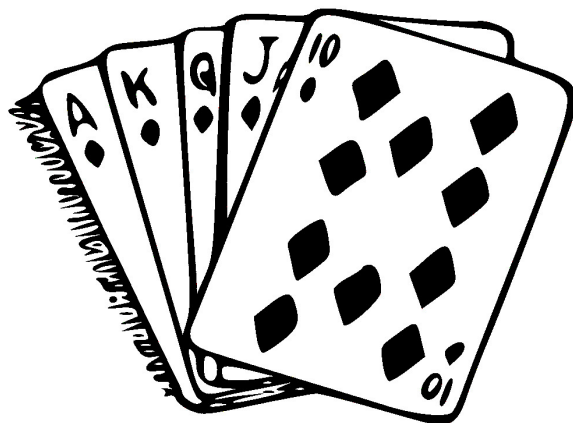


Playing Card Cartomancy

An Introduction to Divination by Playing Cards



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The Raven's Crucible

Introduction

I've written previously about how different divination systems have different [characters and vocabularies](#). One of the systems I referenced repeatedly was playing card cartomancy. It's one of my favorite systems, so I'd like to provide an overview walking through the basics of that.

First off, what is cartomancy? Cartomancy is a form of sortilege – divination by casting lots – using cards drawn from a deck to divine information about the world. Far and away the most common form of cartomantic divination used today is tarot, in large part due to its inclusion in the curriculum of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. There are also a huge number of oracle decks available to the modern reader, all created specifically for divination.

The origins of cartomancy, however, are much more pragmatic. Packs of cards intended for games provided a convenient set of unique symbols that could be assigned meanings, drawn at random, and interpreted. Detailed tarot decks were popular with the upper classes, with Renaissance decks often having beautifully illustrated major arcana depicting various religious or moral themes. These early tarot decks are true works of art, but even the common paper cards used by the lower classes for gambling found their way into use in divination.

Because of this class divide, there are some notable differences between tarot and playing card cartomancy. Tarot eventually converged into a standard 78-card deck (split between 56 minor arcana in four suits and 22 major arcana). The meanings assigned to these cards in divination are mostly consistent across modern tarot readers. Individual readers might have different shades of meaning attached to particular cards, but the broad significance will be the same.

In contrast, playing card cartomancy never saw a similar convergence. Even among systems that utilize a standard deck, there are dozens of different ways to assign meaning to the various cards. And that's even before we get into things like Lenormand, which generally uses a subset of the cards. This makes it more challenging to combine sources when learning to read; different systems can assign *wildly* different meanings to cards. None of those are necessarily better or worse, but you're better off going deep on one particular system than trying to dabble in many. The latter approach tends to muddy the waters.

The link between playing card cartomancy and folk magic also means

the symbols associated with the cards tend to be pragmatic. These systems provide advice on love, work, finances, and relationships – the kinds of things everyday people need advice on.

There are a couple common ways to assign meanings that I'm *not* planning to cover, and I want to get those out of the way up front. First, it's possible to read playing cards just like tarot. You have to have the cards memorized, because you're missing the pictorial cues, but you can treat your deck exactly like the minor arcana. If you're an experienced tarot reader in desperate need of a reading but without a deck, this is fine. I don't consider it ideal.

The second system is Lenormand. Lenormand uses a reduced 36-card deck, where the cards are read in pairs. Cards can have different shades of meaning, depending on whether they are in a primary or modifier position. Lenormand is a great system, I've seen it yield some incredible results, but it's not the one I'm planning to cover here.

The system I practice draws significantly from Cory Thomas Hutcheson's book *Fifty-Four Devils*.¹ It's a system that has a nice internal logic to it, with a consistent matrix of meanings assigned to the various suits and numbers. It also dovetails fairly nicely with the HedgeWytchery system, originally available online, and later outlined in *The Wise & Subtle Arte of Reading Cards* (which is unfortunately out of print, and hard to find).² There are some differences in meaning, particularly when you get into imagery of specific cards, but the suits and numerology are similar.

Over the following chapters, I'm planning to cover the colors, suits, and numbers in detail, then speak to some of the practicalities of spreads and interpretation. My hope is that this can become a resource for folks learning playing card cartomancy, and spread knowledge or a rich and practical divination system.

¹Hutcheson, C. (2013). *Fifty-four Devils: The Art & Folklore of Fortune-telling with Playing Cards*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing.

²HedgeWytch. (2025). *The Wise & Subtle Arte of Reading Cards: The Picturebook Compleat*. Independent.

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1 The Colors

In the introduction we kicked off our conversation of playing card cartomancy. In this chapter we're going to be exploring the first foundational element in cartomantic divination: color.

Throughout this series, I'm going to be assuming a standard set of American playing cards, such as those made by Bicycle. Such a deck has fifty-four cards (thirteen each in four suits, plus two jokers). This deck can be divided into cards of two colors: red (hearts and diamonds), and black (clubs and spades).

As a rule of thumb, red cards are generally positive or affirmative, while black cards are generally negative. There are some nuances to this as we get into meanings of specific cards, but when starting it's usually safe to assume that red cards are the "good" ones and black cards are the "bad" ones.

This gives us an immediate sense of the overall energy of the reading, depending on the balance of red cards and black cards. Spreads where a lot of red cards come up indicate things generally going smoothly, and the desired outcomes being achieved. Conversely, spreads where a lot of black cards come up indicate challenges, failures, and setbacks. If there is a shift from one energy to the other throughout a reading, that can give some clues about the direction things are trending.

All of which is pretty abstract, let's make it more concrete with a simple card spread: a three-card yes/no reading. While you theoretically can do yes/no readings with a single card, just going off the color (red being "yes" and black being "no"), it's so stark and prone to misinterpretation that I don't much like doing it. A three-card reading allows for a lot more nuance to emerge, and while it's a very simple spread, it's still one I use frequently.

The first thing to consider in this reading is how to frame your question. I have a [whole post](#) on how to effectively frame questions for divination, but the piece that's most relevant here is phrasing your questions such that an affirmative response is a positive outcome. If I ask a question like "am I going to lose my job?" and I get a lot of red cards, what does that mean? Is that an affirmative response, that I am in fact going to lose my job? Or is that signaling a positive outcome, that my job is safe for now? The ambiguity can be hard to interpret. If instead we were to phrase the question as "am I still going to have this job in a year?" the answer becomes much clearer: an affirmative response *is* a positive outcome, and *vice versa*.

With that in mind, we take our deck, contemplate our question, and

shuffle as desired. Some people prefer to shuffle a set number of times, to keep things as consistent as possible for every reading. Others shuffle until their intuition signals them to stop. Experiment with both, to see which you prefer. Now deal out three cards, face-up.

With three cards, there are four possible outcomes: all red, all black, or split with a majority in one direction or the other. If all three cards are red, the answer is a clear, unequivocal positive. If all three cards are black, the answer is a clear, unequivocal negative. Most results, however, will be mixed. Majority red with a black card indicates “probably”; it’s not a sure bet, or there’s room for improvement, but it’s likely to resolve favorably. Majority black with a red card indicates “probably not”; it’s in the realm of possibility, but unlikely on the current trajectory. Both these results are *interesting*, because they show us places where our own efforts have room to make a difference in the outcome.

Moreover, these same three cards can be read as a story. The *order* of the colors can give us some clues about how the answer will unfold.

●●●	An unqualified positive
●●●	A pyrrhic victory, what looks like a success can turn sour at the end
●●●	A major setback, but one that can be recovered from
●●●	A rocky start that gets turned around and put back on track
●●●	A long, hard road — but with the potential of a light at the end of the tunnel
●●●	A false hope, quickly dashed
●●●	A promising start goes off the rails
●●●	An unqualified negative

Spend some time playing with color before moving on. Practice some simple, three-card yes/no readings, where all you’re looking at is the color of the cards that come up. What information can you glean from that? What information are you still lacking?

Next chapter we’ll start to fill in some of the surrounding detail by exploring the meanings of the four suits.

2 The Suits

In the last chapter we talked about the importance of color in playing card cartomancy. This chapter we're getting more specific with an examination of the suits.

In the playing card deck we are discussing there are four different suits: diamonds (♦), clubs (♣), hearts (♥), and spades (♠). For readers coming from a tarot background, it can be tempting to try to map these onto the tarot suits – wands, pentacles, cups, and swords. Resist this temptation. While there are some overlaps, such a reductive mapping can also lead you pretty far astray.

Let's look at the playing card suits on their own terms:

Diamonds – The Suit of Power

The keyword I generally associate with diamonds is “power,” but an equally good one might be “resources.” All the cards within the suit of diamonds relate to the assets you have at your disposal to shape the world to your will.

Oftentimes this means material resources – namely money – but that isn't always the case. Information can be a form of power. As can reputation, influence, or social capital. For folks interested in the occult, magical power can also come into play here.

Diamonds are, broadly speaking, a pretty positive suit. They're about having the tools you need to achieve your ends. Readings where a lot of diamonds come up indicate having the assets you need to get where you want to go.

Clubs – The Suit of Labor

Where diamonds are about assets, clubs are about work. The keyword I associate with clubs is “labor.” They're predominantly about how you take your opportunities and turn them into something tangible; how you get from point A to point B.

Note that while clubs are a black suit, they are not *necessarily* negative. There can be something deeply rewarding about hard work that leaves you mentally and physically exhausted. There is a satisfaction that comes from looking at the results of a job well done, and knowing that you *earned* it.

That said, readings where a lot of clubs come up indicate things aren't coming easily. You may still achieve your goals, but be prepared to put in the elbow grease to get there. Don't look for success to fall into your lap undeserved.

Hearts – The Suit of Intimacy

The keyword I associate with the suit of hearts is “intimacy,” it's a suit mostly relating to interpersonal relationships. Many times this refers to romantic or sexual intimacy (given that these are some of the most common questions people divine on), but it doesn't have to. Platonic friendships involve intimacy. Familial relationships involve intimacy. The suit of hearts involves building mutual trust.

Readings where a lot of hearts come up speak to strong interpersonal relationships. Being supported by lovers, friends, and peers in achieving your goals, or supporting them in turn. Hearts indicate a need for trust and collaboration to reach success. “It takes a village” and all that.

Spades – The Suit of Strife

Tarot doesn't really have a “bad” suit – playing cards kind of do. Nearly every card in the suit of spades relates to strife, conflict, or their aftermath. Readings where a lot of spades come up indicate conflict, division, and ill fortune. They are, by their nature, disharmonious.

However, it's important to keep in mind that strife is not *universally* negative. Some battles need to be fought. Sticking up for yourself and asserting your rights may be disharmonious, but it is also worthwhile. If you find yourself in an abusive or exploitative situation, conflict is often needed to reestablish healthy boundaries. Sometimes the right answer is to cut away a gangrenous piece to save the whole.

Those cases notwithstanding, if you do a reading where you turn up a lot of spades, you're about to go through some shit. Sometimes the conflict is necessary, but you're almost certainly not going to enjoy it.

Alright, so we have a broad understanding of the meanings of the suits themselves. How does that get interpreted in practice? Let's look again at our three-card, yes/no reading from last chapter. While there are more possible

combinations than I want to fully enumerate, we can walk through some illustrative cases.

♦♦♦	This is a positive response, and also an auspicious reading generally – particularly in financial matters. It indicates an overall quality of wealth and power, making success easy to achieve.
♣♣♣	This is a negative response, but the suit gives us a hint as to why. It's not so much about impossibility as about effort. There would be so much labor involved as to make the goal not worth it, or impractically difficult to attain.
♥♥♥	This is a positive response, and a particularly auspicious reading when it comes to love and relationships. It indicates a flow of untempered intimacy.
♠♠♠	This is a negative response, and a particularly inauspicious one. It indicates troubles heaped on troubles, or an effort plagued by a series of conflicts.
♥♣♦	This is a qualified positive response: “probably yes.” It indicates a strong start to the situation, particularly one relies on cooperation or relationships. This is followed by a setback, where something turns out to be much more work than anticipated. This setback can be successfully navigated, and success achieved in the end.
♦♠♥	While the color pattern is the same as the previous example, the nature of the story is different. Here we see a strong, well-resourced start. Then a setback encountered due to external misfortune or strife in a key relationship. Finally the situation is resolved through greater trust and collaboration; relationships forged by coming together in the face of crisis.
♦♠♣	This is a qualified negative response: “probably no.” It indicates a strong start with ample resources, followed by a breakdown in coordination or cooperation. This breakdown results in significant additional labor, wasted effort, or people pulling in different directions.
♣♣♥	This is also a qualified negative response, following the “light at the end of the tunnel” pattern. It indicates success may be possible, but it will be a long, grueling slog to get there. Is the payoff worth the work required?

From these patterns we can start to extrapolate, spinning stories told by the interplay of suits. Again, spend some time playing with three-card readings. How does the addition of suit change the message? What new clarity do we get about the nature of the positive and negative trends?

Next we're going to start diving into the meanings and imagery of specific cards. I'm planning to go number by number, starting with the aces. I'll walk through what a number signifies generally, and how that projects down into each specific suit. Having a solid understanding of the interplay between number and suit will make learning the imagery specific to each card much quicker.

3 The Aces

In the last chapter we covered the meanings of the suits in playing card cartomancy. Here we're going to dive into the imagery of specific cards, starting with the Aces. In a very broad sense, we can think of the numeric cards as having a story arc that unfolds within their respective suit. This starts as a first inception in the Ace, and matures through result and aftermath in the Nine and Ten.

Using this idea, we can think of all the Aces as the “seeds” of their respective suits. They're the conception or driving impulse from which the entirety of their suit flows. They are the critical linchpins that kick off the whole arc. Let's look at them one at a time:

Ace of Diamonds: The Seed of Power – “Opportunity”

Given that the whole suit of diamonds is about power and resources, the Ace of Diamonds is the inception of that theme. While it hasn't yet matured into a substantive power, it is the opportunity to begin building an empire. Power and resources tend to snowball; the more you have, the more opportunities you have to garner more. The Ace of Diamonds can be thought of as the initial spark that kicks off that positive feedback loop; the “seed capital” for future accumulation of resources.

The imagery Hutcheson associates with the Ace of Diamonds is a coin or a letter. We can think of these as concrete representations of different types of opportunity. The coin is a small windfall, which can be leveraged into future wealth; the letter carries a piece of critical information that opens doors for future knowledge. We might also include seeds for other types of power: an invitation that opens the door to social mobility, or an initiation that confers spiritual access.

More generally this is a card about opportunities presenting themselves to you. You may not be able to, or even want to, capitalize on every opportunity – but the options are there. The roads are open.

Ace of Clubs: The Seed of Labor – “Planning”

The suit of clubs is all about labor, and planning is the inception of that. It's where you set your goals, and start to chart out what the path looks like to get from where you are to where you want to be.

Hutcheson associates the Ace of Clubs with imagery of a cave, or solitude. I think that highlights an important aspect of this card. It's not (yet) about collaborative planning, or cooperation with others. It's about withdrawal and introspection to figure out for yourself what it is you're trying to achieve. The cave, in this sense, is the hermit's retreat, which removes exterior distractions and enables deeper contemplation.

I loosely associate the Ace of Clubs with the Hermit card in the tarot. It has a similar feeling of withdrawal and introspection, that enables one to emerge with a clearer direction. It lays the foundation for future efforts.

Ace of Hearts: The Seed of Intimacy – “Desire”

Hutcheson associates the Ace of Hearts with an infatuation, a kiss, and – somewhat contradictorily – loneliness. This seeming contradiction resolves when we think of the Ace of Hearts as the impulse that compels us to seek out intimacy. That can be externally motivated: an infatuation or a kiss with a specific person, which prompts us to pursue a relationship. It can also be internally motivated: a general feeling of loneliness or isolation that prompts us to seek out the companionship of others.

The keyword I associate with the Ace of Hearts is “desire.” Desire is really the seed of intimacy in all its forms, the grain of sand around which the pearl of a relationship is built. Again, the intimacy described in the suit of hearts can be romantic, platonic, or familial, but in all of those cases it is founded on the desire for a closer relationship.

Ace of Spades: The Seed of Strife – “Death”

Spades is a suit of strife, and the Ace is about the underpinning motivation for that strife: fear of the unknown. Like the Death card in tarot, the Ace of Spades can represent a literal, physical death, or a more symbolic “death of the status quo” enacted through sudden, dramatic change.

There is an implicit or explicit threat of violence underpinning all forms of strife: threat of death, or threat of dramatic change of circumstances. The reason situations of strife have such a visceral hold over us is because they threaten the stability of our established order. They compel us to fight to preserve what we have, lest it be ripped from us and we be tipped into the chaos of the unknown. Without that fear, there is no reason to engage in the struggle implied by strife. Or, to put it in Buddhist terms, attachment

is the root of pain.

The Ace of Spades represents the death of those things we have attachments to, be they people, systems, or modes of being.

Thus we can see all four Aces laying the groundwork for their respective suits. They plant the seeds that will mature in later cards into various expressions of their suit-archetype.

4 The Twos

Last chapter we talked about the meanings behind the Aces, now we're on to the Twos. Where the Aces are the seeds of their respective suits, they are all very unified; the Aces relate to the individual and their circumstances or motivations. Twos are where we start to see division, and the dynamic relationships that come with that.

There is no relationship in perfect unity, because everything is homogeneous. In order for a relationship to emerge there has to be differentiation: "self" from "not self", or "agent" from "surroundings." The Twos are where we see that discernment start to arise. All the Twos embody the union or contrast of polarities, projected into their respective suits.

Two of Diamonds: The Polarity of Power – "Differential"

The Two of Diamonds is a very active card. It is all about the movement of power or resources from one place to another. This can be material resources: money or other assets. It can also be information, transferred between people or systems. Or the rise or fall of social status.

Hutcheson associates the Two of Diamonds with imagery of birds, or a transfer of funds. The transfer of funds is obvious – it's literally the movement of money from place to place – but the birds imagery is interesting. I think of that in terms of the transfer of information, as in the phrase "a little bird told me" (or perhaps, taken more literally, a carrier pigeon).

One of the subtle aspects to this card is that the flow of power requires a power *differential*. Richard Feynman has an analogy he uses to explain entropy, that involves trying to dry off with a damp towel. At some point you can't get any more dry because the towel transfers as much water to you as you do to it. The water is so evenly distributed that no work can be done. The greater the difference in distribution, the more can be accomplished.

The Two of Diamonds is a card that exemplifies movement stemming from a lack of equilibrium. It's the flow of money from somewhere that has it to somewhere that doesn't. It's the movement of information from those who know it to those who don't. It's the social status conferred by those who have it on those who lack. Dynamic movement that comes from a difference in resource allocation.

Two of Clubs: The Polarity of Labor – “Partnership”

If the Ace of Clubs was about solitary planning, the Two is where you build your team and share your plan. It’s about finding partners that are willing to work with you to achieve your goals. Ideally those who complement your strengths and cover for your weaknesses.

In contrast to the Two of Diamonds, I don’t view the Two of Clubs as having a differential aspect to it. The Two of Clubs is all about cooperation and mutualism, two distinct elements coming together in a relationship that is beneficial for both. A whole that is more than the sum of the parts.

The imagery Hutcheson associates with the Two of Clubs is a handshake or a business partnership. Both pretty self-explanatory.

Two of Hearts: The Polarity of Intimacy – “Coupling”

Most of the cards in the suit of Hearts can describe a variety of different types of intimacy, that’s...less applicable with the Two. In readings where the Two of Hearts comes up, it most often signifies physical intimacy. And not the comfortable, familiar intimacy that comes from knowing somebody deeply. The Two of Hearts is about the steamy, passionate, can’t-think-about-anything-else sort of intimacy that sells romance novels.

The Two of Hearts occupies an interesting middle ground between the Twos of Diamonds and Clubs. There is definitely an aspect of polarity to it, as well as an aspect of mutual compatibility. It embodies immediate, atavistic chemistry – the kind of sexual tension that you can cut with a knife.

As hinted from the keyword “coupling,” it’s not *just* a card about sex. It can also be a card about pairing off into romantic relationships. But even in this context, the Two of Hearts is more about bubbly, infatuated, new-relationship energy than anything long term. Those relationships may mature into something more stable, or they may flame out quickly, but either way they’re going to start with a bang.

Two of Spades: The Polarity of Strife – “Duel”

Where the Ace of Spades is a card of violent change, the Two is about two people trying to enact that violence on each other. That polarity between *two* people is important though. This is not (yet) about chaotic, free-for-all violence; the strife embodied in the Two of Spades is surgical, it is targeted.

In the context of physical violence this is represented by a duel. It's very directed towards a specific opponent; you don't (generally) need to worry about being sucker punched by a third party. It's also still somewhat bound by rules. Yes, the goal is to win the upper hand and do harm to your opponent, but there are still some limits on what sorts of harm are permissible. Some things remain off the table. Finally, it's a very technical, tactical contest. There is continuous jockeying for superior position, feints and counterfeints and misdirections. Outside the context of a duel, that can look like passive aggression: subtle tactical moves intended to make your opponent misstep, doubt themselves, or lose face among their peers.

5 The Threes

Where the divinatory meanings of the twos in a playing card deck are all about polarity, the threes are all about plurality. What started as a singular relationship is multiplied again and again, into a dynamic web of interaction where nothing can be perfectly isolated from anything else. The threes are about bounty, about plenty. They take the energies of their respective suits and multiply them into overflowing.

Three of Diamonds: The Bounty of Power – “Beneficence”

I strongly associate this card with the planet Jupiter. Like all diamonds, the Three is about wealth and resources. But these are not resources carefully and prudently husbanded. Nor are they resources foolishly squandered. The Three of Diamonds is about celebrating the resources we have at our disposal, and passing that good fortune along. It is a card of charity and grace, joyously expressed from a place of security. Think harvest festival, not bank vault.

When we interpret this card in terms of material wealth, it often looks like charitable giving; bestowing some of your wealth to worthy causes because you can afford to do so. With information, it can be freely sharing your good news with the world. With social power, it can look like acting as a social hub: making connections and introductions between interesting new people who would not otherwise have met.

The imagery Hutcheson associates with the Three of Diamonds is a gift or a fountain. Both of these make sense to me. A gift, because it is a selfless use of your resources to delight someone else. A fountain because it enriches the space it is in. Building a fountain trades singular wealth for beauty and cultural significance that the public can benefit from. Sometimes fountains are ostentatious, and even that ostentation has value. Patronage of the arts falls firmly under this card.

Three of Clubs: The Bounty of Labor – “Obstacles”

The Three of Clubs again multiplies the effects of its suit, but rather than multiplying wealth it multiplies work. I don’t see this as a negative card, necessarily, but it is a hard one. There is a truism that if a worthwhile task were easy, everyone would be doing it. The Three of Clubs embodies this idea. It’s a card about the grind.

The obstacles described by the Three of Clubs aren't strokes of ill luck, they are necessary hardships that must be navigated to achieve anything worthwhile. One road may be smooth, and another stony. The Three of Clubs is about taking the stony path and smoothing it, flattening it, and paving it to create a road that will endure for generations. The outcome is worthwhile, but there is a lot of back-breaking labor that must be put in to realize that end.

Hutcheson associates this card with imagery of stone walls. I think this can be apt, so long as we don't think of the stone walls themselves as the obstacles, but as the outcomes. A city may be surrounded by stone walls a thousand years old, but those walls are the end result of thousands of hours of planning, architecting, construction, and maintenance. This is a card that tells you anything worthwhile is achieved in sweat.

Three of Hearts: The Bounty of Intimacy – “Friendship”

I've associated the keyword “friendship” with the Three of Hearts, but that's sort of a shallow reading of the card. This is a card of deep and intimate social support networks. That can take the form of friends, family, or lovers. In any case, the throughline is that these networks are both wide and resilient. You have a community of people who are willing to come together to support you in the event of hard times. People who you care about, and who care about you in turn. There is such a bounty of love in your life that it cannot be contained.

The imagery that Hutcheson associates with this card is a wish granted, or a full cup. Both of those are a little abstract, but come into clearer focus when we think of this as being a card of both plenty and relationships. You are not lacking in friends. When it comes to meaningful connections, “thy cup runneth over.”

Three of Spades: The Bounty of Strife – “Battle”

Where the Two of Spades was about technical, precise, carefully directed violence, the Three sees that structure dissolve. The Three of Spades is about violence in its most brutal and chaotic form. It is no longer a game won by the most skilled, but by the most aggressive. It's not about technique, but about stamina.

Despite Hollywood depictions to the contrary, most lethal fights are over

in seconds. Success on the battlefield is not about winning a particular engagement, but about being able to put down opponents with ruthless efficiency again and again long past the point of exhaustion.³

Hutcheson also associates the Three of Spades with “setbacks,” which I think is fair. But they’re not minor setbacks. This card embodies the kind of setbacks that upend the paradigm entirely, and plunge us into a violent struggle for our very survival.

³For folks interested in European martial history, there’s a really interesting rabbit hole to go down around the distinction between dueling and battlefield weapons. Weapons intended for facing a single opponent in controlled circumstances (smallsword, rapier, longsword, etc.) evolved to be long, thrust oriented, and develop highly technical fencing systems. In contrast, battlefield weapons tended to be heavier, more capable at cutting (and thus controlling arcs of space), and to be used with less finesse.

6 The Fours

Where the divinatory meaning of the threes in a playing card deck are all about plenty, the fours are all about stasis. Numerologically, the fours are very stable – think of the four legs on a table or a stool, preventing it from tipping in any direction. In the context of divination, this stability shows up in how they embody their respective suits. All the fours indicate stability and stasis in their unique domains.

Four of Diamonds: The Stability of Power – “Conservatism”

Where the Two of Diamonds was all about the flow of resources from place to place, the Four is the opposite. It’s about holding tight to the resources we have, and keeping them all in their current locations. It’s a card that recognizes the value of closely guarding the resources you’ve accrued, as well as living within your means. Much like the Four of Pentacles in the tarot, this card can be a little bit austere or miserly. But there are some situations – like when trying to get out of debt – where that is exactly what you need. Now is not the time for grand, ostentatious gestures. The Four of Diamonds reminds us that a penny saved is a penny earned.

The imagery Hutcheson associates with this card is a closed purse, or no news. This makes perfect sense when we think about money and information as two of the most common types of power. A closed purse keeps your money where it is. No news means no information is flowing through a system. In both cases resources remain where they are and the status quo is preserved.

Four of Clubs: The Stability of Labor – “Patience”

The Four of Clubs is a card that counsels patience. There is a time for putting in the work to achieve your goals, but also a time for resting from that work. Some things just can’t be rushed. The Four of Clubs indicates that you have put in the required work, and now you need to pause and wait for the results to ripen. You aren’t done, but you’ve made good progress along your path. Recognize what you have achieved so far.

Hutcheson associates this card with imagery of a horse cart, or a plowed field. I think of this field being a field that is both plowed and planted – now you need to wait for the crop to sprout. Nothing you do at this point will make your crops come up more quickly. A horse cart is a little more

obscure, but I think of it in terms of a *loaded* cart. There was labor involved in producing whatever is being conveyed in the cart, and labor involved in loading it. When you get wherever you are going there will be labor involved in unloading and processing it. For now, however, there is a moment of stasis where the load is packed away. Until the cart gets to its destination, there is a period of forced tranquility. Be patient in this moment. It's not itself a destination, but it is a respite.

Four of Hearts: The Stability of Intimacy – “Reservation”

The Four of Hearts captures this idea of stability in the arena of relationships. In contrast to some of the other cards in the suit, this is a card that guards the heart closely. There is a reserve and aloofness here, a reluctance to start new relationships or deepen existing ones.

I associate this card with preparing for travel. Not a vacation or a short-term trip, but a long journey for a significant period of time. Moving cities or changing jobs. In the run-up to such a journey, you will begin to naturally pull away. You know you are leaving behind the relationships in your current location, but you are not yet at your destination to start new relationships. The interim is a stasis point, where you invest less into relationships for a time.

The imagery associated with this card is a trunk, travel case, or a lock. I link all of these with the previous journey idea: the steamer trunk and valise – packed, locked, and ready for a voyage to a new place with a new social circle.

Four of Spades: The Stability of Strife – “Prison”

The previous Fours mostly conveyed temporary stability. They were natural breaks that put the energies of their suits on pause. But in each case there was an end in sight. The Four of Spades breaks this pattern. The intersection of stability and strife is unpleasant. This is a card that conveys being bogged down or trapped by your circumstances. It feels like things out of your control are holding you back from achieving your goals, imprisoning you in a web of troubles from which you cannot see your way clear.

The imagery Hutcheson associates with this card is mire, or the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Mire is pretty clear – it literally sucks you down and prevents your movement. To be mired is to be stuck. The Four

Horsemen are interesting. The Four Horsemen – disease, famine, war, and death – are not small and personal troubles. All of them are massive ills that sweep through society at large, upending normal structures and plunging the entire community into chaos. These issues epitomize those circumstances that make us feel trapped and out of control of our own lives. Imprisoned by circumstance. That's what the Four of Spades is about.

7 The Fives

Last chapter we talked about the divinatory meaning of the fours in a deck of playing cards, which are all variations on the theme of stasis. This chapter we're talking about the fives.

Up until now, the numerology informing our interpretations of the pip cards has been pretty standard. It's not *identical* to the meanings of numbers in other systems, but it's at least close. For the fives, sixes, and sevens, this pattern breaks down. The meanings ascribed to these numbers are pretty unique to playing card divination.

The fives all take the energies of their respective suits and project them into the body. The best explanation I've heard for this is that it comes from Christian theology: that the number five relates to the five wounds on the body of Christ. Regardless of the origin, we can think of fives as all being related to the physical body in some way.

Five of Diamonds: The Embodiment of Power – “Luck”

What do power and resources look like when projected into the body? This one is sort of obscure. Hutcheson lists the imagery of the Five of Diamonds as “good luck” and “laughter.” To be honest, for a long time I didn't see the link; I just memorized that imagery and moved on. The breakthrough for me centered on the idea of this card as relating to good luck.

In Norse cosmology, a person was composed of many aspects. It wasn't a simple division of body and soul, there were different conceptions tied to the individual. One of these concepts was the *hamingja* – approximately translated as “luck.” The *hamingja* related to a person's fate, and encompassed their good fortune, prosperity, social standing, and success-bringing power. Having a person of strong *hamingja* along was likely to bring success to your ventures.

The idea of *hamingja* straddled the line between facet of the self and guardian spirit. On the one hand it was intrinsically tied to the individual. On the other, there are accounts of people lending their *hamingja* to others temporarily, or bequeathing it to a family member upon their death.

For me this idea captures the essence of the Five of Diamonds very well. It's not about charisma, precisely, but about a *presence* or force of personality that tends to bring success to all your endeavors. It leads to good fortune, it leads to laughter, but it's not precisely either one.

Five of Clubs: The Embodiment of Labor – “Health”

Where the Five of Diamonds projects power into the body, the Five of Clubs projects labor. There is a fascinating reciprocal relationship between health and hard labor. On the one hand, having a healthy body gives you the ability to be more effective at manual labor. You are able to use your body to apply effort in a sustained way. Conversely, physical exercise is *massively* beneficial for both physical and mental health. The scientific consensus is overwhelming that the benefits of regular exercise outweigh those of any medication ever invented, for promoting, prolonging, and preserving health.

Hutcheson also associates this card with imagery of a barn. To my mind, this is partly because barns are usually found on farms, where manual labor is very important. And partly because barns are tools for the protection and preservation of animals, who in turn will likely nourish the farmer. Again a reciprocal relationship between labor and health.

Five of Hearts: The Embodiment of Intimacy – “Fertility”

The Five of Hearts takes the intimacy inherent in its suit and projects it inward, into the body. Fertility is a clear example of this. Conception is the result of an intimate act, as well as generating new life within the body that must be nurtured and grown until it can exist on its own. There is little more intimate than the bond between mother and child, particularly before birth when they are nourished by the same breath and blood.

In addition to fertility, Hutcheson also links the Five of Hearts to imagery of a chapel, or a bed. I think this is because these are places where we carry out the small, intimate rituals related to the progression of a body through life. Birth and christening, marriage and the consummation thereof, death and funerary rites. Historically, the chapel and the bed were where our bodies were ushered through points of major transition.

Five of Spades: The Embodiment of Strife – “Illness”

When projected into the body, strife and trouble shows up as illness. In the case of a traumatic injury, it is physical violence that has carried past the barrier of the skin to impact the internal machinery of the body. In the case of infection it is a very literal battle within the body, waged between the cells of the immune system and the invading organism. Where the Five of Clubs

is about good health, the Five of Spades is about a body in disharmony or dysfunction.

Taken to the extreme, injury and illness result in the death of the body, which can also be a meaning of the Five of Spades. It's not about the transformative power of death – which is captured in the Ace of Spades – nor about the processing of death – which will show up when we get to the Nine. The Five of Spades is about the body, and in the context of death refers specifically to a corpse; it's the physical shell left behind when the processes of life have been extinguished.

8 The Sixes

Where the divinatory meanings of the fours in a deck of playing cards are all about stasis, the meanings of the sixes are all about direction and forward movement. This theme, like that of the fives, is somewhat unique to playing card divination (rather than being associated with standard numerology). The best explanation I've heard for it is that it's drawn from the shape of the pips on the card itself; the six pips taken together look sort of like a road. And that's really what these cards are about: the paths that lead you in one direction or another.

Six of Diamonds: The Direction of Power – “Acquisition”

If the sixes are about direction and the diamonds are about power and resources, the Six of Diamonds represents moving in the direction of increased power and resources. I personally think of this as “the Midas card,” after the mythological King Midas, whose merest touch turned everything to gold (though without the tragic moral undertones). When the Six of Diamonds comes up in a reading, it indicates that you are on easy street. Opportunities seem to fall into your lap, and every one you turn your hand to seems to flourish and blossom. Everything is going your way.

The imagery associated with the Six of Diamonds is “streets of gold,” and good decisions more generally. It's about making sound choices that seem to work out for you without much effort. The resources you need to reach your goals are speeding your way, like a rain of golden coins dropping from the heavens.

Six of Clubs: The Direction of Labor – “Direction”

With the Ace of Clubs we talked about planning, the Six of Clubs is all about execution of that plan. Here the direction of your next step is clear – there is no ambiguity on the path, no decisions to be made – this is a card about putting in the work to follow that path. When you know what you need to do, and it's just a matter of getting it done, you're likely to turn up the Six of Clubs.

Hutcheson links this card to imagery of footprints, or a clear trail. Both cases where there is a clear indication of direction for you to follow. You haven't reached your destination yet, but you know how to get there from

where you currently are. The steps are laid out before you, be they literal or metaphorical.

Six of Hearts: The Direction of Intimacy – “Fidelity”

Strong relationships, be they romantic or platonic, are built on trust. That trust is derived, in large part, from constancy. It is hard to trust someone when you aren’t confident they’re going to follow through on the commitments they have made. This is where the Six of Hearts shines. It’s a card about quietly, steadily showing up. It’s about saying what you mean, and doing what you say. It’s about remaining true to someone else; loyal in a world that would seek to constantly test that loyalty.

In addition to loyalty generally, the Six of Hearts is also associated with imagery of a dog, or the concept of stamina. A dog because it is an animal that exhibits unqualified, adoring loyalty. Stamina because remaining constant in the face of trouble takes fortitude. It takes no courage to be a friend during fair weather; remaining true when the storms come is the real test.

In readings about romantic relationships, the Six of Hearts is a very auspicious card. It doesn’t describe the kind of tumultuous infatuation you might find at the beginning of a relationship, but instead the steady warmth of a relationship likely to endure for decades.

Six of Spades: The Direction of Strife – “Temptation”

Where the Six of Diamonds was about things being easy, the Six of Spades is about them being challenging. But – critically – these are challenges of our own making. This is a card about temptation, and the inability to resist it. About the poor choices we make coming back to bite us.

The Devil card in the Rider-Waite-Smith tarot shows two naked people chained at the feet of a hulking demonic figure. But you will notice, when looking closely, that the chains lie loose about their necks. The “prisoners” have the option to remove them. But they don’t. They are trapped by their inability to resist their own vices. The Six of Spades has a very similar feel to it. It’s not about being trapped by external circumstances. It’s not about learning new information that makes you regret your past choices. You go into your decisions clear-eyed; you *know* you will probably come to regret your choice, but you go ahead and make it anyway.

In contrast to the Six of Hearts, the Six of Spades is a really rough card

to turn up in a reading about a romantic relationship. Where the former conveys a steady fidelity, the latter screams “affair.” Perhaps not one that’s being acted on yet, but one that’s being actively considered.

9 The Sevens

Last chapter we talked about how, in playing card divination, the sixes all represent facets of direction and movement. Perhaps because the pips on the card themselves look like a road. On the sevens, this pip-image becomes a road with an obstacle in the middle. The sevens all encompass downsides and pitfalls.

In our discussion of color, we mentioned that most red cards are positive. *Most*, but not all. The sevens are where we see this play out the clearest.

I tend to think of the sevens as the shadow-selves of their respective suits. When the virtues of a suit are carried so far as to become vices, or bring with them negative side-effects, we see them show up in the sevens.

Seven of Diamonds: The Shadow of Power – “Deceit”

The Seven of Diamonds is what happens when we recognize that power and resources are as much about appearance as reality. Rather than real value, wealth can be created through an elaborate shell-game of overvalued castles in the air. Social reputation is a convenient collective fiction, which can be torn down with a well-placed piece of slander. The fastest path to advancing yourself is at the expense of others, and the fastest way to accomplish *that* is through deception. When playing the games of power, what you say doesn’t need to be *true* – it just needs to be plausible.

This is a card that recognizes the power of a good lie. That inflammatory misinformation spreads much faster than humble retraction. That public perception is more important than truth. Like all Diamonds, the Seven is about power – but it’s the power of an unscrupulous politician or used car salesman.

Seven of Clubs: The Shadow of Labor – “Worry”

The Seven of Clubs captures the shadow-side of work: stress and anxiety. Sometimes, despite all your best efforts, you will fail. There are cases where you work as hard as you can, and your efforts still aren’t good enough. Those cases take up a disproportionate share of our thoughts. When the results are uncertain, we’re inclined to worry ourselves into frayed balls of stress. What if we fail? What if we are judged and found lacking? What if all our carefully constructed dreams come crashing down?

This isn't a card about *actual* negative outcomes. Those are more the realm of Spades. This is a card about our *thinking* about the possible negative outcomes, and pulling that negativity forward into the present. The performance anxiety that causes us to stumble at a crucial moment, or the stress that keeps us lying awake into the wee hours of the morning. In any labor where the outcome is uncertain, there is worry. The Seven of Clubs cautions us that our worries may be getting out of hand.

Seven of Hearts: The Shadow of Intimacy – “Jealousy”

I have the keyword “jealousy” tied to this card, but there are a number of others that would have been suitable: hate, fear, paranoia. When we build a meaningful intimate relationship, we open ourselves up to the possibility of loss. The more invested we become in the relationship, the more we come to fear losing it. To some extent that's natural, but it can be taken to an unhealthy extreme. The jealous lover, who never wants their partner to spend any time with other people. The helicopter parent, who is so over-protective that their child never learns to be independent. The rivalry that festers into zero-sum bitterness. In each case the personal ramifications of the relationship have superseded the mental health of the parties involved.

And to be clear, the alternative is also not good. To live one's life in armor, never daring to open up and connect with anyone, for fear or being hurt. To be so focused on protecting ourselves from wounds, that we cut ourselves off from the joy of the world. There's a balancing act in connecting deeply enough to be meaningful, but holding on loosely enough to not smother. The Seven of Hearts warns us that we are straying too far from that balance, in one direction or the other.

Seven of Spades: The Shadow of Strife – “Righteousness”

The Seven of Spades is a twisty card to catch a hold of. What does it mean to be the shadow side of a suit that is mostly shadows? If most of the sevens take generally positive suits and flip them negative, I sort of like the idea of the Seven of Spades taking a generally negative suit and flipping it positive.

Hutcheson links the Seven of Spades to imagery of tears, blood, and war. Which are not obviously positive, on first inspection. But I think there is still some meaning worth mining here.

For me, the Seven of Spades captures the idea of *necessary* strife. If

peaceful submission is the only option on the table, there isn't a lot of virtue to be found there. If you meet every challenge with surrender, you're not enlightened, you're just a pushover. Sometimes battles need to be fought. Sometimes, when you are pushed, pushing back hard prevents further escalation. In this light, the war captured by the Seven of Spades is not one of senseless attrition, it's the righteous crusade. The blood is blood spilled for a worthy cause. The tears are tears of catharsis, rather than tears of trauma.

The Seven of Spades reminds us that the strategy that gets us a seat at the negotiating table is deterrence, rather than appeasement. Once you have established a capacity for violence, there is serenity in choosing the path of peace.

10 The Eights

We mentioned previously that the numerology of the fives, sixes, and sevens within the deck is somewhat specific to playing card divination. The eights return to more standard numerological interpretations. The eights are associated with Mercury.⁴ Specifically, the facet of Mercury that governs language.

All four eights embody their respective suits in the realm of language: the words we use, the people we talk to, and the various roles language can play in our lives.

I'm a firm believer in the idea that [words are magic](#), and the Eights are where we see that play out most clearly. They all, in the domains of their suits, speak to the ability words have to shape reality, in addition to merely being shaped by it. Words are how we bring our ideas through into the world. They are the first tools we reach for in the act of creation.

Eight of Diamonds: The Words of Power – “Reputation”

The Eight of Diamonds speaks to the cyclical relationship between words and power. Those who accrue power and resources find themselves more frequently the subject of conversation or gossip. That conversation or gossip *about* a person builds a reputation, which can in turn affect the flow of power and resources.

Having a reputation as a socialite gives you more social capital. Having a reputation as a shrewd business-person makes it easier to attract shrewd business partners. Having a reputation as a broker of information makes it more likely that people will offer information in kind. In all these cases the reputation prompts gossip, and the gossip builds the reputation; an ouroboros winding back upon itself.

There's an interesting interplay between the Seven and the Eight of Diamonds. Both are about others' perception of you, and how that perception influences reality. But the Seven is intentionally deceptive – the narrative is deliberately crafted to convey a false impression. The Eight, in contrast, tends to speak to a reputation well-earned.

⁴Just as, in Golden Dawn inspired ritual frameworks, the planetary influence of Mercury is associated with the eighth Sephirot of *Hod*.

Eight of Clubs: The Words of Labor – “Collaboration”

Where the Eight of Diamonds is very focused on you as a *subject* of conversation, the Eight of Clubs brings you in as an active participant in the conversation. Specifically a conversation centering on the topic of work.

We’ve seen various aspects of planning and execution throughout the suit of Clubs so far: solitary planning in the Ace, the formation of business partnerships in the Two, clear-eyed execution in the Six. The Eight speaks to one of the most important factors in executing a plan effectively within a group: communication.

The ability to have clear lines of communication within a group, share new information quickly with the people who need it, and collaboratively brainstorm solutions to any problems encountered, all fall squarely within the domain of the Eight of Clubs. It’s about effective cooperation within a team. Cooperation that is only possible when ideas are being communicated clearly.

Hutcheson relates the Eight of Clubs to imagery of a workbench or table. But it’s important to keep in mind that this isn’t a bench for solitary work, it’s the table as a locus of collaboration. The table in the boardroom during a meeting where everyone gets aligned on direction. The workbench covered in blueprints that the heist team gathers around while they go over the plan and everyone’s role in it.

Eight of Hearts: The Words of Intimacy – “Flirtation”

The Eight of Hearts shifts the topic of conversation from work to intimate relationships. While it might signify open, honest communication generally, I usually see the Eight of Hearts turn up in readings about romantic, rather than platonic, relationships.

In this context, the Eight of Hearts is about words interweaving with romantic intimacy: the flirtatious exchanges beforehand, the sweet nothings in a passionate moment, or the pillow talk that arises while basking in post-coital glow.

This is a card that recognizes that seduction is more mental than physical; that the moments that most heighten our intimate connection with another person are the beats where we connect in conversation. When we recognize ourselves in them, and feel the pull of a kindred spirit. Those moments arise from words.

Eight of Spades: The Words of Strife – “Shouting”

The Eight of Spades shifts the focus from language as a collaborative tool to language as a combative tool. Language becomes the arena in which we fight our battles.

This could be as simple as a debate, but it’s usually not. That’s much too principled. The suit of spades brings a dysfunctional, uncivil energy to our arena of words. This is a card about arguments. The cutting remark, intended to wound in the most vulnerable spot. The past failure brought up and thrown back in our face. The knock-down-drag-out screaming match. While the confrontation may be limited to words, people are going to come away hurt. The pen is mightier than the sword, and just as sharp.

11 The Nines

We're in the home stretch talking about the numbers in playing card cartomancy. Last chapter we covered the eights, this one we're looking at the nines. I said back in our discussion of the aces that the progression of cards within a suit tell something of a story: beginning with the first impulse in the ace, progressing through various forms and facets as we count on from there. The nines are where we reach the climax of that story. All the nines relate to the ultimate achievement or destination of their respective suits.

Nine of Diamonds: The Culmination of Power – “Idealism”

Throughout the suit of diamonds, we've been considering different aspects of power and resources. But power is a means to an end, not an end in itself. The Nine of Diamonds is about what we choose to do with our power, once we have it. Given the ability to change the world, what changes do we seek?

Before you can affect a change in the world, you must first imagine the possible future you would like to see. The Nine of Diamonds is where we give ourselves permission to dream. We don't constrain ourselves to the bounds of the possible. If anything were possible, what would we do? Where would we go?

If you can dream of a better future, you can start to move the world in that direction. You may never see that future fully realized, but you can fight for change secure in the knowledge that each step along the way moves things in the right direction.

Hutcheson associates the Nine of Diamonds with daydreams, which we've already touched on, but also with peace. And what is peace, but a shared – perhaps impossible but nonetheless worthwhile – dream.

Nine of Clubs: The Culmination of Labor – “Harvest”

The Four of Clubs counseled patience: the seeds were planted and we needed to wait for them to ripen. In the Nine of Clubs our patience is rewarded. Here we reach the end of our labors, and get to enjoy the fruits of our toil. The harvest is bountiful.

This card has a little bit of a double-edged quality to it, however. It's a card about the reward for diligent effort. We reap what we have sown. If we have *not* been putting in the diligent effort, then that too will come home to

roost. It's about us having made our bed – good or bad – and now getting to lie in it.

This card is sometimes associated with imagery of a forest, but for me it's less forest-as-wilderness, and more mature orchard. We planted our trees, and waited years for them to grow. Now we have a renewable bounty of fruit. Our long-term investment has paid off.

Nine of Hearts: The Culmination of Intimacy – “Nesting”

I've associated the keyword “nesting” with the Nine of Hearts, that's the energy I get from it. The culmination of intimacy, in all its forms, is the creation of new family and new life. That can be literal: finding a long term partner and creating a home together, a place in which to raise children. It can also be more metaphorical: a friendship deepening to something more akin to a sibling bond, in a way that changes both of your lives. In either case, it's about the creation of a new family unit; a family of choice rather than one of inheritance.

The Nine of Hearts is linked with imagery of a cottage or a small house, which ties in nicely with our idea of new family. The cottage is not grand nor ostentatious, but it is a place of cozy practicality. Not a mansion, but a home.

Nine of Spades: The Culmination of Strife – “Mourning”

The Nine of Spades is the end result of our journey through strife: mourning that which was lost. Hutcheson associates this card with imagery of a funeral, or a coffin, or a ghost. Funerals and coffins are about recognizing our loss, experiencing our grief and releasing it. We mourn our dead, and commend their remains back to the void – be it the grave or the pyre. The ritual treatment of our dead is as much for the living as it is for the deceased. It allows us to experience our loss, mourn it, and then make peace with it.

The imagery of the ghost cautions us what happens when we cannot make that peace. When the specter of the past lingers, frightful and festering. We become trapped by it, haunted by memories we have no ability to process and no ability to change. Shades of our former selves, with all the joy and vitality leached away from our continued existence.

It's worth considering the relationship between the Ace of Spades, the Five of Spades, and the Nine of Spades. All relate to death imagery in

some form. The Ace of Spades is the moment of death itself. The dramatic, irreversible change that tears away the *status quo*. The Five of Spades relates to the remains after death: the corpse or the cadaver or the skeleton. The shell of the physical body left behind after the moment of death. The Nine of Spades is about our processing of the loss and our treatment of the remains. Are we able to mourn our losses and go on with our lives? Or do we become haunted by them? The Nine of Spades covers both.

12 The Tens

If the playing card suits tell a story, the tens are the epilogue. The nines are more about the climactic result of the forces and patterns that have been building within a suit. The tens are the aftermath of that climax, once everything has settled down into a new equilibrium. All the tens deal with new realities brought about by the energies of their respective suits.

Ten of Diamonds: The Aftermath of Power – “Joy”

All the diamonds are linked with the flow of power and resources. The nine gave us permission to ask the question “with our accumulated power, how do we change the world?” The ten then is about life after we have successfully enacted that change. Our dreams have materialized. Our wishes have come true. The disruption caused by any change fades away, and leaves the world once more stable, but in a new shape. We have the joy of seeing what we have wrought, and deeming it good.

At its most basic level, the Ten of Diamonds is about that joy. It is the delight that results when we have the means to reshape the world in accordance with our will. It’s a card that also gets associated with imagery of a treasure chest (with its obvious wealth implications) and sunlight. For me this is sunlight in the moment that it breaks through the clouds, brightening the whole world and causing it to sparkle. When we have the resources we need, when we are not worried about the future, we have more opportunity to take joy in small moments of delight.

Ten of Clubs: The Aftermath of Labor – “Stewardship”

Throughout the suit of clubs we have built towards a goal, working – alone and with others – towards the achievement of some end. In the Nine of Clubs we attained that end, and reaped the rewards of our efforts. The Ten of Clubs is what comes after.

It is a card that recognizes that the work doesn’t stop when your goals are achieved. There is a pause for celebration at harvest, but then further work to preserve that harvest and put the farm to bed for the winter. It is hopefully not as urgent and grueling as the work required to initially get you to this point, but it requires care and attention nonetheless.

Hutcheson associates this card with imagery of flocks or herds of livestock,

and with clouds. This ties in very neatly with the agrarian metaphors we have used for many of the clubs up to this point. Even a bountiful flock needs tending to, lest it decline. Even a mature orchard needs the rain. The Ten of Clubs is a card that reminds us that we are starting a new era of labor. One where we must watch over what we have built, and tend it carefully to keep it healthy.

Ten of Hearts: The Aftermath of Intimacy – “Family”

Where the Nine of Hearts was about the establishment of a new family unit, the Ten is about that family once it is established. The relationships are stable, the roles have been agreed upon, the routines are comfortable. There is a sense of contentment in such a family, derived from mutual caring and support.

When our family unit is in harmony, whether it be a family of blood or of choice, it becomes a source of strength for every member. It forms a safe and stable foundation from which we can launch our ventures, and a source of support should those ventures fail.

Sometimes this card is also associated with imagery of a fire. Occasionally, in a romantic reading, this might be metaphorical fire – a relationship that is satisfyingly *hot*. But often this speaks to the more literal role fire has played as the center of the domestic sphere. In times past the fire served as a source of warmth and light, and as a focal point for the cooking of shared food. Even today, where we have electric stoves and central heating, people congregate around fire. There is a cozy, homelike quality to an indoor fire, which draws people into its sphere of warmth, light, and relaxation. This is the essence of the Ten of Hearts.

Ten of Spades: The Aftermath of Strife – “Ruins”

After war, life goes on. The dead are mourned. Wounds heal. Communities rebuild. People adapt to their new circumstances, and some semblance of normalcy is restored. But despite this restoration, the scars of conflicts past are still visible. Today’s peace doesn’t erase yesterday’s violence.

The Ten of Spades is about this legacy of violence. It’s about the traces left behind long after the struggle is past. Traces that may eventually fade, but slowly. The legacy of violence has a long half-life. This is a card that speaks to both our resilience and our fragility.

Hutcheson associates this card with imagery of a cemetery or a ruined church. Both very tangible reminders of things that were lost to conflict. The dreams of the past cut short before their time. Personally, I also associate this card with imagery of physical scarring. Old wounds, now long healed over, but healed in a way different from their original form. Scars which can be mental and emotional as often as physical. The Ten of Spades is a card which recognizes that strife changes the world, for better or worse, indelibly.

13 The Jacks

We've now covered the meanings of all the pip cards, ace through ten, in playing card divination. That brings us to the court cards: jack, queen, and king. Compared to the numbers, the court cards – especially the jacks – can be a little slippery. They each have a number of possible meanings, depending on the question and the context, and pulling the right meaning out in any given reading is as much art as science.

Most often the court cards represent the people involved in a situation. Frequently they signify people who embody the qualities of their respective suit (at least in relation to the question at hand). A court card from the suit of hearts being someone sensitive and caring, a court card from the suit of clubs being someone meticulous and hard working, etc.

Alternatively, the court cards sometimes describe the physical appearance of a person, rather than their personality characteristics. In this case, the cards form a spectrum from fair to dark: diamonds → hearts → clubs → spades. A blonde woman, for example, might show up as the Queen of Diamonds. Not because she is especially powerful, but simply because she is blonde. In my experience this is less common, and usually shows up in readings where you're asking about an unknown person, and information about their appearance might be helpful to identify them.

Finally, many of the court cards have their own specific imagery as well, similar to the pip cards. The King of Diamonds, for example, might refer to a bank or a court case – rather than a powerful man. All of which is to say that some intuition is required to interpret a reading when the court cards make an appearance.

Mirroring our discussion of the pip cards, we're going to take the court cards one level at a time, starting with the jacks (also called the *knaves*). When the jacks describe a person, it is a youth. This might be a child, a teenager, or a young adult, of any gender.

The line between jack and queen/king is as much about life stage as it is about physical age; a young professional who likes to go out partying with their friends might still show up as a jack at twenty-eight, a responsible young parent would likely show up as a king or queen even at twenty-two.

The jacks can also represent messages or the flow of information. In this case, the suit represents the character or quality of the information in question.

Jack of Diamonds: The Youth of Power – “Change”

As a person, the Jack of Diamonds is a spirited and joyful youth, especially a girl. Perhaps one who can tip over into willfulness. It can also describe a young person of very fair hair or complexion.

In relation to messages, the Jack of Diamonds represents good news. This is most often good news that precipitates some change in circumstances.

Jack of Clubs: The Youth of Labor – “Peer”

Describing a person, the Jack of Clubs can be a diligent and industrious youth. One who isn't afraid of hard work, or is more responsible than expected for their age. It can also describe a young person of moderately dark hair or complexion.

The Jack of Clubs also regularly comes up in relation to peers: siblings, co-workers, or friends. In romantic readings, it can show up to signify a close relationship, but one without a romantic spark – a desire to be friends rather than lovers.

In relation to messages, the Jack of Clubs usually represents new information related to a job or career. Not necessarily good or bad news, but something that resolves a question you've been waiting to hear back on.

Jack of Hearts: The Youth of Intimacy – “Children”

As a person, the Jack of Hearts can be a sensitive and empathetic youth, especially a boy. Someone displaying high emotional intelligence. It can also describe a young person of moderately fair hair or complexion. More than any of the other jacks, the Jack of Hearts is often associated with very young children: pregnancies, babies, or toddlers.

In relation to messages, the Jack of Hearts represents news about family. Again, not specifically good or bad news, but news of a change in circumstances for someone in your family.

Jack of Spades: The Youth of Strife – “Enemy”

The Jack of Spades is bad news – literally and figuratively.

The Jack of Spades can describe a young person who is angry, troubled, or prone to lash out. Perhaps one harboring a grudge or special enmity towards the querent. It might be someone who is putting on a friendly appearance,

but is ready to throw you under the bus as soon as it advances their own agenda. It can also describe a youth of very dark hair or complexion.

With messages, the Jack of Spades is an unpleasant surprise. It's the arrival of bad news. Sometimes this is news you've been waiting for, sometimes it's out of the blue, but it wrecks your day either way.

14 The Queens

We started talking about court cards in divination last chapter with the jacks, this chapter we're continuing that conversation with the queens. The queens are a little more straightforward than the jacks, in that they more consistently signify people. The jacks all have alternative meanings related to news or messages; the queens don't. When a queen comes up you can be reasonably confident it's talking about a person.

Just like the jacks, the queens generally signify people who embody the traits of their specific suits. But where the jacks denote young people, the queens denote women.⁵ A sensitive, caring woman in the Queen of Hearts, a harsh or troubled woman in the Queen of Spades, etc.

Again – as with the jacks – the queens can also describe appearance. The spectrum of coloration is the same: fairest with the Queen of Diamonds, darkening through hearts and clubs, and darkest with the Queen of Spades.

Queen of Diamonds: The Lady of Power – “Matriarch”

The Queen of Diamonds is a powerful woman. That might be a wealthy woman, a beautiful one, or one invested with special authority in the situation in question. In occult circles she might come up to signify a sorceress. Regardless of the source of her power, the Queen of Diamonds has leverage, and she knows it.

There is an aspect of traditionality associated with the Queen of Diamonds, in a way that is a struggle to articulate. This card is a matriarch. She likes the proper forms to be observed. Sometimes this card comes up in readings to signify a wedding, but in this case it's as much about the ritual surrounding the wedding than the lovers themselves. A wedding as an occasion for social spectacle.

I associate the Queen of Diamonds with the goddess Freyja. Freyja is often viewed as a love goddess, sort of a Norse equivalent to Aphrodite, this is a very shallow interpretation. She is a goddess of love, true (though generally *not* one associated with motherhood). But also a goddess of wealth. And of battle. And of magic – specifically *seið* magic, which encompasses glamour and enchantment. In short, she is a goddess of power; of those passions that drive us, but can also twist our minds. Those are facets worth exploring within the persona of the Queen of Diamonds.

⁵Or, in a less binary sense, people who identify or present as women.

Queen of Clubs: The Lady of Labor – “Caregiver”

We associated the Queen of Diamonds with matriarchy, but not necessarily motherhood. The Queen of Clubs definitely speaks to motherhood. But not an idealized, unrealistic version of motherhood. This is a card that signifies the pragmatic, repetitive, often thankless work that real motherhood entails.

It’s also a card I associate with caregivers of other forms: nurses, teachers, any who do the work to take care of those in need. There is a grace to such roles. The Queen of Clubs may not be as glamorous as the Queen of Diamonds, but she keeps the world running.

The women represented by the Queen of Clubs give good advice. This is someone you can go to in times of trouble, and count on getting sound, practical guidance based on lived experience. It may not be the advice you *want* to hear, but it’s always what you *need* to hear.

Queen of Hearts: The Lady of Intimacy – “Romantic”

The interpretation of the Queen and King of Hearts are one of the few places where I deviate substantially from Hutcheson’s *Fifty-Four Devils* system. He lists the meanings of these two cards as either “self” or “soulmate,” depending on how the querent identifies. For example, a woman asking for a reading would be represented by the Queen of Hearts, and her soulmate would show up as the King of Hearts.

I have two issues with this. First, it assumes a very normative view of relationships. Is a gay man going to be represented by the queen or the king? How about someone who doesn’t identify with either? What about multi-partner relationships? Romantic interactions come in a lot of flavors, and not all fit a binary representation.

Second, I have issues with the whole “soulmate” or “twin flame” concept generally. *Particularly* when it comes to divination. I’ve never found the idea that there is a singular, perfect partner for everyone to be super compelling. I think it undersells the complexity and compromise involved in good relationships. Also, even well intentioned diviners have caused a lot of heartache by trying to identify people’s soulmates. What if you identify someone as “my soulmate” but they’re already married to someone else? What if my “soulmate” doesn’t want anything to do with me? How far might I push pursuing that relationship if I thought it was my one chance at happiness?

Instead, I read the Queen of Hearts just like any other queen. A woman

who is sensitive and empathetic, with high emotional intelligence. Perhaps one of moderately fair hair or complexion. She might be a woman you are strongly attracted to, or feel a deep sense of connection with. Maybe someone you could form (or already have formed) a deep relationship with. But not someone unique in all the world.

Queen of Spades: The Lady of Strife – “Harpy”

The Queen of Spades is a woman who instigates trouble. She might be an overbearing mother (or mother-in-law). A shrewish ex-wife. A back-stabbing gossip. A homewrecking temptress. A rival for the affections of your romantic interest.

In any case, she works consistently against you. Cutting you down, either to your face or behind your back. While it may not be feasible to cut ties with this woman entirely, you’re going to be better off putting as much distance between yourself and her as you can, and setting clear boundaries on the places you do need to interact.

15 The Kings

Over the last couple chapters we've been looking at the meanings of the jacks and queens in playing card divination. This one we're wrapping up our discussion of the court cards with the kings.

Like all the court cards, the kings can represent people, typically men⁶ who embody the characteristics of their respective suits. To make things more complex, several of the kings also have non-person meanings associated with them, similar to our interpretations of the pip cards.

King of Diamonds: The Lord of Power – “Monarch”

The King of Diamonds is a powerful man. He might be wealthy, charismatic, or invested with some special authority in relation to the situation in question. In readings related to occult matters, this might indicate an accomplished magician. The social circles of power and privilege orbit around people like the King of Diamonds. The King of Diamonds rules over an empire, either literally or figuratively.

Because of the association with established power, the King of Diamonds can sometimes come up to signify institutions, rather than people. This is most common with government or financial institutions: boards, banks, hedge funds, etc. Anything where the few are directing the course of the many might fall in scope here.

The King of Diamonds is also associated with legal matters – but specifically civil law, rather than criminal. Lawsuits, contract litigation, or property disputes all might show up here.

King of Clubs: The Lord of Labor – “Leader”

Where the King of Diamonds rules on authority, the King of Clubs rules on competence. Like the King of Diamonds, this card also represents a powerful man in a position of leadership, but it is leadership derived from the wise judgement of long experience. The King of Clubs has been around long enough to see how the world works, and to know how to navigate it with prudence and foresight.

This might be the patriarch of a family, whom everyone goes to for his sound advice. It might be a judge, presiding over complex legal cases. It

⁶Or those who identify or present as men.

might be a general, who earned his position through long and distinguished service.

In each case, there is an element of discernment present with the King of Clubs. Practical expertise and long experience combine, to form a strong intuition. This enables intricate situations to be navigated swiftly and successfully. The King of Clubs holds his position of leadership on his own merits.

King of Hearts: The Lord of Intimacy – “Confidant”

We’ve already touched on some of the possible interpretations of the King of Hearts in our discussion of the queen. Hutcheson attributes it as meaning either “self” (in cases where the querent is male) or “soulmate” (in cases where the querent is female). I have a number of issues with this, which we already discussed with the Queen of Hearts.

Instead I prefer to interpret the King of Hearts in a similar way to the other kings. This card represents a sensitive and empathetic man, with a high degree of emotional intelligence. He might be a man you are strongly attracted to, physically or emotionally. Perhaps someone with whom you feel a strong sense of connection or kinship. Someone you could form, or already have formed, a deep relationship with.

For those in a loving romantic relationship with a man, the King of Hearts might symbolize their existing romantic partner. But not a perfect soulmate you are destined to be with.

King of Spades: The Lord of Strife – “Kingpin”

The King of Spades is a nemesis. He’s a man in a position of power or influence, and one whose interactions with you are entirely governed by malice. This might be a vindictive boss, an abusive ex, or the leader of a criminal gang. In every case, he’s a man who instigates trouble for you.

The trouble caused by the King of Spades is generally more straightforward than that caused by the queen. Where the Queen of Spades is likely to poison your social circle against you behind your back, the king is more likely to show up unannounced and try to kick your teeth in. There’s a directness, of anger or violence, that characterizes the King of Spades. He’s not subtle, because he doesn’t need to be. He is – or thinks he is – untouchable.

Alternatively, the King of Spades can also refer to legal matters. In this sense, the King of Spades refers specifically to criminal cases (just as the King of Diamonds covered civil matters). Often these are criminal cases in which you are the target of the accusations or charges – whether those charges are grounded in truth or not.

Regardless of whether it comes up representing people or situations, the King of Spades warns you to watch not just your back, but your front as well.

16 The Jokers

We've now covered the meanings of all the cards – ace through king – in playing card divination. But open up any brand new deck of playing cards, and you will find two additional cards included: the jokers.

These two cards don't belong to any specific suit. They're included with the deck as replacement cards; if a card were to get lost, you could substitute one of the jokers in instead, and still have a full deck of cards. Most of the time, in card games, the jokers just get pulled out. And you can do the same thing in divination.

But you don't have to. You can, if you like, leave the jokers in. In this case, they have their own special meaning when they come up in a reading. I treat the jokers as an obscuring factor.

They might come up in a situation where the answer to your question is still in flux. Where the threads of fate come together in such a way that multiple possible futures are open, depending on the choices of the people involved. The situation is still in balance, and hasn't yet "broken" one way or another. This is the cartomantic equivalent of "Future unclear, ask again later" from a Magic 8 Ball.

Alternatively, the jokers might come up in a case where the future *is* set, but there's some aspect of it that's important for you to stay ignorant of. As you get more fluent in divination, you can go overboard on trying to do readings for everything. Becoming paralyzed by analyzing all the possible futures, and trying to guide yourself towards some perfect one. The jokers give the universe an opportunity to tell you to get back in your own lane. Sometimes you have to be comfortable operating with less than perfect information.

Finally, the jokers can come up to mean a lack of clarity or visibility in a more mundane sense. Back when I was doing daily card draws, I several times pulled jokers on days when smog from wildfire smoke was particularly bad. Nothing related to fate or uncertainty, but a very literal reduction in visibility.

Looking at them, you'll notice the jokers are not identical. Typically one is in color, while the other is black and white. In my own practice I read them the exact same way, but there's no reason that has to be the case. You could decide that some meanings are distinct to one versus the other. Perhaps the colored one meaning "future uncertain" and the black and white one meaning "this is not for you to know." Or you might assign

your own meanings to them, if there are things that you want to include in your divination vocabulary that you don't feel are adequately covered by the other cards.

In fact you can do this with any card. The system of meanings I've presented here is the one I like, because it has a nice internal coherence to it. The suits mean things. The numbers mean things. It's easy to reason about what a specific number within a specific suit should mean. But there's nothing magical about these particular meanings. You'll find other traditional systems of interpretation that are wildly different from what I've outlined here. As you become a more experienced reader, you'll develop nuanced associations with particular cards that go well beyond what I've laid out. Some of those may reinforce my ideas, some of them may diverge. That's fine. The important part is that *you* have a clear idea of what the cards mean. You and your deck will speak the same language.

And, as far as this version of that language goes, we're basically done. I've covered the meaning of all fifty-four cards in a standard deck. At this point you have all the tools you need to pick up a deck of cards and start doing readings.

There are a couple additional topics I want to touch on before wrapping up this series, just to tie everything up neatly. Next chapter we're going to cover building your own spreads, and some considerations that go into making good playing card spreads, which might be different from other systems. Finally, we're going to go through some example readings to help illustrate what this system could actually look like in practice, to help take it out of the realm of the theoretical and make it more concrete.

17 Spreads and Questions

We've gone through the meanings of all the cards in a standard deck of playing cards. The vocabulary of playing card divination, if you will. This chapter we're looking at how those cards interact and relate to each other and to the question being asked. The grammar and syntax of our divination system.

One of my biggest pet peeves (in the context of playing card divination), is when novice readers post pictures of their spreads online and ask for help interpreting, with no context whatsoever on the spread in question. They will often have drawn some huge number of cards (well over a dozen in some cases) and laid them all out in a line. What does this indicate? Not much.

Remember, the vocabulary of playing card divination is fairly limited. There are at most fifty-four different cards that can come up. Drawing a dozen of them in a single spread is like trying to write a coherent essay that uses 25% of the words in the English language – each exactly once. It's more an exercise in frustration than a useful practice. A three-act story is easy to follow, a sixteen-act story is gibberish.

If you're going to draw more than a couple cards (and generally even then) it is enormously helpful to define upfront what each position in the spread will mean. Know how many cards you're planning to draw before you start, and have a clear idea of what concept or domain each of them map to. "This first card represents the root cause of the issue, this second one represents other people's perspectives on it..." and so on. People are almost always taught to do this when learning tarot, but often miss it with playing card divination. Going back to our essay analogy, it's like including an introduction, thesis, conclusion, etc. The structure itself provides a helpful framework that facilitates interpretation.

And with divination, as with essays, brevity is king. More words do not necessarily convey more information. The vast majority of the readings I do for myself consist of two or three cards. Enough to provide some color, but not so many as to make interpretation overwhelming. If I have further questions, I'll then do a series of follow-up readings to clarify those. It works like a conversation, rather than a legal contract. There's no need to enumerate every possible ambiguity up front.

Even when I put together complex spreads, they are almost always composed of simpler spreads. A three-card yes/no or past/present/future spread, paired with one or more two-card spreads to speak to specific aspects of the

situation.

Because playing cards – unlike tarot cards – have no reversals, it can be helpful to include positions in your spread that provide the same functionality. Build in space for cards to indicate things which are lacking or things holding you back. This effectively doubles the vocabulary you have available to you.

Two-card spreads are perfect for this. You can easily pair a direct, positive position with a complementary negative position: What you need to bring to a situation to accomplish your goals, and what you need to refrain from. What you're pursuing and what you're avoiding. What you have in abundance in a relationship, and what feels like it's missing. It's easy to define two-card spreads on the fly, that speak directly to the question you have in mind.

Which brings us to the framing of the question itself. I have a whole post on [how to ask good questions for divination](#), which I recommend you take a few minutes to read, if you haven't. The most relevant bit, for playing card divination, is to frame your questions such that an affirmative response is a positive outcome.

Early in the series, in our discussion on color, we mentioned that red cards are generally more positive and black cards are generally more negative. Red cards are also usually interpreted as an affirmative response to a yes or no question, while black cards are the reverse.

This can lead to some weird interactions if you ask questions about outcomes you fear. Say you ask a question like “will my boyfriend break up with me?” and get a card like the Eight of Hearts – which we had said was associated with flirtation and pillow talk. Does that mean yes, because the card is red? Does it mean no, because there's still a flirtatious spark in your relationship? Will your breakup prompt you to go flirt with new people? It's not immediately clear.

In contrast, if you were to frame the question as “will my relationship with my boyfriend continue to grow stronger?” then the cards have a number of options to choose from. The Six of Hearts: yes, and he will be loyal to you. The Two of Hearts: yes, and the sex will be good. The Five of Diamonds: yes, and you will make each other laugh. There are a whole host of positive cards that can show up here, all with their own shades of meaning that can add to the interpretation.

Which is all great in theory. But one of the best ways to learn to communicate effectively with your deck – how to ask good questions and confidently

interpret the answers you get – is to practice. Start simple, with a card or two, and go do some readings. Write down your question, exactly as you stated it, the cards that came up, and how you interpreted them. A few months down the line, go back and look at that record again. You'll be amazed at how much more fluently you can interpret things, and the kinds of details that will jump out at you with the benefit of both hindsight and experience.

18 Putting It All Together

For this entire document, we’ve been going through a cohesive system of divination using playing cards. We’ve covered the meanings of the colors, the suits, the various numbers, the court cards, and the jokers. We’ve looked at how to structure spreads and questions to get clearer, more actionable readings. In this last chapter, I want to put everything together in a quick example reading.

For easy reference, I’ve pulled the meanings of the various cards together into the table in Appendix A. It is highly recommended that you read the entries for particular cards, to pick up on the nuanced differences between them. But if you just need a quick reminder (“What does the Seven of Spades mean again?”), this table can help jog your memory.

An Example Reading

To help make this more concrete, let’s walk through an example scenario, and how I might conduct a reading.

Let’s say the querent in question – we’ll call her Jane – has a tumultuous relationship with her boss at work. She often feels like she is being singled out in team settings, or that she is being specifically set up for failure.

The first question I might ask is something like “Is this perception accurate? Is Jane actually being singled out by her boss?” Because this is an easy yes-or-no question, I’d probably start with a three-card yes/no spread, like we talked about early in the series. You could potentially just pull a single card, but I like the additional insight you get with three.

I actually did this reading, and the three cards that came up in response to this question were the King of Spades, the Eight of Diamonds, and the Ten of Diamonds. Looking first at the color, we see we have two reds and a black: a qualified yes. Jane is correct that she is being specifically targeted by her boss. It’s not an unqualified yes, so there may be some additional factor she’s not aware of (perhaps other people are being targeted as well), but she is largely correct in her assertion.

Because I’m mostly interested in the yes-or-no answer at this point, I’m not going to go too deep on looking at the sequence of colors or suits as a story. But it’s worth noting that we start with black (spades), before transitioning to red (diamonds). That indicates this has been a rocky relationship from day one, rather than there being some specific event that turned it sour.

Finally, I'll look at the cards themselves. First up is the King of Spades – a very apt card to see here. This is the most immediately informative card in the spread. The King of Spades can mean wrath, violence, or a male rival. Specifically one who is used to operating as a power unto himself, and thinks the rules don't apply to him. We've learned that the boss in question is most likely a man, and a little bit more about his temperament. Cards two and three are less directly informative, but tell us something about the reasons the boss might be targeting Jane. The Eight of Diamonds (Reputation) and the Ten of Diamonds (Joy) are pretty positive cards. I'd read that as Jane having a reputation for being highly effective at her job, and the boss feeling threatened by that reputation, her passion, and her ability to effectively accomplish hard tasks at work.

We now have a little bit of a picture about the situation at hand. But really, the goal of any divination is to give you some actionable intelligence. What's the best course of action here? My next question would probably be a two-card reading on how to improve this work situation. The first card being what Jane needs to bring to the situation to improve things, and the second card being what Jane needs to withhold from this situation.

The two cards that came up for me were the Two of Clubs and the Eight of Clubs. Both interesting, work-related cards, but not immediately straightforward to interpret. The thing Jane needs to bring to improve this situation is the Two of Clubs: the Partnership card. That could be read either as Jane making some sort of agreement with her boss that lets them work together, or forming a partnership with someone else to help improve things. Given the context we have about the situation, I read that as the latter.¹ The thing Jane needs to bring here is allies. She should be looking for other folks within the company to team up with for mutual support. Particularly if Jane isn't the only person being targeted, that's a sound strategy.

The next card, what should be withheld, is more interesting. The Eight of Clubs is the card of collaboration and work-related communications. I read that as Jane needing to be less transparent about her plans, to limit her boss's ability to sabotage them. This is counterintuitive advice, since generally I think transparent communication improves most relationships. But the indication seems to be that the relationship here is unsalvageable, and less interaction will give less opportunity for issues to arise. Given the perhaps-controversial nature of that advice, another card could be drawn here, to clarify or confirm.

Taken together, I read these cards to mean that Jane should start routing

around her boss. She should be cultivating a network of supportive co-workers, ideally those who have experienced similar interactions, and then relying on that network to get things done even in the face of a hostile manager.

From here the reading could continue, to look at other factors that might be in play, or examine how the situation is likely to evolve over the next year if Jane follows the advice outlined. But this example has already gone on for a while, so I'll wrap it up here.

Where Do You Go From Here?

You can study as much as you like about the theory of divination, but the only way to actually develop the skill yourself (as with any other skill) is through practice. Start reading cards regularly.

One easy way to do this is by starting to draw a daily card every morning. This is useful both from a purely pragmatic standpoint – a flashcard-style drill to remember the meaning of at least one card a day – and also to form your own conceptions of the card meanings. If you draw a card in the morning, and then reflect in the evening about what happened during the day that might relate to or embody that card, you'll start to make connections beyond just the imagery I've outlined. You'll take my definitions and make them your own.

While daily card draws are helpful, they are not sufficient to become a skilled reader. You also have to take a stab at reading for specific questions. You can start with made up scenarios, like the one outlined above, but you'll get the most mileage out of real questions you can use a real answer to.

What you get out of this practice is precisely commensurate with what you put in.

Appendix A: Quick Reference

Card	Title	Keyword	Imagery
A ♦	The Seed of Power	Opportunity	A coin, a letter
2 ♦	The Polarity of Power	Differential	A transfer of funds, birds
3 ♦	The Bounty of Power	Beneficence	A gift, a fountain
4 ♦	The Stability of Power	Conservatism	A closed purse, no news
5 ♦	The Embodiment of Power	Luck	Good luck, laughter
6 ♦	The Direction of Power	Acquisition	Streets of gold, good decisions
7 ♦	The Shadow of Power	Deceit	Lies, deception
8 ♦	The Words of Power	Reputation	Gossip, idle chatter
9 ♦	The Culmination of Power	Idealism	Daydreams, peace
10 ♦	The Aftermath of Power	Joy	A treasure chest, sunlight
J ♦	The Youth of Power	Change	A girl, good news
Q ♦	The Lady of Power	Matriarch	A good wife, an elaborate wedding, sensuality
K ♦	The Lord of Power	Monarch	A bank, an institution, a civil trial
A ♣	The Seed of Labor	Planning	A cave, solitude, planning
2 ♣	The Polarity of Labor	Partnership	A handshake, a business deal
3 ♣	The Bounty of Labor	Obstacles	A stone wall
4 ♣	The Stability of Labor	Patience	A planted field, a loaded cart
5 ♣	The Embodiment of Labor	Health	A healthy body, a barn
6 ♣	The Direction of Labor	Direction	Footprints, a clear trail
7 ♣	The Shadow of Labor	Worry	Doubts, worries, stress
8 ♣	The Words of Labor	Collaboration	Shop talk, a table, a workbench

9 ♣	The Culmination of Labor	Harvest	Reaping a field, an orchard, a forest
10 ♣	The Aftermath of Labor	Stewardship	A herd or flock, rainclouds
J ♣	The Youth of Labor	Peer	A friend, a sibling
Q ♣	The Lady of Labor	Caregiver	A mother, a nurse, a wise woman
K ♣	The Lord of Labor	Leader	A father, a judge, a general
A ♥	The Seed of Intimacy	Desire	A kiss, infatuation, feeling lonely
2 ♥	The Polarity of Intimacy	Coupling	Lovers, sex, intimacy
3 ♥	The Bounty of Intimacy	Friendship	A wish granted, a full cup
4 ♥	The Stability of Intimacy	Reservation	A locked trunk, a travel case
5 ♥	The Embodiment of Intimacy	Fertility	A chapel, a bed, fertility
6 ♥	The Direction of Intimacy	Fidelity	A dog, loyalty, stamina
7 ♥	The Shadow of Intimacy	Jealousy	Jealousy, hatred, fear
8 ♥	The Words of Intimacy	Flirtation	Seduction, flirtation, pillow talk
9 ♥	The Culmination of Intimacy	Nesting	A small house, a cottage, a new life
10 ♥	The Aftermath of Intimacy	Family	A happy family, a fire
J ♥	The Youth of Intimacy	Children	A baby, a cradle, a young boy
Q ♥	The Lady of Intimacy	Romantic	A sensitive woman, attraction
K ♥	The Lord of Intimacy	Confidant	A sensitive man, attraction
A ♠	The Seed of Strife	Death	Death, sudden change
2 ♠	The Polarity of Strife	Duel	A duel, separation
3 ♠	The Bounty of Strife	Battle	A battle, setbacks
4 ♠	The Stability of Strife	Prison	Mire, the four horsemen

5 ♠	The Embodiment of Strife	Illness	Illness, wounds, a corpse
6 ♠	The Direction of Strife	Temptation	Temptations, sins, bad decisions
7 ♠	The Shadow of Strife	Righteousness	Tears, blood, war
8 ♠	The Words of Strife	Shouting	An argument, shouting
9 ♠	The Culmination of Strife	Mourning	A funeral, a coffin, a ghost
10 ♠	The Aftermath of Strife	Ruins	A cemetery, a ruined church
J ♠	The Youth of Strife	Enemy	A rebel, a backstabber, bad news
Q ♠	The Lady of Strife	Harpy	A cruel mother, a seductress, a false friend, a female rival
K ♠	The Lord of Strife	Kingpin	A criminal, an executioner, a male rival, wrath, violence
Joker	—	—	An undefined future, information withheld, vision obscured