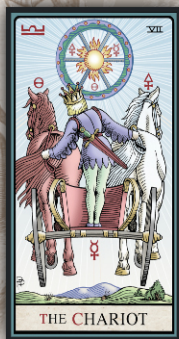


The Alchemical Tarot

complete descriptions for
the 80-card tarot deck



by Robert M. Place

TINCTVR -
COAGVLATION -

Hermes Publications

Saugerties, New York

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Introduction

In August 1987, during the time of the Harmonic Convergence, I was studying an alchemical image that symbolized the Philosopher's Stone, the mystical goal of the alchemical work, and I had a flash of insight. It seemed that the image had unlocked a secret door in my mind and in an instant I saw that the alchemical Great Work and the story told in the Tarot's trumps were interchangeable. I immediately picked up my copy of Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy* and began to make notes in the margins next to the alchemical images comparing them to Tarot cards. This was the beginning of a process that would take several years. The fruit of this insight and labor was *The Alchemical Tarot*, which was first published by Thorsons, in 1995.

In this new edition, the illustrations have been improved and the columns that flanked the cards on the original have been removed. The images are larger, filling more of the card. In keeping with the explicit nature of alchemical symbolism, the image that I originally drew for the lovers card was sexier than the censored version that was published by Thorsons. This edition contains both versions of the Lovers. This edition also contains a twenty-second trump card, called Truth. It will be described in its place at the end of the trumps.

The Fool and trumps in *The Alchemical Tarot* each relate to an alchemical material or process, which is part of the Magnum Opus (great work) of alchemy that leads to the creation of the Philosopher's Stone, a mystical catalyst that transforms what it touches into its highest form. Composed of the mysterious fifth element, it can cure any illness, turn lead into gold, and turn an ordinary person into an enlightened sage.

A symbol representing its alchemical process is displayed on each trump. The Philosopher's Stone, is represented by the World card. The four minor suits are related to the four alchemical elements: Earth, Water, Air, and Fire, and each of these elements is related to one of the four functions of consciousness as described by Jung: sensation, intuition, thinking, and feeling respectively. Thus the feminine elements align with the passive observational functions: sensation and intuition, and the masculine elements align with the active decision-making functions: thinking and feeling.

The Card Back



The backs of the cards on the 6th edition of *The Alchemical Tarot* contain an image of the Anima Mundi as “Lady Alchemia” It is based on an engraving found in *Collectanea Chymica*, Morley and Muykens, 1693.

Lady Alchemia stands on the Earth; her hair is Fire; her breath is Air; and her breasts pour forth Virgin’s Milk, which is the Water of Life. These four elements are marked with their symbols.

The Lady’s eyes are the Sun and Moon, and her brow holds the seven-pointed star. She holds the Fixed and the Volatile animals, a lizard and an eagle; her dress is composed of the seven metals plus Sulphur; and her winged feet tell us that she is also Mercury, the Quinta Essentia, in his female form.

In the background, we find the symbol for the Opus, a circle with a triangle, a square, and another circle. There are also the symbols for four essential aspects of the Opus: the prima materia, putrefaction, resurrection, and the Stone as the Anima Mundi.

The green letters spell Alchemia’s name, and in the corners we find four red letters that spell TARO. By occupying the corners, they turn the image into a quincunx, with Alchemia in the sacred center. This is the same sacred mandala that is found on the World card.

0. The Fool



In *The Alchemical Tarot*, the Fool represents the neophyte alchemist, who begins the Opus, and will persist to the end to obtain *The Philosopher's Stone*. He starts in ignorance, and he wears green, the color of beginnings because it is unripe. As he persists, his foolishness will ripen to become a type of wisdom. This Fool is based on the alchemist on the bottom of the third page of Michelspacher's *Cabala, Mirror of Art and Nature: In Alchemy*, 1616. Here the Fool is blindfolded, a common Renaissance symbol for ignorance or blindness. The word blind itself derives from the Indo-European term *bhlendhow*, which means confusion and not knowing where to go. It is related to the word blunder, which comes from the Old Norse term *blunda*, to

shut one's eyes. The Fool does not yet recognize the *Materia Prima*, the first substance needed for the Work. Not knowing how to proceed, he follows his guide, the hare, who leads him into the dark interior of the Earth, which signifies the first black stage of the Opus, the *Nigredo*. This is the same hare that will appear later on the Ace of Coins.

M	V	C	0	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

0. The Fool

The star over the Fool's head is the Platonic star that guides every person through life. In Jungian terms, it is the Higher Self. The feathers in the Fool's cap, colored in the alchemical opposites: red and white, are a symbol of foolishness.

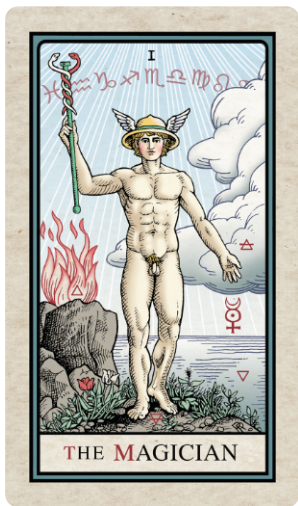
They are like the feathers found in the oldest version of this card, but they also function like antennae or sensors for the Higher Self. The glyph in the sky in front of him represents the squaring of the circle. This describes the process of the Opus.

Psychologically, the Fool represents the natural mind. He is a beginner and, like all novices, he has to be ready to make a fool of himself if he is going to learn and mature. If the Fool appears in a reading, you may determine if his foolishness is really justifiable trust in divine guidance or a detriment to his wellbeing, by paying attention to the cards that flank him and to which one he is facing.



M	V	C	0	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

I. The Magician



In *The Alchemical Tarot*, the Magician is not an alchemical process but the matter of the Opus, called the *Materia Prima*. Mysteriously, he is also the *Anima Mundi*, as is the end result, seen in the *World* card. He is the tail swallowed by the ouroboros. He is *argent vive* (living silver) the basis of all metals. He is *Hermes* or *Mercury*, the god of alchemy, and the seminal ingredient in all things. With him we begin the alchemical Opus.

This image is influenced by the images of *Hermes/Mercury* as the *Materia Prima* in *Altus's Mutus Liber (Silent Book)* of 1677. *Hermes* is the interface between Heaven and Earth and his gesture embodies the Hermetic axiom, “as above, so below.” He commands and unifies the four elements;

these are seen in the background landscape, labeled with the alchemical symbol for each element. He is the power that unifies opposites, symbolized by the red and the white serpents on his caduceus and the red and white flowers at his feet. The staff of his caduceus is green because it is still unripe at the beginning of the Opus.

In alchemy, *Hermes/Mercury* is considered both masculine and feminine. Below his left hand is the glyph for *Mercury*. This version of his glyph is made of the glyphs for the *Sun* and for the *Moon* conjoined with the cross of matter below.

M	V	C	0	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

I. The Magician

This symbol indicates that Mercury/Hermes combines the masculine Sun with the feminine Moon, and connects these celestial bodies with the Earth—"as above so below." The glyphs for the signs of the zodiac arching above him represent the Opus, which is often equated with the path of the Sun through the constellations marking the year.

With his gesture the Magician reminds us that what we seek to create in the world is an inspiration that comes from the Higher Self. He is a visual expression of his axiom but it might be more correct to change it to, "as above, do below." He represents skill—both physical and verbal. He is agile, athletic, eloquent, and confident. He is a messenger of the divine but also a trickster. Alchemically, he represents the initial unity of the elements with the spirit hidden inside.



M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

II. The High Priestess



To me this card represents esoteric spirituality and intuition. It is an experience that cannot be put into words—it therefore represents sacred silence. This is the meaning that I have also tried to express for this card in my decks. In *The Alchemical Tarot*, the image of the High Priestess is more influenced by Smith's illustration than by the Marseilles card. Alchemically, she begins the alchemical process called dissolution, in which the *Materia Prima*, symbolized by the Magician, is dissolved and separated into its four constituent elements, Water (the High Priestess, the feminine soul), Earth (the Empress, the body), Air (the Emperor, the mind), and Fire (the Hierophant, the masculine soul). The symbol above represents water (the

triangle) separated from solution (the wavy lines, like the sign for Aquarius), which is her aspect of the dissolution.

We can find the solution symbol on the Waite Smith Wheel of Fortune, where it is joined with the alchemical symbols for Mercury, Salt, and Sulphur. This glyph is borrowed from Lévi's illustrations in which he referred to this fourth addition to the alchemical trinity as Azoth. Levi, in turn, borrowed it from Etteilla.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

II. The High Priestess

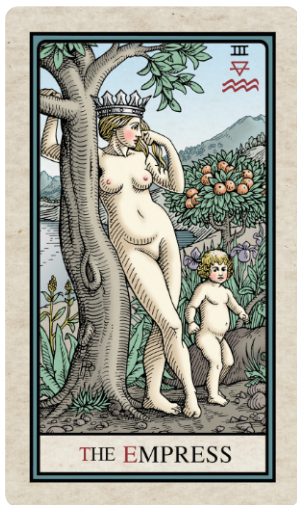
Like Isis, the High Priestess wears the crescent Moon on her head. We see the full Moon in the sky above her, and she stands in a crescent-shaped boat. She is the Moon to the Hierophant's Sun. As a symbol of Water, she represents intuition. She therefore, expresses what cannot be expressed in words, an esoteric spiritual knowledge, which is not found in books but comes from direct experience and from initiation into the mysteries. Like the mysteries of life hidden in the womb, the wisdom of the High Priestess is hidden. Thus, her book is closed, and she is silent. She beckons us to a Gnostic, or personally realized, spirituality. We must discover her secrets for ourselves by deciphering her symbols. To show that her wisdom cannot be put into words, she holds her finger to her lips. This gesture is borrowed from the image of the Sorror Mystica in Altus's *Mutus Liber* (*Silent Book*), 1677, but it originally stemmed from images of the Hellenistic Egyptian god of silence Harpocrates.



The High Priestess is the ultimate ruler of Water, which is an archetypal symbol for the unconscious. Sailing in her moon-boat on the sea, she is the gateway to the unconscious. She acts as a messenger who surfaces from the unseen depths, bringing inner wisdom to our conscious awareness. She encourages us to see what is hidden—to read between the lines, to find subtleties, nuances, patterns, and connections. This is the card of intuition, dreams, and esoteric knowledge, but in its simplest form it may only be a reference to silence.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

III. The Empress



In *The Alchemical Tarot*, the Empress continues the process of dissolution of the *Materia Prima*, begun by the High Priestess, and represents the element Earth in this process, which is related to the Sensation function. We can see that the Earth glyph has risen out of the symbol for solution at the top corner of her card. Besides Earth, the Empress represents the alchemical vessel, which nurtures the creation of *The Philosopher's Stone*. She is related to the Earth Mother, the Great Goddess, or other personifications of nature found in mythology. She is the embodiment of attraction and fertility. She may also relate to the alchemical process called *praegnatio*, because she is the mother of the alchemical child.

The Empress is based on images of the White Queen found in *Anatomia Auri* (*Anatomy of Gold*), 1628, *Atalanta Fugiens* (*Atalanta Fleeing*), 1618, and *Philosophia Reformata* (*Philosophy Reformed*), 1622. As a symbol of Earth, the Empress is the expression of feminine energy grounded in the physical. She nurtures the three kingdoms in her womb: animal, vegetable, and mineral. In this image, the child represents the animal kingdom. The vegetable and mineral kingdoms are represented by the vegetation and rocks surrounding her. She is a symbol of feminine attraction, natural abundance, fertility, and the healing force of nature. She draws to her what she desires.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

IV. The Emperor

In *The Alchemical Tarot*, the Emperor continues the process of dissolution of the *Materia Prima*, initiated by the High Priestess. Whereas the Empress is the expression of feminine energy grounded in the physical, the Emperor is the expression of the masculine physical, which correlates to the element Air in the dissolution. We see the symbol for Air ascending from the symbol for solution in the upper left corner. Air, in turn, symbolizes thinking or intellect, which may soar like the eagle.



This image is based on the engraving of the Red King found on the title page of *Le Voyage des Princes Fortunez and of Anatomia Auri*. The Emperor represents someone in power, ruling with a keen intellect and full confidence in his power. Or, he may simply represent the mind as the ruler of the ego. As the love interest of the Empress, he also represents aggressive male sexuality.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

V. The Hierophant



In *The Alchemical Tarot*, the Hierophant's body and crown forms a red triangle, symbolizing Fire. He represents Fire in the dissolution and, therefore, masculine spirituality—the Sol aspect of the soul in contrast to the Luna aspect represented by The High Priestess. His glyphs for Fire and solution are split and occupy both upper corners of the card. He is correlated to the Feeling function, which determines what is right and wrong. The Hierophant is crowned by a magnificent triple-crown, which appears often in alchemical texts and represents dominion over the three kingdoms: animal, vegetable, and mineral. The triple-crown also indicates that he is Hermes Trismegistus (“the thrice great”).

The small figures at the sides of the Hierophant represent the Emperor and Empress, who are being joined in sacred marriage. They are the earthly representatives of the celestial masculine and feminine principles symbolized by the Sun and Moon in the archways. Mediating between the figures and the orbs are two candles, representing the Hierophant's element, Fire. One is red symbolizing masculine and the other white for feminine. This image is based on a plate from Senior's *De Chemia (Of Chemistry)*, 1702, which depicts an ancient statue of Hermes Trismegistus, the first alchemist, holding a mystical text. The statue was said to have been found in an ancient Egyptian tomb.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

V. The Hierophant

His book depicts three Moons on the right and three Suns and a double ouroboros on the left (like the one depicted on the Wheel of Fortune). The model for the triple-crown can be found in *Metamorphosis Planetarum* (*Transformation of the Planets*), 1663, and also in Michelspacher's *Cabala*.

Like Smith's Hierophant, the Alchemical Hierophant represents exoteric spirituality in contrast to the High Priestess, who represents esoteric spirituality. He is a teacher of sacred truth. He makes value judgments, and he can be conservative. Also unlike the High Priestess, his book is open and he publishes his teachings. In his highest aspect, he represents a wisdom tradition, but he may simply represent authority, teaching, publishing, and written communication.



M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

VI. The Lovers



In *The Alchemical Tarot*, the two cards for the Lovers, represent these two stages, but we might call them foreplay and consummation. The sexually active consummation version was the first card that I designed, but my first publisher censored it and I made the foreplay version for the first edition. When I began publishing the deck myself, I decided that I should print both versions—a modification that I feel is in harmony with the alchemical symbolism.

In the foreplay card, the Red King with his gold and ruby crown embraces the White Queen with her silver and diamond crown, and kisses her on the cheek. The Sun and Moon are in the sky above and a Marseilles inspired Cupid aims his arrow

at the King. In the consummation card, the action continues to its natural sexual act. To keep the Moon on the female side it was placed in the sand bath with the couple. One model for this card is the conjunction in the 16th century *Rosarium Philosophorum* (Rosary of the Philosophers). But there the conjunction of the King and Queen takes place in a water bath instead of the warm sand bath that I used here, representing the dry method mentioned in chapter eight of my book, *The Tarot, Magic, Alchemy, Hermeticism, and Neoplatonism*.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

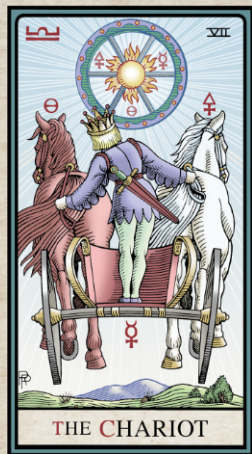
VI. The Lovers

The Lovers signifies sexual attraction and fulfillment. It can also signify joy, the fulfillment of other desires, partnerships in general, and, ideally, balance between the male and female aspects of our personalities. It is the initial attraction that can lead to a deeper relationship if it is allowed to mature. The foreplay version represents the initial attraction and the impetuous action on the second version represents the result of this attraction. This can be a metaphor for many activities other than sex.



M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

VII. The Chariot



In *The Alchemical Tarot*, the Chariot is moving away, and the charioteer is inviting us to join him. This reversal is derived from my personal vision that I had while I was meditating on this card. I have described this experience in detail my complete book, and I invite you to read the account.

Alchemically, the Chariot represents the process called sublimation, in which a solid substance when heated goes directly into a gaseous state, bypassing liquefaction, and ascends to the top of the alchemical vessel, where it condenses. We can find the symbol for sublimation in the upper left corner. Sublimation is considered an improvement in quality. In a sense, the substance is acting

impetuously by jumping right to its final state and bypassing the intermediary state.

On the card, this process is symbolized by Phaethon, who in Classical mythology was the son of Helios, the god who drove the Sun Chariot through the sky. To provide proof of his divine origin, Phaethon convinced his father to let him drive the Sun Chariot for a day. The boy, however, was too immature to handle the steeds. He lost control, scorching fields and drying rivers, and he had to be struck down by Zeus.

M	V	C	0	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

VII. The Chariot

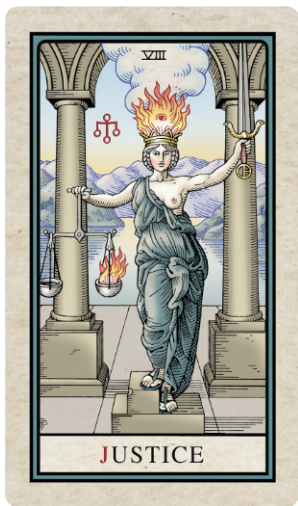
This image is influenced by the solar chariot in the *Opus Medico-Chymicum* (Chemical-Medical Work), 1618, and by my vision, as I explained above.

The impetuous Charioteer may be thought of as the offspring of the Red King and White Queen. He also corresponds to the ascending figure found on the oldest Wheel of Fortune cards. He, therefore, marks the beginning of the ascension of the Wheel of Time. He sees his goal in front of him, the Internal Sun in the center of the Wheel, and rushes to capture it. Surrounding the sun, clockwise, are symbols for Mercury, Salt, and Sulphur. These three symbols are also placed next to the three parts of the chariot that they relate to them. As in Plato's myth, the three parts of the chariot symbolize the three parts of the soul and the alchemical essences. The Chariot represents impatience, and rushing ahead toward a goal. This action can, at times, be immature and impetuous. But at other times, it can be what is needed to overcome fear and procrastination.



M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
	Sw	St	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
			XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

VIII. Justice



In *The Alchemical Tarot*, Justice weighs Fire and Water balancing the masculine and feminine principles. Her alchemical process is disposition, in which the correct proportion of elements is determined by weight before they are sealed in the retort. Like presenting facts in a trial, this process must be performed without prejudice. The glyph for disposition can be seen in the sky next to her head. Its shape is based on her scales. The pommel of her sword bears the alchemical symbol for vitriol, the secret fire. Disposition is depicted as Justice in Maier's *Tripus Aureus* (Golden Tripod), 1618. Her scales are derived from an image of Roger Bacon weighing Fire and Water in Maier's *Symbola Aureae Mensae* (Symbols of the Golden Table), 1617, and her sword from *De Goude leeuw* (The

Golden Lion), 1675.

Fire emerges from Justice's crown, turning her body into the alchemical athanor (oven). There is an eye in the flames and a column of smoke rises out of sight. Her body has become like the center column in the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, and the pillars on each side are like the columns of severity and mercy. With this symbolism, justice can be seen as a path to higher truth.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

VIII. Justice

This trump is a virtue and represents sound judgment based on an unbiased determination of the truth. Her sword also indicates that action must be taken based on judgment but that punishment must always be tempered with mercy. At the highest level Justice is universal divine balance, and harmony, but her card may simply pertain to legal matters.



M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

IX. The Hermit



In *The Alchemical Tarot*, the Hermit's process is exaltation, in which the Prima Materia is dissolved into a purer or higher degree of itself. This can be thought of as a metaphor for meditation, the Hermit's practice, which can be described as a turning inward to raise consciousness. As we said above, the Hermit is related to Saturn. Saturn devoured his children just as his symbol, the ouroboros (seen in the sky) devours its own tail. In the center of the circle of the ouroboros is the glyph for exaltation. In alchemy, Saturn represents lead, and rules the Nigredo, the first, black stage of the Opus, symbolized by the raven on the Hermit's shoulder.

Like the Hermits found in the *Musaeum Hermeticum* (*Hermetic Museum*), 1625, and Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens* (*Atalanta Fleeing*), 1618, the Hermit holds his lantern in the Diogenes gesture. Here he is searching for the Anima Mundi, whose footsteps he is following. The Anima Mundi is invisible but in his wisdom the Hermit knows he can find her by the evidence that she leaves. Although she leads him away from the town, the crowd, or from popular opinion, the Hermit follows his invisible guide. He has conviction and perseverance. This card may also represent meditation, old age, or simply the desire to be alone.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

X. Wheel of Fortune



In *The Alchemical Tarot*, the three figures have been reduced to two serpents. This image is inspired by Eleazar's *Uraltes Chrymisches Werk* (Ancient Chemical Work), 1760. It is like the double ouroboros seen earlier on the Hierophant's book. It depicts the Fixed scaly serpent and the Volatile winged serpent, each swallowing the other's tail, changing what is fixed into what is volatile and the volatile onto what is fixed. Alchemists believed that this process had to be accomplished over and over again as their work patiently spiraled towards completion.

This alchemical process is called circulation and the glyph for circulation is in the upper right corner. The two serpents on the wheel may be thought of as the ones that entwine Hermes's caduceus. The four elements in the corners refer to the elementary wheel of the sages, in which one element may change into another by manipulating a shared quality. Incorporated into the picture with each element is a glyph for the three alchemical essences and for Earth. The correlations for the elements and the essences are based on the model for this picture in *Uraltes Chrymisches Werk*.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

X. Wheel of Fortune

As in the earlier examples, this Wheel of Fortune represents the principle of change. What was fixed or static will become volatile or active, and what was volatile will become fixed. In this regard it can be seen as a Western equivalent to the celebrated yin/yang symbol of the East. It also represents the problem of mortality that the alchemist hopes to overcome. Change may work in our favor but not always. As we distance ourselves from its ups and downs, we start to identify with our eternal soul.



M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XI. Strength



The alchemical process represented by Strength in *The Alchemical Tarot* is fermentation. This is part of the process of exaltation in which a ferment is incorporated with the matter to exalt it. It enters the matter and brings it to a higher form, like the soul entering the body. The symbol for fermentation is in the upper right corner.

Alchemically, Strength is also a virgin. In Medieval myth, the virgin is the only one who can tame the unicorn, which is interchangeable with the lion in alchemical symbolism. The lion represents our untamed animal nature—our libido. In this illustration, it is depicted as the green lion, which the *Rosarium Philosophorum* tells us is Mercury, the

deadly poison that will be transmuted into the healing elixir. The symbol for the green lion appears above his head. The virgin represents the Higher Self, who tames the lower animal nature through love. Thus, Strength holds a flaming heart and the Sun and Moon pour the masculine and feminine alchemical fluids into this heart-vessel. This image is based on an illustration in *Tripus Aureus* (Golden Tripod), 1618.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XI. Strength

Strength signifies not only physical strength but also the strength of character that leads to discipline and self-mastery. The lion represents our animal nature, the source of strength and vitality, but it can also be dangerous, and demands respect. We need to tame the lion to make its strength our own. Tamed does not mean overpowered. Strength's power is love. She loves the lion, the lion loves her back, and he does her bidding. Power comes when we love ourselves, control our cravings, and take on hardships for the sake of others.



M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XII. The Hanged Man



The alchemical process that the Hanged Man represents in *The Alchemical Tarot* is calcination, in which the matter or body of the work is suspended over a fire or a corrosive agent and reduced to white ash. The glyph for calcination appears above the man's left foot. The 15th century *Buch der Heiligen Dreifaltigkeit* (*Book of the Holy Trinity*), found in the Codex Germanicus, shows calcination represented by a man hanged from a similar Taw shaped gallows. Here, in *The Alchemical Tarot*, the rope that binds the man is a serpent, itself nailed to the crossbeam. This crucified serpent can be found in any text based on the work of the 14th century French alchemist, Nicolas Flamel. It is one of the seven enigmatic images that he found in his book, and it represents Mercury, being

sacrificed to complete the Work.

The Hanged Man represents the sacrifice of both the persona and the ego—this sacrifice is necessary to unfold the Opus. A similar sacrifice is often found in myths that tell of a hero's journey, such as Odin, the monarch of the Norse gods, who hung himself from the World Tree to gain wisdom. Many similar practices can be found in shamanistic initiations.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

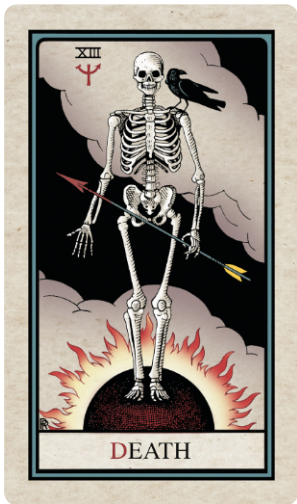
XII. The Hanged Man

By hanging upside-down, the Hanged Man is losing his gold coins (in some variations of the Marseilles card gold coins are depicted falling from his pockets), which represent the loss of worldly possessions, or self-esteem. Likewise, alchemical texts mention the need to sow gold into the calcinated ash during this process. His descending pose is similar to that of the figure headed downward as Fortuna's Wheel turns. He may, therefore, also represent the descent on her Wheel of Time, the opposite pole from that represented by the Charioteer.



M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XIII. Death



Images of Death were also used by alchemists to represent the process of putrefaction. In *The Alchemical Tarot*, the glyph for putrefaction lies above the death figure's right shoulder. Unlike other alchemical processes, putrefaction has no modern chemical equivalent. This is because, scientists no longer believe that chemicals are alive and, therefore, cannot be killed. In putrefaction, the material is ground and dissolved in a humid oven. The essence of the material separates, dies, and begins to rot and stink. The image in *The Alchemical Tarot* is influenced by the illustration of putrefaction in Mylius's *Philosophia Reformata* (*Philosophy Reformed*), 1622.

A skeleton stands on the alchemical vessel, which has been blackened in the furnace. At the center, the well-blackened product of the Nigredo has formed. The raven on Death's shoulder also symbolizes this stage of the Opus. Death's arrow while it is a weapon that brings Death, it is also the symbol of Cupid and draws a symbolic connection between the polarities of Love and Death as can be seen in the illustration from the *Dance of Death*. Death is simply the end—the end of a job, a relationship, or any good or bad situation, even of life (although it must be said this trump rarely directly references the end of life).

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

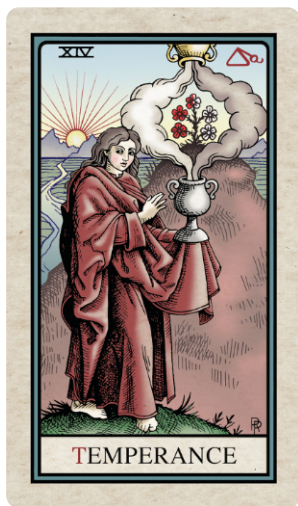
XIII. Death

Death and rebirth are essential themes in alchemy. Death is necessary if the matter of the work is to be reborn in a higher state, and it is a necessary part of the process of spiritual growth. We go through many deaths in life, every time a phase or cycle comes to an end. After each death there is always a new beginning.



M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XIV. Temperance



The alchemical process Temperance represents is distillation. This trump in *The Alchemical Tarot* is based on images of Mary the Jewess, the mythical inventor of distillation. She is also known as Bain-Marie, and appears in Michael Maier's *Symbola Aureae Mensae* (*Symbols of the Golden Table*), 1617. Distillation is the extraction of material from its solution by forced evaporation. It is the oldest and most fundamental stage of alchemy. The whole course of the *Opus* involves continual distillation. As distillation is based on the natural processes of evaporation and precipitation, this picture also illustrates the alchemical axiom; "Art imitates Nature." We can see the symbol for distillation in the upper right corner.

Behind Temperance, growing out of a dunghill, is a rose bush. The rose is a symbol of alchemical perfection and this image demonstrates that perfection emerges from chaos and that life comes from death. The white and red opposites are coming together in this bush. Framing the bush on our right, water vapor ascends from the earthly cup to the cup in the sky and descends like rain on our left.

After the Death trump, we enjoy the nurturing of new life, symbolized by Temperance, the sustainer of life.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XIV. Temperance

Her virtue involves self-control but not denial. She represents the balance necessary to make a work of art, a musical composition, or a great meal. She is the virtue that produces health, beauty, and perfect timing. Like Nature, she nurtures growth with the right amount of rain and sunlight.



M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XV. The Devil



In the Bible, the Devil is not described as a horned man. He is depicted as a serpent or a dragon instead. Because of this, he is often depicted in Renaissance art as a dragon and it is the dragon form that appears in alchemical texts. Although the traditional Marseilles card depicts a hermaphroditic antlered Devil, in *The Alchemical Tarot* the hermaphrodite on this card is actually the Devil's male and female prisoners in one being. The red dragon that they are chained to is the Devil. He does not need a torch because his breath is fire.

The alchemical process the Devil represents is coagulation, in which the matter is reduced to a solid state in a homogeneous body. That body is comprised of the Lovers, who have united in the single body of the hermaphrodite. They must now coagulate in darkness while awaiting rebirth. The Lovers are trapped in Hell, chained to the Devil, but they can only go up from here. The glyph for coagulation appears on the upper left of the card.

The Devil may also be thought of as Hermes/Mercury showing his venomous side. This trump is based on an illustration from Mylius's *Philosophia Reformata*, 1622. The Devil is portrayed as a red dragon sitting atop the same vessel that we found on the Death card.

M	V	C	0	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XV. The Devil

In the center of the vessel, the substance has formed into a lump that is now blacker than black— the goal of the Nigredo has been reached. The Devil may also relate to Saturn, the god of Time, who was called the Old Serpent, a reference to his ouroboros symbol. Additionally Saturn was related to lead, the dead metal, and to the color black.



M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XVI. The Tower



In *The Alchemical Tarot*, the Tower represents the oven, or the athanor, in which the elixir is prepared. Alchemists often referred to their oven as a tower and portrayed it as a small tower as we can see in the illustration from *Mutus Liber*. Besides Altus's *Mutus Liber*, 1677, this image is inspired by Mylius's *Philosophia Reformata*, 1622, and *Opus Medico-Chymicum*, 1618. The alchemical process represented is the greater dissolution, which is accomplished through divine intervention, which is why the vessel is breaking. This is a higher order than the first dissolution, initiated by the High Priestess. Unlike the twofold symbols included on the cards of the four temporal rulers, it has a single symbol depicted in the upper left corner. The Tower

represents a breakthrough from the coagulated darkness of the Devil, symbolizing the Nigredo, to the next white stage, the Albedo. The white lightning breaking through the black sky and cracking the alchemical vessel is the beginning of the Albedo.

For the two figures at the base of the Tower, this is a moment of enlightenment and exhilaration. The man is the alchemist and the woman is his partner, the Soror Mystica. They kneel looking up expectantly with their hands raised as though their prayers have been answered by the falling drops.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XVI. The Tower

The red, masculine drop falls to the male and the white, to his partner. The lightning has opened a gateway to the higher realms, and will become the Ladder of the Planets, depicted in the next trump. The Tower also corresponds to the human body, which, on an esoteric level, is the real alchemical oven. It can represent a breakthrough, a sudden inspiration, a flash of creativity, an opportunity that must be seized. It may also signify an upheaval in life, such as the loss of a job, a change in relationship, a breakup, an unexpected move, or a sudden illness. Often these calamities and opportunities are one and the same.



M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XVII. The Star



The Star represents the alchemical process of baptism, the purification by water in which the blackness of the Devil is washed away into white. We are now firmly in the second stage, the Albedo or whitening. The image in *The Alchemical Tarot* is based on the two illustrations from Basile Valentine mentioned above, the “Siren of the Philosophers” and the “Ladder of the Planets.” The Siren is the Anima Mundi depicted as Aphrodite, but also as Stella Maris, the Star of the Sea, the goddess who serves as psychopomp (a guide for the soul).

The Siren on the Alchemical Star rises as a messenger from the depths of the sea of the unconscious. Her spread tails are an open doorway to spiritual transformation, through the mysteries of birth, death, and rebirth. Her body is literally the fountain of life. From her breasts pour two streams, one of blood and the other milk. Combined with the sea water, they form the alchemical trinity: Sulfur, Mercury, and Salt. In this example, the red, masculine symbol is united with blood, suffering, death, and fear, and the white, feminine symbol with milk, nurturing, life, and hope. The Siren, as their source, represents the calm state that lies beyond fear and hope. She is the tranquility that is necessary to begin the ascent up the Ladder of the Planets, labeled with astrological symbols and representations of the Sun and Moon.

M	V	C	0	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XVII. The Star

The large seven-pointed star, with the glyph for the Anima Mundi, is the gateway to Heaven, and the glyph for baptism appears in the upper right corner.

The Star is a guide to a higher level of consciousness. It is the Anima, the first face of the Higher Self, emerging from the unconscious. The Star indicates a sense of balance and of wellbeing. It is the peace after a storm, forgiveness after an argument, and the negotiations that prevent war. On a mundane level, it may indicate a rise in social status or recognition. When flanked by two cards the card on the blood side may represent our fears and the one on the milk side may represent our hopes.



M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XVIII. The Moon



In the alchemical Opus, the Moon represents no alchemical process, but symbolizes the White Stone, which is the result of the processes. The glyph for the White Stone can be seen under the number at the top of this card in *The Alchemical Tarot*. The White Stone is the culmination of the Albedo. It is not the Philosopher's Stone, but the Mother of the Stone. What is missing is the masculine seed. The Moon is waiting for her lover/brother, the Sun, to join her in the final conjunction that will give birth to the Red Stone of the Philosopher's. She teaches us patience and the need for rest.

The image on this trump in *The Alchemical Tarot* is inspired by Maier's *Viatorium* (Wayfarer's Guide), 1618, and another

image of the Moon Goddess found in Lucas Jennis's *Musaeum Hermeticum*, 1625. It has the major elements that are found on the Marseilles card, including the crab, but Luna/Diana has been placed in the scene. Also the towers have become mountains and I have moved the crayfish or crab from the pool in the foreground to the sky, where it represents the constellation Cancer, the native house of the Moon. The astrological glyph for Cancer can be seen below the crab. Diana has two wolfhounds. One is dark and passive and the other white and active.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XVIII. The Moon

Diana's torch links her to Diana Luciferus, whom the Romans saw as the beacon in the night. She stands at the edge of the waters of the unconscious.

The Moon represents the night before the dawn, a time of patience, rest, and reflection. The card may simply represent the need for sleep or recuperation but she is also in a state of expectation, waiting for her lover to join her at dawn. The night is the time when consciousness is at rest and the unconscious is active.



M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XIX. The Sun



With the Sun, in *The Alchemical Tarot*, we reach the third stage of the Opus, the Citrinitas, or yellowing. In this stage, the yellowing is caused by a beautiful light that illuminates the vessel and symbolizes enlightenment. It is the spiritual Sun rising to join his lover, the Moon. They are the souls of the Emperor and Empress joined in the second or greater conjunction, the hieros gamos (sacred marriage). As Sol and Luna, they are joined under one crown, the symbol of mastery, and the internal Sun rises between them. This illustrates the description of this stage from the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, which states; “a perfect light is begotten between them.” This process correlates to the merging of the unconscious and conscious minds, a

conjunction that Jung finds essential to the state of individuation. This image is based on the illustration of the greater conjunction found in François Béroalde de Verville’s *Le Voyage des Princes Fortunez*, 1610.

The dawn is a state of radiant health and wellbeing. We are cleansed of the past as we bask in the healing rays of the new Sun. This Sun is the internal illumination, that dawns when we bring our masculine and feminine sides into unity and balance. It is also the ripening of the White Stone, as it is reddened by the fire of our libido.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XIX. The Sun

Yet in its simplest interpretations, this card may only represent joy, fame, a new outlook, a deeper more meaningful love, or a new beginning.



M	V	C	0	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XX. Judgement



In *The Alchemical Tarot*, this card depicts the alchemical process called the reviving or resurrection. In this stage, the matter of the work, which was killed in the Nigredo, is revived by the power of the Stone. This is demonstrated by the Stone's ability to transmute base metals into gold. To the alchemist base metals are dead, and become resurrected by becoming gold. It may also refer to the process called multiplication, or projection. Here, the alchemist reaps what he has sown. The operation is performed by the Stone itself, not by the alchemist. Essentially, the substance has been killed, buried in the Earth, reborn, and now its power multiplies like grain. Theoretically, the power of the Stone may multiply to infinity.

In the mystery ritual of Osiris, the Egyptian god of the underworld and the giver of eternal life, grains of barley were sown in a coffin. When they sprouted, Osiris was said to have arisen. The central symbol in this image, the grain sprouting from the skull in the center of the ouroboros, is a reference to this mystery. We can see the same reference in an image from Maier's *Tripus Aureus*, 1618, in which a corpse rises out of a field of grain.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

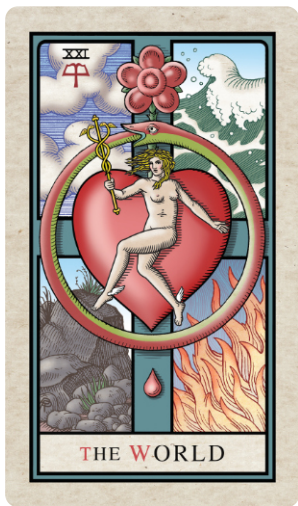
XX. Judgement

Judgement can represent rejuvenation and healing. It can also refer to calling up past experiences or bringing the past back to life. It indicates decisions or judgments, which are based on the truth of our experiences.



M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XXI. The World



Alchemically, the World brings us to the culmination of the Opus. It is the final red stage, called the Rubedo, in which the ruddy Stone of the Philosophers is formed. The Stone, symbolized on this card in *The Alchemical Tarot*, by the heart, is composed of pure spiritual essence, the heart is also the Anima Mundi, which is personified as the nude woman in the center. Because its goal is symbolically female, the Great Work is called “the work of the woman.” Besides representing the purified soul, the nude can represent Truth and the spiritual ideal. We can see that she is central to the four elements, which may be correlated with the traditional symbols of the evangelists, and it is her that gives them life. The Rose represents the perfection that the Stone engenders, and the red

drop is the healing elixir, like Christ’s blood dripping into the Grail. The glyph for the Philosopher’s Stone appears in the upper left corner of this card.

This design is influenced by several alchemical images, including the mandala representing the Stone in L’Agneau’s *Harmonic Mystique*, 1636, and the image of the Anima Mundi as the Stone in Solidonius’s 18th century Parisian text. It is also influenced by the similarity of the Marseilles World to these alchemical images and my personal visions engendered by these illustrations, as I described in the introduction.

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XXI. The World

The Anima Mundi is what was hidden but is now exposed. She is the mother of the elements and the spiritual essence of matter. She has the power to cure any illness, to prolong life and conquer death, to transform any substance to its highest state, and to make a person one with his or her Higher Self. In her simplest meaning, the World is what is good or desired. She is the achievement and culmination of our goals. On the highest level, She is the merging of our individual personality with the Anima Mundi—the Soul of the World.



The Anima Mundi strains the ability of words to describe her, and she can seem paradoxical. To the Neoplatonic philosopher, she is the highest form of the divine presence that we can comprehend. She is at the center and the circumference of being, outside space and time, and yet here now. She is composed of neither matter nor energy, but she is the mother of both, continually creating the universe. She is the intelligent, compassionate guide that is evident in the evolution of life. Here is the description of the Anima Mundi personified as Sophia from *Aurora Consurgens*:

Long life and health are in her right hand and glory and immense riches in her left. Her ways are beautiful and praiseworthy works and neither despicable nor bad, and her paths are measured and not hasty, but connected with persistent continuous hard work. She is the tree of life for everybody who understands her and a light, which is never extinguished. (Von Franz, Marie-Louise. *Alchemy: An Introduction to its Symbolism and the Psychology*. Toronto: Inner City Books, 1980.)

M	V	C	O	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

XXII. The Truth



Shortly after the first edition of *The Alchemical Tarot* was published, in 1995, my partner on the first book, Rosemary Ellen Guiley, had a vision.

Hermes Trismegistus came to her in the middle of the night to show her the 22nd trump. She described the scene to me, and I drew this illustration.

After studying the drawing for several years, I realized that the pyramid composed of four solid layers and three invisible layers represented the Pythagorean Tetractys, a symbol of emanation, symbolizing how the divine essence creates the visible world.

M	V	C	0	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
			VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
	Sw	St	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI	XXII	

Ace of Vessels



In *The Alchemical Tarot*, cups are called vessels to harmonize them with alchemical imagery. On the Ace of Vessels, a fish swims on the surface of the water in an inlet of the sea. On his back, he carries his suit symbol, a large glass vessel that is half filled with blood and floating in the center is the corresponding playing card suit symbol, the heart. This heart is also a vessel. A grapevine grows out of its spout and continues out of the glass vessel, bearing its grapes in the open air. The heart with the grapevine is based on an image found in Jacob Bohme's *Theosophical Works*, 1682.

The fish is an appropriate animal to represent the element, Water, as is the vessel, made to hold liquids. Water is a feminine element, and it is a natural symbol for the unconscious, which presents its surface to our conscious mind but keeps the majority of its substance hidden below. The sea symbolizes the collective unconscious. The fish is its messenger and appropriately presents himself on the surface. The vessel represents the psyche of an individual and the blood, which is chemically related to seawater, represents the individual unconscious. In the center of the psyche, the heart—a vessel within this vessel—symbolizes the depth of the individual soul.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

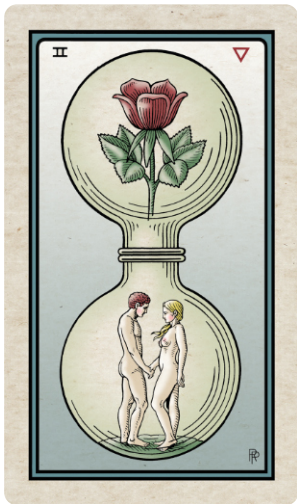
Ace of Vessels

Seeds have been planted in this inner vessel by the Anima Mundi. These seeds are one's true destiny that surfaces when we look deep into our psyches and are honest with ourselves. To find fulfillment, we must nurture these seeds and let them grow. It is not selfish to fulfill these desires; they are planted in us by the Anima Mundi and the world needs the fruit. This card represents uncovering one's true destiny and soul's purpose. It may represent deeply held desires or a new direction in life that is more fulfilling, such as a new career or a new relationship. It is not selfish to follow these desires.



M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Two of Vessels



On the Alchemical Two of Vessels, the man and woman, now nude, stand holding hands in a glass vessel. A second vessel has been placed on top, mouth to mouth. In the upper vessel, the caduceus has been replaced with an Old World Rose, which arises like a vapor from the union of the couple. This rose is a symbol of perfection. It is the vegetable counterpart of gold. This image is influenced by an engraving found in Mylius's *Basilica Philosophica* (*Philosophical Pavilion*), 1618, where the upper vessel contains the god Mercury, who is the alchemical essence and the equivalent of the rose. This card represents sexual attraction or attraction of other kinds. The pair in the vessel are lovers but this may be a metaphor for other partnerships. Attraction is

wonderful, but it only a beginning.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Three of Vessels



On *The Alchemical Tarot's* Three of Vessels, three women, one wearing yellow, one blue, and one red, are balancing vessels on their heads. They resemble caryatids, which, in classical architecture, are columns in the shape of women. Like columns, the women on the card are equal, and are almost identical to each other. On their vessels, are the symbols for three of the four elements. The first vessel is labeled Earth, the second Air, and the third with flames emerging from its spout is labeled Fire. Below their feet there are three colored circles that represent three of the four stages of the opus: the black Nigredo, the yellow Citrinitas, and the red Rubedo.

This image is based on an engraving of four woman with vases representing the four elements and the four stages found in Mylius's *Philosophia Reformata*, 1622. In *The Alchemical Tarot*, the vessel symbolizing the missing element, Water, can be found on the head of the Lady of Vessels later in this suit. She also represents the missing stage, the white Albedo. These woman are her companions, her support group. The three women are also suggestive of the Triple Goddess, or of the Three Fates. This is a card of friendship and support. It is literally a support group. This is especially true when it is next to the Lady of Vessels.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Four of Vessels

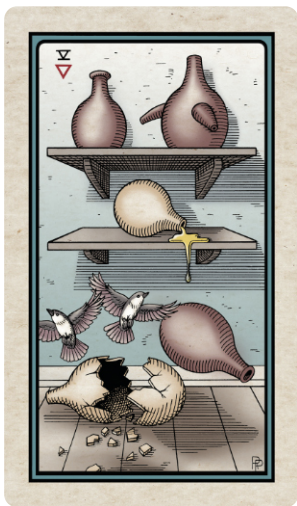


This is a card where my interpretation for *The Alchemical Tarot* differs quite a bit from Smith's. Four is a number of stability and solidity, and Water and the imagination are not well served by these qualities. For this card in my deck I depict an elephant, who stands on four vessels, which act as pillars and are capable of holding his great weight. He stands on a dry beach with water in the background. These vessels are metaphors for emotional complexes in the psyche. As we become comfortable with our emotional life, we fall into habits of acting. These habits are like these vessels; they become our physical environment—a fourfold structure. They become so strong that they can hold an elephant but, because it is difficult for him to step off of the vessels,

the elephant cannot go anywhere. We have made ourselves comfortable but the Anima Mundi is unhappy because we have stopped evolving and growing. This situation may seem secure but we should not be complacent. We are inviting the Anima Mundi to break our vessels, to shake up our lives, and give us new challenges.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Five of Vessels



On *The Alchemical Tarot's* Five of Vessels, the vessels were arranged on shelves but, as in an earthquake, the building has begun to shake. One vessel has fallen over and is spilling its content, another is falling in midair, and a third egg-like vessel has hit the floor and cracked. From this last vessel, two birds have emerged and are flying to the left and the right. The birds represent things that were hidden and are now emerging from the unconscious: new possibilities, inspirations, or directions.

Five is the spirit or the Anima Mundi making her presence known. She is central to all matter. We may think that uncovering the Anima Mundi would be a pleasant experience but we see instead that she breaks up the comfortable orderliness that we observed in the Four of Vessels. We may experience her presence as a loss or a shake up. This shake up is necessary, however, because it allows for new growth and new creativity. The Anima Mundi does not want us to become complacent. She wants us to keep evolving toward our destiny.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Six of Vessels



On the Alchemical Six of Vessels, a woman fills five vessels by pouring from a sixth. Each vessel is of a different size and shape, and serves a different function. An iris grows from the last one in line. From the one vessel the woman can fill many different vessels, each according to its own capacity and needs. This woman is like a gardener; she nurtures and intuitively provides what is needed for each vessel. She knows that too much water can be as destructive to a garden as too little. When the amount is right, the result is growth. Love demands that we nurture and give what is needed—not too much or too little. Love cannot be forced.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Seven of Vessels



For *The Alchemical Tarot's* Seven of Vessels I made use of an alchemical chart depicting various tools to symbolize choice, but also alchemical processes. Each vessel serves a different function that relates to a different alchemical process: distillation, pouring, filtering, funneling, storing, cooking, and drinking. This image suggests that a choice needs to be made and the vessel that serves our purpose is the one that fulfills that purpose. The Grail-like golden chalice at the bottom, however, serves the highest function and represents the best choice.

Engraved on the side of this chalice is a diamond with an eye in the center—the symbol for the Anima Mundi that we have seen on the Star trump. It depicts consciousness in the center of the fourfold world. It is a simplified version of the mandala depicted on the World trump. This golden chalice is the best choice—the one that is the most fulfilling. It leads us to our highest purpose. To find this vessel we need to follow our intuition. This may seem like a difficult task, but to find our way we only need to ask; “Which path feels the best?”

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Eight of Vessels



Because I view eight as a number representing work, the eights in my decks do not always agree with Smith's. *The Alchemical Tarot's* Eight of Vessels is based on the engraving of a potter found in Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens*, 1618. The potter uses clay to create vessels by centering it on his wheel and pulling the shape out of the clay. Because his work is intuitive and all of his vessels are different, he is totally engrossed in his work. The potter symbolizes alchemical transmutation: he starts with Earth, softens it with Water, dries it in Air, and hardens it with Fire. He transforms clay into useful vessels, making something of value out of one of the most common substance on Earth. Paracelsus believed that this was an example of transmutation.

Centered above the potter's wheel, is yet another symbol for the Anima Mundi, in which the timeless lemniscate is connected to the center of the fourfold physical world. When a potter is centered, he or she is present in this work. In contrast to the Eight of Coins, this card represents creative work that is engrossing and keeps the worker focused in the moment.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Nine of Vessels

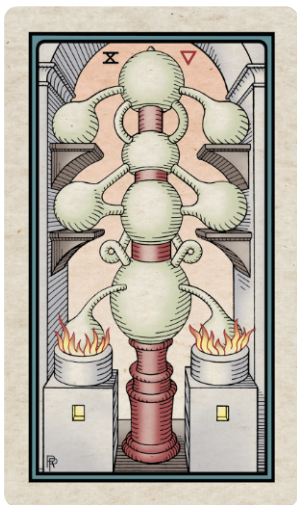


The Nine of Vessels in *The Alchemical Tarot* has a different meaning. A chamois, a goat-antelope species that is found in the mountains of Europe and known for its dexterity and balance, stands on top of a hill and looks out to horizons beyond, on our right. The nine cups, in the foreground, can be interpreted as being either in front of the hill, or within it. They are neatly stacked. These cups are like emotional complexes or achievements that we have stored neatly in our psyches. They then become like this hill that allows the surefooted chamois to ascend and gain perspective.

This card depicts someone who has used his or her accomplishments to gain the upper ground. Because of his or her achievements, he or she has greater confidence and greater perspective. If a card is to our right, it may represent the animal's focus. If a card is to our left, it may represent the achievements that have allowed the chamois to develop confidence.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Ten of Vessels



On the Ten of Vessels in *The Alchemical Tarot*, we see an alchemical still, composed of ten glass vessels united into one device. In ten, the many may come back to the one, and that is what has happened here. Two vessels, at the bottom, are being heated by fire and this energy will fuel the process that will circulate through all of the vessels. We may think of these vessels as separate individuals who have come together to serve a common purpose or who are interconnected through their relationships to each other, or to another network. This card represents connectedness. It may represent a family, a social network, or connections in a workplace. It may also symbolize the mechanism that allows connectedness, such as the radio, the telephone, or the

Internet.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Lady of Vessels



On the Alchemical Lady of Vessels, a poised woman bears a vessel on her head. She is posed like the women on the Three of Vessels, who represent her support group. Her emblem and the color of her dress stand for Water, her element and the one that belongs in this suit. She is at home in this suit. and demonstrates her ease by standing on Water. To stand on Water is considered a miracle, but if we think of Water as a symbol of the unconscious, this image takes on a new meaning. To stand on Water can mean to trust our intuition— to accept guidance from the unconscious mind. This Lady is intuitive and she demonstrates that we can trust the unconscious to offer support. In its simplest meaning, this card depicts confidence and grace.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Knight of Vessels



The Alchemical Knight of Vessels walks into the Water in full armor and wisely confines his exploration to the shallow end of the inlet. He gathers Water in his vessel, while, below, a fish comes to greet him. The Knight's action can be considered an exploration of the waters of the psyche. Perhaps he is looking for omens or interpreting his dreams. When we embark on this type of investigation, the unconscious responds and sends a messenger, like this fish. This card represents an exploration of the unconscious. It may also pertain to spontaneous messages, or to any message that we receive.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Queen of Vessels



On *The Alchemical Tarot's* Queen of Vessels, a crowned mermaid, bearing a sealed vessel, skims the surface of the Water. She is at home in her element. Unlike the Lady of Vessels, she does not need to stand. She can swim and she can travel below the surface. She is a relative of both the Knight of Vessels and his fish. She carries her sealed vessel to its destination but has no need to open it. She knows the vessel will open when the time is right. The hook on the lid may be thought of as a question mark, denoting a mystery.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

King of Vessels



The Alchemical King of Vessels is a whale. As the natural king of the sea, a whale often appears in alchemical texts as a symbol for Water. He appears in this role in an alchemical mandala found in the *Musaeum Hermeticum*, 1625. Our Alchemical whale wears a crown and in the center he balances a large cup. Because he is a sperm whale, he can spout Water from his blowhole and fill his own cup. He is so big and stable that the waves do not unsettle him. He is at home in the sea and he finds his own fulfillment. This card represents the mastery of intuition and the ability to seek our own rewards. The whale, who is secure in his own inner truth, is not upset by the ups and downs of fate or the emotions that fate engenders.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Ace of Coins



On *The Alchemical Tarot's* Ace of Coins, a rabbit, the Earth animal, sits in front of a large coin nestled into a fertile bower of the Earth. The coin has a diamond shaped hole with arrows extending to indicate the four cardinal directions. Alchemically, the number four is linked to the physical world of time and space, with its four directions and divisions. The most important element, however, is the non-material essence, the Quinta Essentia. To depict this essence, alchemists placed its symbol in the center of a mandala with four divisions, like this coin. This coin illustrates that all of physical reality emerges from the immaterial. In the same way, everything that we have manifested in our lives, such as our physical surroundings and our relationships,

started with an idea that, in turn, emerged from the unknowable depths of our unconscious mind.

In many cultures a rabbit is considered a shamanistic guide, and at times, a trickster hero. The alchemists used the rabbit as a symbol for Mercury, the alchemical essence. This Rabbit is the same rabbit that appears on the Fool, where he is guiding the novice alchemist into the interior of the Earth.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Two of Coins

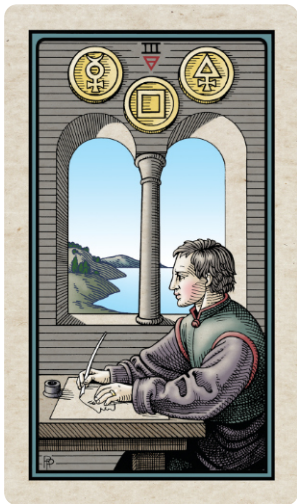


The Two of Coins in *The Alchemical Tarot* is based on engravings found in Von Stolzenberg's *Viridarium Chymicum* (*Chemical Garden*), 1620, and in Mylius's *Basilica Philosophica*, (*Philosophical Pavilion*) 1618, which show alchemical lemniscates surrounding the Sun and Moon. On my card the Sun appears as a gold solar coin and the Moon is a silver lunar coin. They represent a masculine and feminine polarity. The lemniscate is a two-headed serpent. One head is of a lion symbolizing the fixed in alchemy. It is swallowing the other head, which is of an eagle, symbolizing the volatile. The fixation of the volatile represents a situation that is unchanging. At times, this may bring desired stability but more often it represents stagnation. This is

different from Smith's meaning. In the Chinese oracle, the *I Ching*, stagnation is considered to be one of the most undesirable situations that can occur. The text adds, however, that change is the "way of Heaven" and, therefore, this situation cannot last.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Three of Coins



On this card in *The Alchemical Tarot*, three coins are attached above a double window on the inner wall of a building. Through the windows, we can see a landscape, and we can see that the building is at the shore of the sea. The symbols on the coins represent the complete alchemical trinity: from left to right, Mercury, Salt, and Sulphur. The building shelters an artist, who is at work on a profile in pen and ink. The card suggests an artist or writer who works for the establishment, or who works at a salaried position. It signifies creativity with security and stability. The Salt coin, which is over the center column of the windows, represents stability. The card also represents bringing the unconscious, in terms of creativity and ideas (the sea), into the physical plane (the shore). The

artist is intently focusing on his subject, who is outside of the card. This may imply inspiration or scholarly work. Pay attention to a card that lies to the left, where the artist is looking. It will tell you the focus of his investigation.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Four of Coins



I refer to the figure on the Four of Coins in my decks as the Miser. On the Alchemical card, a man dressed in primitive animal skins is burying his wealth, his four golden coins, in the ground. The four coins each bear an image of the Sun, and the man seems to be hiding their light in the Earth. This man may represent the act of hoarding his wealth instead of using it on other things—such as buying clothes. In a more positive light we may think that he is being frugal or wisely planting his money like an investment. If properly nurtured his coins could grow into a money tree, like the one depicted on the Nine of Coins.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Five of Coins



On the Alchemical card we find a crippled beggar, missing his left foot. He holds out a hand waiting for alms. The beggar seems unaware that coins lie scattered on the ground around him. These four coins bear the symbols of the four elements. The glowing coin in the sky with the star on its face represents the Quinta Essentia, the spiritual element that he longs for.

The beggar's affliction symbolizes a lack of balance. He can only stand on his right foot. Not having a left foot, he has no connection with his unconscious and the spiritual realm. No matter how much wealth he obtains, he will not accumulate anything because the Quinta Essentia is missing. This card can symbolize poverty, ill-health, or loss of self-esteem. Prosperity

and health are enhanced by the acceptance of a higher power and the feelings of gratitude, generosity, and humility that this acceptance brings. Even a person with an excess of wealth, but who is plagued with worry and the fear of loss that leads to a lack of generosity, is still like this beggar.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Six of Coins



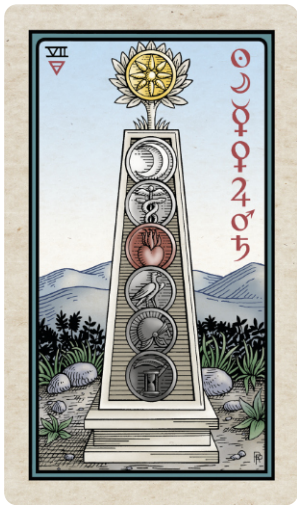
On *The Alchemical Tarot's* Six of Coins, two children, representing innocence and youth, stand facing one another. One, on a pile of coins, gives the topmost coin, an ancient Greek tetradrachm, to the other boy, who has none. The youth on this card is the opposite of the old man on the Four of Coins. Whereas the Four can represent miserliness or stinginess, this card represents generosity and trust.

Athena's owl depicted on the coin is a symbol of wisdom, and there is wisdom in sharing. Through sharing and trust, greater wealth is gained than through the selfish fear-based actions of the miser. To give or receive without attachment allows wealth to flow freely and keeps one in harmony with the Anima Mundi. The

Chinese oracle, the *I Ching*, praises this type of action as being in harmony with Heaven, and tells us that it is the way of nature to wear down mountains and fill up valleys.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Seven of Coins



On the Alchemical Seven of Coins we find a stone obelisk with six coins on its face and a seventh in a tree at the top. Each coin is made from one of the seven alchemical metals. Alchemists believed that all metals were of one substance and that they were differentiated from each other by the impurities that they contained. As a metal was purified, it would ascend this hierarchy to become gold. Each coin contains an image that represents the god that rules both the metal and the corresponding planet. The glyphs for each are in the sky on the right. From the bottom up, they symbolize Saturn/lead, Mars/iron, Jupiter/tin, Venus/copper, Mercury/mercury, Luna/silver, and Sol/gold. It is notable that this alchemical hierarchy is different from the Ptolemaic

hierarchy of the planets.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Eight of Coins



On *The Alchemical Tarot's* Eight of Coins, a coin-stamper takes a blank metal disk and stamps an image into it to create a coin. A blank coin awaits on his table and six finished coins are displayed on the wall behind him. Because they are stamped, every coin is the same. This card symbolizes repetitive work that lacks creativity and variation. The man is successful at accumulating coins, and therefore wealth, but his work may be boring and unfulfilling. Sometimes this type of labor is necessary to achieve our goals but it may be another form of stagnation and not in harmony with the way of the Anima Mundi. This card, however, may simply be a reference to repetition, which lends strength to a habit or a belief.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Nine of Coins

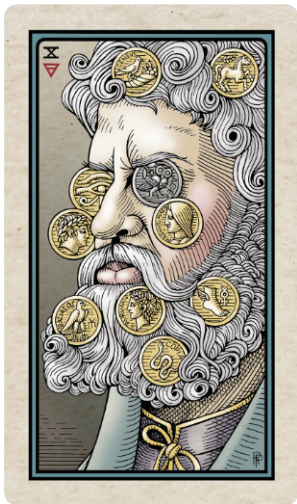


On *The Alchemical Tarot's* Nine of Coins, a money tree bears fruit in the form of ancient coins with designs that symbolize wealth, peace, wisdom, and political power. The coins also show a balance of silver and gold, the feminine and masculine principles. This tree may be the result of the investment made when the man on the Four of Coins planted his coins in the Earth. Now, they have grown into a tree, and continue to provide new coins in a natural way. This is not wealth that is hoarded out of fear but wealth that is growing as part of a natural process. The coins are provided by nature as they are needed. This is true prosperity and health provided by the Anima Mundi. There is no need to fear loss as long as the tree is sound. We do not need more than our

share but will be given the right amount as the coins ripen.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Ten of Coins



In *The Alchemical Tarot*, the Ten of Coins focuses on the excess of wealth. On the card we find a Renaissance merchant, who is literally covered with money. Even his eyes are covered, with a coin on each. He represents someone who is rich and thinks about money a great deal, but the coins are all that he sees. The Coins are metaphors for money, position, health, sex, or any physical object or possession. The merchant is very good at obtaining what he desires but that is all he is focused on and he does not cultivate other interests. He does not see other people as equal to himself or care about their desires or needs. This card may also symbolize a materialistic philosophy, one that believes only in the reality of the physical world and in cause and effect. At times, this card

may speak of the need to look out for our own interests but if prolonged this attitude can be another type of stagnation.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Lady of Coins

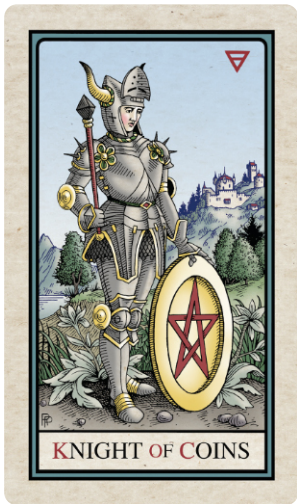


On this card in *The Alchemical Tarot*, a well-dressed woman, with a visibly full purse, admires a bouquet of flowers. In the sky, a coin with the symbol of Luna represents the feminine principle. The Ladies in *The Alchemical Tarot* are the mates of the knights. Unlike a page or a knave, they are not servants but the partner of the Knight. The Ladies are all involved in aesthetics or beauty. In the Renaissance, aesthetics was one of the main concerns of a noble lady. The Lady of Coins is materially well off; she has the time and the resources to spend in the enjoyment of beauty. She appreciates and admires the physical world, like a patron of the arts, or a scientist. She also appreciates feminine beauty and fashion. She may be offering her flowers to the card

on our right or she may be telling us to take time out for pleasure.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Knight of Coins

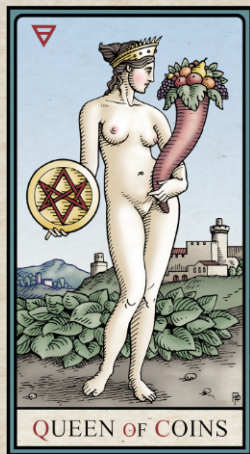


On the Alchemical Knight of Coins, an armored knight stands in the fertile countryside, on the edge of the sea, with hills and green trees. His castle is in the distance, in a well-fortified position at the top of the steep hill. He is lean, tall, and strong, like a plant, with bristly thorns and horns like a bull. His weapon is a diamond shaped mace. His coin is his shield and it bears a protective pentagram (the five-pointed star can serve as a protective amulet). He is the protector of his castle and of physical well-being. This knight represents someone who guards wealth or health, like an investment banker, a lawyer, or a healer. If there is a card to our left, which would be at his back, it represents what he is protecting. A card to the right could represent what he is

warding off.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Queen of Coins



In *The Alchemical Tarot* the Queen of Coins is a crowned nude—like a classical goddess, a combination of Ceres and Aphrodite. She stands in a garden in a field in front of her castle. Her nudity is a symbol of her physical and spiritual perfection and demonstrates that she has risen above all social norms. In her left arm, she holds a cornucopia, a symbol of wealth and the abundance of nature, and in her right hand she holds a coin bearing a six-pointed star drawn with one continuous line, a talisman that draws to her balance, harmony, and well-being. With these attributes, she may also be linked with the goddess of good fortune, Bona Fortuna. This card is the personification of sensuality, health, wealth, and well-being. Pay attention to a

card that may be to your left. This will symbolize what the queen owns. To our right we may find her goal.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

King of Coins

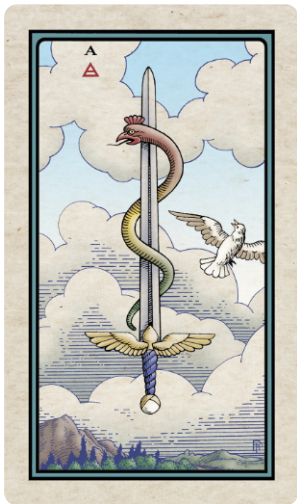


In *The Alchemical Tarot*, all of the Kings are animals that represent the essence of their element. The King of Coins is a regal, crowned lion, who is the embodiment of courage and physical strength. He holds a coin bearing his own image, and sits in a natural setting. He is the essence of satisfaction and the ultimate ruler of coins and Earth. He holds his coin possessively but it is more than just a coin. It has his image on it symbolizing that the King has made his physical environment in his own image. His work reflects his own interests and he earns his living doing what he wants. He may represent an artist, or a person with his own business. He does not lack for what he needs. He may also represent the ability to heal himself by taking control of

his habits.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Ace of Swords



On *The Alchemical Tarot's* Ace of Swords, a basilisk (a serpent topped with a cock's head) is spiraling up around the sword. The Sword is upright in its element, Air. A bird, another symbol for Air, is startled by the sight, and flies away to our right, starting on its transformation into an eagle, the ruler of this suit, depicted as the King of Swords.

Because the blade of a sword swiftly cuts through the Air, it is a natural symbol for this element. As a double-edged weapon, it is also a fitting symbol for the Thinking function. Thoughts can forge ahead with an argument, cut through fallacies with logic, and further our interests, but negative thoughts can turn against us and be self-destructive. The sword's hilt ends

in a crystal ball, connecting thought with intuition. The sword's guard is shaped like a winged spade, the corresponding French suit symbol.

The basilisk's name means "little king" in Greek. This name is thought to be a reference to the serpent's crown (the cock's comb), which is replacing the encircling crown on the Marseilles card. In mythology, it was said that a basilisk could kill with a look, but it was also a symbol of wisdom, and in heraldry it is often depicted devouring a human, an ancient symbol representing initiation into the mysteries.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Ace of Swords

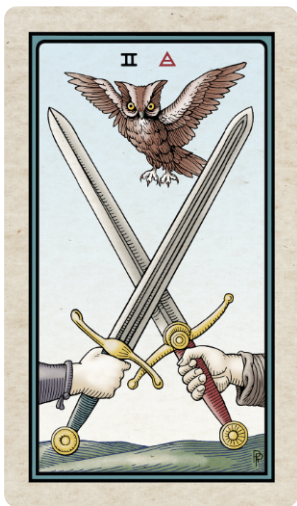
In Christian symbolism, the basilisk became a symbol for the Devil, but in alchemy it symbolizes the Opus, or sometimes just the Citrinitas stage.

These meanings do not necessarily contradict each other. As we have learned from alchemy, we have to go through the darkness and confront the Devil to gain wisdom. This transformative aspect of our basilisk is symbolized by its coloring. Green in alchemy represents what is unripe or immature and red what is ripe and mature. The sword is upright, positive, single minded, and focused on its goal. As the basilisk ascends this blade, he ripens, changing from green to red, and from ignorance to wisdom. Besides the pursuit of wisdom, this card can represent a new idea, an inspiration, or a positive approach. It can also be the beginning of a new endeavor.



M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

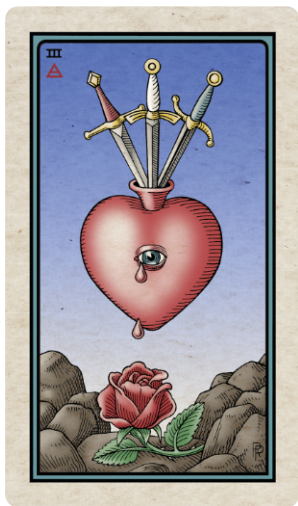
Two of Swords



The Alchemical Tarot's Two of Swords returns to Etteilla's crossed swords, but each held in a hand and crossed in opposition, as in a duel. Above them hovers Athena's owl, the symbol of wisdom. As swords are related to Thinking, each of these swords may represent an idea in opposition, as in a debate. This is the Socratic method for finding truth. For this method to work, the goal of the debate cannot be for one side to dominate the other. It must be to uncover the truth no matter who is right. In this dialectic method, an opinion is defended against verbal attacks not intended to destroy the defendant but to uncover any weaknesses, or illogical contradictions in his or her theory. It is like cutting away the mother rock to expose a gem. The opponent may be viewed as a friend.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Three of Swords



The Three of Swords in *The Alchemical Tarot* is based on both Smith's card and the *Sola Busca* card. It depicts three swords entering a heart from the top, their downward thrusting implying pain and negativity. The eye in the center of the heart symbolizes consciousness within this heart, which is a symbol of the soul. The suffering causes the eye to tear and the tears fall on the rose below. The rose is a symbol of perfection in alchemy. The rose needs joy and sunshine to grow, but it also needs to be watered by our suffering. Without this water the rose would die on the rocks in this harsh landscape. Although this is a card of suffering, it tells us that pain and hardship are as necessary for our spiritual growth as are sunshine and joy.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Four of Swords



The Alchemical Tarot's Four of Swords depicts a meditating woman. Behind her, on top of an embankment, four swords are thrust downward into the grass. Their negativity is put aside and grounded safely in Earth. Seated in front and below, within the Earth, the woman is deep in meditation. She has withdrawn into herself and deep into the Earth—a symbol of her unconscious. Through meditation, she is letting go of her thoughts—they are grounded like her swords. Thistles grow where she is sitting, yet she is undisturbed by their thorns as well. She remains unattached to her conditions and to her thoughts, and finds peace within herself.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Five of Swords

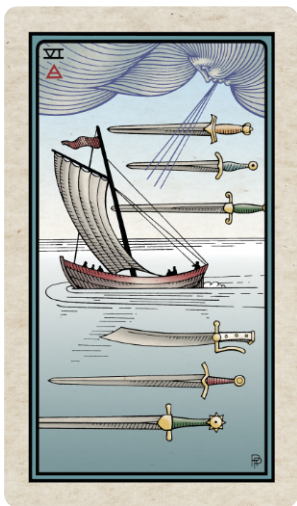


The Alchemical Tarot's Five of Swords has a different meaning. On the card, a blacksmith works on a sword, striking the red blade on his anvil while the blade is hot and malleable. Two broken swords hang on the wall, their points downward, connoting negativity. Two repaired swords, upright and positive, hang above them. Outside, the Sun is shining on an idyllic landscape.

The blacksmith is taking broken negative swords and fixing them. To accomplish this, he has to take each one apart and rework the blade. This process involves heating the metal until it is red and hammering out dents and nicks. Then, the blade is quenched quickly in oil or water to restore its temper and allow it to hold a sharp edge. This card represents fixing things, but also fixing ourselves—letting go of negative thinking and believing in the possibility that things can be improved.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Six of Swords

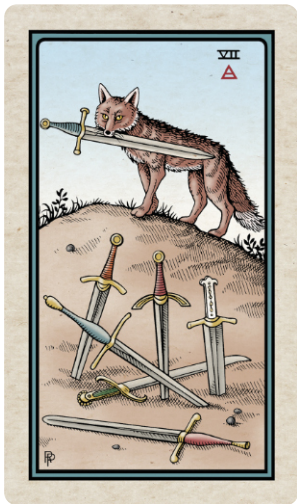


The Six of Swords in *The Alchemical Tarot* also features a boat. Six swords hang in the air horizontally as a boat sails along in the same direction. The boat skillfully maneuvers through them, aided by the personified loving breeze. The swords would represent a grave danger if the boat was sailing to the right, toward the points of the blades, but this is not the case. The wind, a symbol of the Anima Mundi, guides the boat to the left. This card represents the easy well-being we experience when we go with the flow and let the Soul of the World guide us. It may represent intuitive guidance that lets our minds take a rest. It also represents trust in a higher power. It can be a great relief when we can admit that we are not solely responsible for our fates and that there is

an intelligent loving presence guiding us.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Seven of Swords



In keeping with the theme of a trickster hero, *The Alchemical Tarot's* Seven of Swords depicts a fox, an animal that earned his reputation for cunning and trickery because of his depiction in Aesop's Fables. On this card, the fox has been gathering swords for his stash. He is coming over a hill with his seventh trophy. Is he building an arsenal or just a collection? Did he steal the swords or just find them? His swords face various directions, some are facing left or right, not in a positive or a negative way. Some downward, negative ones are safely stuck into the ground.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Eight of Swords

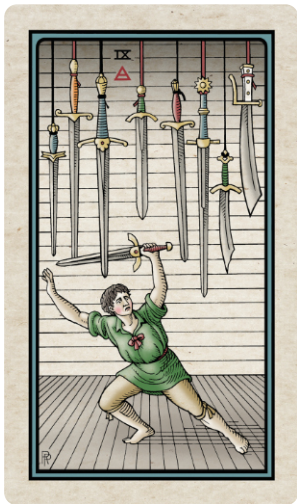


The Eight of Swords in *The Alchemical Tarot* is a related image. Eight swords are thrust downward into the ground to form the bars of a cage. A mythical creature, made of parts from all four of the evangelical beasts: with a lion's body, a bull's horns, a human-like expression, and eagle's wings, is held within this cage and chained to a stake, so he cannot fly away. Because he is captured and held back, the beast has become red with anger and repressed heat. This beast represents repression, anger, and feelings of alienation, or of being cut off from others.

It is our vital life force—our libido—that becomes red and heated when it is repressed by blocks in our psyches. These blocks may happen because of a negative experience that we do not wish to revisit but they can also be caused by the strengths in our personalities that we rely on, even when they are not the right behavior for the current situation. To restore our vitality, this beast needs to be set free in a safe, respectful environment.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Nine of Swords



The Nine of Swords in *The Alchemical Tarot* also illustrates fear. Eight swords, each hung by a thread, dangle from the ceiling and threaten a man, who holds the ninth sword and wants to pass through this barrier. His way seems open, yet the swords present an emotional threat because he is gripped with the fear that they might fall. This card represents fear: the fear to act, the fear to move forward, the fear to test our ideas, or other fears, including needless fear arising from unrealistic thoughts of impending doom.

Negative thinking creates fear and the way out is to move forward in spite of fear. If the man was to strike one of the swords, its thread might break and it could fall, but if he leaves it undisturbed he can pass through without incident. Similarly, when we fight with our fears we make them stronger and more able to do us harm. The best course is to let these thoughts alone and just move forward.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Ten of Swords



The Alchemical Tarot's Ten of Swords and this card in The Tarot of the Sevenfold Mystery are both based on Smith's card. But in my decks the man is stabbed in the chest. On the Alchemical card, a man has been stabbed with ten swords and lies dying in a pool of his blood. An open book lies on the ground in the foreground. The number ten has come back to the one, and in this case, all of the negativity, symbolized by the downward thrusting swords has been focused on one person. Killing criticism, expressed in words, or even deeds have created emotional or physical pain, and the book suggests the possibility of censorship. This card may also symbolize illness, in which case, it is the body that has betrayed you. The only positive in this card, is that the worst has

happened and now you can heal. It may also imply that healing can only happen when you get in touch with the pain that you have been repressing. For this reason, this card often turns up when we ask for advice from the Higher Self. This card is like a blues song. Although the emotions are painful, it can be good to let them out.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Lady of Swords



On the Lady of Swords in *The Alchemical Tarot*, a woman sits on a cloud playing her lute and singing. She is the artist of Air, of words, poetry, and song. A sword hangs in the air above her, like her song. It represents the power of her words. There is a precedence for this image in the *Sola Busca Tarot*, where, although the Knave of Swords is male, he leans on the edge of the card playing his lute and his sword rests against a tree on the other side. This card symbolizes eloquence and the beauty of words and thoughts. It may refer to the ability to express ourselves clearly, to appeal to emotions, instead of the intellect, and to be persuasive. The Lady is addressing her song to our left. Pay attention to a card that may appear there.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Knight of Swords



On this card in *The Alchemical Tarot*, the Knight is also preparing to strike with his sword, but we can actually see the Knight's enemy, a ferocious beast. The courageous knight, with an upraised sword and the lion of Strength on his shield, is attempting to slay the beast. The bones in the foreground suggest that the beast has lived on human flesh. This assures us that this knight is a hero. He is also quick to make value judgments and take decisive action. These are qualities we admire in a hero but a hero is only measured by the power and the evil nature of his foe.

This card calls for decisive courageous action but it may also be a warning that we are too judgmental. Heroic action is not useful in most situations. It is only

necessary when things are out of balance and force is needed to bring back harmony. The knight is slaying the beast not just because the beast is bad but to save the lives of others. Heroism is at its best when its motivation is unselfish.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

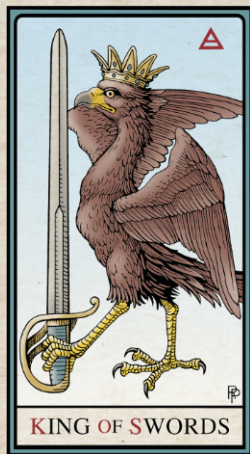
Queen of Swords



The Alchemical Tarot's Queen of Swords is not making a proclamation; she is helping us to make a decision. The Queen is a winged angel with an armored crown, who holds one sword upright sheltered by her red wing, and under her green wing, she supports a downward-thrusting sword. She stands on a cloud, the symbol of Air. She also represents Thought. In alchemy, green symbolizes what is unripe and red what is ripe. The Queen presents us with a choice between what is negative or immature and what is positive, mature, and ripe. She also represents a progression from the immature to the mature.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

King of Swords



On *The Alchemical Tarot's* King of Swords, a crowned, royal eagle proudly holds his upraised sword as he stands on Air. He is the master of his element and of the intellect. He clutches his saber and proceeds with self-assurance. He is the embodiment of positive thinking. When he speaks, his words are clear and meaningful. When he acts, his actions are deliberate and positive. He is at home in his element and does not need clouds for support like the Queen and the Lady. He can stand on the Air.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Ace of Staffs



The Alchemical Tarot's Ace of Staffs depicts a burning staff that stands in the midst of its element, Fire. It has three living leaves, suggesting that this Fire is the energy of life. The leaves are also a reference to the club symbol in modern playing cards, which is identical to the alchemical symbol for wood. Alchemists theorized that all four elements were present in varying proportions in all substances. Therefore, along with Earth, Water, and Air, Fire existed in wood as a latent energy that was released when the wood was ignited. Fire expelled the Water from the wood, transforming it into vapor as it ascended into Air, and left only Earth in the form of ash. This process demonstrates how Fire was viewed as the driving force of transmutation, but the ultimate

transmutation is driven by the Secret Fire, often identified as "vitriol" or "oil of glass." The symbol for vitriol forms the pommel on Justice's sword in the Alchemical trumps.

At the base of the staff, is the elemental creature for Fire, the Salamander. Real salamanders are small, lizard-like amphibians that live in moist places, but, in ancient times, a mythical Salamander was believed to be poisonous and able to survive in Fire. The ancient Roman naturalist, Pliny, believed that this Salamander needed Fire to breed.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Ace of Staffs

He said that a Salamander would seek Fire to breed in, but was able to quench it with the frigidity of its body. With this ancient reputation, the Salamander was a natural choice for the Fire elemental in Paracelsus's system. Because human passion was associated with Fire, in Christian symbolism, the Salamander also became a symbol for the soul and its ability to control the passions. In alchemy, the Salamander, besides being the Fire elemental, is one symbol of the Materia Prima. In the alchemical process, it helps the substance undergoing transformation to give up its Secret Fire, and this helps The Philosopher's Stone to claim its final power.



This is a card of beginnings. The Salamander signifies primal energies and this card may refer to new passions. It may reference a new job, a project, or a romance—anything that requires energy and enthusiasm. Passion is related to the Feeling function, which applies value to any situation. It is the Fire that drives our actions. This card is based on an image found in Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens*, 1618.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Two of Staffs



In *The Alchemical Tarot* the Two of Staffs depicts a hand emerging from a cloud, holding a burning staff, and joining its flame with another torch that is rooted in the ground. These torches represent a joined passion ignited when a lover joins with the one he loves. The grounded torch is labeled with the glyph for Venus, and other torch is labeled Mercury. In mythology, Mercury and Venus were lovers and their dual-sexed offspring was named Hermaphroditus. Hermaphroditus lent his/her name to a being of both sexes who symbolizes the alchemical union of opposites. Below the torches, a salamander, a symbol of Fire and mating, sees that his work is done, and departs.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Three of Staffs



On *The Alchemical Tarot's* Three of Staffs, instead of the beginning of a journey, the image is focused on the successful return of a ship or a boat. We see two burning staffs planted on a shore awaiting an oncoming sailboat with a burning mast. Although the fire on the boat may seem alarming, the fire is contained and the boat is not threatened. An eye is painted on the bow, a Mediterranean custom that originated with ancient Greek and Phoenician sailors. These eyes are commonly said to guide the boat but they are actually a form of apotropaic magic, designed to ward off the evil eye. One of the staffs on the shore is burning down, and the boat's mast may be a replacement for this staff. This card represents help or new energy on the horizon. What we have been waiting for is

arriving; the project will be completed, or reinforcements are on the way. Your wait is over and your ship has come in.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Four of Staffs



On *The Alchemical Tarot's* Four of Staffs, a man and a woman embrace and make a commitment to one another in a ceremony that takes place within a sacred space created by four burning staffs. The four staffs represent the four directions and therefore their center is sacred. The couple also represents a pairing of opposites: male and female, nude and clothed, natural and artful, and tall and short. Four is the number of physical manifestation and this is the suit of Feelings. This combination creates the environment where a commitment can be made, based on love. It is the deepening of the relationship that started with the attraction depicted on the two of vessels. This card may represent ties of marriage, friendship, family, business partnerships,

or any relationship where love and commitment are part of the motivation.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Five of Staffs



In alchemy five is the number associated with the Quinta Essentia, and the meaning of the Five of Staffs in *The Alchemical Tarot* differs from the Waite Smith card. We see a hand, whose five fingers are transforming into five burning staffs. It is held up against the sky. Because it is related to the Anima Mundi and the Quinta Essentia, five is the number of creativity, and this image represents creative energy flowing through a hand. It may be the hand of an artist, an inventor, a scientist, or an entrepreneur.

This Fire in the picture is elemental. It is energy and enthusiasm directed into a project. It may be a bit frightening because it appears that the hand can be consumed by the flames. Although the flames are

symbolic, in reality there is a danger that the person it belongs to may burn out because of continued work. However, when we are connected to the Anima Mundi, and doing work from this place of connectedness, there is little danger of burning out. The Anima Mundi has an infinite amount of energy to lend.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Six of Staffs



On *The Alchemical Tarot's* Six of Staffs, an artisan, wearing a worker's apron, is being honored. He stands on a cloud above the crowd and is crowned with a laurel wreath. Under his feet are the alchemical symbols for perfected silver and perfected gold, attesting to his success as an alchemist. Although many torches are held up in his honor, we can only see the arms of the people holding them, and they remain anonymous. When we compare their size to that of the alchemist, they seem gigantic, almost threatening but this may only be an illusion created by perspective, with the alchemist further away in the distance.

This card represents love in the form of respect and admiration. The man on the cloud has become a hero and an example for others. It is his moment of glory but it is a long way down from his cloud. The arms that are now honoring this alchemist may turn against him in the future. Throughout history, alchemists who achieved some success in their work often found themselves in danger, because of the greed and impatience of their patrons. A card to the right may show who is honoring the alchemist.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Seven of Staffs



On *The Alchemical Tarot's* Seven of Staffs, We find two dogs fighting. This image is based on an engraving found in Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens*, 1618. The big dog bites the smaller one on the face. In the background, seven burning staffs form a gnarled tangle. Alchemically, this image, based on the work of Nicolas Flamel, represents two chemicals trapped in the retort competing and destroying each other to become a new compound.

This card represents severe competition or violence. It literally depicts a dog-eat-dog world. This is not a debate, as depicted on the Two of Swords, but a struggle in which only the strong will survive. Neither dog wants to find out the truth. They only want to dominate or survive in this struggle. Such actions have consequences.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Eight of Staffs



As Staffs represent energy and work or projects, at this point in the series of pips, too many staffs have been accumulated and it is necessary to cut back. I believed that it was necessary to add a symbol for cutting back in *The Alchemical Tarot* and that is why the Eight of Staffs in my decks differ from Smith's. On my card we find a woodcutter diligently chopping at one of seven staffs with his ax, and it begins to tilt. An eighth staff in the foreground has already been cut down and lies on the ground next to its stump. After being taught by the previous pip that too many staffs can lead to violence, the woodcutter has decided to cut back and reduce the number of staffs he has burning. He may also need the wood to build the bonfire we will see in the next two pips.

In modern culture, it is often tempting to take on more work than we can handle. Sometimes it is hard to say no when asked to volunteer for a worthwhile project or we may take on extra work because of the demands of our jobs or because we need extra money to make ends meet. This card represents cutting back on work, on projects, or appointments before they get out of hand. Alternatively, the message may address taking care of an emergency. For example, trees are cut to stop a forest fire from spreading.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Nine of Staffs



The Nine and Ten of Staffs in *The Alchemical Tarot* are influenced by the alchemical Opus and they have different meanings than Smith's cards. The Alchemical Nine of Staffs is another image based on an engraving found in Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens*, 1618. The gray wolf represents Mercury as a dissolvent. In the alchemical text, he is depicted devouring a king, who represents the Gold of the Philosophers. Then, as in this image, the wolf is sacrificed in Fire and miraculously, from the body of the burnt wolf, the king is restored to life, with renewed health and beauty. The phoenix on the next pip, rising out of the flames, is a related symbol. This card reminds us that sometimes sacrifice is a necessary step if we want to achieve our goals. The wolf's body

is facing to our left and a card on this side may tell us more about the goal. The wolf's head is facing right, suggesting that he has doubts about going forward.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Ten of Staffs



The Ten Staffs in *The Alchemical Tarot* and in *The Tarot of the Sevenfold Mystery* are variations on the same image. The ten staffs in the pictures are joined into one Fire, and a red phoenix, also called the firebird, rises from the flames reborn. In Classical mythology, the phoenix is said to immolate itself at the end of its life. After three days, it is reborn—rising renewed from its ashes. The phoenix may be considered a symbol of the sun, which is eternally reborn every morning. The Phoenix's Fire would, therefore, symbolize the red sky at sunset and at dawn. In Christian symbolism, it represents Christ and his resurrection. In alchemy, the phoenix is a symbol for the Philosopher's Stone, which is red like this bird and reborn from the ash of the Materia Prima

during the Opus. These cards pertain to renewal. They say that we can come through hardship stronger than when we started. We can be tested by Fire and win.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

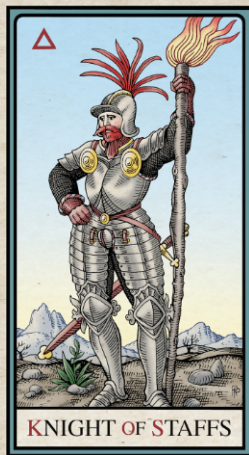
Lady of Staffs



The Alchemical Lady of Staffs is a woman in a classical dress standing in a hot, dry desert holding a burning staff. She is looking upon it with admiration as she begins to dance. Like Smith's Page, this woman is going into a new area of her life, moving to a new location, or exploring previously untried possibilities. She is doing this with great optimism and joy. This is not a forced move; it is an adventure.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Knight of Staffs



In *The Alchemical Tarot* the Knight of Staffs is the mate of the Lady. Like the Lady, he is moving into the hot and dry desert, and as we learned, these are the qualities that the desert shares with its element. As an ambassador for Fire, he has red hair and red details on his outfit, including his scabbard, belt, gloves, and the flame-like feathers on his helmet. As a representative of the Feeling function, he is robust and confident. Also like the Lady, he is moving into a new uncharted territory and a new phase of his life.

The difference between his approach and the Lady's, is that he is fully armored and prepared to fight for his goal. He is also optimistic and exhibits great stamina and strength. If the cards with this Knight and

his Lady are next to each other in a reading, they will either be face to face, in agreement, or back to back, in opposition.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

Queen of Staffs



In *The Alchemical Tarot*, the Queen of Staffs is related to the Queen of Swords. She stands facing us displaying two torches and asks us to make a choice. The torch in her left hand is raw and natural. The other is refined and has been carved in a decorative classical design. She is presenting us with a choice between what is natural, unprocessed, or possibly crude, and what is refined or sophisticated. At times, either condition may be considered positive or negative. For example, it would be considered negative to display crude manors at a dinner party and positive to have refined them, but if the food is unprocessed and natural, it may be better for us than overly refined food.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K

King of Staffs



The Alchemical Tarot's King of Staffs is a dragon, the King of Fire and of Feeling. He coils around the base of his flaming staff, representing his passion, and claims it for himself. His scales form his crown naturally—he has crowned himself. The king is unashamed of his feelings, recognizing them as naturally and rightfully his. He has great self-assurance, and seems to be facing to the left, to the right, and occupying the center all at once.

In alchemy this dragon may be a symbol of the Secret Fire, or represent the poison that will be transformed into the healing elixir. Psychologically, the dragon symbolizes the unclaimed power of the libido that falls into the Shadow. This energy must be reclaimed to experience wholeness and health.

M	V	C	Ace	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Sw	St	8	9	10	L	K	Q	K