

The New World Witchery Guide to
CARDOMANCY



The Art of Fortune-Telling with Playing Cards

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Contents

| | |
|-------------------------|-------|
| <i>Overview</i> | p. 4 |
| Red & Black | p. 5 |
| The Suits | p. 5 |
| Pips & Faces | p. 6 |
| <i>The Cards</i> | p. 7 |
| Diamonds | p. 7 |
| Clubs | p. 9 |
| Hearts | p. 10 |
| Spades | p. 12 |
| <i>The Spreads</i> | p. 14 |
| One-Card | p. 15 |
| Three-Card | p. 16 |
| Five-Card (Full Spread) | p. 17 |
| <i>Final Notes</i> | p. 21 |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | p. 21 |

Overview

I've always been a fan of what's referred to as "secrets in plain sight." I love the idea that certain everyday objects have deeply mystical significance which needs but the right pair of eyes to unveil it. Keys, coins, bottles, and boxes all find their way into my magical life and onto my household shelves, where most people ignore them. I, on the other hand, can turn to them at a moment's notice and use them as tools to open up the mysterious and wonderful world around me. So it is with playing cards.

In this small book, what I would like to do is explain my personal system of card divination, as well as some of the variants and influences which have shaped my practice. I'm not going to dive into an extensive history of playing cards or tarot cards, as those subjects are well-covered and well-documented in other sources. However, a little of the history that sometimes slips through the cracks (especially regarding playing cards) might be worth mentioning here.

While the absolute origin of pictographic cards is unknown, [many folks believe](#) they came out of India, China, or Turkey, or with the travelling Romany people (also frequently called "Gypsies"). What is known is that by the 1500's, playing cards were very popular with the lower classes, and often cited as a vice by clerical and governmental documents throughout Europe. They [received wide-spread appreciation](#) from the highest ranks, including Bohemian emperor Rudolph II and Madame Lenormand, who is reputed to have provided psychic guidance to Napoleon's empress, Josephine. Yet cards have almost always been popular among the lower classes, too. Cards came to America with settlers, sailors, and soldiers. In fact, in the late 1700's, a popular ballad called "[The Soldier's Prayer-Book](#)" described the suits, pips, and enumeration of playing cards in terms of biblical metaphor. For example, the fives represent the five wounds of Christ, the nines are the nine lepers healed by Jesus, and the tens are the Ten Commandments. While this song may have been a white-wash for gambling soldiers eager to keep one of the few portable entertainments allowed them, it does register an important point: cards make wonderful tools for metaphoric interpretation.

So why playing cards instead of tarot cards? For one thing, playing cards of one kind or another have been more or less easily accessible since the 1600's, and are extremely versatile. The cards you play a game of blackjack with one day can be used to reveal the future the next. They also travel well in a pocket and are easily replaced if they get torn or damaged. Plantation owners in the antebellum South often thought little of slaves having decks of playing cards to amuse themselves in their few off hours (though in some places stricter masters prohibited them altogether). [William Wells Brown](#), who provided a slave narrative for a character named "Uncle Frank," claimed that each plantation also had at least one fortune-teller somewhere on the premises, and at least few of them used playing cards. Today, playing cards are an excellent way of divining even in plain sight. No one thinks much of two people over a table full of diamonds, spades, clubs, and hearts, while a Devil or Lovers card might raise eyebrows.

My own system of playing card divination is largely based on the book [It's All in the Cards](#), by Chita Lawrence and the rhyme "[For the Witch of Poor Memory](#)" by Dawn Jackson, with a significant amount of additional material I've picked up from other books, teachers, and experiences over time. What I outline here will be *my own* understanding of these cards, so please do not take it as gospel, and find a method that works for you.

Red & Black

Like most who practice cartomancy, I break the major meanings of the cards down by color and suits. However, unlike a lot of other practitioners, I don't ascribe these suits to tarot parallels or elemental attributes. There are some connections, of course, as hearts and cups both signal emotion-based interpretations, but it's not a hard-and-fast link.

First, black cards indicate "negative" or "no" answers, while red cards are "positive" or "yes" answers. This is most important in short readings, which I'll address in a later post. Some will say that having more black cards than red is a sign of negativity, but honestly, the only truly "negative" cards in an extended reading are the spades, in my opinion.

Getting hung up on the red vs. black significance can short circuit a reading, too. While it is helpful in a way to be able to "summarize" the reading based on the proportion of "positive" red cards to "negative" black ones, it might also predispose you as a reader to offer a particularly strong interpretation as you continue with the session. Seeing lots of red cards may make you think "Oh, a very pleasant reading! Good news for the client!" but when you see that, in fact, you've actually got a Seven of Diamonds and an Ace and Seven of Hearts in your reading, there are distinct possibilities for a negative reading that you might ignore based on your positive bias.

Basically, as always with divinatory methods, keep an open mind. Use the colors of the cards as a loose guide, but don't get invested in them before thinking about the individual card meanings.

The Suits

If you've had any experience with tarot, understanding the different meanings for each suit might be easier. Then again, it might be harder, as many tarot readers have preset notions about suit correspondences. I advise that a reader spend time with the cards and determine what patterns emerge from continual use. But I will definitely admit that having at least a rough concept of what each suit means can be incredibly helpful. For me, I look at the suits in the following way:

Hearts – Family, friends, love, and lovers. Also emotions and things which are deeply felt.

Clubs – Work and business. One's "calling" or destiny. Also conflict, discussion, and debate.

Diamonds – Money, luck, fortune, happiness. Also news, letters, and socializing.

Spades – Tears, suffering, woe. War, fighting, violence. Also change, warning, and doubts/fears.

I'll get into each of these suits a little more when I break down the individual cards, but this should give you some idea what I see when I do a layout for a reading. If I see lots of diamonds and clubs, I know that someone's got some good work he or she will be well compensated for coming around the bend. All hearts means that the client is emotionally invested in the reading, or that he or she is dealing with deep family or friendship questions. Spades and clubs together would be a sign that the client's job might be in jeopardy, or that work is very unfulfilling for him or her.

Next, we'll get into the significance of the pips on the cards, but it is good to keep the overall meanings of the suits in mind as we go forward.

Pips and Faces

There are lots of different systems of interpreting the card numbers and the royals. Some are fairly simplistic (mine definitely are) and some get incredibly detailed, looking at astrological and numerological significance in cabbalistic and ceremonial magical contexts. I'm not a particularly good ceremonialist, so I tend to use a fairly straightforward system focusing on key concepts associated with each number. I can probably demonstrate better than I can explain, so here's my numbering system.

Aces – Beginnings; Primary or Solitary things

Twos – Pairs; Couples; Exchange

Threes – Growth; Wishes

Fours – Decisions; Stagnation; Choices

Fives – Groups; Bodily things; Gains/Losses

Six – Paths

Sevens – Epitome cards*; Inversions; Trouble

Eights – Talking; Ideas

Nines – Patience; Ambition; Expansion

Tens – Completion; Endings

Jacks – Youth; Children; Messages; Peers

Queens – Women or a particular woman; Beauty; Mothers; Nurses; Teachers

Kings – Men or a particular man; Wisdom; Age; Power; Judges

*A note on "epitome" cards – the Sevens of each suit represent the most concentrated form of that suit. Often, there's a somewhat negative connotation to this intensity. Yet, this does not necessarily mean all good or all bad. For example, the seven of spades can mean "tears" as an epitome card, but if those tears are near lots of red cards, they are likely tears of joy.

The number combinations can also lead to a certain amount of interpretation. For instance, if you had several threes and nines, that would guide you towards a reading about opportunities and very quick growth (because both cards are about growth/expansion). A seven, five, and four might indicate bad choices and losses that come out of those choices. A king with a six might mean a teacher or elder is going to help guide the questioner in a new direction.

Royal cards (or "face cards") also have a certain potency that the numeric cards lack. I sometimes include aces as a face card, but this really depends on the reading and the number of other face cards around it. It's sort of like spiritual blackjack—it can be the highest or lowest value depending on the other cards. The other face cards usually represent particular people or major events in the subject's life. Getting a king and a queen of the same suit can often indicate "parents" or the parental guidance which shaped the questioner's life. You'll see more about these as we explore them in depth later on, but for now just know that royals, aces, and sevens all mean "pay attention to this reading." There are some divinatory systems (such as the card-reading taught in [curanderismo](#)) which also remove the queens from the deck before reading. This dates back to a European practice based on a specific deck, but don't be surprised if you don't see them in someone's reading. As a final word on royals, there are two special royals in my system of divination: the King and Queen of Hearts. Depending on the gender of the client, one of these cards will represent him or her (the king for a man, the queen for a woman). We'll look at how that works later on, though. All of these interpretations are also deeply linked to the suits, of course, and to where they fall during the reading.

Now, on to the individual cards.

The Cards

Now we're going to look at individual cards and their significance in my readings. I'll basically tell you a few key words, and then elaborate a bit on potential interpretations of these cards. Most of my system comes out of years of practice using playing cards for divination, as well as for games. I have found that in some cases, my personal work with a particular card has shown me a meaning different from the one I originally learned. When it comes to these sorts of fortune-telling methods, practice makes perfect.

Now, onto the cards! Let's start with:

Diamonds

Remember that diamonds in general signify money, fortune, luck, and happiness. They also can relate to messages or news, or social interaction.

Ace – A letter; A coin. The Ace of Diamonds indicates some new money or new information entering the questioner's life. It can also have to do with a sudden shift in luck—if preceded and followed by spades, that could mean bad luck. Additionally, due to the solitary nature of the pip, it could mean being very careful with your news, luck, or money—keeping it to yourself, as it were.

Two – Birds (as in “a little birdie told me”); Exchange of funds. This card is about sharing, whether that's news and gossip (like the birds), or sharing your luck or fortune with someone else. It *can* indicate a partnership of some kind, but usually not a business one so much as a financial one. For example, if it were paired with a card connected to a friend or lover, you might be moving in with that person soon (because you'll be yoking yourself to them financially).

Three – Gifts; A fountain. The Three of Diamonds shows generosity—sometimes even unwilling generosity. Someone who draws this card likely “throws his/her money away,” just like one throws pennies in a fountain (if you're singing “Three Coins in a Fountain” right now, I sympathize with you). This may seem like a sign of irresponsibility, but it can also simply *receiving* a gift, or an expansion of fortunes which allows the person to be generous.

Four – The purse/money bag; No news. With the Four of Diamonds, the reader will need to figure out if the reading is about money or information, as it changes the card's meaning a bit. If the question is financial, the four indicates a stable monetary situation, but also one without any chance of growing—much like a closed purse neither receives nor spends money. In the case of information, this card indicates a dull waiting period, possibly a prolonged one. This can mean “no news is good news,” or that the client must wait on tenterhooks for a proper resolution to his/her situation.

Five – Good luck; Laughter. This card shows the subject surrounded by friends, fortune, and happiness. It's not the all-encompassing joy found in other cards like the **Ten of Diamonds** but it's generally positive nonetheless. Depending on context, however, it can also mean something like “the last laugh,” and have slightly more sinister connotations.

Six – Streets of Gold; Good decisions. No, not the Yellow Brick Road, but the idea's the same. The client's on the right path and merely needs to continue doing what he/she is doing and success will

come. Paired with a card like an Ace, this card may mean recent decisions have been good; paired with a King or a Queen the client is probably getting very good advice from someone.

Seven – Lies; Deceit and falsehood. The Seven of Diamonds indicates that the questioner is being lied to by someone. This lie may or may not have to do with money, but almost always has to do with happiness. Perhaps the client is happy being lied to, and little white lies sustain him/her—this could certainly be the case if a Jack of Diamonds, Clubs, or Hearts were nearby. More often, though, the lies indicate trouble to come.

Eight – Gossip; Idle chatter. Much like the Two of Diamonds, this card means an exchange of information, although it usually is information of little value. It can also indicate talking about money, getting good news about one's fortunes or finances, or someone's natural wit. Paired with something like the Two of Spades, it might mean something like "loose lips sink ships," and that one should hold one's tongue for a while.

Nine – Daydreams; Peace and contentment. Think of this card as a leisurely day spent in the sun with nothing particular to do. It's a card of relative idleness, but without any real negativity. It's a well-earned rest, a chance to plan for the future, and time to stop and smell the flowers. Beware, though, if it's paired with a four of any kind, as it may mean that all one's plans are but pipe dreams, destined to disappear like clouds in an afternoon sky. Or something like that.

Ten – A treasure chest; Sunlight; Joy. With the Ten of Diamonds, the client can expect great happiness. In the context of other good luck cards, this may mean an unexpected windfall or a sudden improvement in circumstances. The Ten of Diamonds leaves little room for any sorrow or woe, and generally indicates the fulfillment of financial goals and personal dreams. Of course, as Willy Wonka said, "Do you know what happened to the boy who suddenly got everything he ever wanted?" Oh, wait, he lived happily ever after...

Jack – Good news; A girl. This card displays a young boy (or possibly a young girl, hence the card's alternate meaning). At one time these cards were known as Knaves instead of Jacks, and would have been similar to a knight's squire. In the context of a card reading, this Jack means that some good news is about to arrive. Or that a beautiful girl is about to arrive. Which might also be good news, depending on your point of view.

Queen – The good wife; A wedding; Sensuality. This Queen is all about duty and splendor. She could be a mother or wife in the questioner's life who inspires joy and happiness, or provides sound financial advice. More likely, though, she indicates someone who does what must be done or a woman with a deeply sexual side. She can also mean a wedding (and thus a large expense and a large celebration), or in some cases a big party (for instance if she appeared alongside "friend" cards like the Queen or Jack of Clubs).

King – A bank; A civil trial; Wisdom with money. The King of Diamonds means power through money or fortune. Paired with several spades, the client can expect to face some financial trials (literally in a courtroom or possibly only figuratively). Alternately, paired with clubs or diamonds, this card probably means that money is being invested wisely, or that there is a man in the questioner's life who provides very good advice when it comes to luck and money.

Clubs

Clubs are work, destiny, plans and debate. Remember that as you do your readings.

Ace – A cave; Solitary contemplation. This card tells the reader that the subject should take some time to really evaluate his or her life. Has he/she got goals? Is he/she working to reach them, or should there be some reevaluation of priorities. This is a lonely card, but not necessarily a bad one—often we need moments of intense personal reflection before we can move on to do the great things we are capable of.

Two – A handshake; Business partnership. The Two of Clubs shows an agreement or arrangement made between two people, often for the sake of business or stability. It can indicate a treaty or alliance of some kind, or a pairing up to overcome obstacles in the way. Pulled with something like a Two of Spades, it may mean the impending end of a previous business partnership.

Three – A stone wall; Obstacles. In most cases, threes indicate wishes or growth, so this card may seem odd. However, the setbacks provided by a good obstacle also provide the impetus to overcome them oftentimes. Usually this card means that whatever challenges the subject faces, whether they be business troubles or a lack of personal direction, he/she can and will overcome them. Paired with something like a Three of Hearts or Diamonds, such progress is likely just around the bend.

Four – A horse and cart; A plowed field. This card is about potential. The Four of Clubs definitely means that for the moment nothing is happening, but that now is the time to prepare for inevitable change. By “tilling” and “plowing” oneself or one’s business plans, the eventual outcome will be far better than one would get just sitting on one’s hands. If this card appears with a Nine of Clubs, that outcome is ripe and should show up very soon.

Five – A barn; A healthy body. The Five of Clubs is encouraging. It can represent either a full barn (which in turn stands for abundance and hard work paying off) or a strong, healthy body. If this card were at the end of a reading full of cards which indicated illness (such as a Five or Nine of Spades), a recovery should be expected. An inversion of that order might mean deteriorating health, however, so context is important.

Six – Footprints; A clear trail. A person who gets this card in his/her reading probably has a definitive sense of purpose, or has recently begun some activity that he/she finds very fulfilling. This can be a career, a hobby, or even a friendship of some kind. If the appropriate King or Queen of Hearts comes after this card, it might be a sign that true love (“wuv...twue wuv”) is on the horizon.

Seven – Doubts/Worries. The Seven of Clubs indicates that the client is very troubled by something. So troubled, in fact, that it is likely hindering or debilitating the questioner in some way. Paired with something like the Seven of Spades and/or the Ace of Clubs, he/she likely spends a lot of time alone and crying over something that he/she feels powerless to change. The nice thing about this card (and there is a nice thing) is that for the most part, all the troubles are really in the asker’s head. They can be overcome, but it may take a mental sea change to effect that change.

Eight – Shop talk; A table or bench. When the work day finishes, it’s nice to crowd around a table with friends, family, and sometimes even co-workers for a drink or a meal. Often the events of the day get rehashed, with details added or subtracted as conversation directs. That’s what this card is all about. It

shows people getting together to share the tricks of their particular trades, make plans for times ahead, or even occasionally plumb the mysteries of the universe, depending on how much beer is at the table.

Nine – Reaping; A forest. The Nine of Clubs shows things that have grown and how we deal with them as human beings. In some cases, we reap what we've sown and prepare for hard times ahead, hoping that what we have will be enough. Sometimes, we wander through the trees getting lost, hoping we'll find our way back again. A questioner finding this card may be having trouble making sense of his or her life, but there is still plenty of hope left. Followed by something like a Ten of Hearts or Clubs, this card simply means that a dark night soon reveals a bright dawn.

Ten – A herd or flock; Clouds. This card is abundance, completion, and satisfaction. It is definitely all about rewards, comfort, and a job well done. It completes the sense of accomplishment found in the Five of Clubs, and adds the element of restfulness. The seeker's found his or her calling, home life is happy and stable, and/or business is steady and fulfilling. The clouds, heavy with rain on the horizon, are pouring down copiously. This is the "pat on the back" or "Miller time" card.

Jack – A friend; A sibling. The Jack of Clubs is a peer, whether that's a co-worker, a good friend, or a sibling. This is someone with whom the questioner has a mutual respect. The Jack can also indicate business news of some kind (especially if an Ace or Two of Diamonds or an Eight of Clubs shows up), and may also indicate a young boy entering the client's life.

Queen – A mother; A nurse; A wise woman. This is a card indicating someone very smart, very strong, and very helpful. The seeker probably knows exactly who this card represents when he/she sees it, and also probably knows exactly what kind of advice this person would give (think of this as a conscience card). This card can also mean a mother hen, too, though likely only if connected to an argumentative card, like the Eight of Spades. Conflict in the Clubs is productive, however, so even a mother hen has her place. Finally, this card indicates nurturing. Paired with something like an Ace of Clubs, it likely means taking the time to heal old emotional wounds before moving forward with something or someone new.

King – A father; A judge; A general. The King of Clubs is someone with authority, someone who can give an order and get things done. He may not always be nice about it, but he has his reasons for driving people so hard. This person is someone wise, though perhaps also someone very stubborn and set in his ways. For those who have issues with feeling judged all the time, this card could be troubling, but it may also mean that the questioner must face his or her fears and forge ahead. This is a card about what *must* be done, and living up to expectations.

Hearts

This suit has to do with deep emotions as well as family, friends, and lovers. These cards often represent people well-known to the questioner.

Ace – A kiss; A new romance; Feeling lonely. Pulling the Ace of Hearts in a reading means that likely a new lover has entered the picture, or at the very least a formerly bland relationship has taken on new life. Generally it's a positive card, but next to something like a Two of Spades it can mean a period of separation and loneliness.

Two – Lovers; Coupling; The sex card. This is the card that inspires knowing smiles and lecherous grins. Simply put, it's about sex. Not so simply put, it can also be about a deeply emotionally intimate connection with someone else, including a family member (try not to mix those two meanings together... *shudder*). So if you pulled it with say the King or Queen of Clubs, it likely means a family relationship, while a lay next to any Jack might mean a delightful tryst.

Three – A wish granted; A full cup. The Three of Hearts means that something deeply longed for is about to appear. This isn't quite the fulfillment found with the Ten of Diamonds or the Ten of Hearts, but it does generally mean at least one thing will go right.

Four – A trunk or travel case; A lock. Like with other fours, this card shows a relative stagnation. However, in the case of the Four of Hearts, that could also mean incubation or preparation. The image of a hope chest or a steamer trunk fits this card, with all their promised potential for excitement, romance, marriage, and just life in general. However, getting mired down in preparation can lead to a life of lockdown, where everything is being kept just so, and never given the opportunity for use.

Five – A chapel; Fertility; A bed. The Five of Hearts shows the healthy development of a romance, leading to family and (potentially) marriage. Paired with something like the Queen of Diamonds, it almost certainly means a wedding of some kind. Paired with a Jack of Hearts, be prepared for a new member of the family in nine months. Paired with a Nine of Clubs, however, this card could just mean someone needs a good night's sleep.

Six – A dog; Loyalty and stamina; Long-term relationships. If the questioner gets the Six of Hearts in a reading, he or she can expect to be in it for the long haul, whatever "it" may be. It could be a family situation, a romance, or even—if paired with something like the Two of Spades—a lengthy divorce. However, the upside to this card is its dog imagery. Paired with a lover card like the Two of Hearts, it indicates a sincere and faithful mate, one who loves unconditionally and who will always be there.

Seven – Hate; Fear. This card shows a love that has grown too strong and become hate, or possibly fear and terror of another person. If the reader sees this card with something like the Five or Nine of Spades, it's a sign that the relationship will end in violence and help should be sought immediately. Alternatively, with something like the Ace of Clubs, this may indicate self-loathing which needs to be overcome. It's also possible that the Seven of Hearts will act as a warning in a reading, alerting the subject to the presence of an enemy.

Eight – Flirtation; Pillow talk. While the Two of Hearts is all about doing it, this card is all about *talking* about doing it. The Eight of Hearts shows that giddy, fun stage of flirtation and wooing that so often appears early in the relationship. It can also mean a sweet, tender intimacy and connecting with a partner on an emotional as well as physical level.

Nine – A little house/cottage; A new life. When a client pulls this card, it usually has to do with the establishment of a new family or a new home. Paired with something like the Four of Hearts or Five of Clubs, it may mean saving for a new house, or possibly moving away. If aces show up, however, pay attention to them, as they may indicate a sudden shift in life circumstances which leads to a new life that the client doesn't actually want.

Ten – A happy family; A fire. With the Ten of Hearts, everything about one's emotional and personal life seems to be falling into place. Romances go well, family relationships are strong, and everything's good.

Think of being gathered around a nice warm fire with friends and family, enjoying a perfect summer evening. Be aware, however, that as with all fires, this one can burn. Paired with an Ace of Spades, be prepared for an upheaval in happiness.

Jack – A baby; A cradle; A young boy. This card is one that makes plenty of clients nervous, and some extremely happy. Because of its strong associations with a newborn child, the Jack of Hearts often tells of a pregnancy, especially when matched to something like the Five of Hearts. This card can also have to do with calm and peace, though, even indicating a period of self-pampering in a way. In some cases, the card simply refers to a boy or young man in the client's life.

Queen – The client; Soulmate. Remember how I said the King and Queen of Hearts were unusual? That's because they are used to represent the actual client in a reading. If a reader has a female client, she is represented by the Queen of Hearts. If the reader's client is male, this card represents that perfect, ideal lover or soulmate. One of these two cards, at least, will always show up in every extended reading (more on that when we talk about layouts). The presence of both indicates a preexisting marriage or a deep and abiding love.

King – The client; Soulmate. Just like the Queen of Hearts, this card can represent either a male client or a soulmate. I know some people will ask about homosexual couples, and I will say that despite the gender pairings implied by the card faces, the meaning "soulmate" still applies to gay couples. Since there aren't two Kings of Hearts in a deck, a gay man will see his ideal mate represented as a Queen of Hearts. The reverse is true if a gay woman sees a King of Hearts in her reading—she can expect to meet the girl of her dreams.

Spades

These are the cards of woe, suffering, and fighting. Consider them warnings or signs of trouble that may yet be avoided.

Ace – Death; Sudden change. This card is paralleled by the Death card in the tarot deck. And like its counterpart, it doesn't necessarily mean physical death, but instead a sudden transformation or an ending. Much of this card's meaning depends upon what it's next to. If it is with a Six of Clubs, it might mean that a business venture will come to an abrupt termination. With Threes from Diamonds and/or Hearts, the client can stop expecting others to give them anything...they are on their own. This card can also indicate deep isolation, and in some cases might even mean a period of contemplation, but again, it depends on context.

Two – A duel; A separation. The Two of Spades means that someone is itching for a fight, and there's a good chance they'll get one. Paired with cards like the Two or Nine of Hearts, a romantic separation is imminent. If it sits next to a person card, like a jack, king, or queen, it's likely there will be a falling out with that person soon.

Three – A battle; Setbacks and obstacles. Unlike the obstacles presented by the Three of Clubs, the roadblocks that come out of this card are not about developing oneself and overcoming difficult trials. Instead, this card is about fighting through the hardest parts and living to see another day. Metaphorically, the Three of Spades might indicate a bitter falling out with one's parents (if next to a King or Queen of clubs) or a difficult economic situation at one's job (with a Six of Diamonds or Clubs).

Four – The Four Horsemen; A mire. Seeing a four in any suit indicates feeling a little stuck, but seeing a Four of Spades means being immobilized. It can also presage illness, poverty, violence, or even death. It means that if the subject doesn't make some changes—difficult as they may be to make—there could be some dire consequences. However, there are positive ways to see this card. If it is followed, for example, by the Five and Jack of Hearts, it may mean that someone who's been trying to get pregnant will soon be able to, though it won't be easy. Overall, though, consider this a definite “warning” card.

Five – Illness; A corpse. This suit is just full of jolly things, isn't it? The Five of Spades indicates sickness, disease, pain, etc. It can also mean that there's something that needs to be buried, like a hatchet between the client and someone he/she is feuding with. Paired with cards like the other Fives or the Ten of Clubs, it generally means that the client will beat the illness or deal with the skeletons in his/her closet. With a Nine or Ten of Spades, however, things get worse.

Six – A devil; Temptation; Bad decisions. If the Queen of Clubs is the angel on your shoulder, the Six of Spades is on the other side with red pajamas and a pitchfork. The nice thing about this card is that any temptations it brings up can be recognized and dealt with. But sometimes it's fun to give into temptation, too, so pay attention to the other cards. If you see lots of red cards around this card, it may mean a little harmless vice. With a Two of Hearts and a Five of Spades, however, it may mean that a sexual relationship is becoming destructive.

Seven – Tears; Blood; War. I've already mentioned that the tears implied by the Seven of Spades can be tears of sorrow or tears of joy, depending on context. This card may also be a warning that violence is not far away, or that something deep down inside the subject is affected by the overall reading. But the sevens always carry a twist. While the sevens of the other suits tend to have some potent negativity, the Seven of Spades can have a very good side. It can imply a great deal of strength, mastery of a situation, or even coming victory and glory. Caution is always best, though. If this card lands with the Ace, Five, Nine, or Ten of Spades, heads will roll.

Eight – An argument; Shouting. Communication is important, but how a person communicates is also vital. Pulling the Eight of Spades means that the client is not making him/herself clear and likely finds him/herself constantly embattled and unable to resolve the problems in his/her life. It can also mean long-standing arguments with those close to the client. If it were with a Queen of Clubs and a Five of Hearts, it could be a mother-in-law, for example.

Nine – A funeral; A coffin; A ghost. The Nine of Spades looks like a funeral procession as scene from above, with pallbearers carrying a black coffin (at least that's one way to see it). This could indicate some kind of grieving process, the need for ritual and order to restore balance, or just a need to put an end to things. In some cases, this card may mean that someone or something from the past is still haunting the subject (it may even indicate a literal haunting). Matched with something like the Jack of Clubs or Jack of Hearts, it might mean an old friend or an old flame of some kind.

Ten – A cemetery; A ruined church. This card shows the aftermath of woe and trouble, and in that way it's actually not all that bad. It shows that the worst is over, and that all that's left is to pick up the pieces and move on. It can also be a peaceful card, a return to calm and quiet, or even to innocence in a way. Paired with a card like the Six of Clubs, it might mean a lapse in faith and a need to reevaluate one's beliefs about something.

Jack – A rebel; Bad news; A backstabber. The Jack of Spades is a bad boy/girl, someone not to be trusted but who likely is very seductive and enticing. With a card like the Six of Spades beside it, it might mean the kind of lover who is no good, but incredibly desirable. With a Two or Eight of Diamonds, it means that gossip and slander are spreading about the client, and steps should be taken to staunch it. The Jack of Spades can also simply mean bad news is on the horizon, so be prepared for it.

Queen - A cruel mother; A seductress; Jealousy; A female rival. With this particular queen, watch out! She's intensely powerful and knows how to use that power to get what she wants. She is trying to take something from the subject, be it a lover, money, or happiness in general. However, this card can also be a warning that the subject is becoming too jealous for no reason, which is almost an opposite reading in a way. So again context is important. Paired with a Six of Spades or an Eight of Hearts, it's likely this woman is trying to wreck a relationship. Paired with a Six of Hearts, though, it probably means that the subject is needlessly jealous.

King – A criminal; An executioner; Wrath; A male rival. The King of Spades is powerful, too, and just as vicious as his queen. He is not the just judge found in the clubs, but an executioner ready to exact a penalty for any wrongdoings. He will take what is rightfully the client's if he can, or attack when the client is the weakest. If this card appears, the client should attempt to make amends for any transgressions, and turn to friends or family for support in case hard times lie ahead.

The Spreads

In the system I work with, spreads tend to be very simple and basic. Only a small number of cards are used to provide divination, and the overall structure of the reading will be guided mostly by the completed spread taken as a whole. There are many cartomancy systems which use more cards and which take longer to do (the most elaborate reading I do takes about 30-45 minutes at most), but anytime I've attempted anything bigger than the methods I'm about to demonstrate, I've felt the answers were too vague to be of any use. That is just me, however, and others may find tremendous success with those expanded readings.

Basically, there are a few different readings you can do:

- A one-card yes/no reading
- A three card time-based spread (past/present/future, morning/noon/night, etc.)
- An extended "five-card" spread (though this is a bit of a misnomer, as you'll see in a moment)

I'm sure other people have other methods, but these are the ones I work with so I'll be explaining from my point of view only.

Before you do any spread, contact spirit(s) if you like. If you don't know how to do that or don't feel like that will help your reading, you can bypass this step. In the illustrations below, you'll be seeing candles and a ram's skull in the picture. While these *are* a part of my Ancestral contact work, I'd like to be up front in saying they are in these pictures more for show than anything else. I do sometimes contact Ancestors via the cards (mostly because my cards are handed down from my mother, so if I want to speak to her they're a great medium for that), but generally speaking I don't have a lot of paraphernalia during a cartomancy session. Part of the charm of reading with playing cards is their ubiquitous and unassuming nature, so getting all the trappings and trimmings of a full Ancestor contact working out is a bit overkill. But it looks nice in pictures.

Often, a short prayer to the effect of “Spirit(s), guide my hands as I shuffle these cards, my eyes as I read them, and my mind as I speak their meaning” will suffice. A glass of water and *maybe* a candle will add to it, if you are so inclined. But don’t feel compelled to twist yourself into knots before you’ve even begun.

Okay, onto the spreads.

One-Card Reading



[Figure 1]

This is the simplest kind of reading, and can be done in a minute or two. The questioner posits a yes/no query, and the reader cuts the deck and shows the card at the split (see Fig. 1). If it’s a red card, the answer is “yes,” and a black card means “no.” The actual card itself can add a *little* more meaning to the reading, if you care to discuss it with the client, but it won’t tell you much. For instance, in the photo, I’ve got the Eight of Diamonds. So if the questioner asked something like “Will I meet a new romantic partner soon?” the answer would be “yes,” with a slight augmentation indicating that perhaps they will meet their lover due to some office gossip, or that perhaps their new paramour will be a gossip him/herself.

This type of reading is not particularly good for deep questions. The new love question probably is about as profound as it can get with such a cursory effort. However, it’s a perfect reading for folks who want to get simple answers to simple questions, or for those “fence-sitting” on a trivial decision. It can also be a nice way to perform a quick daily divination, just to keep yourself in practice.

You could also use a single-card reading as a way to guide your meditative or prayer practice, as the individual card might give you a theme to focus on. These are all just my suggestions, however, and you will likely find your own uses for this spread.

Three-Card Reading



[Figure 2]

This sort of spread is a little fuller, but it is usually linked to a period of time. Make sure to establish that time-frame before doing the reading, asking the cards to show you yesterday/today/tomorrow, tomorrow morning/noon/night, etc. You can be very vague and say past/present/future, but the answers will likely be equally vague. You can also be very specific and say 1pm/2pm/3pm, but that may also short-circuit the reading. I generally find morning/noon/night readings are my favorites with this type of spread. In fact, I often do them in the evenings as part of staying in practice. They take about 5-10 minutes and they help me to pay attention to different things throughout the day.

In Fig. 2, you can see a three-card spread displayed in front of the nifty ram skull (I apologize if the pips are hard to read). The deck is shuffled, and the top three cards are laid out in a line. Cards are read left to right, with the left-most card being the “oldest” or “earliest” card (the past or the morning, etc.). For the sake of easy explanation, let’s say this is a typical morning/noon/night reading. That means you’ve got:

- Morning – Four of Diamonds: The purse/money bag; No news.
- Noon – Five of Spades: Illness; A corpse.
- Night – Ten of Diamonds: A treasure chest; Sunlight; Joy.

So for this particular reading, the morning would be fairly stagnant, especially financially. As the day progressed, things would feel like they were getting worse, or perhaps some real effort would be needed to “bury” those monetary woes. But by the end of the day, everything’s working out, and finances are secure. So perhaps the client will have a money scare (an overdraft charge or something like that) which they spend a good bit of time dealing with, but by the end of the day, it all works out in their favor. Or, it could be that the actual workday (assuming a 9-to-5 schedule) will be awful, going from bad to worse, but that the evening will redeem the day, perhaps by allowing some small luxury time with friends or loved ones.

Five-Card Reading (Full Spread)



[Figure 3]

This is the reading most people want, and the most detailed one I personally give (there is another type of reading where you spread out almost every card before you're done, but I find that to be excessive, so I've never worked with it). It's called a five-card spread because in its basic completed form, five cards are displayed (as in Fig. 3). I mentioned, though, that this is a misnomer. In fact, you'll actually read *at least* seven cards in this layout, with the potential for several more on top of that.



[Figure 4]



[Figure 5]

I start by "clearing" the deck, which is just a highly ritualized shuffle while I attempt to keep my mind blank in order to "neutralize" the cards for the client. Then, I let the client shuffle the cards while asking and focusing on his or her question. Queries here can be as simple or complex as the subject wants. I know there are folks who do not like others touching their cards, so if you're not comfortable with that, feel free to just hold hands with the client before shuffling the deck yourself. That should at least allow

you to get a bit of the client into the cards for the reading. Once the client feels the deck has been shuffled enough (or you, if you do it that way), stop and stack the deck into a single pile. Then the client (or you) will cut the deck (Fig. 4) and put the top half of the pile facing up on the reader's left. The bottom half is flipped over so that the bottom card is face up on the reader's right (Fig. 5). This is the "quick read" of the situation, which will examine internal and external influences on the subject.

For this sample reading, let's assume that the reading is about the client's current relationship/romantic life and where it's going. On the left or internal side is the Eight of Diamonds, and on the right or external side is the Three of Hearts. This breaks down to mean:

- Internal - Eight of Diamonds: Gossip; Idle chatter.
- External – Three of Hearts: A wish granted; A full cup.

So the internal situation seems to be one of pleasant, if light, emotional content. The external component says that the cup is full, and all is well. Basically the cards indicate an extremely happy if rather casual romantic relationship.

The next step is to restack the deck so that the two halves are reversed. In other words, the Eight of Diamonds will now be the bottom card and the Three of Hearts will be the "middle" card. The reader then pulls cards in pairs starting at the top of the deck and going down until he or she reaches the signifier card (the Queen of Hearts for a woman, the King of Hearts for a man). See the process in the following figures:



[Figure 6]



[Figure 7]



[Figure 8]



[Figure 9]

In Fig. 6 (apologies for the blurring), the cards are turned over two by two. In Fig. 7, the signifier (in this case a King of Hearts as I'm reading for myself) has been found, with a Ten of Diamonds behind it. That pair is set aside as it was found (with the ten behind the king, which I'll get to in a minute). The pile of

cards overturned to find that pair is put back on top of the unturned pile to make a single deck again (Fig. 8). This group is then splayed or sorted through by the client (or you) and three cards are selected at random (the three “pulled” cards in Fig. 9). These three cards are then placed in a “tree” pattern coming down from the signifier pair in the order they were pulled. You should end up with something looking like this:



[Figure 10]

This is your basic layout for the reading. The first thing to note is whether the signifier card is on top of or below the companion card. If it is on top of its mate, the companion card indicates internal processes and functions, while the opposite indicates outside influences. In this case, the Ten of Diamonds is behind the signifier card, indicating a great deal of internal happiness and contentment. The rest of the reading has to do with the future/fortune of the subject:

- Companion Card – Ten of Diamonds: A treasure chest; Sunlight; Joy. (internal)
- Signifier Card – King of Hearts: The subject (male)
- Card 1 – Queen of Hearts: Soulmate.
- Card 2 – Two of Diamonds: Birds (as in “a little birdie told me”); Exchange of funds.
- Card 3 – Ace of Clubs: A cave; Solitary contemplation.

First, I note that there are no spades, which indicate a relatively positive reading. Second, the soulmate card appears almost immediately, which is a very good sign in a question about relationships. The reader already knows that the signifier card is surrounded by good things (the interior sunshine and the near future or current soulmate). Next down the list is the birds card. This might mean getting some good news about the soulmate, or possibly even something more significant (think “birds and bees”). It could theoretically mean an exchange of funds for love (an expensive date, or possibly prostitution), but there’s not much to support that in the reading otherwise. The third card is a little bit more difficult, as it indicates a need for personal space. So it may indicate that while things are going great now, something is going to take the relationship to the next level (the birds and their associated nesting), and that the subject will feel the need for his own space or time. Conversely, a cave is also the most rudimentary form of home, so it could mean that the subject will be doing his own version of “nesting” soon. All in all, this could mean moving in together, or possibly even starting a family together, sometime in the near future.

The reading can stop here, if the client and/or reader wishes, or cards can be pulled one at a time randomly from the remaining deck.



[Figure 11]

In this “extended” spread, the meanings become vaguer and vaguer as you go further out. Generally speaking, I will only allow 2-3 extra cards during my readings, because after that things just start falling apart. In Fig. 11, you can see I pulled the Six of Clubs. That is the card for “Footprints; A clear trail.” This basically just reinforces the current trajectory of the relationship, and for someone who’s already started a family or moved in with their significant other, probably just means “stay the course.” The current home life is rich and rewarding, and will continue to be so.



[Figure 12]

Just to tie everything up, one more card is pulled (Fig. 12), the Jack of Hearts. This is the card signifying “A baby; A cradle; A young boy.” If I weren’t the client, I imagine whoever I was reading for would probably get beads of sweat on his neck right about now. All indications are that the natural ending to all this domestic and romantic bliss will be a bouncing baby not too far down the line. It’s a tidy ending to a very positive reading, and a good place to stop.

Final Notes

I hope that this guide has been of some use to you. My apologies if the photos aren't great, but hopefully you get the idea. I reiterate that this is my own system, based on several I've encountered and worked with over time. I'm happy for folks to use it, though if you quote it or share it with others, please attribute it to me.

Cartomancy is a very personal practice, and will take time to learn. The rewards are great, and learning to read playing cards will yield surprises in unusual places (imagine playing blackjack and getting a very clear message from the spirit world in the middle of the game—it's not an uncommon experience). The most important step in becoming a good reader is practice. That's true of any magical or mystical system (or any new skill, really), so don't get discouraged if you're not great at first. With a little time, patience, and effort, you'll be able to see the world in a deck of cards.

Thank you for reading! Blessings and good fortune go with you!

-Cory T. Hutcheson

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