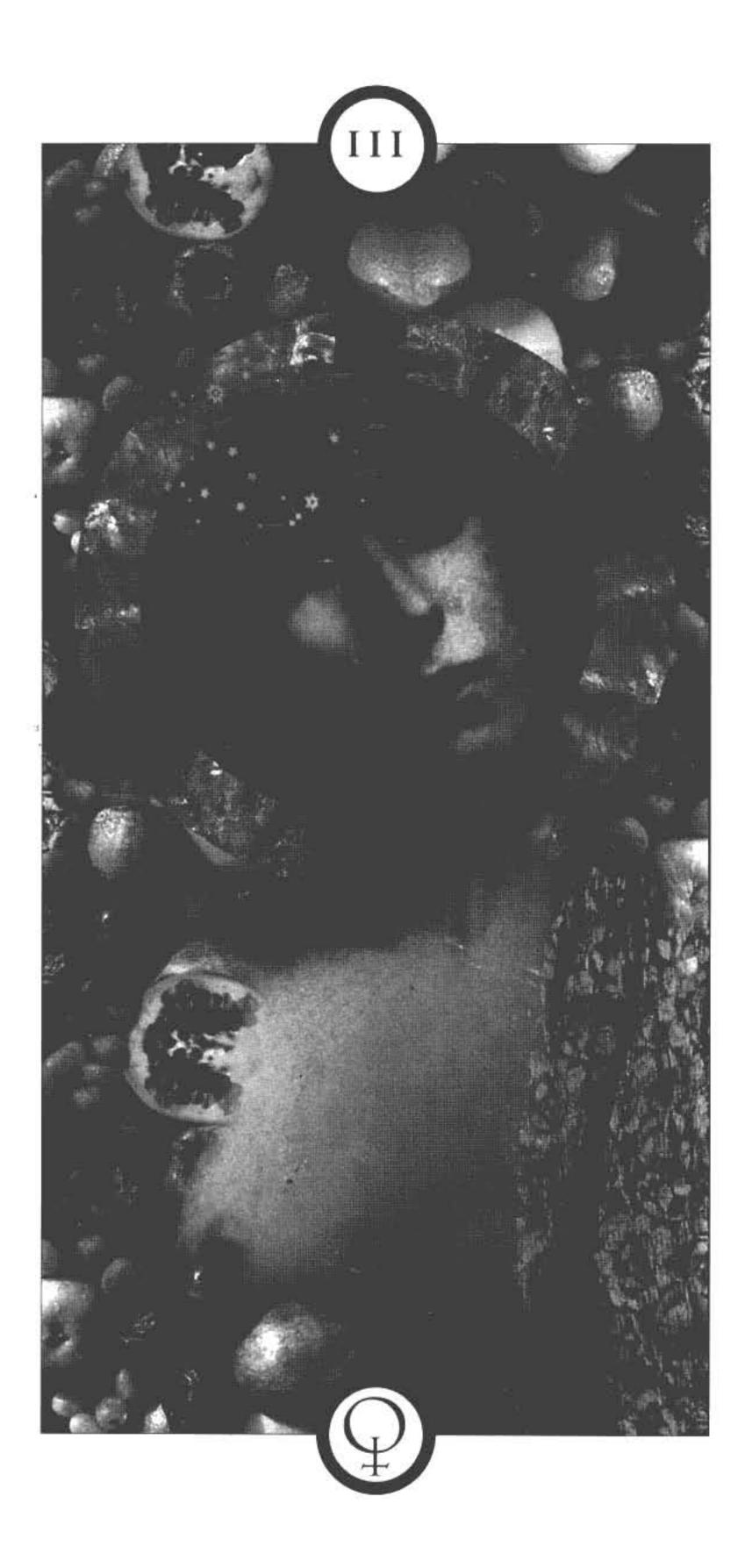
> Female Pope) represents the Magician's opposite: receptive rather than active, dark rather than light, silent rather than expressive, the mysteries of the Moon rather than the blazing expression of Mercury. There is nothing weak about this card. Think of her as the stillness

of deep water, whose secrets no diver can ever discover. Usually, the card shows a silent woman sitting before a temple, whose entrance is blocked by a curtain, or "veil" (the famous occultist Madame Blavatsky titled her revelations "Isis Unveiled"). The Vertigo figure subverts the classic image. Mad Hettie posesses all the knowledge of a priestess, but she lives the life of a bag lady. We see a shopping bag above her head, its form resembling the open jaws of a wild animal.

While the traditional High Priestess remains silent, Hettie babbles, like any crazy woman on a street corner. And yet, in a world that does not recognize mystery, her muttering will guard the secrets as well as any ancient temple. The High Priestess is often thought of as a virgin. To some extent, this comes from a male dominance in occult tradition. In cultures where women actually served as priestesses, they were much more often crones, women who had passed childbearing and could turn their energies inward. The face of Mad Hettie, and in fact, the whole quality of this card, suggests great age.

There is something frightening about old women, especially those who do not go quietly to their rocking chairs. We suspect them of witchcraft and strange powers. The red of this card suggests an angry energy. The usual pillars of the temple become discarded widshield wipers. Instead of a veil, we see that wild animal shopping bag. We begin to suspect that the High Priestess keeps her secrets more to protect *us* than herself.

> Divinatory meanings--Stillness. Wisdom, intuition. A sense of knowing things which cannot be explained in normal terms. Reversed--A change from stillness to action. Defending, or seeking out, what is rightfully yours.



THE EMPRESS--TITANIA, QUEEN OF THE FAIRIES, from "BOOKS OF MAGIC" (Venus) The High Priestess signified the mysterious depths of femininity. The Empress represents female passion, in all its aspects--sexuality, fertility, motherhood. Mythologically, she is the Goddess of nature and abundance. She does not just rule the world, in the way we think of the Jewish or Christian God ruling the universe from outside. She is the world. She is the spiritual power that gives life to the land and its creatures. Titania, queen of the land of Faerie, expresses this idea of complete identity with her world. The traditional version of this card shows the Empress sitting in a garden, wearing a crown of stars. She is identified with Demeter, Goddess of the green Earth. The Vertigo card emphasizes the Empress's lush sensuality. Instead of sitting on a throne, she stands in a universe of ripe fruit. Her naked breast appears like another offering. Unlike the High Priestess, she holds nothing back. But her face remains clouded, for we can experience her gifts, we can taste her and live from her, but we can never really know her.

> Around her head we see a kind of cracked halo, as if she has descended from heaven to rule our imperfect

world. Constellations move over her right eye, reminding us that the Empress of nature rules the sky as well as the Earth. On the left side of the picture we see two halves of a fruit. The skin looks like an apple, but the many seeds suggest a pomegranate. If so, this suggests a new range of ideas. Demeter blighted the world when the Lord of the Dead kidnapped Demeter's daughter, Persephone. Persephone returned, but because she had eaten a pomegranate, she must spend part of every year as queen of the dead. The Empress is Persephone as well as Demeter, winter as well as summer.

> Divinatory meanings--Passion, sensuality, desire. Motherhood and nurturing. Reversed--Detachment, emotional distance. Thinking something through.





THE EMPEROR--THE GEEK (Jupiter) The traditional Emperor card bearded man sitting on a throne. Often he holds a scepter and a globe of the world. He may wear armor under his imperial robe. As the Empress's consort, he brings law and human society to her abundant nature. In a wider sense, he signifies the idea of structure, including the laws of nature, imposing order on chaos. Because of his emphasis on law and society, many people see him as a symbol of repression.

The Geek is wonderfully opposite to all of this. Instead of a rigid figure in armor and princely robes, he is a rag doll, brought to life by a quirk of nature. Far from a symbol of structure, he flops about, his head tilted impossibly to the side, and a dazed sweet expression on his face. Rather than laying down the rules for others to follow, the Geek tries, helplessly, to figure out human society.

We see him sitting on a rigid throne, but in his own floppy way. In fact, the way his hair streams upwards suggests that he has fallen onto his Emperor throne, or maybe is falling past it (remember the traditional Fool stepping off his cliff). His face and body recall Punch, the English puppet. The arms look human, though the hands and fingers stick

out in strange angles. His scepter and throne dangle from strings, like marionettes. Below them, we see actual marionettes, a man and a woman reaching out to each other.

> They may think they control their own destiny, but in fact, it is the Emperor's choice what happens to them. Though none of us has any actual strings attached to our arms, we may be more controlled by outside forces than we like to admit. We can also read a political meaning in the Geek's puppetry. In his story, the Geek posseses the power to occupy and bring to life any doll or image. In our ordinary world we have learned that those who rule the images can often pull the strings for the rest of us.



Divinatory meanings--Law, structure, the social order. All of these may be less powerful than they seem. May also mean fatherhood.

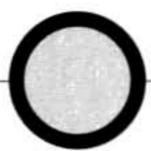
> Reversed--Whatever undermines law and order. Discovering who is pulling the strings.



THE HIEROPHANT ---MORPHEUS, from "THE SANDMAN" (no astrological attribution) The Hierophant used to be called The Pope. Some modern decks name him the High Priest, to show that where the High Priestess conceals the inner mysteries, the Hierophant reveals the outer truths. In many ways, Morpheus, also called the Sandman, Dream, and the Lord of Dreams, is the very image of a High Priest. Like a High Priest, Morpheus does not so much act in his comic as preside over it. Often, he will not even appear for several issues, and yet his presence pervades the story. It also is fitting that the Hierophant for the Vertigo Tarot be a master of dreams. Though the various Vertigo titles make no attempt to form a single continuity (or style), many of them move in and out of a dreamlike state. In many Tarot decks, the Hierophant represents orthodox spirituality. By contrast, Morpheus has seen all religions come and go. He knows them as special dreams, and so can lead us beyond specific

knows them as special dreams, and so can read us beyond specific teachings to the strangeness and beauty of sacred experience. The word "hierophant" actually suits him very well, for it literally means "one who shows sacred things." In Greece, the hierophant presided over the Greater Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone (remember the Empress).
Morpheus here appears more sensual, even androgynous, than we usually see him in his own book. We see the darkness of night in the card, but also strange colors, suggesting the luminous variety of dreams. He holds up his hand in blessing, a gesture from the standard imagery for the card. The wand he holds looks at first like the Greek Orthodox triple cross (another standard Hierophant image). When we look closer we see that the crosses are wings. Like something from a dream themselves, the wings signify the transformational power of dreams.

Divinatory meanings--Teachings, traditional ideas, wisdom. Gaining wisdom or knowledge from dreams. Reversed--Unorthodoxy, finding your own path.

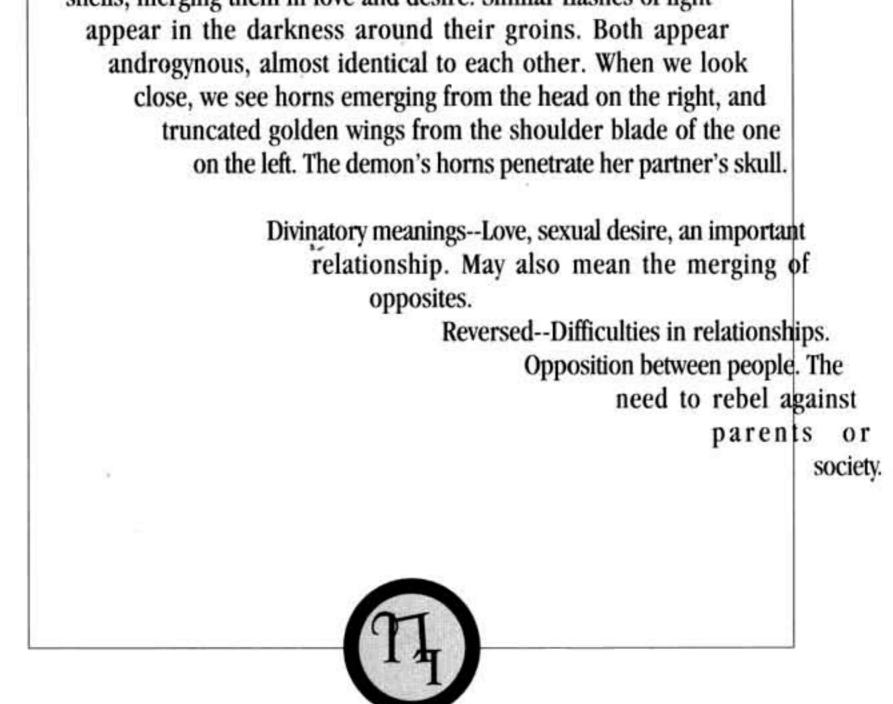




THE LOVERS--CHANTINELLE AND TANI, from "HELLBLAZER" (Gemini) The Lovers card symbolizes the positive power of sexuality in our lives. Besides leading us to love, sexual desire liberates us from being copies of our parents (Empress and Emperor), or simply doing whatever society tells us (Hierophant). Sexuality helps make us individuals. We see this very strongly in this Vertigo version of the card. Tani, an angel from heaven, Chantinelle, a demon from hell--no two lovers have ever defied their "parents" and "society" more than these two. Partly, the story of this romance derived from the idea that heaven and hell are really the same, because they both wield absolute power and use it to protect their privileges. In other words, they represent the upper classes, whether they take the roles of good guys or bad guys. At the same time, the characters embody the idea of sex and love overwhelming all

rules and ideology. Most versions of The Lovers depict them standing apart, in a rather stately manner. Here we see them touching, and almost merging, for the demon seems to put her hand through her partner's body.

Their heads appear both inflated and fragile, like eggshells. We might think of the heads as representing the abstract ideas of good and evil. But here a kind of explosion breaks through these shells, merging them in love and desire. Similar flashes of light





VII

THE CHARIOT--THE ENIGMA (Sagittarius) This is the most abstract of all the Major Arcana images. It gives us a sense of something unfinished, something only partly in the world. Of the Chariot itself, we see only the horse's head and the wheel. Both have a rough look, with the horse just outlined. The head within the outline looks partly dissolved. It resembles a fish. Of the Chariot driver himself, we see only a hand holding the reins.

The Chariot sometimes bears the title "Victory." It culminates the first group of seven cards. To master (or at least confront) those first lessons--such issues as nature, society, sexuality-allows us to make us a place for ourselves in the world. But there are still fourteen more cards, two whole levels. And so the victory here is incomplete, only a beginning. The Chariot signifies the power of will. The Enigma controls the world around him through the force of his mind. He takes over people's personalities and changes them into characters from an old comic book. He takes over Michael, pushing Michael's hidden homosexuality to emerge, so that he and Michael can become lovers. He can even change reality itself. And yet, there is something desperate about this card. Something fearful. Despite all the abstraction, the Chariot driver seems about to impose order on a formless existence. But he does so because he cannot tolerate a world he cannot control. In the comic, Michael discovers that the Enigma's need to take over the world and remake it into his own fantasy derives from massive and terrifying abuse he suffered as a child. This says something about the Chariot's concept of will, not just for this deck but for all versions of the card.

Divinatory meanings--Will, great force of character. Success, power.

Reversed--Weakening will. Doubt, but also openness to sharing, or working with others.





STRENGTH--BLACK ORCHID (Leo)

Strength often contrasts the aggressive will of the Chariot with a gentle, more persuasive kind of power. In the Chariot we saw an abstract, yet very bright image.

> Here we see a much more representational image. And yet, the woman is dark, very distant from us. Her shape is distorted, as if we see her underwater, so that even though we see her holding apart a pair of wild beasts, she appears passive, disengaged.

Originally, the card of Strength depicted Hercules clubbing in the head of the Nemean lion. Over time, this aggressive image was changed to that of a maternal-looking woman taming a lion. Usually, she holds the lion's mouth, as if persuading him not to roar. Often, she wears a girdle of flowers, extending the flower chain to a wreath around the lion's neck. With Black Orchid, we see the world of flowers itself taming the animal violence of humans. Black Orchid is an outgrowth of the plant world, a defender of the Green and its secrets. She uses the power of perfume, a very gentle kind of strength indeed, to soothe humans, and command them to serve her.

The submerged quality of the card suggests the dreamworld of plant consciousness, slow and mysterious, always distant, and incomprehensible for humans. Her hair flowers from her head like her namesake, the orchid.

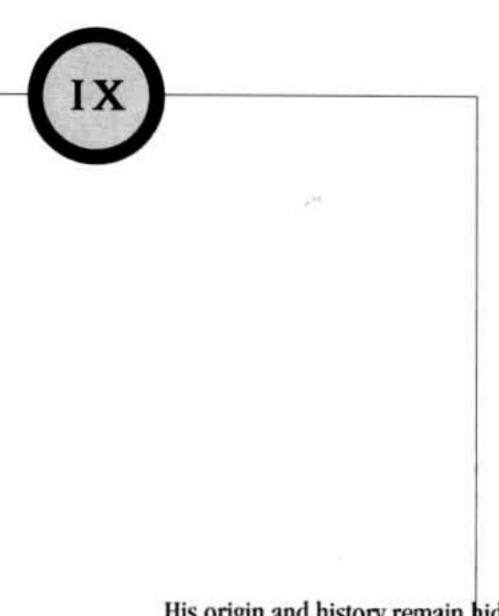
Instead of taming a single lion and closing his jaws, she appears to hold back two violent-looking creatures. In fact, she holds open the mouth of a single creature with eyes on either side of its jaw. Black Orchid cannot really tame human greed and destruction, but only fight a holding battle against them. Strength in this modern Tarot does not promise any ultimate solutions or happy endings, only a greater awareness of the mysteries of our world. Divinatory meanings--Strength of character and feeling. Gentle persuasion. Reversed--A need to act or speak more directly. Feelings of weakness.



THE HERMIT--

THE PHANTOM STRANGER (Taurus) The Phantom Stranger bridges the gap between Vertigo and the more traditional super-hero comics of the DC Universe. Unlike, say, the Doom Patrol, who have changed drastically to become Vertigo characters, the Phantom Stranger has retained much the same qualities as he did in earlier appearances. This is because his sense of mystery and remoteness already pointed to the dark strange world of Vertigo. The traditional Hermit shows an old man standing at night on a mountaintop. He holds up a lantern, symbolizing wisdom. The card is dark because he looks inward for truth, rather than seeking power in the ordinary world. In places like India and medieval Europe, hermits have gone into caves or dark forests to meditate.

The Phantom Stranger is usually encountered in darkness, or at least dark situations.



His origin and history remain hidden. His recent Vertigo appearances have added a certain self-doubt to the character without actually giving anything away. He may still appear out of nowhere and help others while keeping his own secrets. But now we find that his persona of I-knoweverything-but-I'm-not-telling masks confusion, or even fear. As with Strength, we do not find any absolute values or easy assumptions of power. This is a Hermit for the late twentieth century. We see him here struck by the mystery of his own existence. He stares at his hands. They appear disembodied, as if he cannot really connect himself (or his feelings) to any of the things that he does. The danger of the Hermit is that once a person withdraws from the world, he may find it very difficult to return. We see the hands as positive and negative, light and dark. The Hermit looks at the dualities and conflicts of life without recognizing that he himself plays a part in them.

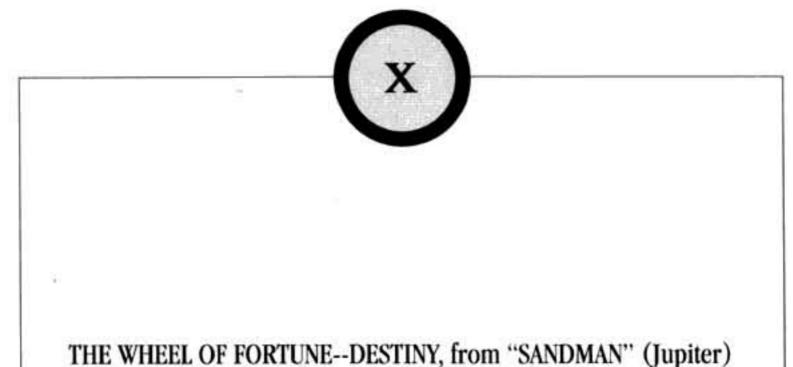


Divinatory meanings--Withdrawal, acting alone, seeking wisdom. Difficulty in connecting with the world or other people.

Reversed--Becoming more involved with others. Becoming more active in the world.



per gui est apendant appliet accueil riegue de per al l'effisionation i un droit souverain et l'étéringe des as : il hui faut se de passer elle même et s'ourrir i la trainendance de l'amour Le monde de l'intelligence quit m'étre que le monde des set et du calcul, le monde mont, et l'homme out ges et du calcul, le monde mont de l'étre de l'étre des aspires.



Destiny follows very nicely from the Phantom Stranger, since this, the oldest of Morpheus's siblings, shares the Stranger's aloof, mysterious quality. In fact, they share this characteristic remoteness with Black Orchid as well, giving us a trio of emotional distance. At the same time, where Black Orchid struggles for justice, and the Phantom Stranger helps people in trouble, Destiny remains uninvolved. Knowing the entire pattern of events, how can he try to change anything?

The face of Destiny looms large behind the Wheel, as if he himself set it spinning. The spiraling spokes make it appear to turn, hypnotically. They give off golden strands, like the threads spun (and finally cut) by the three Fates in Greek mythology. Words spin off as well within the strands. We also find a written text at the bottom of the wheel. In *The Sandman*, Destiny usually appears with his great book containing all events, past and future. Destiny's black headdress merges with the night sky. The very few stars implies the end of the universe, when even the Endless must surrender to entropy. On the left side of the Wheel we see a snake slithering downwards. On the right, a somewhat abstract figure reaches up. When we look closer, we can identify it as a bird-headed man. In Tarot tradition, these represent the Egyptian Gods, Set and Anubis. Set brings death, while Anubis guides dead souls to their rebirth in the other world. Some people view the Wheel of Fortune as the wheel of reincarnation, or

karma.

The astrological attribution for this card is Jupiter, the same as with the Emperor, but with an extra flourish, as if to signify a higher level. The Emperor may represent laws and structures, but he too must follow his destiny. In Greek and Roman myth, the all-powerful Jupiter (Zeus), must bow to Necessity (Ananke).

Divinatory meanings--Change of circumstances. Events taking place of their own accord, without conscious control.

Reversed--Taking hold of your destiny. Discovering the causes behind events.





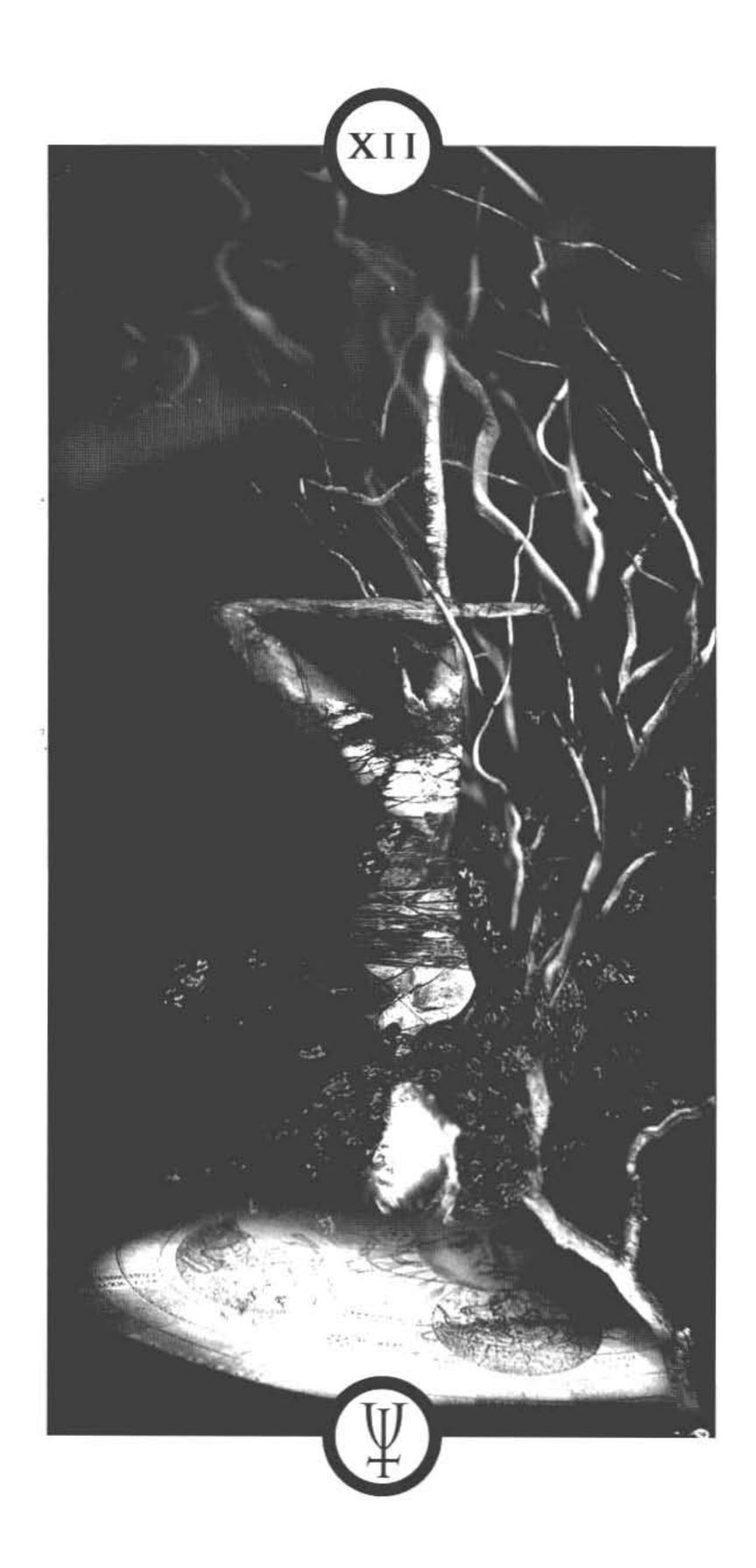
XI JUSTICE ---THE GOLDEN AGE SANDMAN, "SANDMAN MYSTERY THEATER" (Libra) The Golden Age of comics (1930s and '40s) introduced the idea of the super-hero. Wesley Dodds, the Sandman of that period, was one of these costumed figures, a crimefighter who used a gas gun to render his enemies unconscious. Wesley Dodds has been brought back now, in Vertigo. He still fights crime, but now they are more often crimes of hate and prejudice. And even though he still uses a gas gun, he is more realistic now, without great powers or even great muscles. He may put evil to sleep, but he cannot eradicate it. The phrase "sense of justice" appears at the upper left, and near the bottom (traditional Tarot symbolism makes much of the ideas of "above" and "below," the spiritual world and the world of human experience and morality). In both cases, the words "of justice" are mostly covered up, so that "sense" becomes emphasized. The Golden Age Sandman's justice

does not depend on laws, but on his own inner sense of right and wrong.

> Wesley Dodds does not actually like what he does. He would rather live a private life. But he likes what he *sees* even less. And unlike most of us, he cannot make himself look away. Sight is the main attribute of Justice. In traditional versions, the Goddess of Justice stares out at us, challenging us to look honestly at who we are. For this reason, Justice stands at the exact center of the numbered trump cards, with ten cards before, and ten cards after.

We do not see the Golden Age Sandman's eyes. He himself sees most clearly from within his mask. The persona of the Golden Age Sandman swallows his personality, and he can see only (in)justice. Crude eyes, like a child's drawing, lie in the scales, and below. The force of Justice becomes balanced by the courage to see with the eyes of a child.

> Divinatory meanings--Honesty, especially the honesty to look at yourself. A passion for justice. A fair outcome, especially in a legal issue. Reversed--Dishonesty, especially with yourself. An unfair outcome or situation.



THE HANGED MAN--SHADE, THE CHANGING MAN (Neptune)

The Hanged Man forms one of the Tarot's most compelling and mysterious images. We see him here close to the traditional iconography, suspended by one foot, upside down, from a tree branch. The legs form the number four, the number of the Emperor, representative of the inexorable laws of existence. Usually, the hands go behind the back so that the arms form a triangle, but here we see Shade bound throughout his body.

The most important symbol in the traditional card is the face. The Hanged Man does not suffer. We see him radiant and joyous, for the tree is the Tree of Life, and he has bound himself to spiritual truth. He hangs upside down because he has reversed the values most people live by, seeking Strength and Justice rather than personal profit or power. Here, golden light obscures his face, though we see a solar face beside him. He hangs above a map of the cosmos. For Shade, the tree is the Madness, which for him is both a place and a tangible force. Shade gains power from it, but he cannot separate himself from it. Like the Hanged Man, he can only surrender. The Major Arcana begins with the duality of card 1, the Magician, and card 2, the High Priestess. The number 12, formed from 1 and 2, suggests a bringing together of seeming opposites. Shade uses the Madness to connect qualities we normally think of as mutually exclusive of each other. These include male and female, violence and gentleness, aggression and passivity, and even madness and sanity themselves. Above the Hanged Man we see a blur of red. The shape resembles a bird, and the color suggests the phoenix, reborn out of the fire that burns it up. Shade's own peculiar kind of sanity constantly rises, reborn, from the wild fire of the Madness.

> Divinatory meanings--A deep attachment to what matters most to a person. Reversal of normal values. Following your own beliefs. Reversed--Listening to other people or social pressure rather than your own values.





DEATH--DEATH, from "SANDMAN" and "DEATH: THE HIGH COST OF LIVING" (Saturn) In the majority of Tarot decks, Death is the most compelling image. Death, after all, forms one of the two great mysteries: where do we come from and where do we go? Children ask their parents, "Where do babies come from?" and "What happens when we die?" Here, the card is still striking, but the figure of Death has become appealing, almost familiar.

Death, the character--Dream's older sister--has deeply touched many Vertigo readers. Most Tarot versions, like most depictions in myth, show Death as mysterious and terrifying. This Death, however, suggests intimacy and playfulness. She is self-assured as well as pretty, a kind of dream date for young men. She is everybody's friend while giving up none of her power.

The medieval image of Death showed a skeleton in a hooded robe, using a scythe to harvest body parts sticking out of the ground: hands, feet, heads. The heads wore crowns, since the image taught a democratic lesson. Kings die the same as peasants. Here the only bones are the rib cage shown on the left, but the lesson remains the same, for Death in Vertigo treats all of her "clients" with the same gentle concern. Contrary to Hollywood movies, Death in the Tarot does not actually predict anyone dying. Rather, it shows the end, or death, of some old way of life which has grown meaningless. The card indicates a great change, which may feel like dying to the person involved. In the card, Death holds a blue rose, alive with beauty. Her famous ankh rests half buried on her body. An Egyptian icon, the ankh symbolizes eternal life.

> Divinatory meanings--Release from old patterns. The end of something that has become burdensome or meaningless.

Reversed--Holding onto something even when you know it's finished. Fear of change.





TEMPERANCE--DELIRIUM, from "SANDMAN" Delirium is another of Morpheus's siblings. However, where Dream, Destiny, and Death all stand outside their actions (that is, Death does not die, Destiny does not cause anything to happen) Delirium acts on herself, becoming more wild and frenzied than anyone she might affect. Delirium as Temperance once again subverts the traditional Tarot symbolism and assumptions. And not just because Delirium is so intemperate. Temperance in the Tarot is a figure of great power, who remains always in command of himself. Delirium's power derives from her willingness to become a victim of her own archetypal gifts. She imagines herself as weak. Paradoxically, that very fantasy gives her strength. She floods the world around with her with deep emotion, swinging from intense joy to tears. In her "weakness" she allows herself to ignore all the restraints most of us think of as normal. Coming after Death, and as the culmination of the second group of seven, Temperance carries the message of liberation. Here, we see her almost completely bound. One provocative breast shows. We see her eyes and mouth, but they appear out of place.

To be delirious is to feel like your body has come apart and will fly off in all directions.

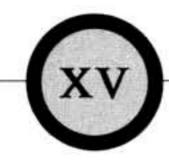
Dream's family, the Endless, may remind us of the archangels from Jewish and Christian mythology. One of those archangels, Michael, appears on the traditional card of Temperance. Here, huge wings rise up from Delirium's body. They look fiery, suitable to her wild nature. And yet, they hardly seem to belong to her. In fact, they are an illusion created by the presence of a large oval mirror, or looking-glass, standing behind her.

The usual Tarot Temperance pours water calmly from one cup to another (temperance originally meant to mix water with wine, and thus to prevent drunkenness). Delirium tosses liquid gold from one gleaming cup to the other. In contrast to the medieval virtue of temperance, which preached moderation in all things, Delirium's power lies in excess at all times.



Divinatory meanings--Traditional temperance: calmness, selfpossession. Containment. Reversed--Delirium. Excess. Losing all awareness of self through extreme action or emotion.





THE DEVIL--

LUCIFER, from "SANDMAN" (no astrological attribution) People who know the traditional Tarot Devil will recognize the horned face, and even the chains in this picture. The beach chair, however might strike them as odd. The image comes from *The Sandman*. In one of the stories, Lucifer, the lord of hell, decides to get revenge on Morpheus for an old slight. In most comics, this might launch a massive battle. Here, however, Lucifer has come to understand that hell is above all slavery. And even though he himself rules over hordes of demons and sufferers, the position itself has enslaved him as much as anyone else. And so, he simply leaves, and for his last official act he sends the keys to hell to Morpheus (in many Tarot decks the Hierophant holds the keys to the kingdom of heaven), putting the Dream Lord in charge of the underworld. At the end of the story, Lucifer is last seen sitting on the beach in Australia, enjoying the sunset. And so we see in this card a beach chair, and alongside it, discarded chains.

> Instead of slavery, Lucifer here means liberation. This follows the ancient radical doctrine of Gnosticism, which saw the physical universe as an oppressive illusion, and Lucifer, the angel who rebelled against God, as the hero attempting to restore imprisoned souls through knowledge. The Greek word "gnosis" means "knowledge." The name Lucifer means "Lightbringer." The Devil initiates the last group of seven cards. Though he usually symbolizes oppression, we also can think of him as signifying hidden desires, fears, and other darknesses within ourselves. If we wish to go to the deepest levels of the Tarot and our own lives, we must face these things and bring them to the light. Neither the Hierophant nor the Devil has any astrological attribution. We can understand both more deeply if we ponder what connection this implies between them.

> > Divinatory meanings--Struggles with oppression. Illusions. Dark feelings or desires, especially sexual. Reversed--Liberation.

Bringing things to light.





THE TOWER--THE TOWER OF BABEL, from "DOOM PATROL" (Mars)

The darkest card in the Tarot, the Tower usually symbolizes some painful or frightening experience that ultimately liberates us from a repressive situation. Though this sounds reassuring, the experience itself can be very harsh. "The Teiresias Wars" in Doom Patrol tells the story of the first inhabitants of the world, the Teiresiae, magical beings who constantly changed, merging in and out of their environment and each other. But then a renegade Teiresias created something new--a fixed, that is, rigid, language, based on a strict grammar, and a place for everything. He and his followers began to separate the world into categories: Male and female. Human and nature. Good and evil. Life and death. To boost their power, they created the Tower of Babel, a psychic machine designed to eliminate change forever. Joining together for one last time, the Teiresiae summoned a great lightning bolt to destroy the Tower. In the process, most of the Teiresiae blew apart as well. Our world today is

a compromise between the two extremes of total liberation and total slavery.

The Tarot begins with the Fool, a character who rejects all restriction. But when he enters the world of the numbered cards, he encounters seemingly fixed categories--male and female, light and dark. To bring himself back to his true freedom may require that lightning bolt of inspiration, that flash of "gnosis" we found implied in the previous card.

Many versions of the card show a man and woman falling from the Tower. Here we see the High Priestess's shopping bag on the right, and an open book on the left. This is the same book we saw with the Magician. Pure inspiration, the Tower overthrows all doctrines and traditions.

Divinatory meanings--Painful or destructive experience, sometimes even violence. The ultimate result is liberation.

Reversed--The experience is not as extreme, but also not as liberating.





THE STAR (Venus) The Star begins a sequence of four cards unattached to any particular Vertigo character or storyline. The Devil took us into darkness, and the Tower ripped away all our attachments, including language. Now we move through the deeper archetypal levels in the Star and the Moon. We might think of John Constantine having all the layers of cynicism and despair blown out of him, until, in the Sun, he becomes reborn as an innocent child. Coming after the cleansing lightning of the Tower, the Star usually depicts the calm after the storm. The standard image shows a naked woman kneeling in a pose of openness and peace as she pours out water from two urns. The Vertigo version shows us a more disturbing picture, a woman bound across her middle and around her breasts. The bindings hold the urns against her body, as if to attach her inexorably to her function. How can we describe these waters? Do they symbolize life energy? Nature? The unconscious? The key to this card may lie in the answer to this question. And the answer may change for each person who looks at the card. Bindings actually play a strong role in this Tarot. Mad Hettie, the High Priestess, is bound across her forehead. The Emperor Geek is bound by *

the same kind of strings he uses to manipulate his marionettes. Shade the Hanged Man is bound to his Madness tree. And Delirium must bind her consciousness within her body. Possibly the Star releases her ego. Temperance pours water (safely) from one cup to another. This woman, who is headless, holds nothing back. The astrological attribution is Venus, the same as the Empress. The two cards give us two visions of femininity. Divinatory meanings-Openness, hope, selflessness and sacrifice, outpouring of feelings. Reversed--Negativity, holding back emotions.



THE MOON (Cancer) The Tower may be the most frightening image in the standard Tarot deck, but the Moon in some ways represents

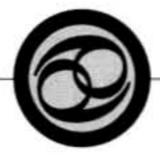
> a more difficult passage. The Tower blasts away our ordinary consciousness (on his way to Damascus, St. Paul was struck by a lightning bolt; enlightenment came in a single flash to the Buddha as he sat under the Bo

tree). The Star shows us without ego. But the Moon depicts the journey back from this strange world to the day world of ordinary reality symbolized by the Sun. The traditional Moon card shows a dog and a wolf howling at the Moon, while below them, in a pool of water, we see a lobster emerging towards the land. Alone among the Major Arcana, the card contains no people. We have descended below human consciousness to our animal selves (the dog and wolf), and deeper still, to strange primal instincts symbolized by the lobster.

This Vertigo version gives precedence to the strangeness, for the lobster dominates the picture. It seems to hold everything else in its pincers, especially the two animals who have become reduced to skeletons. If we look closely, we can see their resemblance to the beasts held apart by the hands of Black Orchid, in Strength. The gentle soothing of the plant world has changed to the more disturbing energy of the lobster.

The Moon activates these primal qualities in us. The word "lunatic" derives from Luna, Latin for Moon. Many emergency room nurses and doctors maintain that they see more violence, accidents, and suicides during the full Moon. At the same time, the Moon also smiles down on us, promising a return to serenity if we do not try to resist her influence. To make this journey from the unconscious back to consciousness we need only surrender to its strangeness and our own animal instincts.

Divinatory meanings--Instinct, wildness, whatever is mysterious or primal. Reversed--Resisting our own instinctive natures. Feeling disturbed by our emotions or fantasies.







THE SUN (The Sun)

After the strangeness of the Moon (and the Star), the Sun returns us to simplicity. Sometimes we can go through a very difficult night, when all our fears rise up in us, but when the Sun comes up, everything seems all right again. The day shines bright and cheerful, we have passed through whatever crises we have had to face, and we feel joyously confident. Our human, rational selves have returned, and we can put aside all those weird animal howlings from the night before. At the same time, we do not go back to who we were before the upheaval that began with the Devil and the Tower. We have emerged stripped of our defenses, our postures, all the layers we have built up against the world. For this reason, the Sun virtually always shows children. Older versions show a boy and girl holding hands in a walled garden. The famous Rider deck depicted a single androgynous baby riding out of a garden on a horse.

The child here is an image of pure joy. A map of the medieval cosmos, with the Sun radiating from the center, fills the air above the child's head. We see rays of light coming from the left side. Instead of leaving a walled garden, the child emerges, from a mass of dense rocky matter. We will look more at the symbolism of this substance in the suit of Wands, but we might think of the baby as the liberated soul the Gnostics described as being trapped in the physical world. The animal in the picture resembles a dog as much as a horse. If so, the child's innocence has tamed the wild beasts from the previous card, and from Strength. The message of the Tarot is that such virtues as Strength can control but never overcome our animal instincts. We need to experience all sides of ourselves to become free of the fears and desires we usually keep buried in darkness.

Divinatory meanings--Joy, simplicity, confidence, innocence.

Reversed--The joy and happiness remain, but we may have to struggle slightly, as if clouds have partly covered the Sun.







JUDGMENT (Pluto)

The name for this card comes from its traditional imagery, that of the Christian Last Judgment. Usually, the picture shows Gabriel blowing his horn as bodies rise up joyously from their coffins to answer him. Even though the card uses that name, "Judgment," we get no sense of anyone condemned. This is part of the Tarot's subversive message, that if you dare to follow your own path you will go beyond morality and fear to ecstasy. This is the last of the cards without any Vertigo attribution. We might call this group, beginning with the Star, "deep process" cards, for the way in which they take us away from our normal signposts (symbolized by the Vertigo character connections) and through a dark and mysterious journey

to a new beginning.

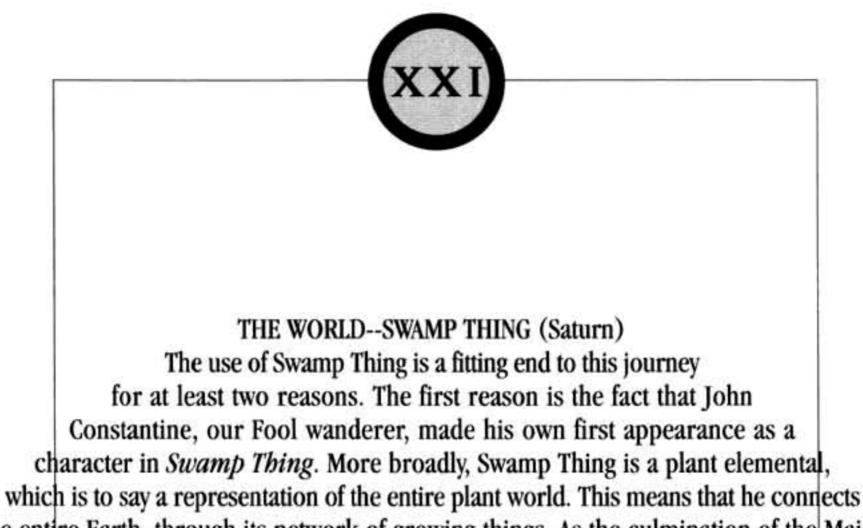
Jesus said, "Except as you be like a little child, you

shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." The baby who emerged in the Sun card (think again of John Constantine giving up his cynicism and despair) is raised up here by many hands. They celebrate the liberation that comes from having completed such a difficult passage. The previous card glowed red like the rising Sun, especially above the baby's head. Here the red looks more like a wash of blood. The New Testament also tells us that "the blood of the lamb" will wash us clean of our sins. But we do not need to employ such a religious reference to understand blood here. Babies are born in a wash of their mothers' blood. The imagery of new life continues. The horns in this version do not belong to an angel. They tend to look more like funnels of some kind. But the essential quality of the card remains: a call to rise up, to become a new person, free and joyous, without fear.



Divinatory meaning--A time of great and positive change, especially in the way we see ourselves. A new beginning. Reversed--Resisting the knowledge that something has changed.





the entire Earth, through its network of growing things. As the culmination of the Major Arcana, the World card connects all the other cards. In the World, we see how all the Fool's different experiences, from The Magician to Judgment, belong together, like individual flowers on a single tree.

The Fool does not appear in this card, but the two have a strong connection. The Fool had to give up his innocence and perfection to go through the different stages of the Major Arcana. In the World we see a different kind of perfection, one that incorporates the wisdom gained along the way. The astrological symbol, Saturn, links the card to Death (notice the extra curl on this version). Swamp Thing emerged partly from the death of a human named Alec Holland. Observation of the plant world teaches us the great lesson that life can only grow out of death.

The traditional picture shows a naked woman dancing within a wreath of flowers or ivy. A sash covers her genitals, and there is a suggestion that she is hermaphroditic, male as well as female, in other words, a complete being. In this version we see a female torso, without a head. The figure suggests a basic humanity, without individual consciousness. Swamp Thing is an outgrowth of all vegetation. His sense of himself as individual (or male, for that matter) is an illusion, derived from his contact with humans. A pure green light fills the card. Tendrils, like roots, reach down from the upper left. At the upper right we see what looks like a tear in the page revealing color codes. This last ironic touch reminds us that this too is a fiction. The real World remains a mystery.

> Divinatory meanings--Success, perfection. A sense of oneness with others, or with the world around you.

Reversed--Stagnation, isolation from others.





Unlike the greater trumps of the Major Arcana, the four suits of the Minor Arcana do not take on any Vertigo characters. At the first meetings to plan the deck (held in a Manhattan hotel suite), the group decided that assigning a particular scene or character to each of the fifty-six cards would only restrict Dave McKean's concepts and imagination. So here, in these stylized images, we are seeing the pure vision of a remarkable artist. At the same time, the four suits still reflect the particular qualities of Vertigo. We see that dark fantasy, the sense of mystery and strangeness. Instead of neatly explaining the secrets of the universe, as some occult decks have tried to do, they open us to the fear and wonder of our lives. They are vertigo in the literal sense, disorienting us from our ordinary perceptions.

The cards begin with the traditional qualities of the Minor Arcana, the symbolism of each suit, and then they take it to a new place, one that we cannot easily define or explain. A lot of them are distorted in some way, submerged under water, or behind a wall of mud, or overwhelmed by light. Writing appears, as if to explain, but the writing is unreadable, covered over by dots, or simply too small, too dense, to make out. People inhabit these cards, but they too become distant from us, made mysterious by distortion. Some have no heads, or no arms or legs. On others we see a face obscured by darkness eating into their features. With some we cannot tell if we are looking at a man or a woman. With others we confidently say oh, that's a man, only to see the exact same face a few cards later, but with different shading, so that we can say, with equal confidence, oh, that's a woman. We've come a long way from those early decks, with their Cups or Swords neatly spread across the card.

The classic Tarot suits are Staves, Cups, Swords, and Coins (or Disks). In Spain, these remain the suits, not only in Tarot decks, but in ordinary playing cards. In other countries, Staves became Clubs, Cups became Hearts, Swords became Spades, and Coins became Diamonds. Some historians say that playing cards descend from the Tarot, while others claim that the two kinds of decks evolved at around the same time, or else that the ordinary deck came first, and then someone added on the twenty-two trumps to make the special Tarot deck. If the Tarot deck is the older one, then conventional playing cards did not only drop the Major Arcana, they also abandoned the Knights, leaving only the Page (Jack), Queen, and King.

Over time, the Staves acquired the name Wands. The pictures, however, continued to show a staff, or branch of wood, usually with a few leaves, or buds growing on them. In the Vertigo Tarot the Wands appear like torches, and sometimes paintbrushes.

When the Order of the Golden Dawn created their own Tarot deck, they changed the Coins suit to Pentacles, a name and emblem that has stayed popular ever since. They made this change partly because they wanted the suit to signify something wider than money and commerce, the obvious associations of Coins. The Golden Dawn also changed the fourth suit to Pentacles for a more specific purpose. They wanted the four suits to represent the tools of the rifual magician. In their magical ceremonies, magicians focus the power of their will through a wand, a knife or sword, a sacred chalice, and finally, the sign of the pentacle, often drawn in the air with the point of the knife. In the Vertigo Tarot, as in many other decks, the card of the Magician shows the four objects laid out before him (actually, suspended in the air, except for the Wand, which he holds). We can trace the suit emblems back to legends of the Holy Grail. When Percival, the Grail knight (a character very like the Fool), encounters the Grail for the first time, he does so in a mysterious castle in a desert, ruled by a wounded king. Percival is eating dinner when a strange procession enters the room, a group of women carrying a cup, a lance, and a sword on a round tray, or disk. Percival burns to ask what purpose these serve, but his mother had told him never to speak unless spoken to. He remains silent, and the women leave. A wise hermit then assails him. If Percival only had asked the essential question, "Whom does the Grail serve?" the magic ritual could have continued, and the Grail would have restored to life both the king and the land itself. Now Percival will have to go on a quest to find the very Grail that had offered itself to him. Many people have compared this story to the journey of the Fool through the Major Arcana. Some historians have offered a more mundane explanation for the origin of the suit emblems. They may simply represent the different classes in medieval society. The peasants grow staves. The clergy use cups in the mass. The nobility fight with swords, and the merchants deal in coins. As described above, almost all Tarot decks before the twentieth century did not show any scenes on the Minor cards. Even the Golden Dawn deck displayed the suit emblems in decorative patterns, though with a few symbolic touches. The great change came in 1910, with the publication of the Rider deck, named for its original British publisher. The painter of the deck, Pamela Colman Smith, revolutionized the Minor Arcana by showing people in action on every picture. For example, the Eight of Cups shows a man walking up a hill in the moonlight, the Five of Pentacles shows two beggars passing a church, and so on. For the first time, the Minor Arcana became accessible to interpretation. Where previous decks forced us to rely on set formulas when doing readings-"You will meet a dark man who will give you a job," or "You will go on a sea journey," or "You will suffer a great loss"-Pamela Smith's Rider cards allow us to use our own imaginations as well as what we find in books.

The most popular Tarot deck in the world, the Rider cards also have influenced several generations of Tarot designers. Some decks follow her Minor Arcana so closely that Tarotists (people who study or use the Tarot) refer



to them as "Pamela clones." Dave McKean's Vertigo cards are strikingly original, but they do show the influence of the Rider images on a number of the cards. Where it seems appropriate we will compare the Vertigo pictures to their Rider counterparts. For example, Smith's Three of Cups depicted three women raising their cups high in a toast. The Vertigo version shows three disembodied hands raising their cups against a dark background. We also will cite two other traditional decks, the Golden Dawn and the "Book of Thoth" Tarot, created by Aleister Crowley and Lady Frieda Harris. Both of these gave names to each of the Minor cards; occasionally we will compare those names to the Vertigo pictures.

The Major Arcana gives us a blueprint for spiritual development, from innocence to mystic enlightenment. The Minor Arcana is both more and less ambitious. While it does not lay out such a grand design, it does show us the variety of daily life. Each of the four suits carries its own special qualities, and within each of the suits the ten numbered cards and the four Court cards show how those qualities emerge in different situations. When we start to combine the cards in readings—for instance, when we turn up the Five of Swords next to the Three of Pentacles, or the Queen of Wands alongside the Two of Cups—we find ourselves with a kind of encyclopedia of human experience. For the moment, we will concentrate on the numbered cards, Ace-Ten, leaving the four Court cards for their own section. This is because the Court cards are organized in a slightly different way than the numbers. At the same time, many of the things we say about the suits as a whole will apply to the Court cards as well. We have seen how the symbol, or emblem, for each suit gives it a particular character. We also can categorize the suit's qualities in terms of the four "elements" which people in the Renaissance and earlier saw as the basis for existence. Around the world, people have always sought ways to categorize experience and the different manifestations of the physical world. For example both the Celts and many Native Americans broke things down in terms of directions and primary colors. European culture from the time of ancient Greece has decribed all existence as combinations of four fundamental elements, Fire, Water, Air, and Earth.

Since the Renaissance we have learned that these four are far from basic. Water, air, and earth all contain many molecules, while fire is a chemical reaction. Nevertheless, the qualities associated with the "elements" remain useful. The elements also provide a link to astrology, since the twelve signs of the zodiac break down into three signs in each of the four elements.

The number four is as clear an organizing principle as three and seven. There are four solar points in the year, the solstices and the equinoxes. There are four natural directions: the two ends of the Earth's axis provide north and south, while the sunrise and sunset on the equinoxes create east and west. Our bodies also create four horizontal directions: in front, behind, and left hand, right hand (if we add above, below, and center we get the other natural number, seven).

In Tarot, the elements match the suits as follows: Fire-Wands, Water-Cups, Air-Swords, Earth-Pentacles (some people

argue for a different arrangement, but this one remains standard). Here are some of their attributes. Fire represents the experience of energy, action, optimism, creative impulse, adventure, sexuality, movement, beginnings. Water belongs to love, fantasy, imagination, passivity, the unconscious, relationships, friendship. Air symbolizes mind, mental activity, analysis, conflict, pain, quarrels, heroism, sadness, abstraction. Earth signifies work, nature, money, physical reality, home, stable relationships, routine activities.

None of these things exist in isolation. In fact, all the elements will contribute in any significant human activity or project. When asked about his concepts for his Minor Arcana, Dave McKean said that the four suits represented aspects of creativity. So we will look at creativity as an example. Fire gives us the spark and the drive to work on, say, a painting. Water allows our imagination to come in, providing both the fantasy and the feeling necessary for any work of art. Air provides the intellectual structure that gives the work a wider meaning than the artist's personal experience. And Earth gives us the determination to work at it until we produce a finished object which we can introduce to the world.

As well as the elements, the suits organize themselves around their numbers. Each number contains its own meanings. For instance, the Aces signify beginnings, and the Tens fulfillment. In the Vertigo Tarot the Tens all show a face, the same face in different shadings. The face has a certain dreamlike quality about it, suggesting that this figure is dreaming all the other cards.

The best way to understand the connections between the different cards of the same number is to lay them out. Take all the Twos and set them together, all the Threes, etc. Examine their similarities and their differences. How does the element affect the number, and vice versa? In other words, how does a Fiery Three differ from a Watery Three? And how do the special qualities of Three affect each element?

The Minor cards in this deck appear more abstract than some of the Majors. This is partly because we cannot link them to specific Vertigo characters. They may take a little time to explore. As we do so, as we find ourselves going more deeply into their strangeness and excitement, their stories, collective and individual, will begin to emerge.

ACE OF WANDS

The Aces all represent the primary, or root, energy of their suit, the source, or beginning, from which all the other cards grow and develop. The Wands' element of Fire is also about beginnings. Fire energy initiates, or sparks, creative activity. Thus, the Ace of Wands carries a special quality for the start of things--projects and ideas, action and movement, even emotions, especially love. The Ace signifies the first impulse of creativity.

We see the Wand rising up through dark dense matter, with its flame burning brightly. In many traditions, the flame of spiritual truth is said to shine from within the heaviness of the material world. In general, cards in this suit show a fire burning

against a dark background, which may be seen as rocky, or woodlike. Here,

however, the rough matter takes on the shape of golden wings rising from the



top half of the Wand. The Wand itself resembles a paintbrush as well as a torch. The combined images--the wings and

> the paintbrush torch--speak of the power of art.

The Wand passes through a flat line drawing of a hand marked with symbols, like a talisman. Hands, which appear in many of the Wands cards, have symbolized humanity creatively and spiritually for tens of thousands of years. Hands are used as charms in popular religion from Judaism and Islam to Santeria, usually marked like the one shown in the Ace. Handprints on cave walls form the earliest known form of human art. Thousands of years later, Michelangelo depicted the creation of human life as the finger of God touching the finger of Adam. The hand, like the Ace of Wands itself, symbolizes creative human action.

Divinatory meanings--Beginnings, new activity, creative impulse. A time of action, of great energy.

Reversed--the energy can become chaotic, difficult to hold onto. Still very forceful but needs more focus.

TWO OF WANDS

Here we see two hands clasped together, with the Wands passing through the fingers. There is a symmetry in the way the hands meet. They almost merge together, and the two Wands seem like one long stick. But the picture is far from symmetrical. The hand reaching up from below points its Wand up against that dense matter we saw previously in the Ace. The flame burns brightly against the rough background.



The hand from above points its Wand down to a dark pool, so that the flame changes to rings of golden light. Balance is more important than symmetry, more alive, more real. We see a balance here between darkness and light, above and below, mystery and power. The pointed flame above symbolizes action, and the idea of the directed will--that is, being able to focus our energy and our power to achieve a goal. The Golden Dawn name for this card is "dominion." The dissolved flame at the bottom does not imply a weakening of the will, or a loss of focus. Instead, it balances the aggressive Wands' energy. It connects us to the unconscious sources of creativity, and of life itself. Without that connection, the will just burns itself out. We see that same balance between the Magician and the

High Priestess--will and the unconscious, fire and water. Just as the Wand emblem links all Wands cards to the Magician, the number Two for this card links it to the High Priestess, card Two of the Major Arcana.

> Divinatory meanings--Control, dominion, power, focused will. The ability to act in the world. Reversed: Openness to change, to giving up power.

THREE OF WANDS Instead of a hand, we see what looks like a tree, with three branches, each one bearing a Wand. Since the three branches are the same height, we also get a sense of a candelabrum. Unlike the Two, the card is far from balanced. The Wands are separated into two and one, giving us an idea of opposition, or of a single person being isolated from a group. There are many ways people can find themselves alone and facing a closed group of other people. We can think of cliques in high school, or of moving to a new neighborhood. But the flame by itself facing

the other two also can suggest independence, or non-conformity. In fact, the "tree" does resemble a hand, but with the fourth finger cut off. A stream of gold flakes pours out from where that fourth branch might have appeared, increasing the feeling of something removed, or amputated. (Notice also the thumblike branch going off in a different direction towards the lower right.)

The flames burn brightly, giving us a feeling of intense energy forcing its way into existence to challenge the world. The Fire approach to life sometimes just burns its way through the world. Other aspects can become lost, or sacrificed along the way.



Divinatory Meanings--Power, independence, divisions between people. Explorations, heroic action, possibly involving sacrifice.

Reversed--Cooperation, people working together.

FOUR OF WANDS

Numerologically, the number Four signifies structure. If we think of a square or a rectangle, we get a sense of formal structure and stability. It takes four sides to make the simplest solid structure, the tetrahedron (see the Four of Pentacles). At the same time, the Fire energy of Wands moves against the idea of structure, and certainly of containment. Fire needs to be free, to move. If we confine a fire in a closed structure it simply dies--unless it

breaks free by burning down the structure itself.

The tension between the symbolism of the number and the natural quality of the suit produces a dynamic energy. The "structure" here is the simplest possible, four Wands tipped together. The fourth is not actually shown, but implied. In fact, the structure is the actual one used to make a campfire. As a result, the flames burn together harmoniously. In contrast to the Three, we see combined energy, different people (or forces)



working together for a unified purpose.

> We see what looks like a cluster of grapes within the Wands pyramid. Grapes are a traditional symbol of abundance as

well as nature. Here they overflow the loose structure of the Wands.

Divinatory meanings--Loosely structured situations. People working together for a unified purpose. Joy, openness, sharing. Reversed--structures falling apart, tension, people having trouble working together.



FIVE OF WANDS

The hand returns, but now the fingers have all become torches, with their flames moving through darkness. The hand rises up from that dense matter, but the torches, the Wands, travel through the dark, bringing in the firelight of creativity. If the Wands form paintbrushes, then we see a kind

of merging of the whole self with creative action. Actually,

if we look closely we can see that the

Wands/torches/paintbrushes

look like tubes slipped over the fingers, a little like finger puppets.

Unlike the three, we do not see the fingers all at the same level, or in any kind of formal pose. Instead, they point in different directions. Notice that the flame on the forefinger is curved, as if the finger has moved sharply from right to left. The effect is one of dynamic Wands energy.

The Fives in the Tarot all represent loss, or difficulty, of some kind, depending on the quality of the suit. Traditionally, the Five of Wands often symbolizes conflict, or "strife," as the Order of the Golden Dawn called it. In the Rider Tarot, the card shows boys banging sticks together. The conflict, however, is not destructive, but rather joyous, an outpouring of energy. We can see a slight suggestion of conflict here in the way some of the fingers cross each other. But again, it is really the breakdown of whatever is static and boring.

Divinatory meanings--Excitement, dynamism, movement, using creativity and conflict to break down anything that is dull or limiting.

Reversed--Conflict becomes more serious. Anger, and possibly a feeling of betrayal.

SIX OF WANDS

Cards One through Five have shown the Wands' potential, the possibilities of Fire energy and what it can do. Cards Six through Ten seem to represent a fulfillment of all that fiery power. The pictures are more detailed and more realistic. The Six is especially lush, with an abundance of color and images. We see a flurry of bright colors, a rush of what looks like feathers, material, flowers. It is as if the energy of the previous cards has suddenly produced great results. We might think of a painter who spends a long time developing his themes, finding what he wants to

do, and then suddenly produces a vast range of works. Near the bottom of the picture we see a single eye. It stares out, wide open, as if astonished, thrilled.

The Wands are all uniform and we see a single flame spread over the tops of them. The flame has a kind of sweeping movement to it so that their uniformity does not have a static quality. If we think again of a painter, we can recognize that artists who produce a great variety of works often will have



underlying themes that move through all of them.

In general, people who do the most in life usually have a sense that all their different activities are connected by an inner awareness of what they want to accomplish.

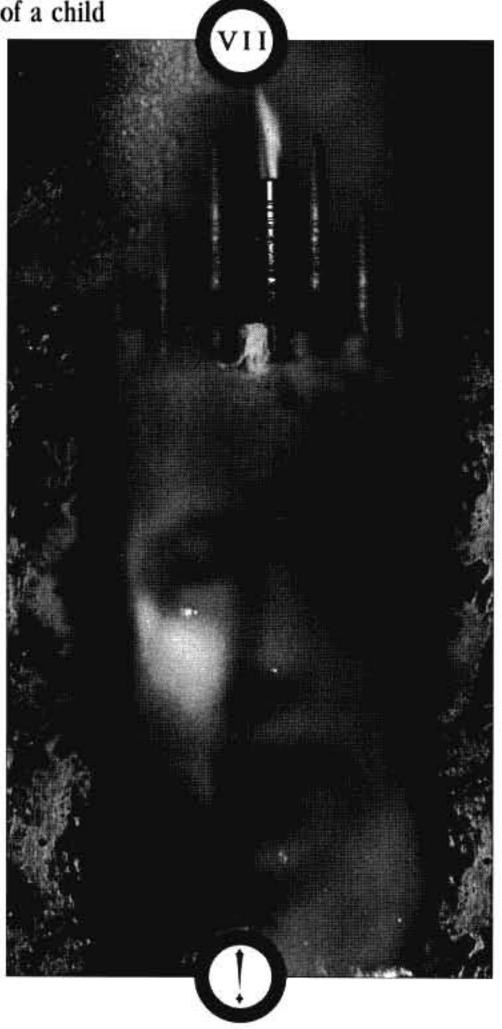
The Six of Wands traditionally means confidence and optimism, as well as the positive results from having such a strong belief in ourselves. Here, the confidence is much more than self-assurance. It shows a belief in your own creativity, and all the things you can do with your skills and enthusiasm.

> Divinatory meanings--Optimism, belief, a flurry of activity, productivity, many projects.

Reversed--Doubt, pessimism, creative blocks, a

SEVEN OF WANDS In between the brightness of the Six and the many colors of the Eight, we find a dark, dreamy card. And yet, it's also the first to show us a face. Faces in symbolic art often suggest consciousness. Here we see a face beginning to emerge. It seems to come from that dense background. The face itself is hazy, not completely real, like a consciousness, or selfawareness, that is only beginning to take shape. We can think of a child

starting to know itself, and in fact the face does appear somewhat childlike. We can think of this card as showing a deeper level of selfunderstanding beginning to emerge after the burst of activity seen in the Six. The Wands appear like horns, with only a single flame shooting from the center torch. Again, instead of confidence, we see a tentative testing of purpose and identity. The face appears distorted, asymmetrical, with the left side (right half of the picture) seemingly longer and narrower. Notice that the right eye is actually lower than the left. A touch of fire illuminates the left half of the face (right side of the picture), especially the eye. If we cover the right side of the face and look only at the left, we see somebody very dreamy, distant from us. But if we look only at the right, we see someone animated and warm.

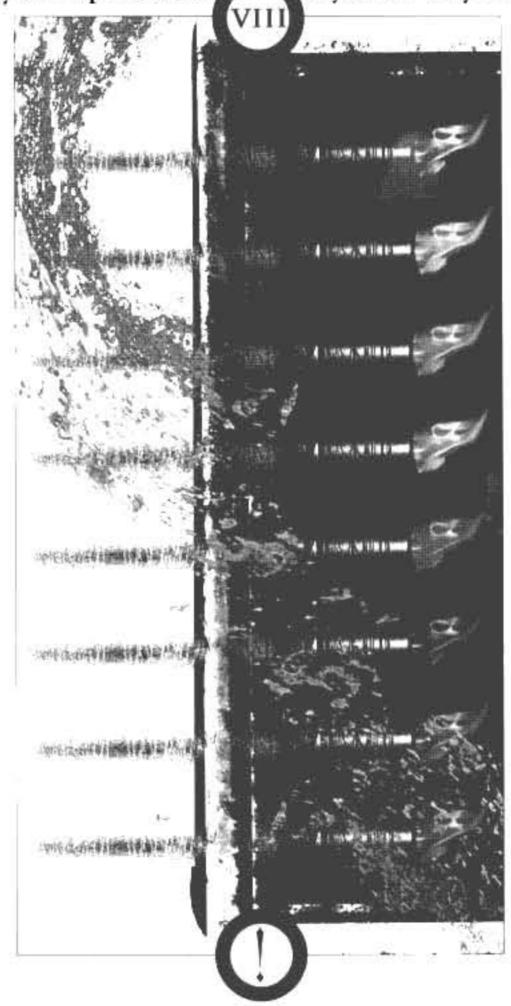


Divinatory meanings--Uncertainty, the slow development of awareness. Quietness, thinking about issues, a purpose beginning to emerge. R e v e r s e d - - M o r e confidence, greater self-awareness. Communication with others.

EIGHT OF WANDS

Here and in the Nine we can see most clearly the connection to paintbrushes.
The flames on the Wands have become the different colors of a painter's palette. They are parallel and equal, suggesting that in life as well as in art, there are many possibilities.
We do not need to choose one and exclude the others. If we hold the card sideways, with the colored flames upright, we get a stronger sense of all the wonderful choices.
Too often we think we must choose one activity, one focus, and give up all the other things that attract us. But a painting with only one color becomes very dull, if not incomprehensible. Though some artists will experiment with works that explore very deeply the textures and subtleties of a single color, most prefer a wide palette, if just to express the joy of life.

Traditionally, this card often symbolizes movement and "Swiftness," to use the Golden Dawn term. Here the Wands seem static at first, but if we look at their base they appear blurred, as if spinning very rapidly. They emerge from white into black, and it is only in the black area where we see color. Creativity and inspiration are _____ mysteries. They emerge best out of darkness,



creating their own light.

Divinatory meanings--Movement, purpose, things coming to realization or conclusion. Great variety of possibilities without the need to choose one over the other.

Reversed--Possible delays, confusion. May indicate the need to make a choice.

NINE OF WANDS

Nine is the last single digit. Therefore, numerologists often describe Nine as the completion of a process. However, as we saw with the Four, Fire energy does not go well with ideas such as completion, finality, structure. Fire prefers freedom and the idea of a new beginning. In this clever use of the nine Wands, we see eight of them forming a kind of simplified box, or cage. The ninth reaches beyond this confinement to draw a trail of light across the sky.

We have returned here to the image of the hand, now more fully and realistically drawn than before. It is the hand, the symbol of humanity,

that stretches beyond the box. It holds the Wand like a paintbrush,

Instead of a flame, we see white light cutting or a pen.



an arc through the darkness. The tip glows, like the magic wand of a magician, or like an angel. It may symbolize the liberated spirit, or creative truth, or release from darkness and confusion. In a way, the Nine does show the completion of a process outlined in the other cards, but not in the form of a box that can hold in the Fire. Instead, the Nine of Wands shows the opposite, the liberation into pure energy.

Divinatory meanings--Firm action, release, purity of purpose. A single action or piece of knowledge which changes a situation dramatically, especially in the direction of liberation. Reversed--Confinement, confusion, the need for a fresh way of looking at the situation.

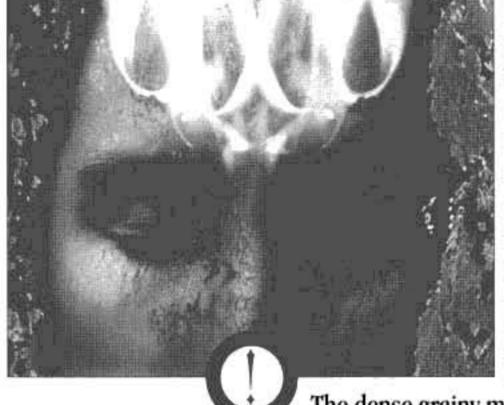
TEN OF WANDS

Each of the Tens features a face, the same one shown in different ways. The eyes are closed, as if the person is dreaming. We might describe all the previous cards in each suit, with their varied expression of the suit's energy, as the dream of this single figure. He or she is dreaming very different dreams according to the

> element belonging to each suit. That is, here the person is dreaming of Fire, later it will become Water, then Air, then Earth.

To call something a dream does not dismiss it as trivial, or unreal. Mystics have sometimes described the universe, as well as our individual lives, as dreams of God. Dreams become trivial only when the person is trivial, when he or she does not give them any meaning.

The flame rises up from the forehead, very large and bright. The ten Wands spin above it like a wheel of fortune. They themselves are not lit. Ultimately, the fire of creativity belongs to the mind, not the tools we use to express it. The flame burns like a flower, balanced and lovely, recalling the lotuses used in Indian meditation.



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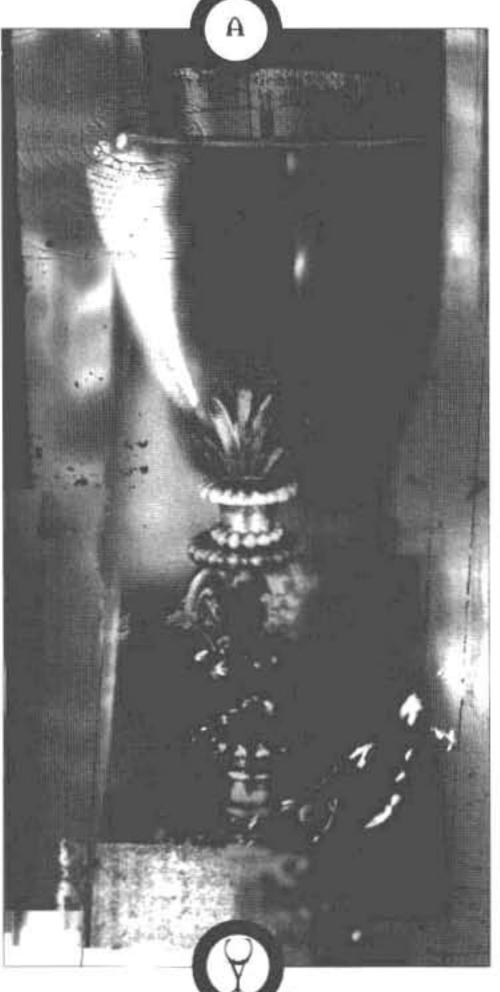
The dense grainy material seen on the other Wands cards has not disappeared. Some of it even goes across the face. The Fire of creativity and dream does not release us from our bodies or the world. Instead, it allows us to burn brightly in our own lives.

Divinatory meanings--Powerful dreams, intense belief, desire, passion. Reversed--Oppression, especially selfoppression through doubt. Dismissing your dreams as trivial or impossible.

ACE OF CUPS

Cups represent love, imagination, intuition, fantasies, the unconsciousall things associated with Water. These associations do not come just from arbitrary choice. Water is deep and dark, like the unconscious. It flows, it is formless, taking on the shape of whatever is holding it. The imagination too is a shape changer, inspired by the sensual world. Like love, Water is shimmering and "beautiful, but dangerous.

The Ace of Cups is often linked to the Holy Grail, and the beautiful chalice shown here certainly suggests that. Medieval myth described the Grail as the cup which Jesus used at the Last Supper, and which St. Joseph of Arimathea used to collect Christ's blood from the cross. Most likely, the Grail goes back to pre-Christian Goddess worship, as a symbol of divine love and limitless gifts. The modern psychological concept of "unconditional" love derives from the Holy Grail and the Goddess's Cauldron of Plenty.



The concentric circles at the upper left represent the medieval cosmos, where the planets (including the sun and moon) moved in perfect circles, with Earth and humanity at the center, and God touching all creation. The diagram intersects the rim of the Cup. The medieval cosmos formed an intersection of imagination and the physical world, mysticism and science.

The Cup appears partly transparent, partly dissolved into the intense blue of the background. The element of Water does not make strict separations. Feelings flow from one state to another, we sense our connections with the world around us and with other people. We learn to merge with others, in sexuality, in sharing, and in love.

Divinatory meanings--Love, great happiness, powerful emotions, a time of life being very good to us.

Reversed--The emotions remain strong, but troubled. Sadness. The need to work at a relationship. TWO OF CUPS The Cups appear in the corners, tipped over slightly, as if pouring out emotion. The main image here is of the two bodies, and the way they flow into each other. The card represents a fantasy of two souls and bodies merged together in love. we see their torsos, without heads, arms, or legs. The head symbolizes consciousness, self-awareness, the ability to stand back and be critical. We lose all this when we give ourselves so totally to love. Similarly, the arms and legs signify our involvement in the world, our need to take action,

> earn money, etc.



None of that matters in a state of sexual and emotional bliss. Both figures have an androgynous quality, but the one on top is clearly female, the bottom male. We might say that this reverses the missionary position, giving primacy to the "female" qualities of merging, intuition, and love. In the Chinese oracle, the I Ching, we learn that yang, the active principle, naturally rises, while yin, the receptive, naturally sinks down. We can say the same about Fire and Water. Therefore, the oracle tells us, we want yin above and yang below, so that they will move through each other instead of separating. In the Two of Cups we see that same image, the woman above moving

downwards, the man below moving up.

Divinatory meanings--People joining in love, sharing, a new relationship. Apart from romance, the card means feeling in perfect harmony with yourself and the world. Reversed--Holding back from a relationship, separations.

THREE OF CUPS

The most famous image for the Three of Cups comes from Pamela Colman Smith's Rider pack--three women dancing together, their arms entwined, each one holding a cup, raised before them like people about to drink a toast. Dave McKean gives us a similar image here, though only of hands. As a result, we cannot tell if they are male, female, or a mix. Friendship and sharing are not gender-specific qualities. The hands do not entwine the way they do in the classic image. Instead, they come from different directions, only to blend into each other and their



environment. If we think of this symbolically, it describes people from different backgrounds, even cultures, joining and working together while keeping their individuality.

Like the Two and the Four, the Cups here have a greenish tinge. Traditionally, green signifies life and growth.

If we look carefully, we can see writing in the water below the Cups, and in the colors above them. The writing is distorted, watery, especially below. If writing signifies rationality, the distortion implies that emotional bonding counts more in friendship than rational judgment. However, another interpretation (or "reading") might see the writing as the communications that develop our feelings for each other and make them explicit.

Divinatory meanings--Friendship, deep connections, sharing, celebration. Reversed--Difficulties between friends, loss of harmony. But sometimes independence, doing things by yourself. FOUR OF CUPS The Golden Dawn called this card "Blended Pleasure" and described it as happiness that may not last. Aleister Crowley called it "Luxury," implying an excess that may be temporary. Here the Cups appear spilled, or turned over, giving us a sense of happiness already lost. Possibly the deep bonding of the previous two cards has come to an end.



The next card will emphasize the quality of loss more deeply. The Rider version of the card did not emphasize loss so much as apathy. It showed a man unable to make use of the Cups standing in front of him, or another one coming as a gift. There is something of the same feeling here, in the overturned Cups. Each suit, each element, carries its own problems and virtues. For Cups, the virtue is love (as well as other deep emotion) but the problem is passivity. In the picture here, the Cups seem to be tumbling away from us. At the top we see what looks like a whirlpool, a symbol perhaps of

energy being sucked away.

The color green dominates this picture. Since green often symbolizes growth, this suggests that opportunities and new possibilities still exist.

Divinatory meanings--Apathy, boredom, loss through inaction and passivity. Reversed--Taking action, making a decision. Preventing loss.

FIVE OF CUPS

The theme of loss becomes much more specific here. Not only do four Cups lie on their sides, but we see what looks like red liquid all around the bottom three. Red suggests blood, and when we see it on a field of white, it recalls the image of blood on snow, a traditional symbol of lost innocence. We also might think of the red as wine, in which case we have lost the luxury and abundance of some of the

previous cards.

The image recalls the Rider version of this card, which showed a man or woman (the figure stands wrapped in a dark cloak of sorrow) looking mournfully at three spilled Cups, while two others remain standing, unnoticed, behind him/her. Here we see four Cups spilled, which implies a more severe loss. However, the arrangement allows us to make a specific connection to the last card. The single upright ' Cup may represent hope, like the single, benign spirit left in Pandora's box, after she'd unleashed all the SOFFOWS.



The standing Cup also may signify what is really important, in other words, what is not lost so easily. After the sorrow of losing luxury, we may return to a sense of what really matters to us. If we connect the four spilled Cups to the last card, then the fifth Cup, the unspilled one, is something added to create the new picture. In other words, it symbolizes something

new and positive that has come into our lives during a time of sorrow.

We see writing at the top right of the card. In contrast to the Three, the writing is clear, if ornate. It may symbolize the ability of consciousness--or art--to understand, and therefore accept, painful loss.

> Divinatory meanings--Loss, sorrow, deep emotion.

> > Reversed--Understanding, fresh hope, an appreciation for what remains, or else something new and hopeful.

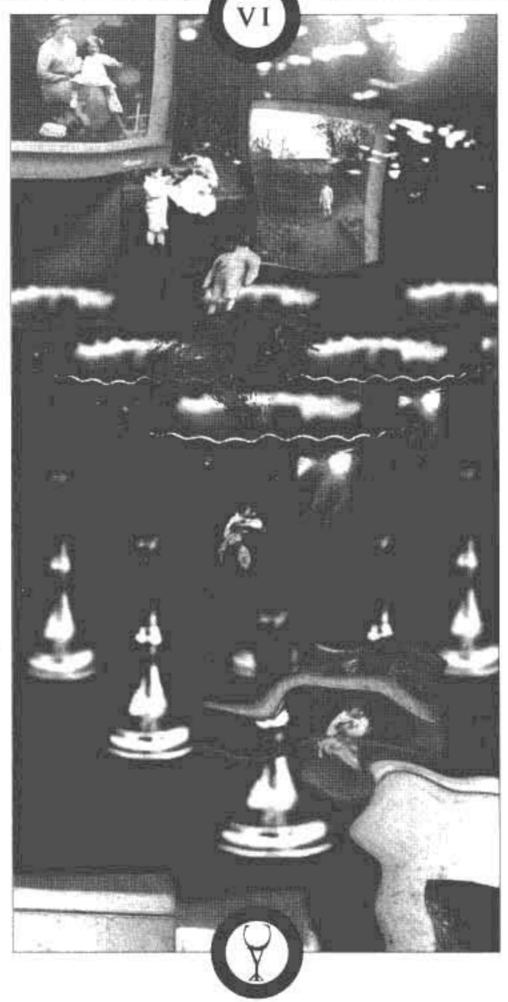
ŞIX OF CUPS

In contrast to the spilled and disorderly Cups

of the past two cards, the Cups here stand in a neat arrangement.

They bring back a sense of peace and serenity to the suit. We see the same effect in the color, that intense blue we saw in the Ace. And yet, there is also a danger in this orderliness. As we have seen, the Cups' quality of quiet dreaminess can lead to passivity. There is little in this card that speaks of dynamism or action. The Six of Cups often signifies nostalgia, a habit of looking at the past, especially childhood, through a soft (Watery) focus. We see this theme in the photographs, mostly of children. The photos carry an antique quality, increasing the sense of looking backwards. Some of them, especially the one on the lower right, look distorted, implying that these are not clear memories, but memories that are blurred by emotion, possibly sentimentality.

At lower left we see what looks like a box, at lower right a frame, or mantelpiece. These are all ways we keep, or display, old photographs. They emphasize again that sense of stored-up memories. An interesting detail appears on the forward Cup: _______ it seems to be the figure of the child from the photo



at bottom right. However, if you turn the card upside down the image on the Cup resembles an angel with a blank face, holding something, possibly a baby, in its arms.

Divinatory meanings--Memories especially of childhood, nostalgia sometimes sentimentality Reversed--Looking ahead instead of backwards. An honest appraisal of the past, particularly childhood. A stripping away of illusions.

SEVEN OF CUPS

The previous cards have given us fairly straightforward images. With the Seven we come to something more complex and mysterious. We see what looks like a hard, maybe metal, mask. However, if there is a face behind it, the face appears unfocused, out of line with the eyeholes. We find the only eyes in the picture down below, in the form of crude drawings, like a child's. This mysterious quality of the card matches its traditional theme, that of fantasy, or illusion. What is real when the face is a mask, and the eyes

cannot see? In traditional versions, the fantasies are simply daydreams. Here we find something deeper, which actually belongs more to the element of Water. The card conveys an otherworldly strangeness.

If the face represents a mask, then the mask is wonderfully formed, subtle and expressive--a work of art. Myth, and dreams, and art, are not the ultimate reality, but they allow us to gain a sense of that reality, a Waterlike intuition of truth behind the mask of mustors.



of mystery.

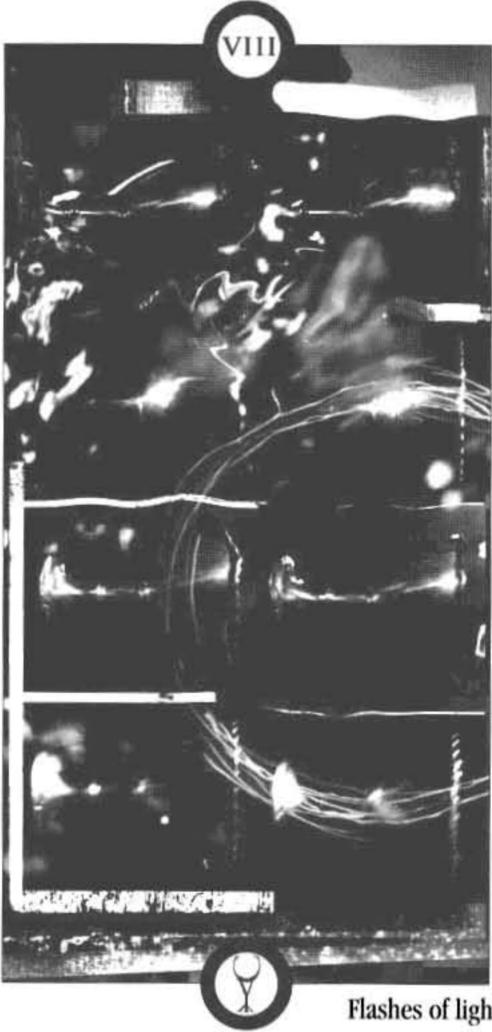
The Cups appear above the mask, like a headdress of dreams. Though they line up just as formally as in the Six, the different angle, and their place above the face, give them a much more dynamic quality--the dynamism of art.

Divinatory meanings--Fantasies, mystery, dreams, strange and captivating ideas. May also mean masking our true feelings.

> Reversed--Realism, assessment of what needs to be done, putting dreams into action.

EIGHT OF CUPS

Here again we see a complex picture. Most of the Cups appear blurred, or even physically distorted. The only one we can see clearly is ringed by what looks like copper wire, or maybe the kind of energy tracks made by elementary particles in highspeed accelerators. The Cups in the top half of the card appear splashed by water, or maybe golden light. The effect is that of stability



The traditional meanings for this card speak of leaving things behind: "Abandoned Success," as the Golden Dawn called it. Pamela Smith's Rider version showed a man turning his back on eight Cups standing neatly together. The man walks uphill, literally going on to higher things. Here we do not see anyone actually leaving the Cups, but we do get that quality of energy and change. At first, it may seem that the Cups have spilled, for they all lie on their side. But they are not in disarray, as with the Four, and nothing pours out of them, as with the Five. If we turn the card sideways we get a view of them as neatly stacked, each in their own compartment, or chamber. And yet, they do not appear static, or dull. The walls of the compartments blur and shimmy, as if seen through water. Flashes of light shine on them.

and movement at the same time.

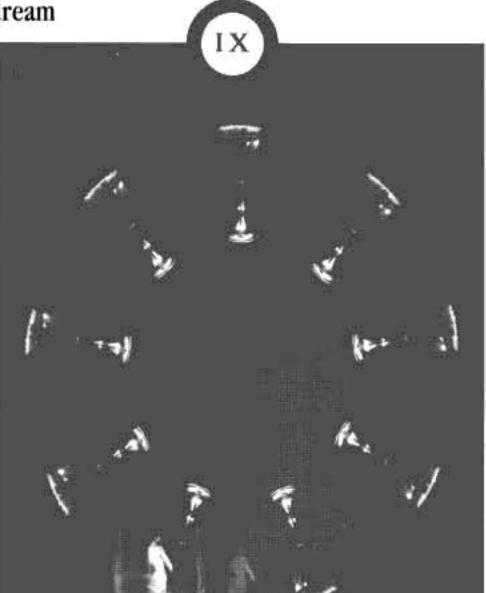
Divinatory meanings--Possibility of change in a stable situation. Flashes of excitement, movement.

Reversed--Stability becomes emphasized. Seeing the value in what you have. Resisting a desire to move on.

NINE OF CUPS

The Cups appear in the air like a mandala, or some mystical wheel of life. If we look at the picture for awhile the Cups may begin to move in a circle, like the wheel turning. Behind them we see that deep blue of mystery and the unconscious, while below we see a golden light. The mandala of Cups spins, taking us deep into our dreams. But the dream here is of the body, of nakedness and desire. On the right half of the wheel we see a large

desire. On the right half the wheel we see a large but faint image of a naked woman. The image repeats itself several times, smaller but more precise. Water



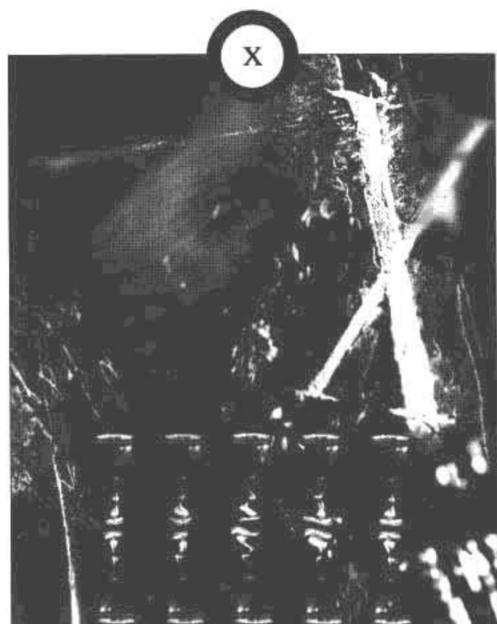
is the element of love, of fantasy, of emotion. We spend a great deal of our imaginative energy on sexual images. Imagining the perfect woman or man. Imagining ourselves as beautiful and desirable. The artist takes these fantasies and uses them as a vehicle for something less personal, even serene, as if art, in its universality, transcends physical desire. This is the image of harmony, of beauty as an ideal. The figure of the woman, gracefully posed, voluptuous and elegant, takes on that quality of art. We see her only from the back, for when individual fantasy becomes transmuted into art, personalities no longer matter. At the bottom we see a

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> fragment of print. We see a reference to a documentary, and a question, followed by the words, "Is anyone..." What is the full question? Maybe, "Is anyone there?" Does this suggest that the universality of art-or the formlessness of water--obliterates individual personality?

Divinatory meanings--Desire, beauty, sexual excitement--or possibly, the perfection of art.

> Reversed--Frustration, an over-emphasis on personal desires and fantasies.



TEN OF CUPS

Once again we see the face of the dreamer, with its closed eyes. Here the color and shading gives the face a very feminine quality. If we look at the Ten of Swords we may see the exact same face as masculine. (I have shown these two cards to two people who knew nothing about the deck, and asked about each card, "Does this look like a man or a woman to you?" Both

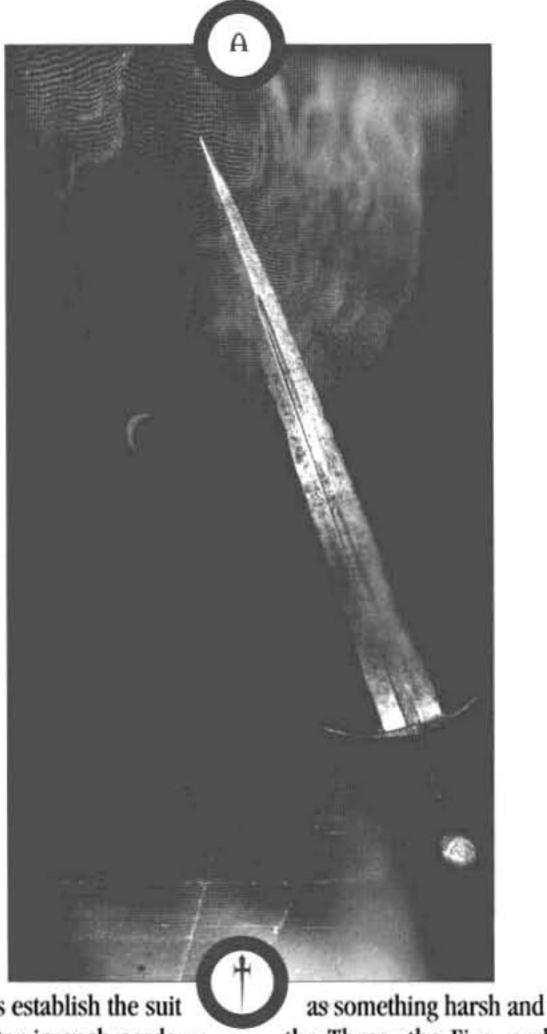
people immediately described the Cups figure as female, and the Swords as male--even though they recognized that

the features on both faces were identical.) This mutability of gender shows the power of art. The sense of dreaming belongs most appropriately to this suit, and in fact, the blue of the card emphasizes dream and mystery more than any of the other Tens. The "woman" closes her eyes and dreams of ten Cups, symbols for the possibilities of fantasy and art. They appear neatly stacked in two rows--or else one set is the mirror image of the other. Traditionally, this card means perfect joy, or a life of happiness. In contrast to some other decks, the joy here appears more quiet and serene. It also comes from deep within the self, rather than any outside material possessions or pleasures. A large X appears above the Cups. Of course, it forms the Roman numeral for ten, but X also signifies something that is banned or forbidden. Are there forbidden dreams, or fantasies, or desires still undiscovered after our movement through the suit of Cups?

Divinatory meanings--Happiness, joy, love. A sense of contentment and inner peace. Reversed--The quality of joy remains, but there may be a need to search for it, or look past momentary frustrations.

ACE OF SWORDS

The suit of Swords belongs to the element of Air, which is related to thinking. Therefore, the Sword symbolizes a clear mind, originality, analysis. We might think of the Sword (we imagine Cups, we think of Swords) as cutting through illusions, or slicing through confused ideas. The sharpness of the blade is said to symbolize a mind capable of making fine distinctions. But a sword is also a weapon. In fact, it is probably the first human creation designed for no purpose other than killing other humans. Unlike an axe or a knife, you cannot use it as a tool. Unlike a bow or a spear you cannot hunt very well with it. So the Sword in the Tarot also represents conflict and pain. At the same time, the association with battle gives it the quality of courage. The Sword here reaches up from a dark night to stormy clouds. Fire below the clouds gives them

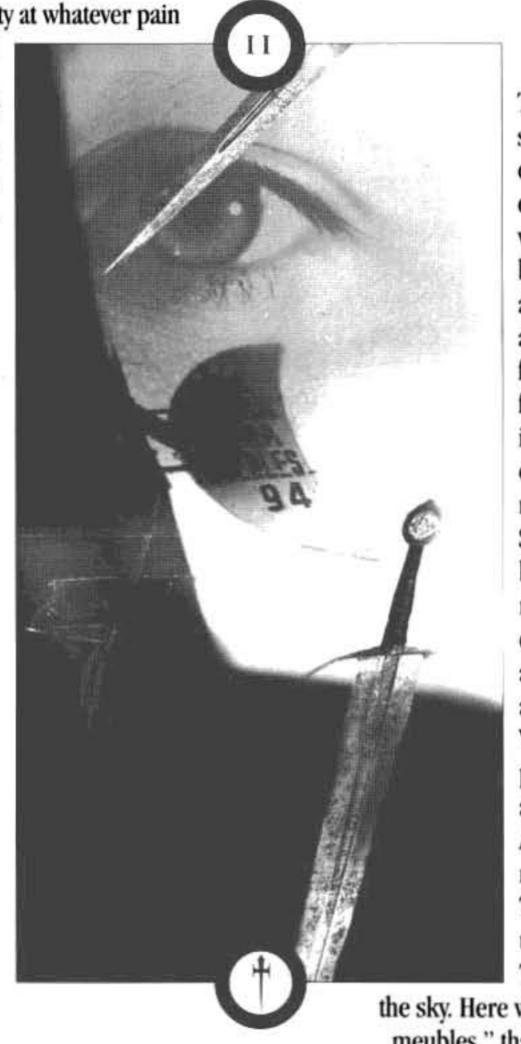


a reddish tinge. All these images establish the suit painful, themes we will see later in such cards as the Three, the Five, and the Nine. But we also get a sense here of courage, and the willingness to confront reality. The Sword is shown clearly, not blurred like the Cup. This signifies the difference between thinking and feeling. Thinking is precise, sharp, especially when we have the courage to look at our issues with total honesty and self-awareness.

> Divinatory meanings--Courage, strong emotion, thinking things through very clearly, facing conflict or pain honestly. Reversed--Confused thinking, difficulty in facing issues, fear of conflict.

TWO OF SWORDS The Pamela Smith Rider version of this card showed a blindfolded woman holding two Swords, as if to defend herself against all comers, without distinguishing between them. Here we see an eye that is wide open, as if to look with total honesty at whatever pain

or conflict the person might be facing. Eyes, and the faculty of sight, come up repeatedly in the Swords cards.



The number Two suggests dualities, or opposites, possibly extreme differences. Here we see a sharp contrast between the dark and light areas of the card. The light area begins at the woman's face (the eye appears feminine), but then merges into whiteness, just as the red on the left of the woman merges into black. Red in the Swords cards suggests both. blood and fire. Notice that the red/black area of the card dominates, giving an impression of a face peering into something dark and frightening. We do not see a whole Sword in the picture. One lacks a handle, the other a point (except for the Ten and the Ace, all the other cards show a mixture of whole and partial Swords). This suggests incomplete, or unresolved, issues in a person's life. The Ace showed a crescent moon in

the sky. Here we see a crescent-shaped sign for "luna meubles," that is, "moon furniture." This odd image intrudes on the face from the dark part of the card.

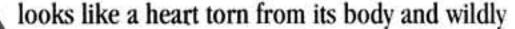
Divinatory meanings--Looking at something honestly, unblinking in the face of danger. Dualities, sharp differences between people.

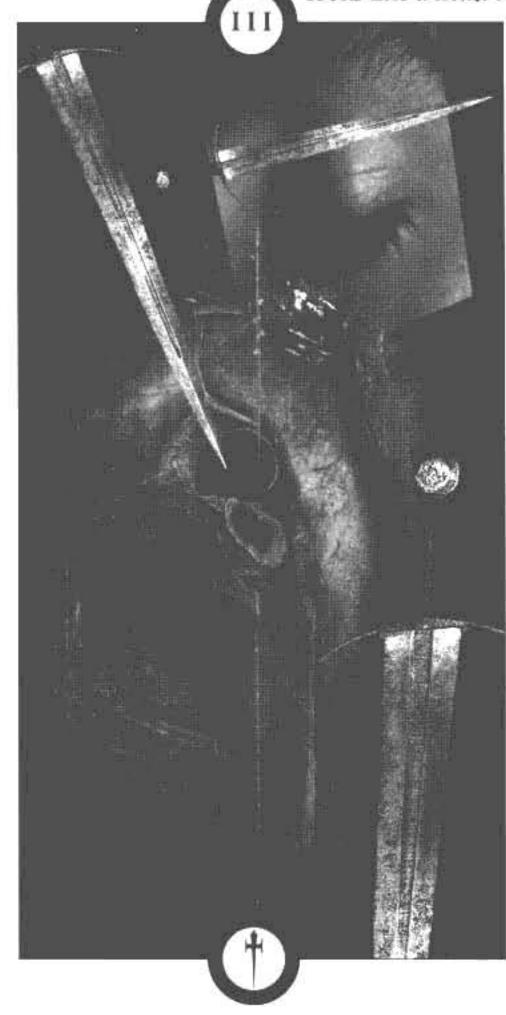
> Reversed--Looking away from something. May also mean resolving difficult issues.

THREE OF SWORDS

The first Tarot deck to include a scene or symbolic imagery on the Minor Arcana cards was not the Rider deck, as many people believe. One of the earliest Italian decks, known today as the "Sola-Busci" deck, included such scenes when it was painted sometime in the late fifteenth century. The Rider image of the Three of Swords derives directly from the Sola-Busci: a picture of the usual symbol for a heart, pierced by three Swords.

The Vertigo Tarot takes this ancient image in a more literal, and disturbing direction. The red mass in the center of the card





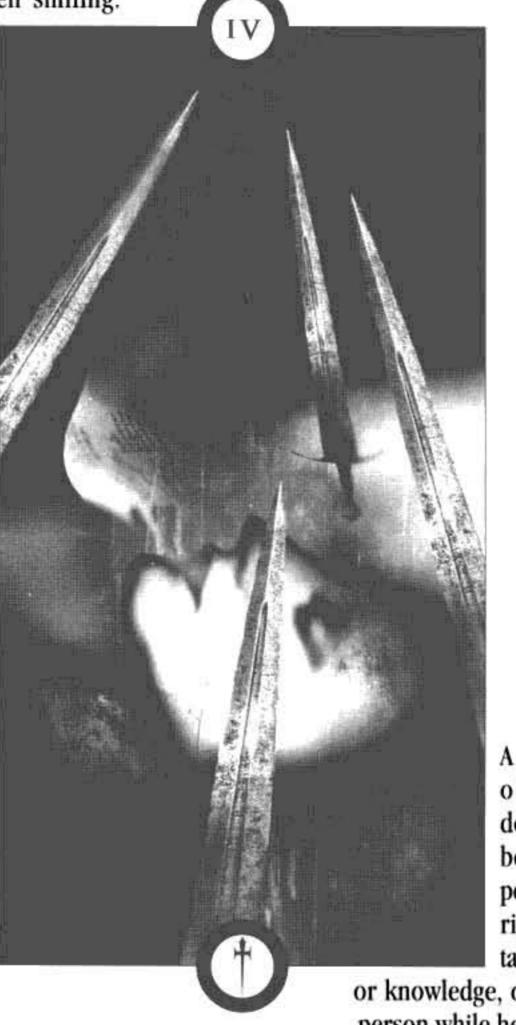
pumping out blood. Though the Swords go in front of the heart (if that is what it is) rather than through it, the closed eye with blood across it increases the feeling of great pain and violence. The eye is closed here, as if unable to look at the sight. The area of the face is much smaller than on the previous card. Comparing the two pictures, we get a sense of the pain taking over, driving away our humanity. Anyone who has ever gone through a period of depression-or for that matter, long physical pain- will know the feeling of becoming less of a person. Life can become boxed-in, encompassing only that one thing, anguish.

> Divinatory meanings--Pain, s a d n e s s, possible emotional disturbance. Reversed--Release from sorrow or depression.

FOUR OF SWORDS

The Golden Dawn called this card "Rest From Strife." Pamela Smith depicted that idea as a knight asleep in a church. The Vertigo Tarot version picks up on that image, showing the face of someone sleeping peacefully while the Swords appear to rise past him or her, into the darkness. Cards Two, Three, and Four form a sequence--the unflinching eye, the closed eye splashed with blood, the sleeping figure withdrawn from the conflict. The expression seems peaceful, even smiling.

The face rests on a splash of red like the blood on the previous card. Beyond it we see either a fire or a golden light. Considering the sequence of cards (including the Five), a fire is more likely, suggesting that the problems burn out of control while the person withdraws. At the same time, however, the Swords rising into the air would hint at a release from pain, as if the situation resolves itself on its own.



A letter, or some other kind of document, seems to be dissolving into the person's mouth, or else rising out of it. Can we take this as information,

or knowledge, or ideas, coming to the person while he or she rests?

Divinatory meanings--Rest, withdrawal, a truce. Problems may resolve themselves on their own. Reversed--Becoming more involved. Taking action. Information that prompts someone to do something.

FIVE OF SWORDS

As described above, the number Five in the Minor Arcana signifies loss, or difficulties. If we add this to the painful imagery of the Swords suit, we can expect the kind of image we see here. The face is distorted, covered over with a red substance which is too dense and solid for blood, but still conveys pain, or anger. Most dramatically, the only Sword shown in its entirety actually pierces the person's mouth. Going through both lips as it does, it effectively seals them shut. The traditional meaning for this card is "Defeat," with attendant ideas of shame and



humiliation. The image of the Sword through the mouth gives us a sense of people unable even to speak about what has happened to them.

The red material forms a mask, a little like the Seven of Cups. But here the effect is more ugly than mysterious. Even under the mask, the face has become distorted, the way shame can distort a person's sense of who she or he is. The eyes are out of line with the mouth. The right eye (left side of the picture) is stretched, as if pulled out of shape.

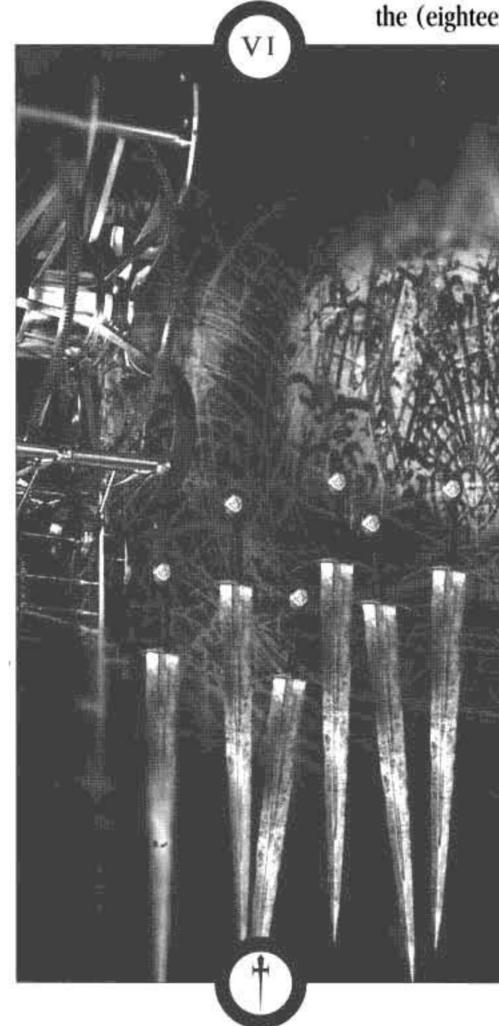
We see what looks like an ear above and between the eyes, with possibly another ear underneath the left eye. The senses of sight and sound have become distorted, in the way that people in physical or emotional pain become confused, unable to think clearly or focus their attention.

Divinatory meanings--Defeat, shame, depression, silence. A harsh situation where a person feels incapable of speaking out. Reversed--Speaking up, defending yourself. Refusal to accept defeat.

SIX OF SWORDS

After several cards of pain, we see the other side of the Swords suit, that of intellect (though books on Tarot usually stress their mental faculty, the actual Swords cards in the many different decks tend to show conflict much more than thought). We see the Swords poised, a little like a fence, before complicated images, the productions of the mind. On the left we see wheels and ratchets, like some eighteenth-century brass clockwork machine. It could stand for technology as a whole, but also the (eighteenth century) belief in the universe as

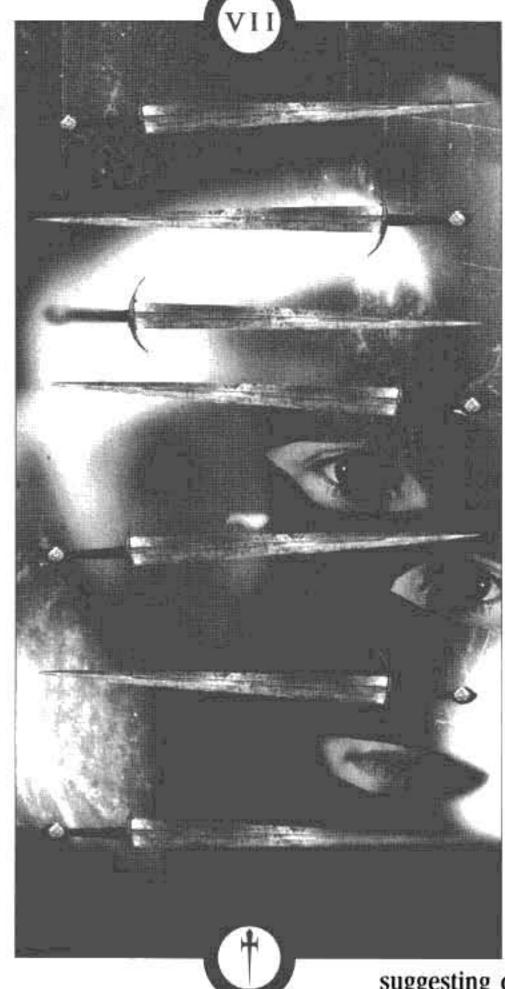
> a product of pure reason, God's perfect clock. More prominently in the card we see a large and very complex kind of latticework or geometric diagram. Again, the effect is one of thought, in particular, thought separated from emotion. The diagram may remind us of medieval attempts to fit everything in the universe, seen and unseen, into some perfect pattern, discernible by intellect alone. And yet, there is a lack of simplicity. When we attempt to make everything fit intellectually, with everything having its place in some grand scheme, we may become obsessive, with our visions becoming more and more complicated. This is what happened to the medieval cosmos, with its description of the universe as concentric circles moving in harmony. The card also suggests that we can never really separate from our emotions, for the same colors we have seen before, red, gold, and black, dominate this card like the others.



Divinatory meanings--Intellect, great ideas, seeing how everything fits together. May mean separating your ideas from your emotions. Reversed--Becoming emotional. Possibly seeing the flaws or difficulties in some grand idea.

SEVEN OF SWORDS

Again we see body parts through holes, as if from behind a mask of some kind. Two eyes, and a mouth. Even more than the Five, however, they do not go together in any order, though they probably come from the same face. When we look again, we see that the top eye at least looks at us from a hole in a complete face. The face is very blurred and is hard even to make out. The sense of the card is of the whole self being vague and unformed. Only parts of our selves, our lives, manage to become clearly defined--and these parts are isolated from each other. They do not match up.



The Golden Dawn named this card "Unstable Effort." Crowley called it "Futility." We see something of the same idea here, though with more of a sense of partial effort, or an effort that is still struggling to make an impact. The image of the blurred face suggests that the struggle is to define clearly who we are, what matters to us, what makes us unique, with an individual personality. These are intellectual issues as much as emotional ones.

Once again, the Swords go across the face, like a fence. They create a kind of barrier,

suggesting obstacles, either from other people, or just from life itself, in the struggle for self-definition.

Divinatory meanings--Difficult effort, struggle, attempts to see things clearly. The need to define yourself and your position.

> Reversed--Individuality. The person's efforts are rewarded. Clearing away obstacles.

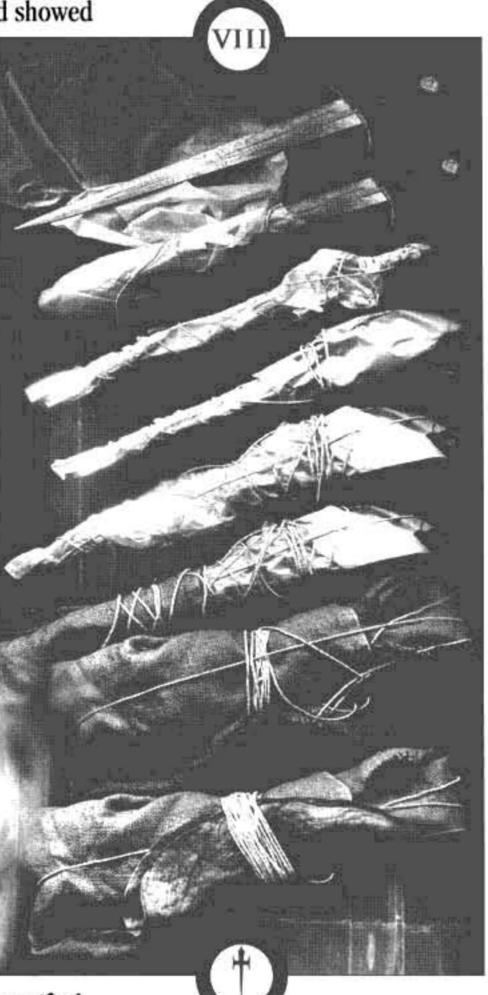
EIGHT OF SWORDS

The picture is stunning in its simple concept, managing to be literal and symbolic at the same time. There are actually two pictures here, depending on whether we read it from the top down or the bottom up. That is, do we see it as a Sword wrapped and tied up until we no longer know what it is, or the opposite, a package unwrapped and discovered to be a Sword?

The Rider image for this card showed

a woman bound by thick ropes, fenced in by Swords, and blindfolded. This version continues the idea of binding, but now it is the Sword itself that becomes confined, concealed, disguised. How we read this card depends a great deal on how we view the Sword. Does it mean anger, aggression? If so, then the binding would symbolize taming, or maybe burying, such dangerous emotions--and untying the package would mean releasing them.

Is it an act of decency, even



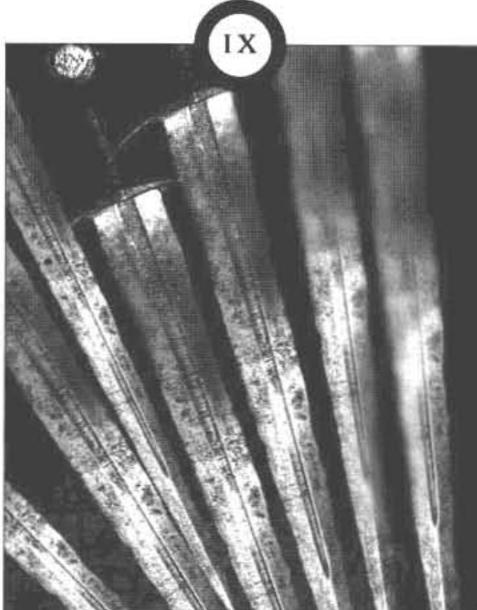
civilization, to bury anger? Or is it repression? Some situations really do require anger. How many of us have swallowed anger at injustice because we learned as children not to "make a scene"? Yet, constant arguments have killed many relationships. And what of the other Sword quality, clear thought? The binding of the Sword also can symbolize confusion, especially

the attempt by others to keep us mystified and unable to see our situation clearly. Then the untying of the Sword would mean a liberation through thinking.

Divinatory meanings--Concealing or burying feelings of aggression. Acting polite or nice when you don't necessarily feel it. Allowing other people to confuse you.

> Reversed--Releasing anger or other strong emotions. Seeing things clearly, especially after a period of confusion.

NINE OF SWORDS This powerful and frightening image returns us to the Swords' theme of suffering. The Golden Dawn called this card "Despair and Cruelty." Crowley shortened it simply to "Cruelty." Interestingly, Smith showed us someone sitting up in bed and crying, so that the hands cover the face. By contrast, The Vertigo version of the Nine of Swords depicts another eye, clear and unflinching despite the Swords pointed directly at it.



The picture is very frightening, even gruesome in its implications. But it also is courageous. We get a feeling that nothing, no pain or cruelty or oppression, will make this person look away or deny the truth. We also get a sense of someone who has to go through a great deal to arrive at this honesty. The eye looks out at us from behind a kind of mud wall which has cracked open. The wall is blood-red, like the eye. It might make us think of someone walled in by despair and suffering, until finally she or he breaks open the wall through courage alone. If we think of this as a frozen

moment, what will happen when the Swords actually strike? What kind of pain will the person endure for daring to look?

Divinatory meanings--Enduring a cruel or painful situation. Refusing to give in or look away. Reversed--Turning away from something. Avoiding a painful situation.

TEN OF SWORDS The eyes are closed here, but not to avoid anything. Instead, we return to the image of the dreamer, who dreams the different visions of the suit. In this case, the dream is not of conflict, or pain, or aggression, despite their strong presence in the Swords cards. Instead, we see an abstract dream of the intellect and its constructions. This dreamer creates a universe of thought rather than sensuality. We may think of this as an

> escape, or a retreat, from the difficult issues raised in the previous cards--or we may look at it as transcendence, the ability of the mind to rise beyond the painful details of life into abstract visions of pure intellect.

As mentioned above, the face here takes on a masculine quality, despite being the same face as the "feminine" one on the Ten of Cups. Traditionally, the suits are often described as male--Wands and Swords, and female--Cups and Pentacles. The Swords are stretched across the space between the face and the graphic images above it. Their curved hilts seem to merge into the delicate web or latticework structures behind them.



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In contrast to the Six, the images here are not cluttered, but orderly. On the right, we see a figure within a circle, reminding us of drawings showing

the human body in classic proportions. The dominant image is one of perfect circles connected and interlaced with weblike lines producing triangles and other geometric forms. At the end of the suit, the mind gives us the ability to transcend pain through the act of contemplating the world's abstract perfection.

Divinatory meanings--Intellect, abstraction, perfection of thought, detachment from emotion or daily worries. Reversed--Confusion, a flawed vision, becoming distracted by worry or responsibility.

ACE OF PENTACLES The Pentacle symbol is a relatively new one for the fourth suit. Older Tarot decks used Coins, emblem of the practical everyday aspects of life. One theory of the Tarot's origins suggests that the four suits represent the four classes of medieval life. Wands (or Staves) stood for peasants, Cups for the clergy (because of the communion cup), Swords for the nobility, and Coins for merchants. The Order of the Golden Dawn changed the Coins to Pentacles, partly because they wanted a symbol connected to ceremonial magic, and partly because they wanted something



The element of Earth means realization, and writing is the most realized of the arts, the most didactic, the most explicit and concrete in its messages. Notice, by the way, that we cannot actually read the particular writings. Their content does not matter here, just the fact of their existence as physical objects. The Pentacle appears within an ornate disk, a tribute to the suit's older forms. Grapevines decorate the disk. Traditionally, grapes symbolize the abundance and joy of the natural world. This is partly because grapes are used to make wine, which we use for celebrations and religious rituals. Pentacles and Cups (Earth and Water) are traditionally considered feminine.

with a wider range of meanings than commerce.

Pentacles are the suit of Earth, which means the practical and the everyday, but also nature, physical reality, whatever is real and solid.

We have seen writing in each of the suits. In Pentacles, however, the art of writing becomes more prominent, a major symbol on the Ace, the Four, and the Nine.

Divinatory meanings--Security, abundance, physical pleasure, wealth.

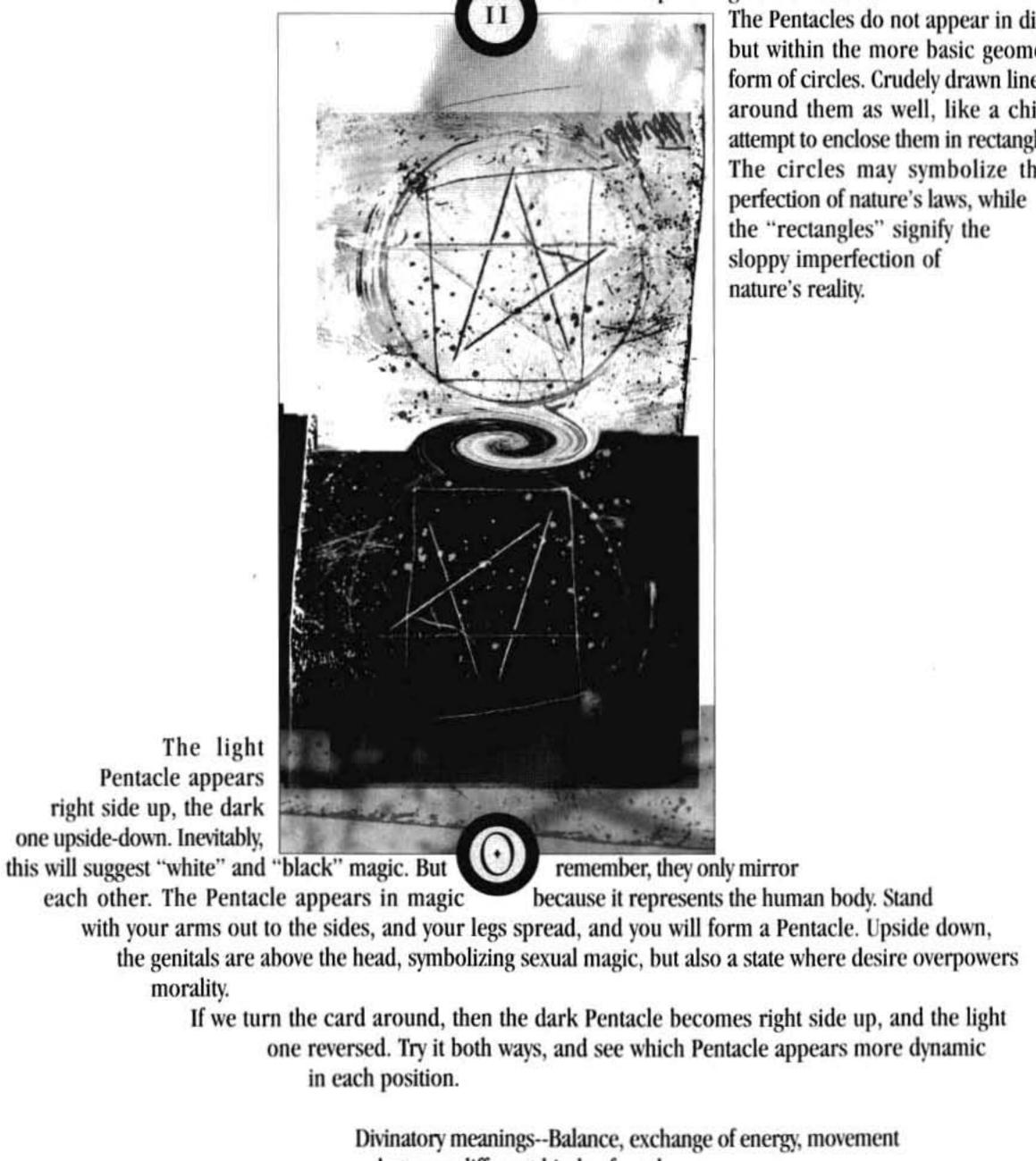
Reversed--Difficulties or arguments around money. Dissatisfaction with simple security.

TWO OF PENTACLES

The dualities that we saw in the other Twos become more pronounced here. The light and dark parts of the card virtually mirror each other. At the same time, the opposites blend together, just as they did in the necks of the torsos from the Two of Cups. At the border, the light spirals into a tight coil, out of which the dark spirals. The effect is similar to the Chinese yin/yang symbol,

where the dark

contains a spot of light and vice versa.



The Pentacles do not appear in disks, but within the more basic geometric form of circles. Crudely drawn lines go around them as well, like a child's attempt to enclose them in rectangles. The circles may symbolize the

between different kinds of work.

Reversed--Imbalance. The need to focus your

energy on one task, or one area of your

life, even if this means letting

THREE OF

PENTACLES

Three Pentacles appear on this face, with its swirl of light around the head, like a kind of turban. One falls more or less at the place of the third eye, the site of psychic awareness. A second goes over the left eye and ear. The one we instantly notice, however, is the one that appears over

the mouth. Partly, we see this one so prominently because the other two fade more into the background. More important, it strikes us so strongly because it gives the impression of the mouth wide open, with the Pentacle filling it. What do we say when we say a Pentacle? What does speech mean in the suit of Earth? Maybe speech here would indicate the ways we express ourselves in the world, the things we do that represent us, the kind of work we do, what we produce and give to others--in exchange for money, but also as a way to realize our creativity.



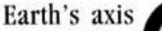
Traditionally, the Three of Pentacles involves the idea of work, and especially mastery at whatever work the person has chosen. The Rider image showed an artist in a church, advised by a monk (spiritual understanding) and an architect (practical knowledge). We see something similar here, in the arrangement of the Pentacles. The third eye Pentacle signifies spiritual truth, without which any work, but

especially art, becomes empty. The eye symbolizes knowledge and skill. The mouth represents the actual work of producing something in the real world.

> Divinatory meanings -- Hard work, mastery, skill, cooperation, success. Reversed--Mediocrity, failure to do the best possible,

FOUR OF PENTACLES

Four is the number of the physical world. There are four solar events marking the natural seasons-the equinoxes, when light and dark balance, and the solstices, when light and dark reach their extremes. There are four natural directions, shaped by the north and south poles of the plus the directions of sunrise and sunset on the





equinoxes. Our bodies also naturally know four (horizontal) directions--before us, behind us, to the right and to the left. The number Four roots us in the physical world, just as the suit of Pentacles does. Traditionally, the Four of Pentacles represents the protection and power of possessions. This is actually the only card where we see the same ornate Pentacles we saw on the Ace. But even more than the Pentacles themselves, writing dominates this card. We see it in different directions, different forms. Thus, it is not possessions but creative work that gives power. On the Three we saw those crude rectangles. A similar shape appears on the Four, more advanced, but still far from the pure geometric form. On the Four, three sides of a more correct rectangle intersect the two Pentacles on the left. And the Pentacles themselves create a perfect square. We have been moving towards the realization of an ideal, symbolized by

fact, the geometric ideal does not realize itself

in the abstract drawings, but in the physical Pentacles. In other words, in the suit of Earth, we best fulfill our ideals through the actual work we produce in the world.

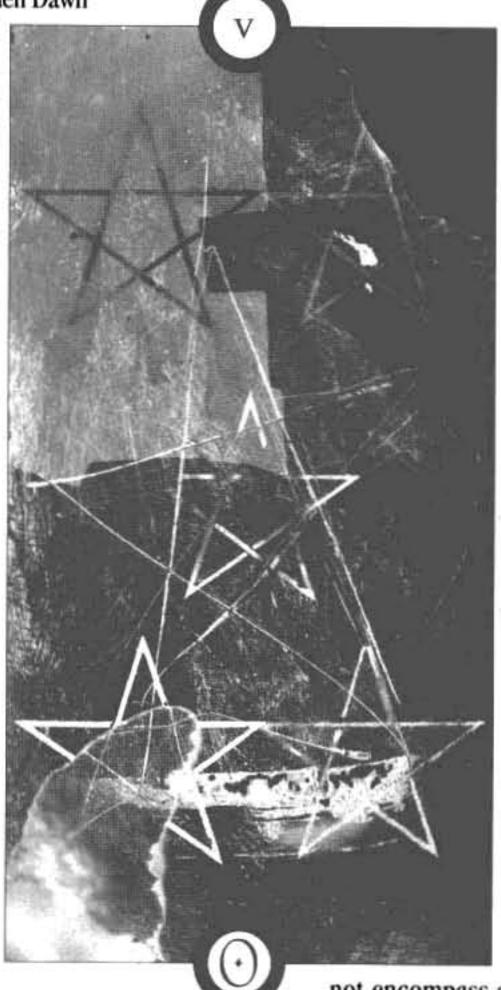
Divinatory meanings--Achievement, realization of goals, power derived from skill or possessions. Structure. Reversed--Letting things go, lack of concern for material things, possibly a need for more structure in life.

FIVE

OF PENTACLES

As we've already seen, the number Five in the Tarot signifies struggle and loss. In Pentacles this becomes translated to what the Golden Dawn

called "Material Trouble," depicted in the Rider version as two people, barefoot and on crutches in the snow. We get no such graphic image here, but we do get a picture of things torn; stained, or disfigured. Notice how crude the Pentacles are compared to the last card. They do not have any circles around them, let alone disks. They stand exposed, naked, without any protection against hardship, or the power of others. If the Pentacle represents the human body, then the body here stands weak, or injured.



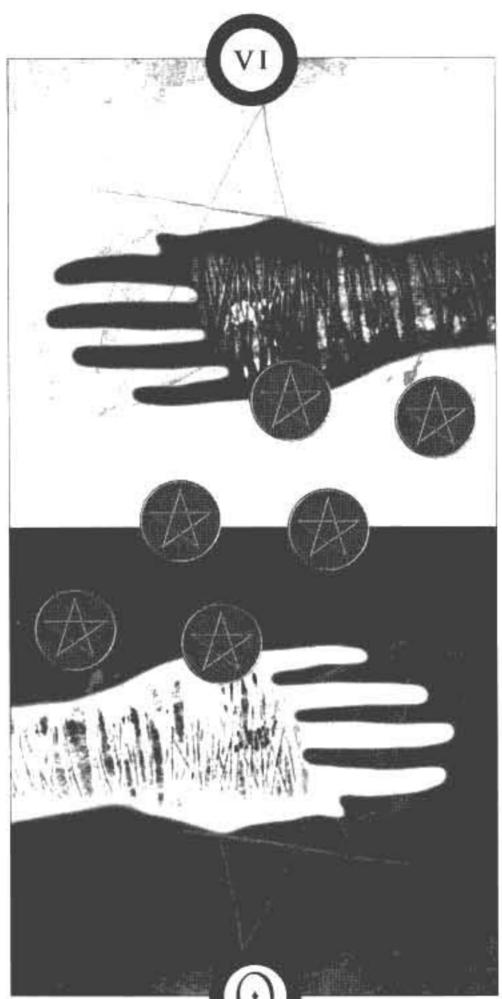
The Four completed a process of realization symbolized by the various incomplete rectangles. We return here to a rough state with the large Pentacle scratched around the other five. The lines do not all meet; they veer off as if the hand scratching it had slipped. The figure not only does

not encompass all the other Pentacles, it does not even touch one of them: the one at upper right, which has a piece of its own Pentacle body torn off. After the last card, we now get a feeling of starting over--possibly at a higher level.

Divinatory meanings--Loss, money troubles, possible sickness (though as Tarot readers we should avoid predicting illness, particularly serious illness, and particularly when the reader is inexperienced).

> Reversed--Recovery, taking action to better your situation.

SIX OF PENTACLES We see a cartoonlike drawing of Pentacles passing between two hands like coins from one person to another. If the Five showed physical difficulties, then the Six shows help, or charity. In the Rider version, the two beggars from the Five are shown on their knees before a merchant who is giving them alms. The theme is assistance, but also inequality. Here, if money is changing hands (compare this card with the Nine, where the Pentacles appear more clearly like coins), there is still no hierarchy, no one playing the role of beggar. The two hands mirror each other. Only the colors change. As with the



Two, the yin/yang symbol comes to mind. The light dark within the light. We can ask the same question we of the picture to turn it upside down? Actually, the hands, or at least the fingers, look more like shadows, or silhouettes, in black and white. The only three-dimensional parts we see are the arms and backs of the hands, which appear wrapped, or bound, in cord. The rough cord marks take away the abstract perfection of the silhouettes. They bring in a rough physical reality, with the possible suggestion of pain, or physical limitations. The crudely drawn or scratched Pentacle from the Five (or one very much like it) appears again on this card, behind each of the hands. It gives us a direct connection between the two cards.

Divinatory meanings--Sharing. People helping each other, particularly against physical limitations. Receiving or giving help.

Reversed--Doing things alone. People holding back from each other. Possibly inequalities between people.

SEVEN OF PENTACLES The eyes are closed, so that the face resembles the figure we see on the Tens. Is this face dreaming, or simply concentrating? As with the Three, a large Pentacle appears (roughly) over the mouth. The effect seems less of an open mouth than simply the Pentacle covering that part of the face. The other six Pentacles stand stacked in a pyramid over the forehead.

The number Seven often signifies a victory of some kind. In the Earth suit of work and the material world, this mean can. achievements. The stacked Pentacles may give us a sense of accomplishments. They may be the products of the person's intelligence. The ornate one over the mouth can=symbolize the actual results of a person's work.

The face is realistic, but vague, blurry. On the side, by the ears and then down the neck, it becomes more abstract. The only thing truly depicted in concrete form is the Pentacle over the mouth. The vagueness of the face can suggest that self, or ego, or consciousness is not what matters in this suit. The work is what counts, and even more, what the work produces.

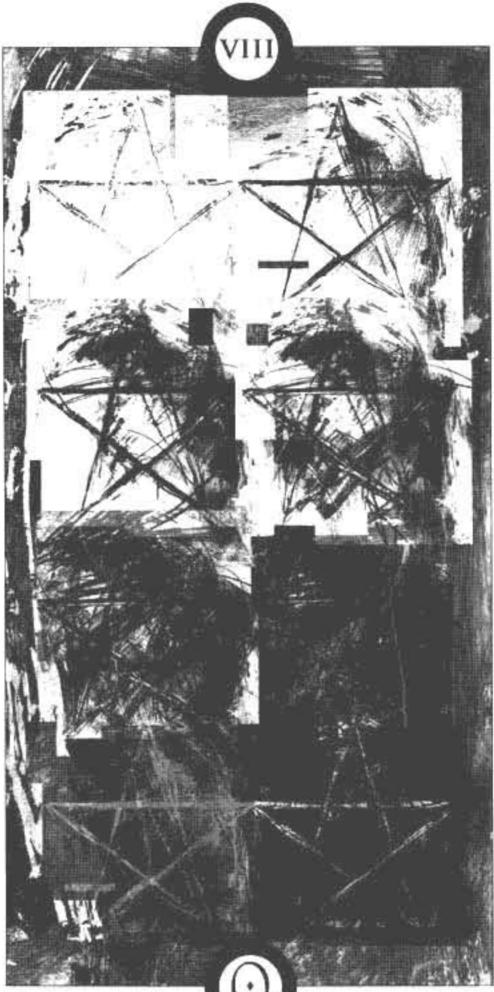


A t the throat we see a dark box, and within it, rough lines and scrawls. Possibly they signify imperfections.

Divinatory meanings--Production, material success, though this may be flawed. Immersing yourself in your work. Reversed--Holding back from committing yourself to something. Hard work, but without satisfaction.

EIGHT OF PENTACLES

What should we make of this picture? It appears simple, yet disturbing, very dark and harsh. The picture shows the Pentacles scratched or covered over with lines, even disfigured (compare them to the Ace). If Pentacles symbolize work, then these would seem to be work that is damaged or obscured. It suggests a great difficulty in achieving work or beauty, or meaning. After the Seven, it might show the collapse of effort. The Rider image showed an apprentice making perfect Pentacles and stacking them up, one on top of the other. Here too, the Pentaclés are stacked. Unlike some of the other cards, with their hands or faces, this is all we see. And they have that scratched, even ugly, look. But maybe the harshness tells us something more valuable than beauty, or at least more valuable than blank perfect Pentacles repeated eight times. The Pentacle



at upper left appears against a light, relatively unmarked background. Then they become progressively more "disfigured," until, by Pentacles five and six, we can hardly make them out. After that, however, they become clear again, so that Pentacle eight actually goes back to the simplicity of Pentacle one, only now a dark green color instead of white. Green is the color of life, and dark green, life that is fertile and fecund. The whole movement of the Pentacles suggests an artistic journey, away from the blankness of empty form, through the artist's own darkness to a new simplicity. Beyond the work of artists, it can mean anyone's journey through difficult or painful issues to a more honest expression of who they are.

> Divinatory meanings--Self-expression, honesty, confrontation with harsh or disturbing issues, a process of creating a meaningful life. Reversed--Beauty, perfection, especially in work. Possibly shallowness.

NINE OF PENTACLES On this card we get the strongest connection to the idea of Pentacles as Coins. The nine Pentacles look like change dropped from somebody's hand, or maybe falling from what looks like an envelope or a book above them. On one or two we even can see the kind of ridges we find on the edges of American quarters and other coins. The more literal, less abstract, image may remind us of traditional fortune telling, with its emphasis on inheritance, sudden fortunes, money gained, money lost.



The letter/envelope/book above suggests something similar. How many fortunetelling cards show mysterious letters, with the meaning being something like "unexpected news." As usual, we cannot actually read the words. Whether we decide that the letter symbolizes creative work or simply messages, it is the object that matters, not the content. Producing work. Receiving a message. Pentacles is the suit of the concrete. The paper appears either burnt or torn, particularly on the right. Does this mean flawed work? A disturbing message? And what do the coins symbolize? Money lost? Wasted? Given generously? Or simply spent, without judgment on whether or not it

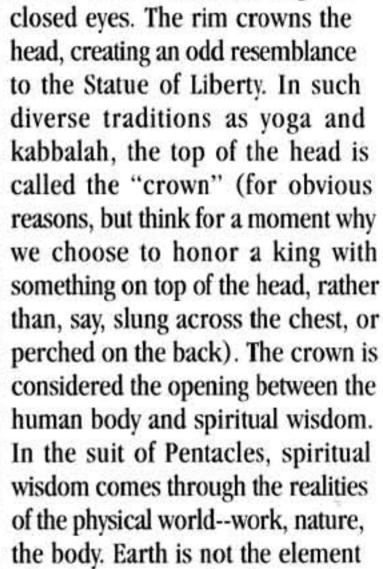
is spent wisel

is spent wisely. Possibly the falling money means giving up material possessions. Nine is the number of the Hermit in the Major Arcana, and the Hermit is the archetype of turning away from wealth and possessions.

Divinatory meanings--Money spent freely, possibly foolishly. Being unattached to possessions. May mean messages. Reversed--Holding on to money. Being careful. Concern for the future.

TEN OF PENTACLES

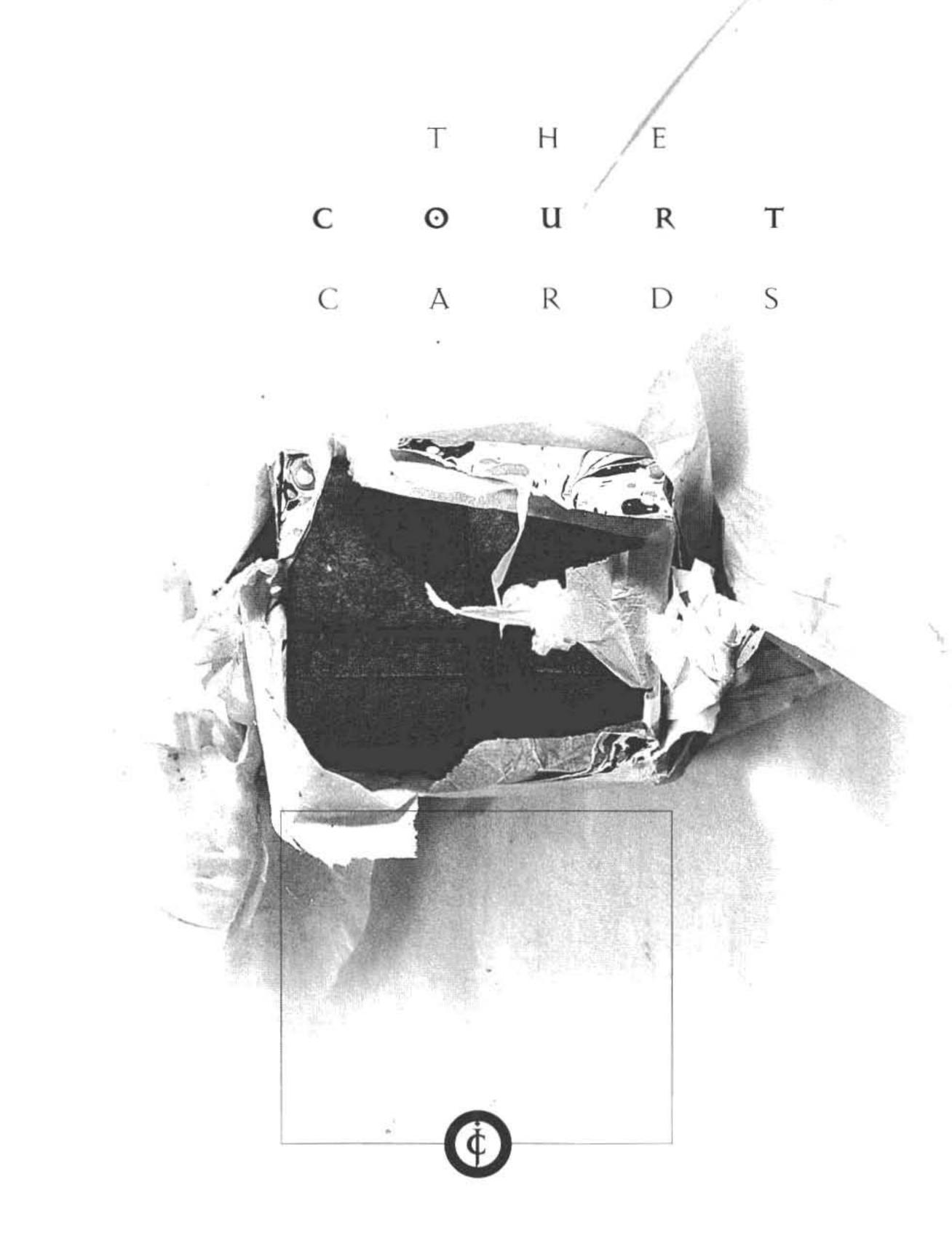
Now we see the final dream, a dream of the Earth, which means a dream of the real world. Nine Pentacles arc above the head. They are not quite as three-dimensional as the nine on the previous card, but they are clear and direct. The tenth Pentacle is actually the one we saw on the Ace. Thus, the Ten consists of what we started with plus the accumulated work of the previous cards. The large Pentacle, with its grapevine rim, merges with the person's face. The star itself covers the forehead, with the feet touching the





of abstract perfection. The background is rough and harsh. At upper left the world of the card seems to open to a black area with a square. The square is often a symbol of abstraction, but this one is imperfect, with curved lines and sloppy angles. The face itself is not centered on the card.

Divinatory meanings--Wealth, security, sometimes family or inheritance. Reversed--Going beyond what you have, looking for new beginnings, or new adventures in life.



In many of the older books on Tarot the Court cards represent types of people. A child with blond hair. A woman with black hair and eyes. In recent years, many descriptions of the cards have shifted from physical types to character types. A strongminded older man. A trusting woman. A man working in the legal profession. This categorization of the cards probably comes from the influence of astrology, where each sign is said to signify a set group of characteristics, and people born under a particular sun sign are assumed to have in common the various qualities of that sign.

If the Court cards do represent types, then we should recognize that these characters do not belong to any individual person for their whole lives. No one is ever a King of Pentacles in the same way that a person born in early September is a Virgo. Someone can "be" a King of Pentacles at a certain time in her life, and then, a few weeks later, become more like the Queen of Cups. Or else, both aspects of the person can exist at the same time.

The best way to find out which Court cards might apply to a person is through a reading. And readings change. One week, the Page of Wands might perfectly sum up what was happening in the person's life. The next week, as circumstances shift, the Page might have changed to the Knight of Wands, or even leaped to the level of the King. And maybe it might show up again, but this time alongside the Page of Pentacles. Or the reading might show no Court cards at all. Like the Chinese I Ching, the Tarot forms a Book of Changes. The variety of people shown in the Court cards embody the many possibilities of change. If we try to see the Court cards only as character types we may limit our appreciation of them. As mentioned above, many people find these cards static and have trouble interpreting them. To give the Court cards more interest, some modern Tarot designers have changed them, creating such titles as Mother, Father, Daughter, and Son, or Shaman, Priestess, Son and Daughter, or Child, Companion, Amazon, and Crone. Some decks give them identities out of mythology, using gods and goddesses from different countries. The Vertigo Tarot has gone instead in the direction of abstraction. At first glance, this might make them harder, not easier, to interpret. However, the strict forms that Dave McKean has chosen--torsos for the Pages, horses' heads for the Knights, faces for the Queens and Kings--allows us to move into a more conceptual, more symbolic way of looking and thinking about them.

Even more than the numbered suit cards, the Court cards follow a distinct line of development. The progress from Page to Knight to Queen to King shows, first of all, human growth. Traditionally, the Pages signify children, the Knights young adults, and the Queens and Kings mature people.

They also show a development of consciousness. Like the Fool, the Pages do not really know themselves. They are young in years, but also in the sense of the eternal child, innocent, straightforward, unselfconscious. They connect to the world directly and sensually. We can see these things in the way the cards show them without heads, even without arms and feet. Their essential reality lies in their bodies, not anything they might do or think.

The movement from the Page to the Knight is a movement towards action. The Knight is defined by his role. He is a quester, a hero. Unlike the Page, of whom very little is demanded, the Knight must fulfill his responsibilities. The use of the horse's head emphasizes the Knight's function.

The person achieves self-awareness with the maturity of the Queen and the King. The choice of faces for these cards stresses the importance of knowledge and consciousness. We should not assume that the only difference between them is that of male and female. The Queen symbolizes an appreciation and understanding of the qualities of that particular suit/element. The Queen of Wands, for example, will represent a special feeling for the wild energy of Fire. We can see this in the amazed look on her face, for Fire startles and excites. By contrast, the Queen of Cups reveals her closeness to Water in the dreamlike mist veiling her eyes and mouth.

In the medieval power structures which supply the basis for this symbolism, kings rule. Therefore, the Tarot Kings signify being responsible towards the outside world. They must make decisions and recognize that what they do affects others.

In readings, we do not need to think of any of these cards as bound by gender. The Pages have always had a certain androgyny (the pictures here show female torsos), but even with the others we should remember that they do not have to signify actual men and women. They represent more the different sides of a person. A woman can act out the qualities of a King or a Knight, and a man can appreciate life with that intensity symbolized by the Queen.

PAGE OF WANDS

The torso of the Page rises out of that woodlike substance swirling around the torch. It stands before a background of light or flame. The background also resembles curtains, giving the card a quality of a performance, maybe a magic performance. The theatrical quality will become more pronounced with the King, who appears poised before an archway like a stage. A divided flame supports the Page's torso, below the rib cage and around the area of the genitals. Fire is our basic energy, that which makes us living beings instead of inert matter. The great discovery of yoga (which is not a doctrine but a scientific discipline) is that the essential energy of human beings is heat, and that it is both sexual and spiritual in nature. This Fire resides at the base of the spine. The torso is muscular, seemingly masculine. In fact, the Pages are feminine cards, and if we look breasts are clearer on the Swords' close we can see breasts underneath the hand (the Page). Wands, and the element of Fire, are masculine; in traditions such as alchemy, Fire and Water are described as male and female. The Page of Wands is not hermaphroditic, but more in the direction of a masculine woman. The right shoulder reaches up, as if stretching. Wands are active and forceful. The Page of Wands carries qualities of movement and eagerness.



A black hand goes across the chest. Like the one on the Ace, it displays writing, with the look of a talisman. It gives the card--and the Page's body--a quality of magic, as if the spirit world is imprinting itself on our actions.

Divinatory meanings--Strength, eagerness, especially for new projects, great activity. A person who is forthright and positive, who keeps no secrets. Sexuality that is innocent at the same time. Reversed--Can mean laziness or exhaustion. Someone who holds back feelings.

PAGE OF CUPS

The Pages are feminine, and Water is the essential female element. We would expect to see a woman in this watery form, and in fact, the breasts are prominent above the stream of words moving across the picture. But if we look further down we can see the suggestion of a penis reaching into the blacked-out area of the

lower body. If so, they are the only actual genitalia to appear, even vaguely, on any of the Court Cards. The



issue reminds us that the Kings and Queens show only faces, symbols of consciousness, and the Knights feature horses, which is to say the Knight's function. The Pages are about bodies. Water is feminine in the way it flows and shimmers with beauty. It is female in its connections to menstruation and pregnancy (the fetus grows in water, which "breaks" at the start of labor). But the element of Water is also hermaphroditic in the way it includes all qualities, and can flow from one thing into another. The suit of Cups does not make strict separations. The body is not marked off from the world around it. Instead, it spreads itself and merges with the world, the way water, when not contained, will spread over everything until it simply dissipates. The woman's head appears distorted, as if it has opened up or dissolved. The Cup on this card is nearly invisible. We can just make it out at bottom right, obscured by water. Writing streams across the middle of the body. We might think of literary stream-of-consciousness, used by Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. The mind of Water does not judge, or analyze, or put things in categories. It simply experiences.

Divinatory meanings--Someone imaginative, dreamy, reflective. Spending time allowing feelings, or fantasies, to flow into awareness, without judgment.

> Reversed--Thinking more clearly. The need to make decisions or speak to others.

PAGE OF SWORDS This is the same torso shown on the Wands card. Here the shading by the gold light, and the appearance of curved hips, allow its femininity to emerge more clearly. And the right breast is shown more obviously. Interestingly, we do not really see the left breast at all. Though there is no sign of any

wound, we might think of the Amazons, as the Greeks described them, with the left breast amputated so that they could pull their bows better. We should remember that the Sword is a weapon as well as a symbol of intellect (we might ask what it says about our traditions that we symbolize mind with an object made for killing). The Sword is actually more prominent in the Page than any of the other three. It connects the head area and the groin (though both are replaced by global maps). However much we believe that we think clearly and objectively, much of our thinking derives from desire, or jealousy, or simply instinct. This is especially true at the level of the Page, which emphasizes the body rather than the head. The global maps symbolize the world, but an abstraction of it. It signifies how we think--or feel--about existence. As a famous maxim puts it, "the map is not the territory." Swords can be emotional, like Cups, but they deal with emotions dynamically, compared to the passivity of Cups. We get a sense of a person more involved in the world than the Cups figure, but in an intellectual way. As with the Page of Wands we see that suggestion of the right shoulder reaching upwards. The Sword itself divides the body, like the split brain described in modern psychology. We see the handle where the face would be, and the point by the genitals.



Divinatory meanings--Someone who is active in the world, but in an intellectual, detached way. A person who believes him/herself objective, but is driven by desires or fears.

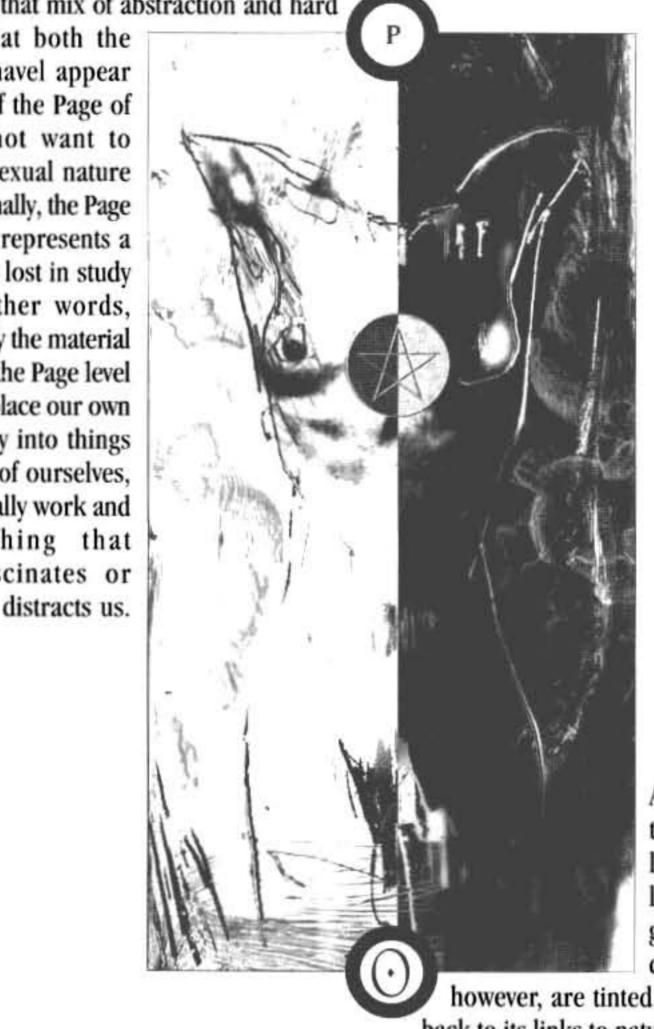
Reversed--Greater awareness of your own motives. Less intellectual, more instinctive.

Can mean suspicion or nervousness.

PAGE OF PENTACLES

The body here is the most clearly female of all the Pages, and the most detailed in representation. Pentacles are the suit of concrete reality. At the same time, the figure is a line drawing, compared to the photographic quality of the Wands and Swords. So the card shows us a paradox, the tension between the idea of Page--an early stage of development--and the idea of Pentacles--completion. The lines appear more scratched than painted or pencilled, as if someone has used a blade to etch the figure on stone, and maybe ice. Again, we get that mix of abstraction and hard

reality. Notice that both the genitals and the navel appear scratched out, as if the Page of Pentacles does not want to acknowledge her sexual nature and origin. Traditionally, the Page of Pentacles often represents a student, someone lost in study or work. In other words, Pentacles signify the material world, but at the Page level we may displace our own physicality into things outside of ourselves, especially work and anything that fascinates or



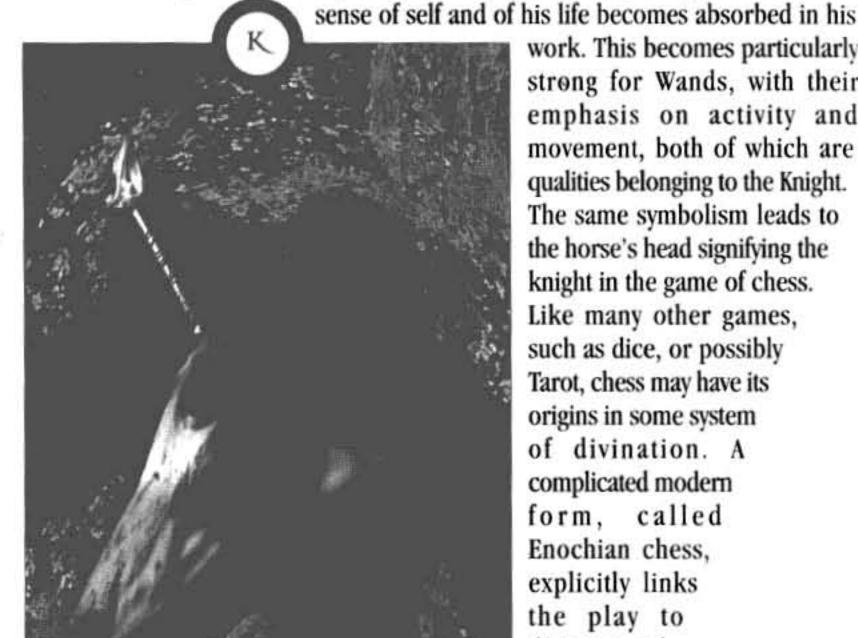
A sharp line splits the card into dark and light. The lighter side looks more like ice, giving the card a cold detached quality. Both sides,

however, are tinted green, bringing Pentacles back to its links to nature. Beyond the body we see spiraling fossils. They will appear more prominently in the King. The spiral is basic to nature. We do not find any pure geometric shapes in nature (except for the sky disks of the Sun and Moon), but we do find spirals, from tiny snails and shellfish to entire galaxies.

Divinatory meanings--Involvement with nature, fascination with the world. Possibly a student, or the idea of studying. Reversed--Someone whimsical, easily distracted.

KNIGHT OF WANDS

The Knights present us with a paradox. In contrast to the Pages, which showed only headless torsos, we now see heads. But they are animal heads. Symbolically, an animal head in place of a human one indicates instinct, or desire, governing our actions in place of human judgment. To some extent, Knights, as figures of action, and even violence, belong to this instinctive animal world, with only the code of chivalry to anchor them in human civilization. More directly, a Knight needs a horse to perform his duties. Therefore, the horse in place of the man emphasizes that the Knight is defined by what he does in the world, not by who he is. His



work. This becomes particularly strong for Wands, with their emphasis on activity and movement, both of which are qualities belonging to the Knight. The same symbolism leads to the horse's head signifying the knight in the game of chess. Like many other games, such as dice, or possibly Tarot, chess may have its origins in some system of divination. A complicated modern form, called Enochian chess, explicitly links the play to divination and magic.

The Wand rises from the head like the horn of a unicorn, an imaginary creature-symbolizing perfection, beauty, and virginity. The card has a certain purity and idealism. The small flame burns against

that dense matter we have seen so often in Wands, but also against darkness. Darkness swallows the neck of the horse. At bottom we see the word "Terra," Latin for Earth, written like a sign. The Knight's heroism, his courage and virtue, keep the flame of the unicorn burning, if faintly, in the hard world of real life.

Divinatory meanings--Someone courageous, idealistic, virtuous. Can be headstrong, refusing to compromise what he believes is right.

Reversed--Someone who has taken a lot of risks and possibly stands in some danger. It also may indicate disillusionment and loss of idealism.

KNIGHT OF CUPS

Here the Cups are clearly visible, compared to the hidden Cup of the Page, or the partially concealed Cup of the King. In both of these, the Cup becomes part of the body. The Queen holds hers like a chalice. Only the Knight does not actually touch the three Cups that appear in the picture. These Cups are taken from a detail on the Nine of Cups. Their position here gives them a quality of a single Cup falling in slow motion (though they also look like the hour marks on a clock face). The idea of falling invokes the difficulty of Knightly action using Water

energy in any productive way. The armored Knight, heroic warrior that he is, does not mix very well with Water, whose basic nature is to yield and transform rather than resist. The Knight of Cups may feel a contradiction between his own dreaminess and the demands of his place in the world. Like a rock thrown in a still pool, action, even the need for action, can disturb Water's placid surface. The figure, and the water around it, are not just dissolving, like the Page. They are breaking up, splattering. There is a quality of violation here, possibly pain. The head, and the falling Cups, shatter the tranquility of the suit. Writing appears again, now almost entirely covered and unreadable (we can make out some words on the Page of Cups). If the Knight were a writer, then the demands of the world make it hard for him to keep his (Watery) inspiration.



Of all the Knights, only Cups looks from left to right. Unlike the others, this Knight belongs to the feminine, the secret depths of Water.

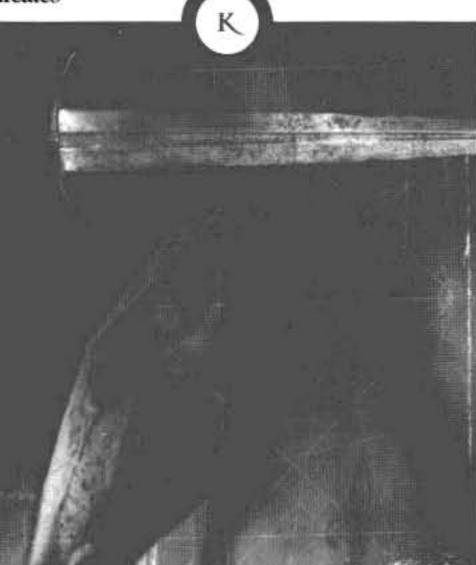
Divinatory meanings--A dreamer, whose dreams conflict with the pressures and responsibilities of everyday life. An inconsistent lover, he may find it hard to fully join in a relationship. Reversed--The dreamy, or introverted, side becomes stronger. He may resent demands people make on him.

KNIGHT OF SWORDS

He is the ultimate Knight, for after all, the emblem of his suit is the Knight's great weapon. We might say that the entire Swords suit moves around him. As well as a tool of the warrior, the Sword represents privilege, and therefore the nobility as a class. The Sword developed as something only a knight could wield (partly, I suspect, because it served no practical purpose other than killing). Therefore, the Knight of Swords indicates

> the warrior, but also the completely dedicated person, and possibly a person with social advantages.

> > The Sword here moves powerfully across the card. The fact that it is incomplete seems to make it stronger, as if it is too big for the card.



On both the Queen and King we see a complete Sword, but a small one. A Knight uses his Sword to attack and defend. He uses it to fulfill his duties. In contrast to the conflicted Watery Knight of Cups, this Knight does not doubt his purpose or his calling. In the Tarot, the Sword symbolizes intellect as well as force. We see the abstract geometric lines we have seen before. Like squares and similar forms, straight lines do not appear in nature (except in one instance, when discrete beams of light appear from behind a cloud). The lines appear random, and therefore

meaningless, but in two places they converge on partial circles (bottom left and mid upper right borders). They imply an order in the world that we cannot quite make out.

The horse is more complete than on any of the other Knights. It is actually more stylized and less realistic than Wands, but we see it more fully. In general, the horse (and all the Knightly qualities it symbolizes) becomes more of a reality in the two masculine suits.

Divinatory meanings--A warrior, a hero, someone of class or privilege. Reversed--Brashness. Going too far, charging ahead when caution is a better policy.

KNIGHT OF PENTACLES

Unlike the other three, this horse has reared back his head. He actually appears more energized, more in movement than the supposedly more active Knights of Wands and Swords. Those Knights may be warriors, but they are warriors at rest, confident. Here we see a action, and more, violence. Like the Page, the figure

suggestion of



is scratched, as if on rock. Along with the posture, the result is kinetic. The lines converging around the eye look harsh and sharp, like icicles or knives. The eye itself is scratched over, as if wounded. Along the lower right of the neck, lines cut across the body. We can see a drawing like a knife at the very bottom. The Pentacle itself forms the only complete and undamaged image.

There is something heroic about this card, something almost of a martyr. Even blinded, he will fight to the end. In some ways, he is most like a Knight because of his dedication to a cause, even when the cause is helpless. But what exactly might this cause be? Traditionally the Knight of Pentacles is sometimes thought of as slow and plodding, as a hardworking salaryman, committed to the unchivalrous mission of his job or career. This is because Pentacles signify money and work. More broadly, however, they signify the material world, the unyielding

realities of life. This Knight struggles against harsh truths. They may include disease, or poverty, or loss, or simply nature itself. Possibly he cannot win. He may know that, but he will not surrender.

Divinatory meanings -- Total dedication to a cause, especially when the cause is impossible or lost. Someone fighting on against enemies or a sequence of bad luck. Reversed--Compromise, the ability to look at situations more realistically.

QUEEN OF WANDS The Queens bring us human faces. They symbolize the development of true consciousness, when we become aware of ourselves and our lives. Through the Queens, the element of each suit can know itself. The Queens as a group show a wonderment, as if they see the world brandnew, and it amazes them. Nowhere do we see this more than in the Queen of Wands. The face appears both



She looks out at us intensely, even though swirls of green and red cover one eye. In the Golden Dawn system of elements, the Queen of Wands is Water of Fire (simply, Queens==Water, Wands==Fire). We can describe her as the mystical contemplation of the Fire of life. She comes to us framed, with her Wand forming one side of the wooden rectangle. The insignificant place of the Wand in the picture is a theme in the Queens, especially the two "masculine" suits of Wands and Swords. The Queens do not seem to need props or tools. They have their own completeness. The frame creates a distance, so that she looks out at our world from another universe, one of color and swirling energy. Peacock feathers lurk within the moving lines. The

startling and startled.

frame, in fact, is partly illusory, for the head also seems to rest on a pedestal formed from tight dark lines. The face is beautiful, but also androgynous, even masculine, with hard lines and surfaces. Instead of hair we see her crown, a little like a short spiky haircut.

Divinatory meanings--Wonderment, joy, someone positive with a deep sense of the astonishment of life. Reversed--Someone jaded, negative, needing to be shaken up.

QUEEN OF CUPS

Continuing the Golden Dawn designations, the Queen of Cups is Water of Water. This makes her the most realized of all the Cups cards, and also of all the Queens. She is a Queen of mystery and imagination. She is the initiate and the teacher, mistress of secrets and divination. She rules feeling and love. She looks like a carnival Tarot reader, or maybe like the sort of Tarot reader we see in Hollywood movies, someone who is always more than she seems, who

knows more than she tells. She appears jeweled, with suggestions of pearls, and even a ring through her nose. She wears a veil, like a traditional High Priestess, but also like that other Hollywood archetype, the Arabian Nights princess. The veil gives her face a gauzy distance, the sense of another world. She seems to live in that world of mystery and our more mundane world at the same time.

Where the Queen of Wands stares amazed at the universe, this Queen knows its secrets. She knows the mysteries of the cosmos as well as your own life and soul. She is larger than life, but also deeper. The Cup before her is the Cup of Dreams, or spiritual mystery and imagination. She seems to offer it to us, and we can imagine her telling us to drink from it at our own risk. We may find ourselves in the land of Faerie.

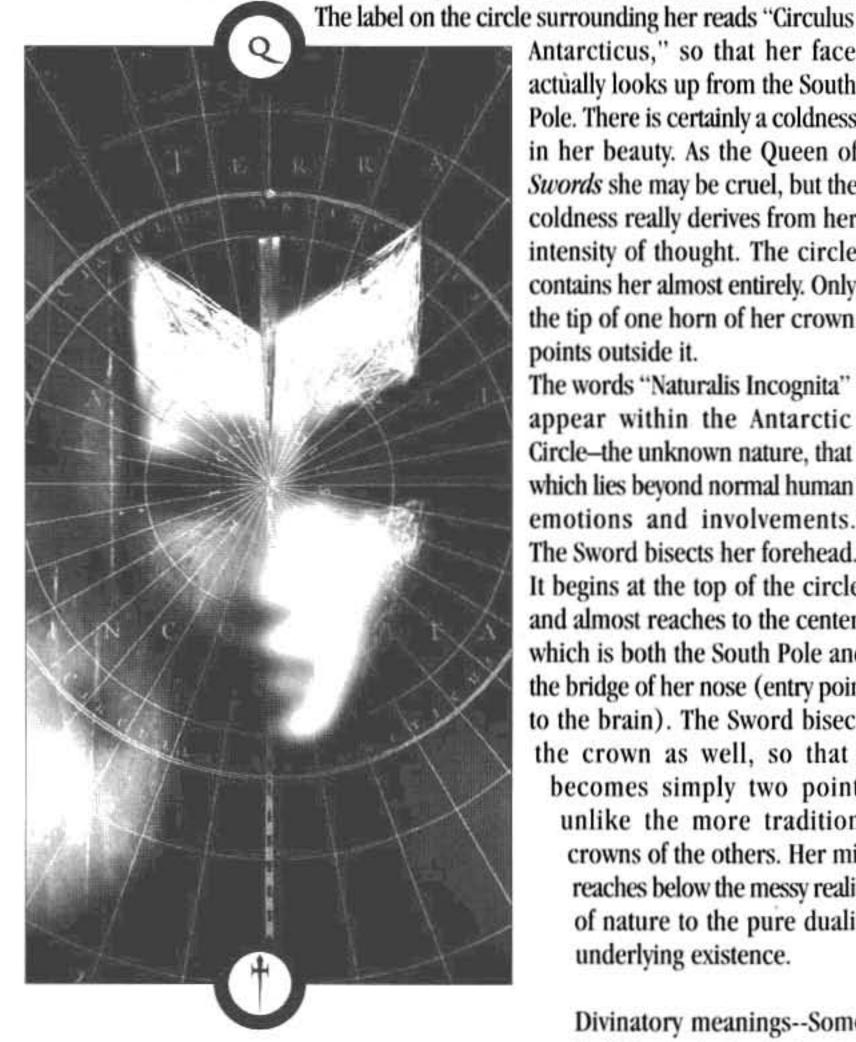


Water fills the card but she does not dissolve or break apart, like the Page, or the Knight, or the King. She is equal to the challenge of Water's constantly shifting reality. What gives her her power is not just knowledge or instinct. She is the Queen of love.

Divinatory meanings--A wise person, possibly secretive and mysterious. Someone able to love very intensely without losing her or his sense of self. Reversed--Uncertainty. Someone fearful, especially in connection with love. The possibility of drinking too deeply from the Water of fantasy.

QUEEN OF SWORDS

The sense of mystery and awe deepens with this Queen, who appears, dim yet powerful, at the center of the world. Though we cannot actually see her eyes, they still stare powerfully at us. Even blurred and distant, the face is beautiful. It may be the same face as the Queen of Pentacles, or even Wands, but the way the light-and dark mold it gives it a special elegance and intensity. The word Terra appears near the top of the map, lettered the same as on the Knight of Wands. She looks up at us from deep within the Earth, or rather a map, an intellectual construction of the Earth.



Antarcticus," so that her face actually looks up from the South Pole. There is certainly a coldness in her beauty. As the Queen of Swords she may be cruel, but the coldness really derives from her intensity of thought. The circle contains her almost entirely. Only the tip of one horn of her crown points outside it.

The words "Naturalis Incognita" appear within the Antarctic Circle-the unknown nature, that which lies beyond normal human emotions and involvements. The Sword bisects her forehead. It begins at the top of the circle and almost reaches to the center, which is both the South Pole and the bridge of her nose (entry point to the brain). The Sword bisects the crown as well, so that it becomes simply two points, unlike the more traditional crowns of the others. Her mind reaches below the messy realities of nature to the pure dualities underlying existence.

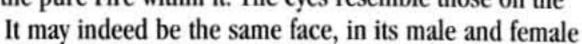
> Divinatory meanings--Someone brilliant, but distant and unemotional. In relation to a problem it calls for clear thinking and detachment.

Reversed--Emotional turmoil, or else someone manipulative or even cruel.

QUEEN OF PENTACLES

The eyes of this Queen have a wise look, knowing and aware. Compare them to the single stare of amazement on the Queen of Wands. It is the character of the Queen to immerse herself totally in her element. The reality of Pentacles and Earth is more complete than the other suits--the real world in all its complexity, compared to the pure Fire within it. The eyes resemble those on the

King, her husband.





aspects. The different ways of looking at existence complement and complete each other (and if Swords and Pentacles are also the same face, then they all play off against their different sides). We see her covered with carbon compounds. These are the basic chemistry of living beings. They show her involved, in an abstract way, with nature and its creatures.

Traditionally, the Queen of Pentacles often shows a woman in a lush garden, and animals. The Queen shown here The actual Pentacle marks her "third eye," which is the place of inner knowing. We might compare this to the Pentacles cards where the emblem covers the mouth. We do not actually see the mouth here. The chemical bonds overlie it. Like the map of the world on the Queen of Swords, these chemical diagrams are not the actual compounds, but a human diagram, a map, of their shape and meaning. Red tinges this document, giving it the look of something burning.

> Divinatory meanings--Someone deeply connected to nature. Someone intense and silent, involved with her or his own concerns. Reversed--Sociability, expression. A need for activities involving others.

KING OF WANDS The card carries a certain elegance not found in many of the others. Where the Queen stares out in amazement from her frame, the King looks poised and thoughtful in an archway. The structure suggests a Renaissance theater. Esotericists in the Renaissance developed a complex system of associations called the Art of Memory, which utilized the image of a vast imaginary theater. A number of people have compared this imaginary structure to the Tarot deck. The balanced aesthetic setting enhances the Kingly quality of being the master of his element. We do not see an actual Wand here.



Instead, the Fire rises from the head, from the crown. In yoga the heat of the kundalini energy rises out the top of the head, called the crown chakra. Before this, it passes through the third eye, where we saw the Pentacle in the Queen of Pentacles. Above the archway we see an image of the cosmos, with the Sun lighting up different versions of the Earth. The sun is shown with a human face. The light comes as much from the King as it does from the painting. The face is rather feminine, in the same way that the Queen of Wands looks masculine. Together, they form an androgynous whole. The face looks thoughtful, deep within itself. It also looks blurred, like a hologram. Along with the setting, this hologram gives the card a feeling of spanning centuries of human civilization.

from the King as it

Divinatory meanings--Someone of great confidence, satisfied with his or her life. Thoughtful and quiet. Someone with a strong sense of art and beauty.

Reversed--Someone charming, but maybe arrogant as well. He or she can be domineering.

KING OF CUPS

The face lies submerged under water, as if his awareness has moved down into the unconscious, like someone deep in meditation. A splash rises at the water level, above his head. This splash forms his crown. Below the face we see a heart-shaped jewel. This lovely creation of human technology and imagination seems to have fallen from above, disturbing the surface, but then sinking past the King himself without being able to distract him from his impersonal serenity.

The King of Cups is a master of emotions and of the inner life. But often this mastery can mean that he controls, or submerges, any feelings, such as anger or fear, that

might lead him to break his outer tranquility. Even if something should disturb him, like that splash on the surface, he will not show anything. A more positive interpretation would see him as a true dweller within the imagination, not distracted by outer events. The Cup lies within the eye, almost sunk down out of sight. It may signify psychic vision, but if so, it looks inward, concerned more with its own contemplations than any need to share its understanding with others. We can compare this to the Queen, who seems to offer her Cup to the world. In both the Wands and Cups suits, the Queens appear more active in the world than the Kings. Writing appears above the water. We also see writing over the Cup, within the eye. The distortion of the Water makes it almost impossible to read. The name Barthes appears, however, recalling Roland Barthes, the French philosopher who spoke of the author submerged in the work and its readers.



Divinatory meanings--A dreamer, someone with a deep inner life. He or she is very calm, but this may conceal more difficult emotions. Reversed--Something disturbs a person's outer tranquility. Can mean someone becoming very emotional.



KING OF SWORDS The lines around this King's face resemble those on the Knight, but here, instead of crossing over the figure, they form a scaffolding frame around him. We do not see any focal points or center for the lines, as if the world of the King is bigger than we can visualize. He is the master of intellect and of laws. Traditionally, the King of Swords may be a judge. The lines, however, imply that any laws here are the laws of the mind, of abstract geometric thought, maybe the inner laws of creation. And yet, the eyes

have a skewed look to them, as if he sees point of view. One eye is half closed, distorting to bisect the face and the card, the way the Queen's Sword did. When we look closer, we notice that the Sword stands slightly to the left of the actual center. The left is the side of subjective emotion. It is not just willfulness that distorts his vision. His eye looks closed from a wound or bruise. His whole face appears battered and hurt. On the right it even looks chewed up or torn away. If indeed he signifies the masculine counterpart to his Queen, then he has moved the Swords suit to the side of conflict, anger, and pain. He also takes it to the side of conquest. Knights use their Swords for chivalry and service, Kings for power. Like King Richard, he dedicates himself to battle and empire.

> Divinatory meanings--A powerful personality and intellect, someone in a position of authority. Someone who has fought many battles in life. Reversed--Arbitrary and dogmatic. Someone aggressive, who uses fighting to gain control of others.

KING OF PENTACLES

The solid realness of this picture makes it stand out from all the other Kings, and in fact, all the Court cards. While there are some qualities of abstraction, the face is more developed, more subtly fleshed out with character and substance. Though

he and the King of Swords resemble each other enough to suggest they began as the same face, this King has real individuality. The spiral fossils fill the crown and cluster below the face, and behind the head. Their three-dimensional reality merges with the face, particularly over the right eye (left side of the picture) and the jaw. He belongs totally to the world he rules.



The spirals are not alive; they are fossils, and some are broken. The King is master of the Earth, a body that is mostly stone and dead matter. Ninety-five percent of all species who have ever lived are extinct. The King of Pentacles embraces them all. Traditionally, the King of Pentacles is a master of wealth, a man of property and power. This King seems to look deeper, with his wonderful hooded eyes. The actual Pentacle occupies a very minor position on the card, simply drawn in below the face. Compare it to the third eye Pentacle on the Queen. The crown looks like stone, or maybe metal. Scratchings mar the points, implying that he too has had to fight to achieve, or protect, his kingdom. Unlike the Swords King, he does not

seek out battles. He is more content, less of a conqueror. But he is not weak, or passive. The crown is torn, or cracked. Within it, and so within the King himself, we see a fiery light.

Divinatory meanings--A person of importance and substance. Someone successful, who loves life, and will protect what he or she has. Someone calm, but with deep understanding. Reversed--A shakeup in terms of money or work. The desire for adventure or stimulation.

READINGS - RACHEL POLLACK

We all know about Farot readers. We know what they look like and what they do. They're the women in exotic clothes who lay down a few cards alongside their crystal ball, and tell you—everything. All your secrets, and your entire future. Unfortunately (or maybe fortunately) it doesn't work that way. Tarot readers will get flashes of insight from looking at the pictures, and sometimes these might include a sense of something about to happen. Mostly, however, the reader does just that, *read* the cards. He or she will examine their meanings, both individually and together, and will balance these with what the questioner has asked, as well as the reader's own intuition about the pictures and what they're saying. And then the reader will attempt to put all these together into a useful message. People often judge a Tarot reading by one standard: how accurate was it? It might make more sense to ask, how meaningful was it? How helpful was it?

Tarot reading is much more of an art than a science. This is especially true in a deck based on stories and abstract symbolic images. When we interpret the cards, we certainly can look up their meanings in this book. Many Tarot readers, myself included, have started their work with the cards by setting down a card, looking it up in the book, setting down the next one, looking that up, and so on. Over time you will absorb the meanings so that you no longer need to consult the text. This is not just memorization, in the way we drill ourselves on vocabulary words for a foreign language. The more we work with Tarot cards, the more their meanings become part of our world.

There also is no reason to stop with the meanings given here. Any time you see something new in the cards, a different interpretation of the symbolism, or simply an emotional response, follow it. See what ideas and intuitions it can open up for you. If you are reading for someone else, try out your insights on them. Most likely, they will find your personal interpretations more valuable than the ones given in this book.

The use of Vertigo characters for the Major Arcana in this Tarot gives us a special opportunity in readings. When one of these cards turns up, we can look at it in several ways. First of all, we can react just to the picture, ignoring whatever we know about the card's meanings, or symbolism, or associations. We can see what kind of qualities the picture suggests, how we react to it emotionally, if any intuitive ideas spring up at us. We can then add to this personal response what we know of the traditional meanings associated with that card. We can look it up in this book, or, if we know the card's history from other Tarot decks, we can apply that knowledge to the questions in the reading. But then we can bring in another way of looking at it. We can react to the character from the comic book. People who read a comic often will feel a strong attachment to its characters. This holds especially for the monthly books, which give us time to build up a sense of really knowing the people in the stories. Sometimes we may associate personal memories or fantasies with a particular character. If that character's card comes up in a reading, we can apply some of our own sense of who the character is, and what she or he has meant to us in our own lives. None of this means that we should say absolutely everything we can about each card in the reading. We need to be selective and try to sense what applies to the particular person and situation. What matters is to allow whatever we know about the card to come into play, and then, from this range of possibilities, choose what seems appropriate. If all this sounds very complicated, the actual technique for reading Tarot cards is simple. The person asking the question mixes the cards, face down so that she or he cannot tell which cards are going where. If the reader prefers to use reverse meanings (some do not, and always read the cards right side up, no matter how they come out) then the questioner needs to make sure to turn them all around several times, so that some cards will end up reversed. When the questioner has finished shuffling, she or he cuts the deck into three piles, still face down. Once the reader has reassembled them with the bottom pile on top, they are ready to begin. Starting from the top card, the reader lays the cards down according to a particular pattern, called a "spread," or a "layout." There are literally hundreds of these spreads. In each case, every place in the pattern carries its own meaning. These include such topics as "past experience," or "influence of other people," or "innermost desire." The meaning of the card is a combination of the card itself and the place where it falls in the reading. For instance, if the Lovers appears in the position of "future possibilities," this would mean something very different than if it showed up in "past experience." Here are some simple spreads using only three cards.

past	present	future
hope	fear	opportunity
situation	self	other people
situation	choice 1	choice 2

Using only three cards will simplify the most challenging problem for new readers, which is seeing how the different cards fit together. Notice that none of these spreads includes a position for "outcome." Even the term "future" means a direction and not a fixed result. No matter how uncannily a Tarot reading reflects our lives (and be prepared to startle yourself and your friends with the accuracy of your readings), it does not take away our free will. A reading may show the way things are heading, but it does not determine what happens. The real purpose of a reading should be to increase our choices by increasing our knowledge and understanding.

The use of Vertigo characters for the trump cards gives us the possibility for a special kind of reading unique to this deck. We can call it the Vertigo Spread. Using only the Major Arcana, mix the twenty-two cards in the normal way. Then turn them over with the first one in the middle, the second on the left, and the third on the right.

Two One Three If one of the cards without any Vertigo connection shows up (Star, Moon, Sun, or Judgment), set it aside and replace it with the first regular character card you find as you turn over the cards. You should now have three cards showing characters from Vertigo comic books. This particular reading works best when we interpret all the cards as right side up, so if they come out reversed turn them around. Here are the meanings for the positions:

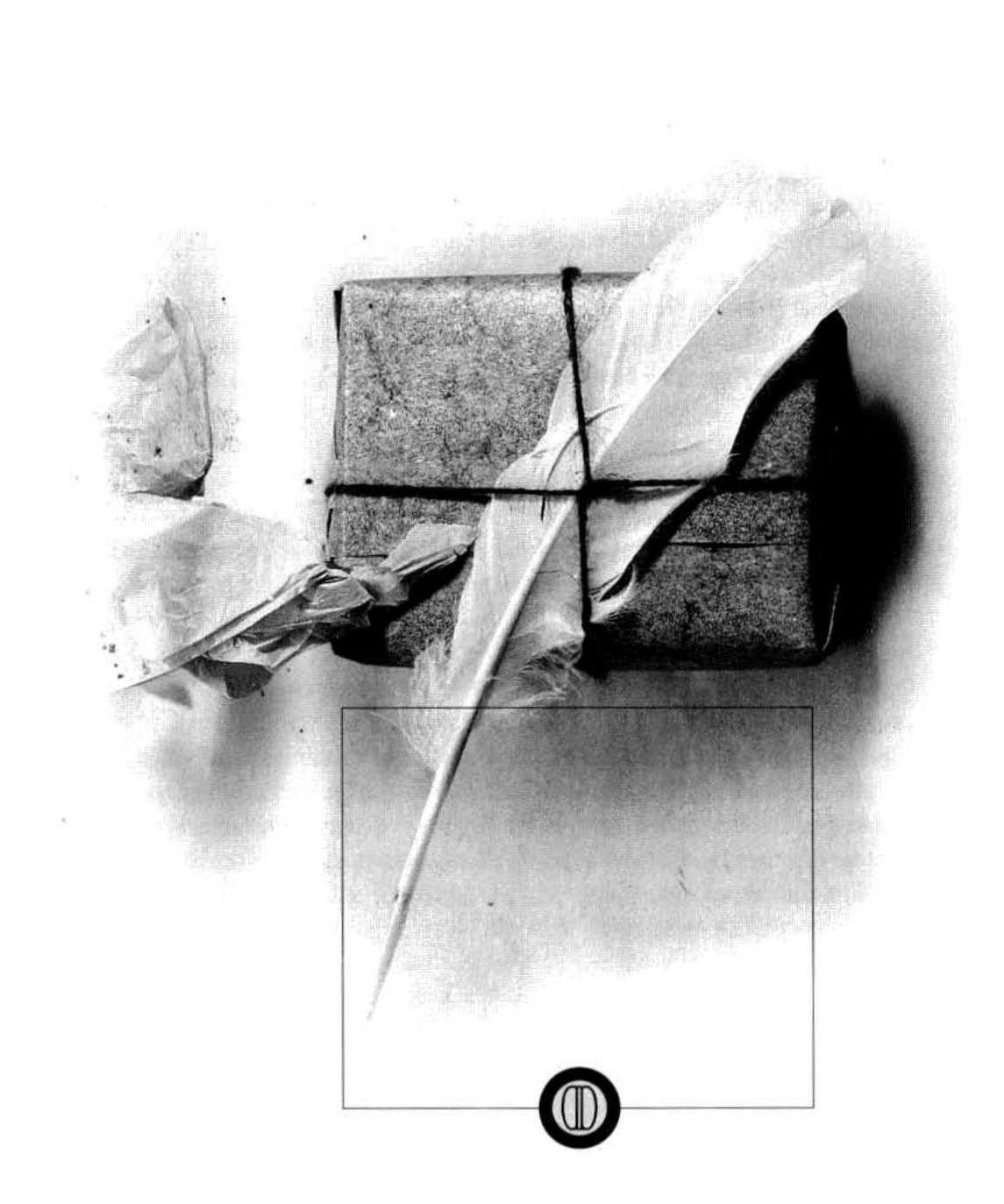
Helper Self Teacher The card in the middle—Self—describes some character we are acting out in our lives. It does not say we are that character, just that at this time our lives have taken on those qualities. The figure on the left is our Helper. We can see this in purely symbolic terms, or we can go in the other direction and imagine that that figure is actually appearing in our lives to help us get through our current situation. The same goes for the card on the right, the Teacher. We can see what message the card is telling us, but we also can imagine what that particular Vertigo character would teach us if he or she could come to us as a real person.

Here is a sample reading with the Vertigo Spread.

Two	One	Three
Strength	Hermit	Hierophant

The Hermit tells me that at this time I am dealing with issues of being alone. Because the card is the Phantom Stranger, it says that I am pondering my own mystery, and that I try to help others while avoiding emotional involvements with them. Strength will help me get through this time in my life. Traditionally, Strength would suggest that I show my emotions more, but with Black Orchid she may help me keep my emotional distance without becoming cold and unfeeling.

Finally, Morpheus comes in to teach me. The Hierophant is a natural teacher. He implies that I can learn about myself and my emotional questions by reading books, or by following traditional ideas. Because the Hierophant sometimes means marriage, the card also hints at formalizing some relationship. But the presence of the Sandman on the card adds another layer of meanings. Maybe I should pay special attention to my dreams. Or maybe I can think back on my reading of Sandman and consider- my own sense of this character, and from that, what lessons I can learn from him. We have gone away from fortune telling and found ourselves in the land of story. Using the Vertigo Tarot we can play with the pictures until we begin to create new stories, not just from the characters, but from the confusion and hope, the fear and the joy, of our own lives. Good luck.



Dedicated to one person; Judgment, Yolanda and the Sun - D.M.

Dedicated to Sharon Kattuah - R.P.

the vertigo tarot

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVE MCKEAN



TEXT BY RACHEL POLLACK



Introduction by NEIL GAIMAN

128-page hardcover guide written by Rachel Pollack with introduction by Neil Gaiman. Seventy-eight 3" x 5 1/2" full-color tarot cards illustrated by Dave McKean. Fifty dollars U.S. Seventy dollars Canadian

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Rachel Pollack grew up in Poughkeepsie, New York, the site of her novel UNQUENCHABLE FIRE. After a 19-year detour to Amsterdam, the Netherlands, she now lives in Rhinebeck, seventeen miles from Poughkeepsie. She has been called "the most interesting writer on Tarot on the planet" (writer Erik Davis, speaking at the Open Center, New York City). She is the author of ten books on Tarot, including the best-selling 78 DEGREES OF WISDOM, and SALVADOR DALL'S TAROT, as well as the SHINING WOMAN TAROT DECK. designed and drawn by Rachel, with images borrowed from prehistoric and tribal art going back 50,000 years. A comics fan for several decades, she has written DOOM PATROL and THE GEEK for DC/Vertigo. She is also an award-winning novelist, a poet, and a lecturer on fiction, esoteric ideas in popular culture, and sexual politics. Her work has appeared in ten languages, on six continents. When not writing, sleeping, or talking on the phone, Rachel listens to scratchy old flamenco records, avant-garde jazz, and lesbian hillbilly singers.

Dave McKean was born in 1963 in Maidenhead, England. He is a regular contributor to The New Yorker magazine, and frequent illustrator/ photographer/ designer for record and book covers, including recent releases by Michael Nyman, Alice Cooper, Rolling Stones, Front Line Assembly, Buckethead, Tori Amos and Bill Bruford's Earthworks. He has won many awards including the Amid Award for the best album cover of the year (MICHAEL O SUILLEABHAIN/CACADE), the World Fantasy Award for his ongoing SANDMAN covers, and a variety of awards for his comics and graphic albums, which include VIOLENT CASES, SIGNAL TO NOISE and MR. PUNCH (all with author Neil Gaiman) and the 500-page comic novel CAGES. He is currently working on new comics (PICTURES THAT TICK), film, CD-ROM and music projects as well as an exhibition and monograph of photographs called A SMALL BOOK OF BLACK AND WHITE LIES. He lives in the Kent countryside with partner Clare and babe Yolanda and several hundred CD's from Abercrombie to Zorn.

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