

THE TAROT

By B. Stafford

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The Tarot

The Tarot has been around for a long time - several centuries at least. Over those hundreds of years, each of the cards came to have a generally accepted meaning or set of meanings when it appeared in a layout. If one accepts, as I do, continued use of and belief in objects, tools, rituals and even the Powers themselves grants added puissance (producing what the Golden Dawn terms an "egregore"), then it makes sense to avail one's self of this added dimension. Accordingly, I am posting a series of articles on the cards dealing with no more than their divinatory meanings. I shall not discuss the "higher" meanings of any of the cards - not even the Triumphs (or Trumps) - and shall avoid all discussion of the placement of the cards on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, which super-imposition did not occur until the nineteenth century, in any case.

The basic source from which I shall extract these meanings is A.E. Waite's Pictorial Key to the Tarot. The "Rider-Waite Deck" based upon his designs and the accompanying book cited above were the first examples of either published in English to gain wide readership and eventual acceptance. Granted, the works of Court de Gebelin, Eliphas Levi and Papus made their appearances either earlier than Waite's work or more or less contemporaneously, but they have the disadvantage of having been written in French (which is not one of my languages and therefore gives me a splitting headache when I try to read it). All other discussions of the Tarot in English with which I am familiar are derived in one way or another from Waite's work: either in opposition to it, as was Crowley's Book of Thoth, or in an effort to modify the symbolism to gratify a particular magical or religious theory. (Waite and the Golden Dawn were by no means immune to this temptation: I view their transposition of the numbers of Triumphs 8 and 11, Strength and Justice, in an effort to make them fit better on their version of the Tree of Life, with much the same jaundiced eye that I view the lab reports of a scientist who fudges the evidence to fit his conclusions.)

Waite was not, however, much interested in the divinatory meanings of the cards, which he regarded as their lesser, almost negligible attribute. He appears to have copied them more or less as they came to him, weighted with the usage of generations of gypsies and other common fortune-tellers who had no interest

in their "higher" meanings.

I do not, however, mean to limit myself to Waite. Other writers during the course of this century have published insights into the divinatory meanings which complement or expand those given by Waite. Also, the Tarot has been my principle tool for divination for something over a quarter of a century: any summary such as I am attempting will necessarily be filtered through my own experiences with the cards.

Nor shall I recommend any particular deck. There are several currently on the market which I consider excellent, many which I think are acceptable, some which I would purchase only if they were the only examples available, and a few which cause me to shudder whenever I look at them but which other people whom I respect couldn't live without. Similarly, I shall try to avoid all discussion of the symbolism included by any particular artist in his or her deck: such a treatment is not germane to this summary, nor within its scope.

Each article in the series will be designated by the number or name of the card(s) with which it treats: _i.e._ "1" will discuss the four aces, "Queen" will discuss the four queens, and the Triumphs will be discussed each in a separate article. I shall also use the terms "Favorable" and "Unfavorable": not all methods of reading the cards recognize recognize "upright" versus "reversed;" some readers prefer to lay all the cards upright and derive unfavorable readings from the neighboring cards. Other methods may differ even from these two, which are the more common.

I shall make one other departure from common practice: I prefer the name "coins" (from the French "denier") to "Pentacles" for that suit. The latter has, for me, a patina of superimposed mysticism (largely thanks to the Golden Dawn) which I find unnecessary for divinatory purposes.

With luck, some of you will find this series of articles useful. Others will find areas of disagreement, while still others will have insights of their own to offer. Maybe, among us, we can generate enough signal to drown out some of the noise on alt.pagan.

Blessed be,
Baird
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1.

The Aces are generally thought to represent beginnings of all sorts, whether of new phases of one's life, new enterprises, new relationships, or of any other matter of concern. They may also, however, represent completion: the whole of the meanings of the other cards in their respective suits distilled into a single symbol. To borrow a phrase from another religion, each Ace is the alpha *and* the omega of its suit.

The COIN

Coins being mined from the Earth represent the Earth in both the mundane and the magical senses. When they appear in readings which indicate conflict, they generally are a shield against aggression.

Favorable:

A new monetary venture; a new career - or the idea for either, which must be acted upon. Turning earth for a garden; planting a new tree. New awareness of the ecology and one's place in it; oneness with Nature. Attainment of mundane goals or spiritual goals connected with one's surroundings. The founding of a Circle which has the potential to grow. When heavily influenced by Cups or Triumphs which generally signify emotional involvement: bliss or felicity.

Unfavorable:

The corruption of character by wealth and the mundane power which accompanies it. Neglect of the environment. Blight, whether from natural causes or man-made pollution. The beginning of an enterprise which, although personally profitable, may harm either the environment or those with whom one comes in contact. Devotion to the spiritual at the expense of both mundane matters and other people; selfishness. When heavily influenced by adverse cups or Triumphs, ecstasy to the point of divorce from reality such as might be induced, for instance, by dependence upon substances either natural or synthetic which alter one's perception of the world.

The SWORD

Swords usually correspond to Air, perhaps due to the

preponderance of metaphors in languages of northern Europe which liken the north wind to a knife or sword. In many decks, the Swords as a suit are depicted with two edges, indicating the ability to cut in either direction, just as the weather may vary from the pleasant to a hurricane within a matter of moments. A layout with a preponderance of Swords might well be considered alarming, even if the cards lie favorably.

Favorable:

Triumph, conquest by force of arms or by force of will. Virility to the point of satyriasis. Courage to defend the right; "the courage of one's convictions." Will-power, perhaps enough to enable one to stop a habit such as alcohol or tobacco "cold turkey." In material matters it may also mean skill, particularly with cutting edges such as a surgeon's knife or a fencer's saber. The recruitment of allies for an endeavor.

Unfavorable:

The triumph of an evil or unjust cause. A lost cause. Rape. Weakness in the face of opposition; inability to make a decision. Lack of will-power. Force applied foolishly or with deliberate malice, resulting in manslaughter or murder. A declaration of war. Persecution of the innocent; dictatorship; cults of personality.

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1 (continued)

The CUP

Cups are generally associated with the element of Water; like the Coins, when they appear in a layout which seems to indicate conflict they represent a defensive armament - perhaps a helmet or other head-covering. Hence, they also represent not only the emotions but also psychic and magical attributes and abilities. They may also represent wisdom.

Favorable:

Nourishment and abundance, though more emotional and spiritual than material. Love. Novitiate in religion and/or magic. Birth of psychic powers. Beginning of a relationship. Inspiration. The womb: hence, the Sea, which is the Womb of Life.

Unfavorable:

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Strong emotions such as hatred, jealousy, and possessiveness. Abandonment of the spiritual for the mundane. Loss of psychic or magical power. Emotional fragility usually induced by events in early childhood: frequently, the victim of child abuse. Constant search for instant gratification. Barrenness.

The WAND

Wands are most frequently, in the Tarot, assigned to represent the element of Fire: when depicted with that element they are represented as burning while remaining unconsumed, like Moses' bush. They are the stout quarter staff of the peasant and the lance and arrows of the warrior. Their association with fire may be extended to other forms of energy, from the unpredictable violence of lightning to the more subtle energies which power growth and maturation. They are also associated with the intellect.

Favorable:

The beginning of an enterprise which may or may not bring fame and fortune, but which will be of benefit to the person carrying it out. Start of a scientific, literary, historical, or other intellectual inquiry: invention. Forensic prowess; intellectual courage. Spring, when seeds germinate and many animals bear their young: conception and the virility which leads to it.

Unfavorable:

Intellectual stagnation, antagonism towards new ideas. A blind alley. Impotence. Overly meticulous attention to detail at the expense of the whole. Superficial understanding, as is sometimes displayed by the "astrologer" at a party or in a bar. Dilettantism. Misdirection of sexual energies towards minors; dislike or abuse of children.

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Deuces

COINS

Favorable:

Joy, gaiety; laughter, song and dance. Juggling two things at the same time, especially things generating income

(that second job, perhaps, or having to be a working single parent); but the card may also apply to such things as relationships. A frequent meaning is messages, particularly in writing: letters, magazine or newspaper articles and books which may have some personal relevance. Interpretation of written or oral materials. Some references suggest movement and physical energy.

Unfavorable:

Too many projects at the same time; scattering of attention, wasteful dispersal of energies. Literal translation as opposed to interpretation. Unwillingness to apply one's self. Simulated enjoyment, forced gaiety. I have frequently found both the unfavorable and favorable meanings of this card to refer to actors or other performers who must appear before the public even when physically or emotionally indisposed to do so.

SWORDS

Favorable:

Contending forces in balance: truce or cease-fire. There is no suggestion of lasting peace; effort is required to maintain this equipoise: if left unattended, it will fail. Stalemate, indecision, inability to progress.

Unfavorable:

Balance disturbed: the cease-fire is broken. Tension released with the beneficence of a snapping cable. A decision made may have unfortunate consequences. Some references suggest disloyalty, two-faced behavior.

CUPS

Favorable:

Love, especially Platonic love which is more emotional and spiritual than physical: one's soul-mate. Friendship, harmony. Marriage, perhaps later in life. Joint efforts in magical or spiritual affairs. More often than not, I have found this card in spreads for partners in couples where physical attraction, emotional, and spiritual love are harmoniously balanced.

Unfavorable:

False love or love for the wrong reasons; divorce.

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Passion which interferes with judgment. Sex without emotional or financial commitment: a one-night stand; prostitution.

WANDS

Favorable:

Interest in intellectual pursuits with the strong suggestion that these will bring at least enough wealth to live on. Influence over others, leadership. The movement or dissemination of ideas.

Unfavorable:

Disinterest in matters intellectual; desertion of a project. Ineffectual nit-picking; too much concern with method and not enough with the final product. Domination by others. Procrastination: I have frequently seen this card in spreads for students who habitually leave their homework until the last minute and then slap together something plausible in hopes it will fool the teacher.

3.

COINS

Favorable:

This is the card of the artisan, the artist, the master of his or her craft. Construction, increase in recompense, acclaim. Indication that projects begun will reach completion as nearly perfect as may be achieved.

Unfavorable:

Mediocrity, pettiness, the co-worker who must pull everyone else down to his or her own level in order to shine. In this sense, it may also indicate jealousy of another's achievements.

WORDS

Favorable:

Absence, removal, delay of reunion, contested divorce which may be hard on children. Before the melodrama gets too affecting, however, it should be noted that the card may indicate something as prosaic as a trip on business or pleasure which causes temporary separation.

Unfavorable:

Confusion, loss, sorrow. Frequently with unfavorable cards, however, the ill omen of the card itself is mitigated by its unfavorable position, indicating a lessening of its influence.

CUPS**Favorable:**

A matter may be concluded in plenty; joy, prosperity, increase of happiness. In some layouts, solace and healing may also be indicated.

Unfavorable:

Excessive devotion to the pleasures of the senses, including (if properly reinforced) satyriasis and nymphomania. It may also, however, indicate speed, swiftness, expedition in bringing a matter to its conclusion - usually successful.

WANDS**Favorable:**

Established reputation in some field, probably intellectual if wands predominate in the reading. Self-assertion, self-confidence, practicality and the financial rewards thereof. May be in a position to assist another.

Unfavorable:

Over-reliance on the ideas of others, possible inability to form one's own opinion on a matter. This is a card of followers, not leaders. Intellectual dishonesty, though material gain may result even so.

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4.

COINS**Favorable:**

This is a card of material possessions - not to excess, but that which one does have may be dearly guarded. It may also indicate a love of

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mundane power, perhaps to inordinate degree. One reference suggests physical health, as well. I do like Waite's suggestion that it may mean, "For a bachelor, pleasant news from a lady." I've never found it to apply, but I think it's charming.

Unfavorable:

Delay in obtaining material possessions, perhaps the inevitable period between the time one purchases that lottery ticket and publication of the numbers drawn or, less charitably, the period of waiting for an ailing relative to die so one may gain one's inheritance. Loss, delay, opposition, disorder in one's material affairs.

SWORDS

Favorable:

Solitude, a hermit's retreat from society, exile; rest, enforced idleness, convalescence.

Unfavorable:

Activity, involvement - but since the suit is Swords, circumspection and caution are advised; the healing process is not yet complete, and undue activity might lead to a setback.

CUPS

Favorable:

Dissatisfaction with the pleasures of the senses, re-evaluation of mundane achievements. World-weariness, ennui.

Unfavorable:

Novelty, new instruction, new vigor in pursuing one's affairs, new relationships.

WANDS

Favorable:

Oddly, according to some references, the best card in the Tarot is a pip card, not a Triumph: its bright meanings are not altered by being placed in an unfavorable position (this also agrees with my experience). This is the bounty of the harvest home, a perfect haven and refuge, harmony, peace and prosperity "and," Waite adds, "the perfected work of these."

Unfavorable:
Prosperity, increase, bounty, happiness to the point of bliss.

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5.

COINS

Favorable:
Material trouble - destitution, impoverishment, overextension of credit, bankruptcy. Loneliness - sometimes refers to divorce and crippling alimony, child support; for the supporting parent, non-payment of same. Unemployment, cessation of benefits.

Unfavorable:
Poverty in material things but riches in spirit, as St. Francis. Also, love (but probably temporary) and companionship.

SWORDS

Favorable:
Loss due not to the vagaries of fortune but the machinations of another. Conquest by physical strength. Spite, slander; defeat.

Unfavorable:
Weakness, either of physical strength or of will. Otherwise, the same.

CUPS

Favorable:
A situation which does not live up to expectations, whether it be a job, a relationship (or even marriage), receipt of money, purchase of a "bargain," or any other. The state is "as advertised" but does not wholly live up to one's hopes.

Unfavorable:
Return of an old friend or lover, reconciliation.

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News, new alliances, new affinities.

WANDS

Favorable:

Imitation of reality, as for instance a battle on stage or in a movie; dramatization of struggles; allowing one's life to become or turning one's life into a soap-opera. Viewing the world in black and white.

Unfavorable:

Guile and contradiction but also, properly supported, the triumph over these. Confusion in legal matters; litigation. Bureaucracy and red tape.

6.

COINS

Favorable:

Ability to afford donations to charities, public or private, and the disposition to do so. Also, receiving such donations. Support of children by parents and vice versa in the latter stages of life, with no indication of hardship monetary or emotional.

Unfavorable:

Unfairness in business or career; envy, jealousy. Personal charities or emotional obligations impose a financial hardship. Greed - the person who takes, but never returns. Illusion of success.

SWORDS

Favorable:

Journey by water (not so common nowadays, but not impossible). Passage away from difficulties, but only with the expenditure of more effort. May also suggest the calm at the eye of the storm, a temporary respite in struggle.

Unfavorable:

Stalemate, unfavorable outcome. Another reference

cites publicity, airing difficulties in the hope of receiving assistance.

CUPS

Favorable:

This is a card of nostalgia, of the golden summer days of childhood, of memories and reminiscences. The return into one's life of old friends. It may also remind one to bear in mind lessons already learned and apply them to present circumstances.

Unfavorable:

There are two, seemingly contradictory meanings for this card; surrounding cards will indicate which is meant. On the one hand, it speaks of clinging to that which is gone beyond hope of resurrection: a love affair, family or local tradition, outdated methods of work; and of refusal to learn the new. On the other hand, it may forebode the future, renewal, new acquaintances or love affairs and the pleasure one may derive from them.

WANDS:

Favorable:

The arrival of good news in any field, winning public recognition for one's efforts, celebrating the success of another.

Unfavorable:

The arrival or anticipated arrival of bad news; apprehension, fear. Indefinite postponement by another of a project. Also, boasting of one's own successes.

7.

COINS

Favorable:

Money, business, barter, but in all cases the card represents not the grand coups of Wall Street that net millions but the slow, steady growth of a small business. A garden or orchard will not bear fruit until its season, and also the toil

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of harvest. Recuperation after illness or injury. This is a slow, steady card, not a card of instant success - but success is indicated in due time.

Unfavorable:

Impatience. Cause for anxiety due to exterior factors (drought or excessive rain, a slump in business and the like). Delay in achieving one's goal.

SWORDS

Favorable:

Plan, design, blueprint for action, all of which should be examined for seen or unseen flaws which may cause them to fail. Theft, probably without violence such as burglary or fraud: once again, a certain amount of planning is indicated rather than the action of impulse. Unstable effort, partial success. A journey by land.

Unfavorable:

Good advice as from an expert in the field, counsel, instruction; but, on the other hand, the exposure and consequent failure of a plot or conspiracy. Vacillation, untrustworthiness.

CUPS

Favorable:

Reveries, daydreams, "if only's," castles in the air which are never reached not built. Great plans which come to nothing due to inaction. If there is success it is neither permanent nor real. This is the card of Don Quixote, and also of the "couch potato" who loses him or herself for hours in the glittering unrealities of the television screen to the exclusion of all other activities or relationships.

Unfavorable:

Desire, will, determination; a project about to reach completion.

WANDS

Favorable:

In the intellectual fields, wordy strife or

competition: "sound and fury signifying nothing." In mundane affairs, competition, haggling. It is, however, a card of eventual success: one holds the high ground, so to speak, and will be able successfully to defend it.

Unfavorable:

A caution against indecision and against hesitation to move through fear of appearing a fool, or of causing damage to another; a warning against over-sensitivity. The person whom one fears to hurt may not harbor reciprocal feelings.

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8.

COINS

Favorable:

This card represents beginnings, preparations, apprenticeships in material endeavors, though it may also represent a new course of study and application in matters spiritual; surrounding cards will indicate which. Entering upon a new job or career, with the suggestion that it will not be wholly the same as positions one has filled previously.

Unfavorable:

Questionable ethics; cunning and deceit though a surface of honesty is maintained. Vanity, greed. Ambitions not met through some lack in skill or character: this is the card of one who sees others promoted time after time while he or she remains at one level. In such a case, one's own qualifications should be examined closely before accusations of office politics or "sexual harassment" are hurled.

SWORDS

Favorable:

Imprisonment, inability to move whether due to indecision, fear of failure, or of social or professional sanctions. The horns of a dilemma. May indicate illness. In matters sexual, the card may indicate a tendency toward "kinkiness."

Unfavorable:

Release, freedom, movement; an obstacle is removed, allowing one finally to act. Opposition collapses, unforeseen opportunity.

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CUPS

Favorable:

The decline of a matter; a matter believed to be of great importance is actually of small consequence; success of a laissez faire policy. The result in all cases may be either good or evil. Loss of interest in a project or relationship.

Unfavorable:

"Party time!" Joy, happiness, feasting, merriment, usually in celebration of a success, though it may indicate holiday pleasures.

WANDS

Favorable:

Speed. Rapid development of an undertaking; rewards are not long delayed.

Also, in modern times, travel by air; arrival of a letter or package by air mail or overnight delivery (usually in combination with the Deuce of Coins); when Triumph XVI

(The Tower) appears near it, the card may indicate the arrival of an electronically propagated message, such as by telephone, fax, e-mail, or news broadcast. In a less prosaic mode, the card is often said to represent "the arrows of love."

Unfavorable:

Non-arrival of a communication upon which one has pinned one's hopes. The arrows of jealousy, the sting of conscience. For domestic partners, the card may indicate disputes of some kind. One reference suggests rote learning without true understanding and preaching the "One True Way."

9.

COINS

Favorable:

Material well-being - enough to live on with some left over. A house with land enough for at least a garden. Prudence, safety, success, accomplishment, There may be a suggestion that the good things in life will be enjoyed in solitude.

Unfavorable:

A project proves not to work out. One reference suggests the possible loss of home, but this may amount to no more than late payment of rent or mortgage. An investment proves worthless or the return is disappointingly small. A bad loan -

surrounding cards will suggest whether the subject defaults, or loses money to another.

SWORDS

Favorable:

Shame, doubt, suspicion, despair: "the dark night of the soul." Delay, misery, suffering. Another source suggests the need for indirect action.

Unfavorable:

Imprisonment, actual or mental and emotional; this may represent a battered spouse. Debasing.

CUPS

Favorable:

Material desires are wholly fulfilled; traditionally, this is the "wish" card. Robust health; mental and emotional well-being. There may be a tendency toward smugness.

Unfavorable:

Overindulgence, gourmandizing, "conspicuous consumption." Wishes fail or fall short. Readings may vary, however: alternate suggestions are truth, loyalty, liberty. Surrounding cards will suggest the correct interpretation.

WANDS

Favorable:

Defensive strength, with reserves enough to mount a counter-attack. Delaying tactics, bull-headedness. When the subject of the reading is a committee, may signify stalemate leading to adjournment.

Unfavorable:

Obstacles and adversity, but the strength is still present and they can be overcome. The idleness of one who will not work rather than one who can not work. Otiosity, laziness and their analogues.

10.

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COINS

Favorable:

This card deals mainly with family matters of the present reaching into the past: the old homestead, inheritance, genealogy and the like. It carries the connotations of establishment, solidity, prosperity. A loving, happy, healthy home.

Unfavorable:

Burglary, robbery, gambling, speculation with monies not properly one's own. Bankruptcy. Lack of solidity; a move to a new neighborhood may be imminent. May also represent a "dysfunctional" family.

SWORDS

Favorable:

Tears, sadness, desolation, misfortune, burdens which may not be shared. The end of delusion, the death of a dream. May represent the state of being "in the closet." Defeat, disruption.

Unfavorable:

Profit, advantage, success, but none of these are permanent. Power and authority, probably usurped and also impermanent. A more temperate trend in the weather, but this, too, will not last.

CUPS

Favorable:

Contentment, happy family life (in the present, as opposed to the past indicated by the ten of Coins); repose of the entire heart, perfection of happiness, of human love and friendship. Waite also suggests the card may denote the town, village or country inhabited by the Querent. Although the card deals primarily with emotional fulfillment, there is a sense of physical and material well-being, as well.

Unfavorable:

A family quarrel, failure of a love affair, indignation, domestic violence. Possible loss of friendship. Some sources go as far as to suggest betrayal.

WANDS**Favorable:**

Abuse of power whether by a government or by individuals. Becoming a burden to another, emotional blackmail. Oppression of the few by the many. Willful disregard of the safety or happiness of another.

Unfavorable:

Difficulties, intrigues, duplicity. Resentment, sullenness. If this card appears when the subject of the reading is a workplace, then the Querent should consider changing jobs.

Page/Princess

These four cards, one per suit, are the cards which do not appear in modern playing cards. The cards were originally Pages but during the late 1880s or early 1890s the Golden Dawn, moved by its twin obsessions for Balance and the Qabala, changed them to Princesses in order to have two face cards representing men and two representing women. The two Golden Dawn Ritual Tarot Decks retain this nomenclature, as do other modern decks (some of whose creators appear to have no idea that the idea was not original with them).

Where the pip cards seem mainly to betoken events and situations, the face cards are said to represent primarily the people, or sometimes qualities in the people, who influence or bring about those occasions.

Traditionally, the face cards of the suit of COINS represent persons who are dark of complexion, hair, and eye; the SWORDS represent persons who have dark hair but fair skin and light eyes; the CUPS represent people who have medium skin and hair and either dark or light eyes; while the WANDS betoken blonds and redheads who have fair to very fair complexions and blue, gray or green eyes. I have

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difficulty with this system since it requires the suit of COINS to represent the majority of humans in Africa, the Americas, Australia and the Pacific, to say nothing of Asia.

I generally choose, therefore, to say that the element of the suit corresponds to the element of the Sun Sign of the person indicated. COINS are thus limited to people who were born under the signs of Taurus, Virgo and Capricorn - a quarter of the human population of Earth rather than ninety-seven per cent of it, and thus a tremendous improvement.

COINS

Favorable:

A child or adolescent whose hair and complexion are dark *or* the a child or adolescent born under an Earth sign, who is a student: hence, study, scholarship, reflection; also new opinions and ideas. Other readings suggest news, messages and those who bring them.

Unfavorable:

Dissipation, prodigality; one surrounded by those whose ideas conflict with one's own; dislike of learning, fear of new ideas; also, bad news and the bearer thereof.

SWORDS: Favorable:

A child or adolescent with dark hair, fair skin and light eyes *or* a child or adolescent born under an Air Sign who is in some sense a sentinel: hence, alertness or vigilance; and by further permutation, spying, secret service, examination as by one who holds authority; inspection or scrutiny.

Unfavorable:

Unreadiness, unpreparedness; taken by surprise; ambush. Also, the more evil connotations of spying: a mark in the pejorative sense.

CUPS:

Favorable:

A child or adolescent with medium hair and complexion *or* a child or adolescent born under one of the Water signs who is of meditative bent: hence, contemplation, meditation, and perhaps the inspiration derived from these. Also, news or messages.

Unfavorable:

Seduction, attachment to another perhaps to the point of obsession; deception, artifice; inclination, taste. The affairs of the world intrude upon one's meditations.

WANDS:**Favorable:**

A child or adolescent with blond or red hair, fair skin and blue, gray or green eyes *or* a child or adolescent born under one of the Fire signs who is quick and intelligent; hence, a bearer or intelligence in all forms, as an ambassador, postman, or the delivery person for the newspaper; by extension, television newsmen and the like. If the card appears next to one representing another person, it may indicate favorable testimony concerning that other.

Unfavorable:

Bad news, rumor and innuendo; anecdotes, theatricality; instability; cruelty.

Knight/Prince

The Knight or Prince is said generally to represent a person in late adolescence or early adulthood - the guideline I find most useful is that the person is in the age group generally considered eligible for required military service.

COINS**Favorable:**

A young person with dark hair and eyes *or* a young person born under one of the Earth signs who is, above all, responsible: hence, responsibility, utility, serviceability, rectitude moral and ethical, practicality.

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As a side note, the person betokened by this card requires no great mental acuity and may laugh as heartily at a joke the twentieth time he or she tells it as the first time he or she heard it.

Unfavorable:

Stagnation, otiosity, inertia, laziness, stagnation. Also, carelessness of the kind that leaves tools lying about the work area to become a general hazard, and the reluctance to take great pains with any project.

SWORDS:

Favorable:

A young person with dark hair, medium to fair skin and light eyes *or* a young person born under one of the Air signs; but if the card signifies one in active military service, that significance may override all others. The person is brave and skillful, and furthermore is secure enough in his or her skills that the habit of command comes naturally. Hence: capacity, ability. May also denote war; in combination with other cards signifying craft or guile, may mean guerilla warfare. Destruction, ruin, and resistance or opposition to these. The card also, in almost all its meanings, carries a connotation of swiftness.

Unfavorable:

Incapacity, braggadocio, imprudence, impudence; unwise extravagance; petty spite or active malice.

CUPS:

Favorable:

A young person of medium hair and complexion *or* a young person born under one of the Water signs who is approaching: hence, arrival, whether of a lover or a messenger; advances, propositions, invitations, incitement. This person may also be the catalyst who leads one to further spiritual development.

Unfavorable:

Beware of opportunity offered by another - remember the Trojans' experience with Greeks bearing gifts. Trickery, artifice, subtlety, and outright fraud. Rivalry.

WANDS

Favorable:

A young person of fair hair and complexion *or*
 a young person born under one of the Fire signs whose mind
 is swift and constantly in motion; hence: departure,
 absence, emigration or other change of residence; travel by
 air.

Unfavorable:

Frustration, as when dealing with minds less quick or
 capable than one's own. Rupture, discord, division,
 interruption. May also betoken intolerance, prejudice and
 the refusal to listen to views at variance to one's own.

QUEEN

COINS

Favorable:

A dark-haired, dark-skinned, dark-eyed woman *or*
 a woman born under one of the Earth signs who is open-handed
 and generous. She appears, on the physical plane, to be the
 Mother in the Tarot; hence: generosity, magnificence,
 opulence; liberty; and the security one gains from the
 presence of a warm and loving elder who supports one
 physically and to whom one may turn for help in solving the
 problems and dilemmas of daily life. Surrounding cards will
 indicate whether the subject of the reading has such a
 person upon whom to rely, or performs that function for
 another. Also, luxuriant fertility.

Unfavorable:

Over-dependence on another, perhaps to a
 pathological extent: this is the card of the co-dependent
 with all the ills suggested by that buzz-word. Possessive
 love; hence, jealousy and suspicion. Mistrust of those near
 one, whether physically or those who should be near in
 heart. Suspense, fear.

SWORDS

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Favorable:

A dark-haired woman with fair skin and light eyes
 or a woman born under one of the Air signs. In conventional published accounts, she represents widowhood, absence and mourning; I would add divorce to these, especially one bitterly contested or desired by one partner only. Conventional wisdom also holds that there is no death card in the Tarot: oral traditions and my own experience suggest that conventional wisdom is either mistaken or deliberately misrepresenting the truth in order to avoid frightening the groundlings; the Queen of Swords (the Queen of Spades in a conventional deck) is the card which most frequently denotes death or other final endings. Caution *must* be observed in the derivation of such a reading, however. The Queen *must* be supported by other cards with parallel meanings (usually the three, five and ten of her own suit and one or more of the more final Triumphs) before such a prognostication may be made; and even then one is left with the dilemma of the doctor who knows a patient's disease is terminal: does one tell the patient - or not? I strongly suggest an alternate reading unless similar combinations of the cards recur frequently when dealing with a given subject. Such alternate readings may include barrenness, privation and the like; according to one source, she may also mean that the Sword of spirit penetrates and informs the material.

Unfavorable:

Spite, malice, ill-natured gossip, deceit; narrow-mindedness, bigotry, intolerance and the cruelty which derives from these.

CUPS:

Favorable:

A woman of medium hair and complexion *or* a woman born under one of the Water signs. This is the card of the dreamer and visionary who works to make her or his dreams and visions manifest in the world; it is also the card of the psychic. Poetry, imagination. In the Victorian view, she is the "perfect spouse and a good mother."

Unfavorable:

A person whose good qualities outweigh the bad, but in whom tendencies towards selfishness and egocentricity

may still be discerned; a person who is not entirely to be trusted. Also, one who answers to every passing fad and fashion.

WANDS:

Favorable:

A blond or redhaired woman with blue or green eyes *or* a woman born under one of the Fire signs. Love of home and nature. Honesty, rectitude; but also adaptability. Someone who will be of assistance to the seeker.

Unfavorable:

A person generally reckoned as good but who expects the world to conform and adapt to his or her own rigid standards. Economy, perhaps more strict than truly essential. Surrounding cards may influence the reading to suggest opposition, jealousy, deceit and infidelity.

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KING

COINS

Favorable:

A dark-haired, dark-eyed man *or* a man born under one of the Earth signs, noted for intelligence and character. He may be a businessman, what used to be known as a "captain of industry." May indicate mathematical gifts, realizing intelligence; valor. A good husband and father, but may be inclined to workaholism.

Unfavorable:

Avarice. A dull, plodding character. Others give perversity, ugliness, weakness: a dirty old man in all senses.

SWORDS:

Favorable:

A man with dark hair and fair skin *or* a man born under one of the Air signs. He may be a judge or

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arbitrator; if in the military, he is of senior rank. A wise man or counselor. Command, authority, militant will. Others suggest he is clever or subtle.

Unfavorable:

Injustice, tyranny, barbarism, sadism; a clever enemy. Caution is advised in legal matters: "The lawyer who represents himself has a fool for a client."

CUPS

Favorable:

A man of medium hair and complexion *or* a man born under one of the Water signs. He has a creative intelligence in the arts and sciences rather than business and is, moreover, disposed to assist the student: a good teacher or professor. May also represent kindness, liberality, generosity.

Unfavorable:

Sensuality, idleness; lies and dishonesty. May also indicate an "artistic temperament."

WANDS:

Favorable:

A man of light hair and fair complexion *or* a man born under one of the Fire signs. He is generally married, honest and conscientious: "The card always signifies honesty," according to Waite, and I have found this generally to be true. May also betoken passion in a noble cause.

Unfavorable:

Severity, strictness, austerity - but always in good cause. May indicate one who applies a stricter standard to his own behavior or work than he applies to that of others. Unpalatable advice which should none the less be followed.

O

THE FOOL

Favorable:

Conventional readings give intoxication, delirium, frenzy, folly, mania and the like. In some of the older decks, however, the animal shown with the youth is not a domestic puppy but a wolf; coupled with the divinatory meanings above, I would suggest that the card may represent the Beast in Humanity which must be harnessed and controlled before any advancement is possible. Other sources give spirituality to the point of folly, or a major decision with multiple factors which must be weighed with extreme care.

Unfavorable:

Negligence, absence, wastefulness, vanity. The Beast is in control.

I**The Magician****Favorable:**

Mastery, skill, occult power or wisdom, will; diplomacy, subtlety; address, self-confidence. Waite adds that it may represent a male seeker.

Unfavorable:

Slyness, craft, cunning, intrigue; innuendo, half-truths; misdirection; may possibly indicate megalomania.

II**The High Priestess****Favorable:**

The future as yet unrevealed; silence, mystery, duality; the growth of occult wisdom. Hidden influences at work. Another source suggests change, alteration, fluctuation.

Unfavorable:

Passion (meaning, usually, sex); moral or physical ardor; acceptance of surface knowledge, conceit.

III The Empress**Favorable:**

Many sources assign her to the planet Venus: I believe she represents Mother Gaia in all her fruitful

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splendor. Hence, beauty, happiness, success; sometimes luxury. Fertility in all creative endeavors, from farming to raising a family to the arts. Length of days.

Unfavorable:

Dissipation, inaction, vacillation, frittering away resources; but also, light, truth, public rejoicings. Surrounding cards will indicate the correct meanings.

IV

The Emperor

Favorable:

Government, the control of masses, temporal power; stability, protection, conviction; also will and authority. The dominion of intelligence.

Unfavorable:

Benevolence, compassion, credit; also emotional immaturity and the possibility of bondage to parents or others perceived as being in authority.

V

The Hierophant

Favorable:

The man to whom the Seeker turns for guidance; preference for the outer forms of spirituality, liking for ritual as theatrics without exploring the hidden meanings beneath; rigid adherence to the conventions of society, conformism. Waite also suggests marriage or alliance, but the connotation is that these are matters of form rather than being unions expressing true love or affection.

Unfavorable:

Unconventionality, heterodoxy, openness to new ideas and spiritual inspirations - all with a caution to beware of being gullible. Possibly weakness through over-kindness, a too-tender heart.

VI

The Lovers

Favorable:

Attraction, love, trials overcome (probably the three trials by which the Princess wins her Prince or

_vice_versa_); others speak of a choice between sacred and profane love (in some older decks, a full-grown angel instead of Dan Cupid stands between the lovers); choice implies responsibility.

Unfavorable:

Quarrels between domestic partners, perhaps due to in-law troubles; failure, frustration and contrarities; the wrong choice may be the more attractive.

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VII

The Chariot

Favorable:

In many decks, the animals pulling the Chariot are of different colors; in some, they struggle to go in different directions and only the strength of the driver holds them to the same course; hence: the conflict between spiritual and material, will (or wisdom) and passion, sense and sensibility. Also, frequently, travel by vehicle. Some suggest success for those engaged in artistic or spiritual pursuits, triumph over ill health and other adversities. Waite also suggests vengeance as a possible reading.

Unfavorable:

One of the animals gets the bit between its teeth and runs away with chariot, driver and all. Decadence, an unethical or immoral victory; dispute; defeat.

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VIII

Justice

Favorable:

Likelihood that the decision will be the correct one. All things pertaining to judicial proceedings; the decision will probably be favorable. Equity, rightness, probity; truth.

Unfavorable:

Injustice due to bigotry or bias; legal punishment, sometimes of excessive severity; the failure of a cause at law.

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IX

The Hermit

Favorable:

The slow, plodding passage of time - sometimes a very long time, indeed. The acquisition of wisdom through maturity, age, or experience. Guidance, whether from an older person or a non-corporeal source. Possibly, a journey. The older readings given by Waite demand prudence and circumspection in the face of dissimulation, roguery, corruption, and even treason.

Unfavorable:

The swift passage of time. Immaturity, the refusal to age gracefully. Waite suggests fear and unreasoned caution.

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X

The Wheel of Fortune

Favorable:

Good fortune, success, increase, elevation, luck, felicity, and so on - all at pretty much face value for the card. I find it may also betoken anything to which the concept of the Great Wheel may be applied: the turn of the seasons, the cycle of birth and death, and the like. The Ciceros suggest Karma.

Unfavorable:

The Seeker is on the descending side of the cycle. Things may turn for the worse. Waite, on the other hand, suggests increasing abundance to the point of superfluity - too much of a good thing.

XI

Strength

(the card is sometimes titled "Fortitude")

Favorable:

Power, energy, action, courage; the triumph of the spiritual over the material, of love over hatred, of the higher nature over carnal desires. I find that the strength the card betokens is not a sudden burst of energy as when an athlete lifts an incredible weight, but rather the enduring

kind such as a woman must have during the nine months of pregnancy.

Unfavorable:

Abuse of power, despotism; weakness; the triumph of the material over the spiritual; discord.

XII

The Hanged Man

Favorable:

This card seems to me to represent Wotan on the tree Yggdrasil or Jeheshua ben Miriam upon his cross; hence: strength of character, wisdom or spiritual insight gained through suffering or self-sacrifice; in extreme cases, apotheosis through agony. In more mundane affairs it may signify stasis, the complete inability to move in any direction, usually due to outside factors over which one has no control.

Unfavorable:

Selfishness, absorption in physical matters; the relaxation of exterior strictures enable one to progress once again.

XIII

Death

Favorable:

It has become fashionable over the past century to claim that this card does not prepresent the end of the corporeal being, and the vehemence with which this view has been expressed and the numbers of readers who have espoused it incline me to believe that this may, now, be the case.

None the less, the picture on the card resembles too much the medieval paintings and later woodcuts of the _danse_macabre_, those allegorical depictions of the progress of the Black Death through Europe, for me to believe that that was not the original meaning. Modern cartomantists, however, give transformation and change - more often spiritual than physical; awakening to a new revelation; complete alteration of one's values and aspirations. In my experience, however, the literal meaning of the card should be considered when it appears with the Queen of Swords strongly supported by other cards in her suit.

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Unfavorable:

Stagnation, inertia, lethargy, petrification; somnambulism.

XIV

Temperance

Favorable:

This is the card of the alchemist or the herbalist: it means combinations or mixtures, primarily. The concept may, of course, be extended to other areas of life; hence: coordination, adaptation, modification, mixture of forces, personalities or lives; modification by admixture; by extension, management, moderation, economy.

Unfavorable:

For the alchemist: great success with stinks and bangs but no Philosopher's Stone. Competing interests in business or personal matters; the competition may well be of the one with the other. Disunion. Waite suggests the religious figure who will marry the seeker (to another).

XV

The Devil

Favorable:

The card deals mostly with the material world to the exclusion of the spiritual: in my experience, it usually denotes a sexual encounter, though it may also signify the amassment of riches, gourmandizing and all manner of over-indulgence. Obsession with matters material. Extraordinary efforts. Predestination. Magic which affects the material plane, for good or ill.

Unfavorable:

Spiritual understanding, psychic healing. Weakness, pettiness, blindness (not physical only), ineffectuality, indecision.

XVI

The Tower

Favorable:

This is the Fire from Heaven: that blinding flash which in a single stroke alters forever a life or a

world. This is the inspiration that compels the poet, the artist, the sculptor who creates at least one masterwork which has, over the ages, a profound influence on the lives of millions. It is also, unfortunately, the inspiration which drove Adolf Hitler to compose *Mein Kampf*. Hence: overthrow of the existing order, unforeseen catastrophe, calamity, ruin - all with the expectation that something new and greater will rise from the rubble. On a more day to day basis, however, I have found that the card frequently signifies communication by electronic means: a telephone call, telegram, email or the like (I suspect this may be because this is the only card which has anything explicitly electrical in its common design, and the cards frequently make the best adaptation they can to a constantly changing world).

Unfavorable:

The same in a lesser degree. Oppression, imprisonment, tyranny.

XVII

The Star

Favorable:

Hope, courage, inspiration, unexpected aid. Good health, spiritual love.

Unfavorable:

Arrogance, haughtiness; impotence, stubbornness, pessimism, doubt; hope deceived, daydreams fail.

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XVIII

The Moon

Favorable:

Fluctuation, change. Unlike the Wheel or the Tower, the connotation here is of evolution rather than revolution. Also, imagination, intuition, dreams, growth of psychic power and spiritual understanding.

Unfavorable:

Unforeseen dangers, secret enemies, deceptions including half-truth and innuendo. Occult forces of malign intent. Dissatisfaction. Imagination may be reined in by

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practical considerations.

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XIX

The Sun

Favorable:

This is an obvious symbol of achievement, success, happiness, contentment; glory, gain, riches; spiritual enlightenment and bliss. It is said also to illuminate all the cards around it; i.e., its influence causes adjacent cards to give their most favorable reading.

Unfavorable:

The same in lesser degree. Clouded happiness, gain not to expectations, difficulties in reaching spiritual goals. Also, sometimes, display, vanity, arrogance.

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XX

Judgment

Favorable:

The final decision, with no appeal remaining. Other accounts suggest awakening, change of position, renewal, outcome.

Unfavorable:

Simplicity, weakness, fear of death, failure to find happiness. Also, a warning to guard one's physical health.

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XXI

The World

(This card is sometimes called "The Universe")

Favorable:

Completion more spiritual than physical, although the latter connotation must definitely be considered. Assured success, recompense in full, reward; triumph in all undertakings. Also in combination with reinforcing cards: change of place, voyage, travel, emigration, change of residence - all with an assured outcome.

Unfavorable:

Permanence, stagnation, inertia; fixity of purpose; fear of change, earthbound spirit; sometimes a venture into the unknown with no perceived security at the end.

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Summary

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For the past couple of weeks, I have been posting articles on the divinatory meanings of the Tarot to alt.pagan. With the posting of XXI, THE WORLD, this series has (finally, to sighs of enormous relief from those who weren't interested in the first place) reached its appointed end.

Some years ago, a sort of ad hoc committee of persons principally from alt.magick but with the participation of some from alt.pagan attempted a similar, card-by-card posting of the Tarot. That effort failed after the posting of The Empress, I think - or certainly not much beyond that. The participants got bogged down in discussions of a) the symbolism depicted on various decks; b) which is the One True Deck; and c) what the cards *really* mean below the pretty pictures on the surface.

I have tried to avoid those pitfalls by a) being one man, not a committee (we haven't begun to argue among ourself *yet!*); b) avoiding all but the most general discussion of the pictures and their symbolisms; c) beginning with the pip cards rather than the Triumphs; and d) confining myself strictly to those divinatory meanings I could discover which appeared to be the eldest and thus hallowed (as it were) by time and tradition or to appear most frequently among my various references, indicating that they are used with high frequency by modern readers. The meanings I have posted are not by any means the only meanings; they are simply the ones which seem to me to be in most common usage. Drawing on my own experience with the cards, I have also extrapolated some meanings to fit modern situations that may not have existed or been defined when the cards first began their career.

One of the more common questions asked on alt.pagan is, "Where can I find on-line definitions of the Tarot?" If this series has been archived, that site may be mentioned; if not, I shall be happy to provide the articles by e-mail as long as *I* am on-line.

I would like very much to thank all those who responded to the articles, either in posts pro or con to alt.pagan or by e-mail. This has been a long project, and cheering words when it began to look as though it would never be finished helped a great deal to bring it to its proper conclusion.

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Blessed be,
Baird