

# THE SUIT OF SWORDS

by Christine Payne-Towler

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The symbol of the sword, dagger, scimitar, or knife represents the world of mind, the realm of thought and ideation where we frame beliefs and values, personally and socially. It points to the rational mind, that faculty which compares, contrasts, balances, and names the processes governing relationships and exchanges, from economic to romantic.

Parallel associations refer to the element air, indicating awareness, consciousness, clarity and insight. We look for a dispassionate objectivity in this suit to clarify mixed motives and mixed up emotions. This scalpel blade also exhibits the qualities of sharp analysis, verbal precision, the inquiring, critical mind in



HORSEMAN OF SWORDS  
STAIRS OF GOLD

Because “Sword” is a cipher for “Truth,” this suit-symbol cleaves through denial and obstructionism, revealing the underlying motives and actions that stand behind appearances. This is the reason for an undertone of conten-

tion and struggle that runs through this suit: people are not always truthful with themselves, much less with each other!

Translated into the common events of everyday life, the sword represents contracts and legal forms, the laws of the land, the judicial system, verbal agreements, and all of the shared assumptions it takes to make up our collective reality.

This suit is invariably the one used to register the potential for conflict built into every communication, whether it’s one-on-one or debate in the Senate. Every conversation brings with it the risk of misunderstanding. Yet there are still facts to be conveyed and information that needs to be exchanged.

We must therefore strive for objectivity, subordinating our personal version of events to the greater truth. You must know there is a price to be paid in this world for attempting to tell the truth, and the two-edged Sword of Truth represents the tradeoff. The sword is two-sided because its user shall be liable to



TWO OF SWORDS  
SCAPINI DECK



the same judgment that he dispenses upon any other.

In the esoteric sense, the Sword represents the Holy Word, the act and art of naming things for what they really are. Spiritual sources from multiple traditions agree that when you find the “real” name of a force, a thing, a spirit, you have the power to command that thing. The inverse of this concept is that when you assert your fears as if they were realities, they are “empowered” through your breath, speech and/or imagining to come to pass.

Psychologists tell us that our subconscious believes every word that we say and take in! Perhaps this suit is calling us to accountability, reminding us to watch what we say, listen to, repeat, fantasize, or ruminate on in our unguarded moments. Beliefs can too easily limit what we are able to envision and what choices we perceive we have.



FIVE OF SWORDS  
THE ESOTERICO

In those Tarots where the Swords are given to the water signs, the emphasis is subtly changed to reflect the ways we use our minds, our words, imaginings and beliefs in negative and disturbing ways. The Swords will be shown influencing the currents of the underground river (psychic and soul life), creating turbulence and upsetting emotional harmony.

When the card shows the water in a relatively calm aspect, it is because the individual has gotten enough control over distracting and distrustful forces to have neutralized them, or

at least put them in perspective. This version of the Swords demonstrates how easily our serenity can be upset when feelings are ruffled, how sharply and defensively we can react when our sensitive egos take offense.

So although the outer appearances in the situations reflected by the Swords cards may appear the same

whether the Swords are air or water, the causes, motives and inner processes will be subtly different as you study the card in the spread. The water variation implies that the cause of conflict is rooted in interior psychic and spiritual phenomena; subjective currents are being stirred up as the inner life confronts new revelations from the deep dark unconscious. This deviation from the standard pattern is one hallmark of the Spanish school of Tarots — El Gran Tarot Esoterico, the Dali Tarot, Balbi, the Euskalherria, and Pumariega are currently available examples of this type of Tarot.

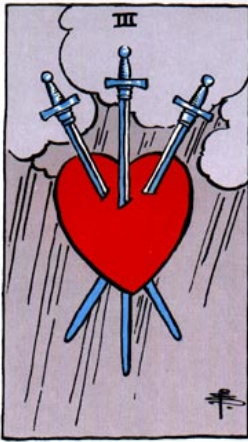
### Ace of Swords

The Ace of Swords, a single upraised sword, represents your prime motive or guiding ideal, that vision which guides you through the outer vicissitudes of life with a single-minded clarity. It is sometimes shown piercing a silver and/or laurel crown, an optimistic formulation implying evolution, progress, a sense of hope and victory. It is occasionally shown pointed downward, a darker message which refers to sacrifice, challenges, and a critical environment.



ACE OF SWORDS  
OSWALD WIRTH





THREE OF SWORDS  
WAITE DECK

### Two of Swords

The Two of Swords usually represents conflicting ideas or visions which must be reconciled by communication to arrive in a harmonious place or complete strategic negotiations. Mixed signals prevail. While being under the impression of communicating, opposite sides are

missing each other entirely, with possibly drastic consequences. In the best case, a frank discussion would clear the air and serve both sides, but one cannot expect that in every instance with this card.

### Three of Swords

The Three of Swords has traditionally signified separation, termination, a breakup of a relationship or family, and all the tragic emotions attendant upon such events. Some cards show the horizon in the upright position filled with storm clouds and lightning flashing ominously, while the reversed horizon is clearing and brightening, ready for sunny weather. The positive side would be finally ending a draining and frustrating association, and becoming free again. Cords to the past are cut as you release loved ones to their own recognizance.

### Four of Swords

The Four of Swords sends a strong message to take some time out, surrender worldly concerns and retreat to a place of serenity sheltered from the hustle and bustle. The oldest images suggest a visit to “the sepulcher of your ancestors” to contemplate your mortality

and breathe in the dust of those who brought you here. On a vision quest or pilgrimage to your own center, you can contemplate your roots, values and goals. Here you will see your own place in the flow of time and unfolding generations.

### Five of Swords

The Five of Swords traditionally references the grim and sobering process of cleaning up the battlefield after a rout. The war as a whole has not yet been won or lost, but in this skirmish there were grievous losses. The advice connected with this image admonishes the loser to study carefully what went wrong so that a new strategy can be devised and further setbacks forestalled. There is a need to regroup and rethink the game plan, discover your blind spots, the weak links, and take corrective measures before getting back into the field for another round.



SIX OF SWORDS  
DALI DECK

In these modern times, when the “battle” is more often being “fought” with words, laws, and contracts instead of weapons, we have even more reason to examine our approach, style, strengths and weaknesses. If we have underdeveloped communication skills or lose our objectivity in tense moments, our ability to reach our goals and dreams will suffer.

### Six of Swords

The Six of Swords has been associated with science and its objective methodology em-



ployed through the generations to sift fact from superstition, build facts into theories and theories into laws we can trust and use to improve our lives. One early title for this card was “The Navigator” who has learned enough about the relation between Earth and the Heavens to be able to set a course across trackless oceans and arrive at a chosen spot on distant shores.

At the time of the first Tarots, this skill was considered akin to magic, so few were the individuals who understood the principles involved. So the person who draws this card is typified as a person with special knowledge, an insight into sophisticated techniques that may be powerful enough to effect a rescue in a dangerous time. Other



EIGHT OF SWORDS  
DELLE STELLE

related titles common to this card are “The Path” (out of danger) and “The Way Through.”

### Seven of Swords

The Seven of Swords is the card of mental preparedness, acquired through the use of imagination, the rehearsing and visualizing of desired achievements. A representative phrase might be “the

habit of mind of a natural winner.” The image most often associated with this card is that of a canny warrior who has infiltrated the enemy camp on the eve of a fateful battle and is checking out their preparations and stealing their swords—a move guaranteed to demoralize them and undermine their performance in the upcoming confrontation.

Putting it in modern terms, those who draw this card need to “work smarter, not harder,” think long and deep, study all the angles, and put themselves in the shoes of their competition. As a result, they will have such a thorough grasp of the whole situation that there will be no surprises, and no excuses for anything but success. Advance preparation justifies the optimism of the “natural winner.”



NINE OF SWORDS  
WAITE DECK

### Eight of Swords

The Eight of Swords, often called “The Test,” usually pictures a warrior running a gauntlet, subjected to harsh examination, who finds out just how tough he is or isn’t in the process. Life provides us with plenty of experiences that put us in situations of close scrutiny, whether it’s an entrance exam for college, a decisive job interview, or even the tough conversations that follow upon a breach of trust in a primary relationship.

Sometimes the challenge or obstacle course has nothing to do with other people, as when an inventor has to face the question “Does it really work?” This card shows what happens to that good idea in real time, where the rubber meets the road. The Test represents your chance to vindicate the time and energy spent in getting ready for this big moment. In most cases, you will either pass or fail, with little middle ground.





He could even be working as a double agent, playing both sides against each other to serve



QUEEN OF SWORDS  
SCAPINI DECK

his own agenda. His title of Page is really camouflage in itself, serving as protective coloration so he can move among the people unrecognized, collecting information anonymously. His vigilance often conceals an ulterior motive. He is a watcher who must himself be watched, because

he dreams of someday taking matters into his own hands, preempting the plans of his employers.

### **Knight of Swords**

The Knight of Swords portrays the restless mind, aroused by thoughts of offense or defense, storming around searching for a target to pounce on. He often feels slighted, has a chip on his shoulder, and bristles with a hostile attitude. His usual method is to look for someone to blame for his irritation. Then, in an attitude of righteousness, he gives himself the job of “correcting” the offender. Jumping easily to conclusions, he “shoots first, asks questions later,” and is therefore often guilty of overkill.

This is not to say that he does not have his heroic side; a single-minded combativeness can have its value. However, even when he is doing the right thing, he is likely to be doing it for the wrong reasons. Apt advice for this card is to deeply question your motives for what

you are about to do. Forethought will help you discriminate between righteous and unrighteous causes. Discipline any traces of impulsive judgmentalism!

Occasionally you will see, implied by the detail on the card, that the person inside the armor could be a woman rather than the expected man. There is some evidence that the tradition of knighthood included a certain number of “anonymous knights” who took mythic names and veiled their true identities. Living on the road with few or no servants, they served as freelance defenders of travelers, champions of the little people against the exploitation of both highway robbers and the wealthy classes. Odds are that some of these knights errant were camouflaged women, and that idea is preserved with this unusual treatment of the Sword Knight.

### **Queen of Swords**

The Queen of Swords was traditionally known as the widow, crone, or divorcee, the woman “no man would have.” Nowadays we see her as a model of self-sufficiency, independence, and high intellect. She often has extremely high standards due to her subtle sensitivities, which can be perceived by those around her as being critical and hard to please. Her true motive is to refine the world, to upgrade people’s understanding so everyone can have the space they need to individuate, to become truly themselves.



KING OF SWORDS  
SCAPINI DECK



She is not interested in conforming, which may be why she has a reputation for “being difficult.” She is too intelligent to be confined to the role of housewife or nursemaid, although she is perfectly competent in those areas when she wants to be. She chooses her associations, and her aloneness, to serve her own agenda, and is seldom caught up in dependency relationships, at least not for long. Her critical intelligence is not always comfortable to be around, but she can be counted upon to see through superficialities and put her finger on the truth of the situation.

### King of Swords

The King of Swords is the adjudicator, the wise judge, a mediator. He helps parties in conflict discover common ground and build upon it, and guides societies to see their greater good. His archetype is Solomon, ancient law-giver and philosopher of the Jewish Old Testament. Sometimes appearing cool and detached, he can be misunderstood as not caring.

But emotional displays are simply not his medium, nor is he moved by appeals to sympathy or pity. With the philosophical overview that comes from long experience, he listens deeply, watches closely, and speaks last. In the end, his evenhandedness and objectivity have earned him the respect he receives from his community, and those who cannot work out their problems come to him voluntarily for advice.

Occasionally this King is subtly detailed to imply that he is a woman in male armor. If you notice this theme in your deck, it is a reference to Joan of Arc, the Maid of Orleans, archetype of a devout and inspired woman warrior, who was mystically led to abandon

her social role to defend what she saw as the greater good. Although she was martyred young, her model crystallizes the message that sometimes the good of the whole is more important than the good of the individual, and in that case, even if you lose, you win just for being there.

**This chapter is excerpted from Christine Payne-Towler’s forthcoming book, *The Underground Stream: Esoteric Tarot Revealed*. To order copies of her book, or to reach Christine for private consultation call 1-800-981-3582.**

