

The
Ironwing Tarot



Lorena Babcock Moore

THE IRONWING TAROT celebrates the ancient art of blacksmithing and its connection with shamanism. The deck is inspired by nature, geology and metallurgy, and the sacred Black Metal itself. Images are nontraditional but illustrate familiar Tarot themes using original personal symbolism. The suits, face cards, and several of the Major Arcana have been renamed. Cards depict women only, offering an alternative and personal view of a traditionally male craft. Those who love the Goddess will find Her here, perhaps in unfamiliar forms, opening a path of beauty, strength, and power. Images are symmetrical and iconographic so the cards can be contemplated in the same way as mandalas or other formal abstract sacred art. They are intended to be powerful and evocative even if the viewer cannot understand everything in the picture, although studying the descriptions will make them more meaningful. Many cards have accurate depictions of obscure plants, fungi, insects, fossils, and other natural history curiosities, drawn in the style of scientific illustration. Occult and astrological symbols were avoided. Originals are black and white 5"x7" ink on scratchboard to emphasize contrast and detail. Designed as a personal spiritual tool, the Ironwing Tarot was created from within a shaman's perspective, rather than simply being about shamanism. Since early childhood I have followed a solitary shamanic path that has developed depth and complexity through initiatory experience, dreamwork, and a lifelong study of nature, art, and writing. I do not have formal shamanic training, nor am I affiliated with any culture or teacher. I have walked the paths of the shaman, scientist, and artist, and they have become a single road.

Card Backs and Title Card

The card backs illustrate the Four Elements: a vulture feather (Air), a flaming iron meteor (Fire and Earth), and a double spiral whirlpool (Water). The title card shows an iron bell-rattle, an alternate version of the Two of Bells. It is shaped like two pomegranates riveted to a handle made of flared tubing. In this type of bell, the jingling pellets roll through the handle back and forth between the two bells.

What is the Tarot?

The Tarot is a card game, an oracle, a tool for self-discovery and creative inspiration, a diverse art form, and a collector's item. It is not a religion, although traditional Tarot imagery has much Christian symbolism, and modern decks explore diverse spiritual paths. A Tarot deck has an undeniable presence, a feeling that the collection of 78 mysterious images adds up to something greater than a stack of odd picture cards. Depending on one's choice of perception, it can be inviting or threatening.

IRON GEOLOGY

Iron is the most stable element in the universe, and is the last element formed in the burned-out cores of dying stars. Its atomic symbol is **Fe**, from *ferrum*, the Latin word for iron. Iron accounts for one third of the earth by weight, and the heart of the planet is nearly pure iron. A liquid outer core surrounds a solid inner core. Both are iron with up to 20% nickel and other elements. Convection currents in the outer core generate the earth's magnetic field, although the mechanism for the field's polarity reversals and changes in intensity are still not well understood. The earth's mantle, which makes up most of the planet by volume, is mostly dark green iron and magnesium silicates such as olivine (peridot), pyroxene, and garnet, and other iron-rich minerals such as magnetite and spinel. In the earth's crust, iron is the fourth most abundant element (after oxygen, silicon, and aluminum), but native metallic iron is extremely rare. Iron is highly insoluble in oxygen-rich water but readily combines with oxygen, especially in the presence of iron-loving bacteria. Iron in the crust occurs as silicates, sulfides, and the oxides formed when these minerals are exposed to oxygen in groundwater and the atmosphere. Iron oxides are natural "rust" and provide most of the orange, red, and brown colors in soil and sedimentary rocks. They are mineral pigments and iron ores. Proterozoic "banded iron" ores, 2.2 billion years old, provide evidence of an abrupt change on earth. At that time, stromatolites and floating "blooms" of cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) became extensive enough that the oxygen they produced during photosynthesis was enough alter the atmosphere. Formerly composed of hydrogen, methane, and ammonia (which would be toxic to most modern life), the atmosphere became rich in oxygen, which eventually encouraged an explosion of life. In the old oxygen-poor atmosphere, iron that weathered out of the rocks was quite soluble in seawater, but as the oxygen level rose, iron became insoluble and precipitated out on the seafloor as hematite and magnetite, filling several basins around the world with thick alternating layers of iron oxide and ordinary seafloor silica sediment. Although compressed, folded, and altered by the heat and pressure of metamorphism, banded iron ore exposures as found today still preserve the record of this ancient event in stromatolite fossils and single microscopic algae cells. The name "banded iron" comes from the alternating layers of black magnetite, gray metallic hematite, and red jasper (hematite-stained chert, or microcrystalline quartz). The most famous are from Michigan and Minnesota and the "tiger iron" of Australia. Tiger iron contains yellow and blue iridescent layers of tigereye, which is chert with inclusions of chrysotile, an iron-rich silicate.

THE BLACK METAL

Ore must be heated or **smelted** to burn or melt off impurities and concentrate the pure metal. In a primitive smelter, ore is piled in a small furnace over a charcoal fire. Heat is carefully maintained for

several hours, and the ore melts into a pool of silica slag with a puddle of molten metal underneath. Copper was the first metal to be worked, since it is found in native metallic form as stream pebbles or in the rock as veins and nodules. Smelting was discovered when such rocks were heated to melt out the copper. Iron ores were discovered later, probably as a by-product of copper smelting since they often occur with copper minerals. In an iron smelter or bloomery, the bloom or lump of new metal must be reheated and hammered flat several times to work out any slag bubbles and to even out the composition, since carbon concentrates at the top of the bloom as the molten metal cools. Each bloom is unique, and some are harder than others. A modern steel mill produces metals with precise compositions and specialized properties. The words **iron** and **steel** are used interchangeably. Steel is iron that contains a small amount of carbon, which makes the metal harder. Pure iron is softer than steel but only a metallurgist or experienced smith can tell the difference. It is also called "wrought iron" (a term sometimes incorrectly used for ornamental steel that has been bent cold and welded, not forged). **Cast iron** objects are very hard and brittle, and are made in a foundry, where liquid molten iron is poured into molds for heavy items such as manhole covers, cauldrons, and pans. Because of their dark gray color and tendency to blacken with age, iron and steel are called the **black metal**, so the metalworker who forges them is a **blacksmith**. **Forging** is shaping metal by hammering it. Copper, silver, and gold are heavier than iron but are soft metals that can be hammered cold. They become hardened as they are worked, so they are periodically annealed or heated to soften them. Thin pieces of steel, such as wire, can be bent cold if they are annealed first. But most steel is too hard and brittle to work cold, so it must be heated to about 1500 degrees F. The hotter the metal, the more malleable it is, and the easier it is to hammer or bend it. Iron is heated in a **forge**, which may be an open hearth fueled with coal or charcoal, or a partly enclosed furnace fueled with propane. A clean-burning propane forge is easy to use because the metal is always visible and the air and gas are easily adjusted. A coal or charcoal forge must be skillfully tended for maximum heat without the open flames that waste fuel and oxidize metal. Air is blown with a hand-cranked or electric fan or (rarely) a traditional bellows. The smith blows air, adds fuel, or sprinkles water as needed. If the iron is left in too long, it will turn white-hot and burn, and clinkers (slag from impurities in the coal) will smother the fire. The iron is heated until it glows bright orange, and hammered until it cools to a dark red. Depending on size, this can be a few seconds or several minutes. Once it cools to a black heat, it is too hard and brittle to hammer, and is returned to the forge. The smith usually works with several pieces at once to conserve time and fuel, and the alternating tasks of hammering and moving the pieces to and from the fire becomes very efficient as the smith finds the rhythm of the work and draws energy from it. This is an intense state of

concentration that engages mind and body but frees the imagination, an active trance similar to that produced by a shaman's drumming and dancing. The smith returns from the "journey" with a physical token, shaped in part by this state of mind during the work.

Blacksmithing is universally a man's craft that is traditionally forbidden to women. In the U.S. and Europe, it has had an artistic revival since the 1970s, and contemporary art blacksmithing has attracted several talented women whose work is distinctive for its organic grace and innovative design. Women are still not completely accepted, but blacksmithing classes are attracting greater numbers of young women. Until recently, a blacksmith was also a farrier (someone who shoes horses). Modern blacksmiths are rarely farriers, and some farriers do not work with hot metal.

Iron Mythology

Symbolically, iron is all that is cold, hard, heavy, and sharp. It is the ultimate "masculine" material and is associated with Mars, the Roman god of war. Hematite gives the Red Planet Mars its color, and blood derives its red color from the iron in hemoglobin. Blacksmithing gods bring technology and civilization, since they provide tools for the conquest of nature through agriculture, building cities, and making war. Because blacksmiths make the tools for other crafts, they represent the practical skill and divine inspiration of all craftsmen. European blacksmithing gods are solitary primitive tricksters, including the Norse Volund (Anglo-Saxon Wayland), Finnish Ilmarinen, Roman Vulcan, Greek Hephaistos, and Celtic Goibniu. They are masters of all metalworking and make objects of supernatural beauty with the power of ultimate salvation or destruction for the bearer. The Celtic goddess Brigid is often associated with smithcraft as a patroness of the hearth fire and creativity, but she is not a smith herself. The mythical figure that can be most closely identified with the themes in the Ironwing Tarot is Ogun, the West African "spirit of iron" and blacksmithing. In Ifa, Voodoo, Santeria, and related traditions, Ogun (or Ogoun) is the male orisha associated with weapons, war, and technology. But he is also the swift remover of obstacles, protector of the home and provider of employment, and the guardian of the forest. He clears a path through the trees but leads the way deeper into the wilderness, with his machete in one hand and a bundle of medicinal herbs in the other.

SHAMANISM

Shamanism is an ancient religion rooted in animism and nature-worship. It has been practiced in most cultures and has its origins among Paleolithic hunters. Using a drum, rattle, singing, and/or dancing to induce a trance state similar to lucid dreaming, the shaman journeys with the help of tutelary spirits and animal helpers. She travels to the Underworld, which is often the Land of the Dead, the home of the ancestors, and the place of "black" spirits of earth and

metals, illness, and animals. She also visits the Upperworld, the abode of "white" deities, birds, and celestial spirits. The shaman may visit both places in the same journey, and receives gifts of knowledge, helping spirits, or supernatural abilities. Her most well-known traditional function is to find and restore the soul of a sick person or to drive out the spirit that is causing the illness. She is also called upon to guide the souls of the dead and conduct funeral rituals. She may find game animals, water sources or precious stones, and lost objects or people. She offers prayers to the spirits of the land at earth shrines, holy wells, and oracular trees. She communicates her experiences with the spirits through creative work as an artist, musician, dancer, or storyteller. Although she may have other shamans as teachers, she receives instruction primarily from the spirits in an evolving lifelong relationship. A shaman's career often begins with an initiation in the form of an illness or an encounter with a harmful spirit, for which only cure is to accept the shaman's vocation. Refusal can lead to death, but people are often reluctant to accept the "call of the spirits". A shaman walks between worlds, spending much time alone with nature spirits, and her life becomes intertwined with strange beings and mysterious obligations. This difficult path inspires fear along with respect, and relegates the shaman to the fringes of the community even in societies where a such a person is traditionally accepted.

Shamanism and Blacksmithing

The blacksmith shares several magical abilities with the shaman, such as conjuring feats, mastery of fire, singing or storytelling, and the ability to drive off malevolent spirits and attract helpful ones. Both shamanism and blacksmithing are often hereditary vocations, requiring the approval of ancestor spirits. Shamanism has a particularly strong connection with iron in West Africa and among several peoples of Siberia and Central Asia. The Yakut, Buryat, and Mongol shamans adorn their costumes and drums with forged iron bells, chains, spirit figures, arrows, and objects that resemble bones and feathers. A Yakut proverb affirms that "the shaman and the smith are hatched in the same nest." The shaman and the smith are both respected and feared. According to Kira Van Deusen, iron reflects this ambivalence in Siberia even today. The "black metal" from under the earth is associated with "black" shamans who guide the dead and work with spirits of disease, yet are feared as sorcerers (personal communication, 2003). In his *Shamanism*, Mircea Eliade (1964) relates several stories of the shamanic power of iron. The shaman may travel over the Iron Mountain and visit the Underworld master blacksmith. The initiate's body is destroyed, his head forged on the anvil, and his skeleton reassembled with pieces of iron.

In these tales, iron conveys a sense of darkness, danger, and formidable difficulties that are the ultimate test the shaman's power and physical endurance. How did iron change the shaman's Otherworld

geography? Did the use of iron objects guide shamans to new places and new spirits, or were old stories reinterpreted? The iron ornaments on the shaman's costume work in several ways. Some spirits have an affinity for iron and others are afraid of it. Chains, arrows, and spirit figures are a form of armor. Their shapes are inspired by the unique working properties of the metal itself. Iron bones and feathers are tokens of the shaman's initiation and allow communication with the spirits that inhabit them. These objects are similar to older versions made of bone, wood, ivory, and bird or animal skins. The forged cone bells are hung in pairs from iron rings or chains, strung on the iron crosspiece of a drum, or fastened onto bowed musical instruments. Thin copper cones made from curled sheet metal or cut tubing are also used, but they do not have the elaborate workmanship of the forged bells. Similar ancient rattling ornaments that predate metalworking include musselshells, deer hooves, and seedpods.

Modern Shamanism

Several authors have recently popularized some of the healing techniques that are common to all shamanic traditions, adapting them to modern urban use through books and workshops. Modern shamans practice in a variety of ways, and the criteria that define a "shaman", "shamanic practitioner", or "shamanic methods" are subjective and not well defined. Each shaman, modern or traditional, has a different background, a unique personal style, and specializes in certain methods, tools, or types of work. There are also people who do shamanic work but do not call it that.

To me, the shaman's most important function is to help people make or rediscover a healthy, intimate, and creative connection with nature, so they can find and use their own spiritual strength to confront fears and claim unused power. Help is given only when requested, and the shaman's first task is to know whether to do anything at all. She is a compassionate listener for those who need someone outside the usual social and religious roles to help them through the "weirdness" of grief, illness, anxiety, recurring nightmares, or other strange experiences. She helps focus, re-direct, or dispel the potentially destructive energy that builds up at such times. She creates sanctuaries and purifies living and work space where fear and confusion have entered. She interprets her Otherworld journeys in art and words so that others may share her visions and live closer to the earth. My own art has this purpose, whether it is a personal project or work undertaken for someone else. My ironwork is "alive" and is small enough to be held, carried, or worn. Pieces are interesting to study and handle. They are talismans for holding strength and transforming power from deep in the earth.

STONES

In prehistoric times, someone who knew how to find flint for tools, clay for pots, ochre for paints, or turquoise for ornaments would have been a valuable individual who was at once a scientist, an artisan, and perhaps a "medicine" person. Certain stones were precious because of their usefulness, beauty, and rarity, so it was inevitable that they would also be used for sacred purposes. As metalworking developed, some minerals acquired new value as ores. Pre-industrial metalwork was difficult, dangerous, and unpredictable, so it quickly became mysterious and magical. Stones and metals retain some of this type of attraction today because of their innate appeal. Since the Ironwing Tarot has a geological theme, you may wish to use stones when working with the cards. Stones listed below were chosen because they are pictured on the cards or are otherwise geologically appropriate for the theme of the deck. Metaphysical properties were not considered. Hematite and small meteorite specimens are appropriate for the entire deck.

Shaman's Pebble Oracle: Collect a bag of pebbles. You can assign pebbles to certain cards, or create your own oracle to use with the cards or by itself. In addition to its color, texture, shape, and composition (if you know it), each stone will carry personal significance related to where you found it, which will help determine its intuitive meaning. Study and meditate on each stone separately, then see how they affect each other as a group. Write down words or phrases that describe and interpret each stone. Try "throwing" the pebbles to determine how you will "read" them. Your collection will reveal its purpose as an oracle and the type of questions it will answer. The results will not be as specific or detailed as a Tarot card reading. Instead, expect to see a general but strong overall mood or direction.

Natural Objects for the Suits & Elements

SPIKES/FIRE: thorns, spines, twigs, resins

COILS/WATER: shells, flowers, beach finds

BLADES/AIR: feathers, leaves, herbs, paper

BELLS/EARTH: roots, gnarled wood, bones, fungi, seeds

STONES FOR THE MAJOR ARCANA

O The Lodestone: magnetite

I The Magician: garnet crystals; labradorite

II Red Earth: stromatolite or other fossil

III The Forge: garnet beads; rose quartz

IV The Anvil: any well-formed crystal

V Tradition: amethyst

VI Connection: twinned crystals; a string of stone beads

VII The Road: pebbles with veins or eyes; horse fossils

VIII Crystallization: pyrite

IX The Hermit: geode or concretion ("hidden treasure")

X The Wheel: a stone "donut" (flat bead with a hole).

Olivine (an iron-magnesium silicate, a major constituent of the earth's mantle) and serpentine (olivine's metamorphic counterpart).

XI Strength: quartz crystals (Herkimer diamonds)

XII Trance: petrified wood, picture jasper

Agate and jasper are gem names for microcrystalline quartz, which is also called flint, chert, and chalcedony. Iron oxides provide most of the colors in agates, including petrified wood. In "picture" jasper, minerals are deposited along microscopic fractures and create tiny landscape patterns.

XIII Death: vivianite, fossil ivory, bones. Rusty steel.

XIV Quench: basalt (black seafloor volcanic rock); amber

XV Molten Iron: carnelian

XVI The Tower: coal or jet, charcoal, black shale or slate

XVII The Star: crystal cluster

XVIII The Moon: moonstone (white or gray iridescent feldspars), silver, white mica, quartz sphere

XIX The Sun: sunstone (orange iridescent feldspar), carnelian, iridescent obsidian, citrine, gold

XX The Furnace: Snowflake obsidian - black volcanic glass with gray patches that are sprays of tiny quartz crystals.

XXI The World: a stone sphere; magnetite

READING THE CARDS

Divination is part of all shamanic traditions. The Tarot may not seem as "shamanic" as bones or pebbles, but it has enduring appeal as an oracle because its structure allows for a variety of artistic interpretations and works for many types of questions. The shaman's journey itself is a specialized type of divination, but cards and other methods are not a substitute for it. You cannot "journey into" a picture by looking at it, although the technique of contemplation is a powerful way to explore the spiritual gifts of any image. Tarot does not diagnose or treat illness, solve legal or financial problems, or do any work for you. Reading the cards is an art and a sacred game. It stimulates your imagination, intuition, and subconscious. It reveals connections and mirrors fears, hopes, and motivations. It suggests new or forgotten options and gives you something to think about when you're stuck. The intention is to show what type of energy is at work in a situation, provide insight on a question, identify sources of power (perhaps unknown or unused), or suggest ways to solve a problem. Ideally, all cards are neutral and carry equal weight. In reality, you will feel affinities for certain cards and aversions to others. These may change over time or with different situations. Some cards will seem especially significant, others will fade into the background. These reactions affect your interpretations and are worth exploring. Set aside enough quiet time to work with the cards. Reading when you are tired, ill, rushed, or stressed is confusing and exhausting. It is unethical to read for someone who has not requested it. If you wish to read for someone who is absent, especially if they are ill or troubled, read for yourself, not the other person, and ask "What can I offer?"

SPREADS

Although not essential, a "spread" or formal layout in which each position is assigned a specific meaning can make it easier to interpret the cards. There are hundreds of Tarot spreads. Those given here are the ones I use most often, and two were created specifically for this deck. Mix the cards on a table or the floor, or hold them in your hand and shuffle them overhand by repeatedly splitting the deck in several places and redistributing the cards throughout. Stack them and cut the deck. Lay out the spread and put the rest of the cards aside, then turn all the cards over and study them. Notice your initial impressions about the pictures and their relationship to each other. These intuitive reactions are as important as the descriptions given in this book, but you will lose them if you turn to the descriptions too soon. Notice how many Major Arcana, Number Cards, and Spirit Guides are present, which suits are dominant or missing, any numbers represented more than once, and whatever other patterns appear. Then consult the descriptions for more details.

The Lodestone Exercise

This is how I introduce people to the deck, informally or as part of a reading. I also use it when I am asked for shamanic help, since it offers insight that helps determine what (if any) work is appropriate.

1. Order the deck: Major Arcana; Number Cards (Spikes, Coils, Blades, Bells); Spirit Guides (Apprentice, Gatemaker, Madrone, Shaman for each suit). Spirit Guides can either be placed with their suit, with the Apprentices following the Tens, or grouped together after the Ten of Bells. Ordering the deck shows respect for the cards and the occasion. It introduces others to the structure of the deck, particularly if they are unfamiliar with Tarot.
2. Have the person look through the entire deck and pick out their favorite cards or those that speak to them strongly (most people will pick 3-8) and lay them out however they wish. Move the cards around to see how they play off each other. Or have the person choose cards for the Four Elements.
3. Have the person describe what they see in the cards.
4. Offer your interpretation, using your reading experience and intuition as well as the descriptions in this book.

You can use this exercise with the Four Element Spread. The reader selects four shuffled cards. The questioner looks through the rest of the deck and chooses four more cards, one for each element. The two element sets are compared with each other.

Four Element Spread

How and where energy is most active, and how to use it.

1 2 3 4

1. FIRE: Inspiration, creativity, self-image, motivation.
2. WATER: Emotions, relationships, attachments.
3. AIR: Intellect, thoughts, conflict, learning.
4. EARTH: Health, work, projects, possessions.

OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL CARDS:

5. CHALLENGE: potential internal or external obstacle. Often a preconception or distraction.
6. OPPORTUNITY: Unrecognized strength, skill, or advantage.
7. SYNTHESIS: How to tie all the cards together and use their energy.

How do the elements in the cards match up with their positions? How do they affect each other? Cards in which the suit element matches the position (such as Coils in the Water position) show particularly strong energy - an Ore (such as the Ore of Blades in the Air position) it represents a significant opportunity to explore. If it is one of the four "double element" Spirit Guides (such as the Apprentice of Bells in the the Earth position), it can be a strong affirmation or a warning of excess.

Three Windows Spread

Divide the deck into Major Arcana, Spirit Guides, and Number Cards. Shuffle the piles separately and pick a card from each. This standard spread has several interpretations.

Major Arcana: The lesson or opportunity in the situation.

Spirit Guide: An aspect of yourself to draw upon or develop.

Number Card: A focus for action or attention.

FOUR WINDOWS VARIATION: Separate the Ores from the Number Cards and pick one. The Ore can represent a way to activate the other cards.

Triple Star Spread

This layout illuminates a connection between two people or two parts of the self. It is patterned after the Major Arcana card XVII - THE STAR.

Study this card and description first. The card can be left out or shuffled back into the deck. When reading for one person, the left side is the contemplative inner self, and the right side is the active outer self. When the question involves two people, read the spread both ways and let the cards determine which side is which.

4 5 3

2 8 9 7 1

6

- 1 What A is standing on: environment, immediate past.
- 2 What B is standing on.
- 3 Person A now: self-image and how she relates to others.
- 4 Person B now.
- 5 What A is looking at/wants B to see: focus, inspiration.
- 6 What B is looking at or wants A to see.
- 7 A's barrier to communication with B.
- 8 B's barrier to communication with A.
- 9 Their connection - the gift of The Star.

The Hermit's Mirror

To see the seeker's face on Major Arcana card IX - THE HERMIT. Study the card and description first. The card can be left out or shuffled back into the deck.

1 2

4 5 3

- 1 The Mirror - Me now.
- 2 The Dark Moon - What I seek in entering the dark.
- 3 The Lantern - Light I carry for myself and others.
- 4 Medicine Bag - Relevant knowledge from past experience.
- 5 The Path - What I must leave as a gift for others.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

BOOKS

Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy by Mircea Eliade.

1964, Princeton University Press, 609p.

Anthropology classic and the first book to explore shamanism as a global phenomenon. Siberian shamanism and blacksmithing.

The Forge and the Crucible by Mircea Eliade.

1962/1978, University of Chicago Press, 238p.

Metalworking magic and myth, including blacksmithing and alchemy.

Shaman: The Wounded Healer by Joan Halifax.

1982, Thames and Hudson, 96p.

Photo essays: Introduction to traditional shamanism worldwide.

Nomads of Eurasia, edited by Vladimir N. Basilov.

1989, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, 192p.

Catalog of the exhibition "Nomads: Masters of the Eurasian Steppe". Chapter on shamanism has photos of iron items.

Treasures of Tibetan Art by Barbara Lipton and Nima Dorjee Ragnubs. 1996, Oxford University Press, 295p.

Description of Garba Nagpo, with photos of paintings and statues.

Geology of the Lake Superior Region by Gene L. LaBerge

1994, GeoScience Press Inc., 313p.

Excellent nontechnical discussion of banded iron ore formation.

WEBSITES

Mineralogy Database: www.webmineral.com/

All known minerals: composition, crystallography, etc.

Life Force at the Anvil by Tom Joyce:

www.artmetal.com/project/Features/Africa/

A blacksmith's photos of spectacular West African iron.

Shamans, Stories, and Music: Kira Van Deusen

www.kiravan.com

Author of *The Flying Tiger* and *Singing Story, Healing Drum*.

Journey to Other Worlds

www.museum.state.il.us/exhibits/changing/journey/intro.html

Illinois State Museum photo exhibit of 19th-century Siberian traditional culture, including shamanism.

Anvilfire: www.anvilfire.com

Blacksmithing FAQ's, information, news, and links.

Tarot Passages: www.tarotpassages.com

Tarot book and deck reviews, links. Article: "Tarot and the Shaman" by Valerie Sim).

MAJOR ARCANA

The 22 Major Arcana are identified as archetypes or personifications of universal ideas. In addition to their role in the deck as a whole, they form a self-contained sequence that is comparable to a journey, an initiation process, or a cycle of self-discovery or spiritual development. Numbers are always written in Roman numerals and are an important part of the symbolism of each card. In the Ironwing Tarot, the Major Arcana depict iron geology, blacksmithing tools, and metal refining processes. Aspects of the shaman's initiatory experience appear in some images. Drawings are accented with three varieties of handground red ochre, the most ancient and widely used of all mineral pigments. Handprint pictographs in red ochre are found on rocks all over the world. Red ochre is hematite, an iron ore and a black metallic gemstone. It symbolizes the glow of ore in the furnace and iron in the forge, the color of the living earth, and the blood of the smith. All iron oxides were used as mineral pigments for thousands of years before smelting technology developed and the minerals were identified as iron ores.

In a reading, the Major Arcana are not more important than the Minor Arcana, they are just different. They can be interpreted as important events, long-term cycles, or outside influences in a person's life. Several Majors in a reading indicate a complex situation or a time of significant change.

Hematite varieties used in the pictures:

Red: Soft, porous, nonmetallic rock from a copper mine.

Brownish Red: Hard red semi-metallic layer in limestone.

Dark Purple: Heavy gray crystalline metallic ore.

EXERCISE: Major Arcana Patterns and Progressions

Lay the cards out in three rows as shown:

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

Compare each pair or triplet of cards. Just look at the images first, then compare the descriptions. How are the images similar? How might the first (lower number) image evolve into the second? What other progressions can you find? Traditionally, 0 (The Fool) begins a cycle and XXI (The World) completes it and brings it full circle. Cards X - XX are sometimes interpreted as a "higher", more complex, more spiritual, or more intense expression of the basic roles or stages presented in cards 1 - IX, echoing the alchemical tenet, "as above, so below." Some pairs are a better or more obvious "fit" than others. The unique imagery of the Ironwing Tarot yields interesting insights with this exercise, but it is different from a layout done with a traditional deck.

O/XXI: HEARTPATH: The white-clad Lodestone girl stands still with her back to the viewer, hands trailing the new fire of birth, looking into the Unknown as symbolized by the magnetite crystal. The dynamic World dancer faces the viewer, having taken the magnetite crystal and its secrets of the Unknown into her heart and transformed herself into iron, hands trailing the fire of command and body holding the promise of rebirth.

I/X/XIX - CIRCLE DANCE: The Magician combines the Four Elements in their raw natural form, creating the Wheel that she learns to ride through a new cycle to triumph as the Sun, the ultimate cyclic wheel and creator of elements.

II/XI/XX - INITIATION: She learns the ancient secret knowledge of Red Earth, uses it to develop her own Strength as she integrates body and spirit, and is reborn anew after enduring the Furnace of testing. Each step is deeper and more focused, and gives more surprising rewards.

III/XII - BIRTH: Creative work is unending and its Source is never depleted, whether in the fiery, active chamber of the Forge or hidden in the dreaming, watery silence of Trance. The branches in the Forge bear leaves, flowers, and fruit. The roots in Trance are turning to metal and stone.

IV/XIII - LAW OF NATURE: Physical laws reflected in the Anvil give order to the world, but the ultimate Law is the Death and dissolution of order.

V/XIV - Tradition begins and defines one's path of spiritual study, whether alone or among others. Quench defines its moments of healing triumph, synthesis, and perfection.

VI/XV - BURNING: When heated any longer, the welds of Connection will burn and melt into Molten Iron.

VII/XVI - TRAVEL: The Road grows ever wider, the traveller moving faster, until there is nowhere left to go.

VIII/XVII - BALANCE: In a black spring, crystallization reveals organic and inorganic reactions that regulate the chemistry of earth and life. Over the night ocean, two observers see a living Star and a mineral Star, and their unity in each other.

IX/XVIII - MIRROR-WINDOW: The Hermit carries a lamp into the dark, to the water's unknown source. At the ultimate destination, the shining Moon reveals all, yet it is not what it seems, and perhaps not what the seeker envisioned. Even the face of the seeker herself has changed.



0 The Lodestone (The Fool)

A little girl finds a fascinating shiny black metallic crystal that inspires her to set out into the Unknown in search of the stone's significance. She holds it carefully in hands that are receptive to new experiences. Her hands are painted with red ochre, symbol of blood and beginnings, the first color that a newborn baby sees. She wears the white of innocence, and her hands glow with new life. The ancient painted handprints of her ancestors offer enduring encouragement, and hold tiny iron crystals that hint at the black metal's possibilities. She consults a compass for direction, but the black crystal mysteriously diverts the needle. Without a guide or knowledge, she simply trusts the earth as she begins her journey. A compass works because the magnetized steel needle is sensitive to the earth's magnetic field and points to the magnetic north pole. If it is laid on a rock that contains magnetite, the needle swings wildly or points in the direction of the crystals instead of North. Magnetite is a heavy black metallic iron ore. Like iron, it will attract a magnet. Rarely, a piece of magnetite is a magnet itself. This variety is called lodestone. It will attract small ferrous objects such as iron filings, steel pins, and other pieces of magnetite. In magnetite sand, lodestone crystals are easily identified because the other magnetite grains appear to stick to them.



I The Magician

Her asymmetrical mask indicates the ability to see and act in the material world and that of the spirit. She carries iron objects for the Four Elements and the Tarot suits: a sparkling spike lamp, a coil-bordered water bowl, a pomegranate bell spilling garnet crystals, and a podlike knife with a half-moon blade. We do not see who she is, but only what she does, and what she wants us to see. On her right side, her fixed gaze and neatly tied hair show focus and self-control. On her left, wild hair reflects the flashing ecstatic visions of the shaman's trance. She works with the raw elements, calling them in and combining them to serve her creative will. She may do this without knowledge, skill, or experience, but only with an innate connection that allows her to be an open channel for power. She has much to learn, but she has overcome any fear or hesitation at handling the elements and enjoys the work for its own sake. Her command of material resources can initiate movement with little thought for its effects. She is the essence of dramatic, original communication, but is also a subtle manipulator. In a whirling dance of energy, her will moves and manifests all, then moves on. She knows the value of performance. The object is not to show off or to deceive people with conjurer's tricks, but to allow her audience to participate in her work. Through sacred theater, she expresses transformational magic. She uses the dark glamor of her craft to illuminate the work as she describes each step. Nothing is secret about the process, yet when it is done, the finished object holds even more mystery and power for those who watched its creation. As a shaman, she provides a focus for the imagination, faith, and fears of the watchers. Dancing between two worlds, she gives substance to visions and personifies the initiate's hidden world for others.



II Red Earth (The High Priestess)

Crowned with horns like the moon, the extinct Australian Pleistocene tortoise *Meiolania* carries iron ore on her back in the form of stromatolites fossilized in bands of jasper and metallic hematite. Jasper is a kind of agate colored with red ochre. Stromatolites are algae colonies that form mounds of banded limestone. They are among the earliest life forms on earth. Stromatolites replaced with iron ore like the one in the picture are about 2.5 billion years old. The fossil tortoise represents geologic time. Extinct 25,000 years ago, she is remote and unattainable as a living being. But she speaks through the rocks that she carries, and all of earth's history is laid out on her shell like a map or a book of oracles and wonder tales. The dome of her carapace is cracked and sutured like the sliding plates of Earth's puzzle-ball crust, and the channels and ridges on its surface resemble lunar landscapes and vanished watercourses. She guards the "strong eye" of the seer and reveals secret doors to mysteries that we would not have guessed existed without questioning her with sincerity and humility. She challenges us to look beyond the veil of willful ignorance and learn to know, understand, and love all that is true and real in Nature, not simply be infatuated with the ideal or make-believe. Scientific knowledge that is discovered, recorded, and used with care and respect does not diminish the earth's mystery or magic, but illuminates its unique wonders, its fragility, and its deep living power that is the source of our own life.

Traditionally she is the High Priestess, the diviner's card, the Seeress who opens a gate to the unconscious. She is Guardian of the Mysteries, the meticulous keeper of secret or forgotten knowledge. She is the sibyl uttering prophecy in the smoky cave or interpreting rustling leaves in the oak grove. She is Kwan Yin, the Chinese goddess who originally rode a tortoise as the patroness of divination, and whose oracle of turtle bones was the ancestor of the *I Ching*. She is the geologist reading patterns on a fossil tortoise shell in a dry river, painting a map in red ochre on a boulder and speaking a story that becomes a stepping-stone to the ancient flowing water.

BOX TURTLE

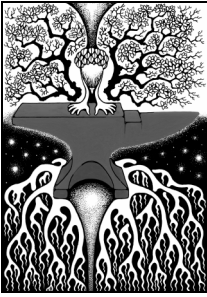
She has been called Earth Island.
The early spring forest trembles
As she dives for a mouthful of creek sand
To build the world.
From a leathery mud tomb,
From eggs as soft as a clutch of grubs,
From the reeking brushpile kingdom of centipedes,
Pangaea emerges.
Her ribs and vertebrae are fused into a map
Of the planet's sutured carapace.
She feels her shell eroding
Even as new growth rings stretch
Over a spine marked with her own tracks.
Turn her over at the end of each age.
Rattle out her bones like sand.
Then her shell is emptier than a geode,
White and fragile as anyone's skull.



III The Forge (The Empress)

The forge is shown as a pomegranate full of the seeds of creative fire, blowing clean hot air and twinkling sparks. A flower and leaves shelter it and cool the outside as part of the living earth. The pomegranate or "garnet apple" (*Punica granatum*) is one of the oldest domestic plants, long associated with health and abundance because of its medicinal properties and myriad of jewel-like fruits, and because its flowers and fruit are the color of red earth. It is also the fruit of the Land of the Dead, and gives that place its own strange vitality that connects it closely with Life and keeps the world of the shades from being cold and empty. In the pomegranate forge, the Veil between worlds is a curtain of flames that is too bright to look at.

Among African smiths and ancient European metalworkers, ores and metals are rare "children" of Mother Earth: the mines, smelter, furnace, and forge are Her body. The forge is the inexhaustible womb of the smith's creativity. All ironwork is born there in the bright heart of the Goddess of creation. With each piece of iron it heats, the world is new. Cold hard steel becomes soft and glowing, ready to be transformed with the energy of the smith's life. The shapes that form under the hammer are those of leaves and blooming branches, and spark-filled fruit enclosed in braided roots. The receptive nature of the forge draws the smith back again and again, a comfort and a challenge. Looking into it is like staring into a volcano, or a forest fire, or a star. When a smith dies, her body is cremated and the ashes are returned to the forge, the crucible of new life.



IV The Anvil (The Emperor)

An anvil reflects branches bearing the tiny leaves of a desert oak, and sinks roots towards the center of the earth. The anvil is the blacksmith's tool, sacred symbol, workbench, altar, and deity. It radiates authority and demands respect, for it is the ultimate source of order, the world axis and the center of the universe. It holds the deep energy of the earth's core and the solid strength of a growing tree. Its face reflects sun and starlight. Symbol of the limits and laws of physics, it grounds the smith in the working reality of the Middle World, poised between the Upper World of space and the Lower World of stone and ancestors. Traditionally this card is the sacred king who renews the land or the tyrant who destroys it. The anvil imposes structure on metal heated in the chaotic birth-chamber of the forge. A smith cannot shape the hot metal to her will without the stability of the anvil to anchor the work and move the iron under her hammer. The anvil's ring is the song of her life force, and is proof against malevolent spirits. The sound can indicate how the anvil was made, whether it was cast from molten metal or forged into shape. If it rings too loudly, magnets are stuck on it to dull the sound. The horned anvil is used in the Americas and Europe. Most weigh between 50 and 150 pounds, though they range from 25 lb. jeweler's anvils to 600 lb. industrial shop giants. The horn is used for shaping curves and the tip can be used to flare a piece of pipe. The smith works while standing, and the anvil is placed on a stand at a convenient height. Dozens of hammers, tongs, chisels, and other tools are often hung on the stand, ready for use. They declare the smith's ownership of the anvil. Asian and African anvils (and Iron Age European ones) are flat-topped stakes, simple blocks of steel, or even large flat rocks. The smith works while sitting on the ground, using a few tools that are kept in a small box.



V Tradition (The Hierophant)

At the door of the smithy, she stands ready to enter or turn away. The hidden doll dressed like the Lodestone child is her soul and her power of choice. The face of Tradition in the center of the door is protected with horned ancestor figures. Handprints show that this has been a place of teaching and learning for many generations. Five windows offer a glimpse of the wonders within. They are also mirrors that encourage the seeker to study her own reflection and know herself before entering. The smithy can offer spiritual guidance or oppression. Its traditions and resistance to change are its strength and weakness. Its rules define Home and Exile. Its discipline ensures that everyone has meaningful work and a place in the hierarchy. It can be the ideal environment to develop skills quickly and to nurture confidence and efficient habits. It is a place to learn practical knowledge and to preserve arcane lore, to hear beloved legends and heartfelt personal stories, to embrace a vocation that will earn money and respect, and to find friends, mentors, and students. If accepted, the candidate will enrich a living tradition with her original ideas as she learns. But if she is too different, she may be denied a place or be unable to make one for herself, and will go her own way alone. She may be invited to visit after proving herself elsewhere, but enters as a stranger. She honors the House of Tradition but makes her own path if she does not find respect for her Self there. It is not which path she takes that is so important, but that she find one and know that it is right for her.



VI Connection (The Lovers)

Two women draw with charcoal on a turtle shell, each unseen by the other. But they decorate the center together, and find that their visions are more alike than they might have guessed. The plants are Partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*), a creeping evergreen that grows under conifers in old forests in the eastern U. S. Each pair of white fragrant flowers unites to form a single red berry with two flower scars and two seeds. Connection requires trust, the choice to work on a partnership, and the willingness to abandon the freedom of solitude. It is made with understanding and the willingness to allow it to grow and change over time. She who refuses all entanglements will stand at the crossroads forever. This card offers the freedom of choice, the attraction of union, and the challenge of commitment.

The bright steel and black iron ring shows six ways to join two pieces of iron, a metaphor for the level of commitment between two people, or between a person and a beloved place, idea, or project. Starting with the hand-shaped hooks at the top, the connections become hotter, more permanent, and less reversible:

1. Hooks: Cold links interlocked and easily unhooked.
2. Wirewrap: Cold-wrapped steel wire holds pieces together. Easily unwrapped while cold, leaving the pieces unchanged.
3. Cable Twist: Two pieces twisted together like rope. Can be unravelled but must be heated to straighten them.
4. Hot Rivets: Holes are punched in both pieces, and hot rivets are hammered in to hold them together. To separate them, the rivets can be cut out but the holes will remain.
5. Forge Weld: Two pieces are heated until the surfaces are almost melting, then hammered together, becoming one in a shower of sparks. One of the most magical and difficult blacksmithing skills.
6. Pattern Weld: Soft wrought iron and hard high-carbon steel are hammered and forge welded many times to form hundreds of layers. Carbon diffuses out of the steel and into the wrought iron, producing a new steel with a homogeneous composition that is stronger than either of the original metals alone. When polished and etched, it shows complex patterns like those on the double crescent knife. Like the knife, this complete union has a double edge. It is unbreakable without destroying the metal, but it offers possibilities that are not to be found any other way.



VII The Road (The Chariot)

Horsehead blacksmith tongs hold horsetail flywhisks, symbols of purification and authority that are used by West African and Tibetan shamans. The smith uses tongs to grip and manipulate a piece of hot iron. Tongs are made in many shapes, each for a specific job. In European tradition, the jaws are called the "bit" and the handles are "reins". The fanciful horsehead pattern is similar in shape to the "hammer eye" tongs that are used when forging a hammer. The split handles with horse's hooves indicate movement with a sure sense of direction and a well-defined goal. If the tongs represent control, the hammer represents skill. The smith keeps her eye on the work, not her tools, and her mind is always a step ahead in the forging. She must hit the hot iron in the proper place and with the right touch. If she is too gentle, the blow will have no effect and her energy will be wasted. If she is too forceful, the work will be ruined. With concentration, self-control, and confidence in her skills, her will and her spirit ride the rhythm of the hammer. The hammer and tongs are the smith's means of achieving magical flight, the equivalent of the shaman's drum or "wind horse". The result is useful objects like the horseshoe, which represents travel and the taming of horses, and thus the human use of iron to dominate Nature. It also represents the responsible use of power, and shows one way that the smith can clear the way ahead for others as well as herself. Ogun, the West African orisha of iron and blacksmithing, is he who "opens the road" and the "Wild Man" who protects the primeval forest.



VIII Crystallization (Justice)

A pyrite "sun" disc of radiating iron sulfide crystals dissolves in the water of a chalybeate (iron-rich) spring. Pyrite precipitates as a coating on three hazelnuts, making them sparkle like gold or silver. Pyritohedra, crystals with a shape unique to pyrite, form in the black mud. The two cairn-like clusters are typical of cubic pyrite crystals. The red one is an iron oxide pseudomorph after pyrite. Pseudomorphs are crystals that have been replaced with another mineral but retain the original crystal's outer form. This card represents chemical reactions in nature and their continual adjustment between depletion and replenishment. The delicately balanced chemical reactions that sustain life on earth are often obscure or misunderstood, and some are made in what we would consider "hostile" environments. In the picture, springwater dissolves pyrite and becomes enriched with sulfuric acid and iron, making it anoxic and poisonous. Mud blackens with carbon from rotting organic matter. But bacteria that thrive on sulfur become active when the decaying hazelnuts fall into the water and disturb its chemical equilibrium. Pyrite crystallizes, water clears, and balance is restored. What is lost in one place is found in another, and both are equally necessary. The two coiled shapes, a white tusk on the left and a black horn on the right, are the Dream Gates of Roman mythology. False dreams come through the Gate of Ivory, and true dreams through the Gate of Horn. Reality and illusion define each other. Does it matter which is which? The truth in dreams depends on how we interpret or act on them. It may be apparent immediately, or unfold over years. The gates offer a choice in perception, and a warning to recognize cause and effect everywhere.



IX The Hermit

She walks alone up the creekbed, seeking the source of the water and the origin of the red ochre pebbles that she finds in the gravel. Inspired by solitary exploration, her visions become increasingly complex as she travels, and she records them as red ochre pictographs on the rocks, a shaman's map of Otherworld geography. She seeks spiritual insight but also records her wisdom, becoming a teacher and a guide for others. Her medicine bag holds accumulated knowledge and her secret reasons for journeying alone into the dark. It may hide a precious talisman, a gift from a spirit guide, an old memory, or pebbles collected on her journey. Her iron lantern lights the way for travel under the dark moon. The lantern and pictographs may guide others who come later, but she herself goes cloaked, hidden, and alone, unseen and unnamed. Others follow the light of her work without looking into her eyes. If you would see her face, look for your own reflection in a pool of dark water by starlight.

DARK MOON MEDITATION

The black mirror becomes a pool under a scorched hollow stump. The gnarled roots have old half-healed scars like eyes full of water that become windows on the stars. Floating on the water surface there are rotting leaves, a drift of ashes, a raven feather. A black jaguar left her pawprint in the inky mud beside the pool. Stones the color of midnight lie underwater, old seafloor basalt pebbles in magnetite sand.



X The Wheel

A red twisted iron wheel is marked with eight nails for the Solstices, Equinoxes, and cross-quarter fire festivals. The nails appear to anchor the twist as it repeatedly turns away from the circle then returns in an endless wave. Four small wheels represent the elements and suit symbols: sunwise from the top left they are Blades, Spikes, Bells, Coils. The World Axis, a stylized tree with five roots and five branches, bisects the picture. Inside the Wheel, a girl transforms her pale heart into a small red bird that she offers to ancient Fortuna, who replaces it with a larger heart made of sprouting leaves. Perhaps a forest will grow inside it. The hands of the Goddess of Fate are twigs of the World Tree.

With the returning sun, the Wheel sprouts new shoots. Through the year they grow thick with leaves, flowers, and ripe fruit that eventually wither and burn. The flaming wheel rolls away and splashes into the cold River, to emerge bare and bright once more, cleansed of the Old Year's ashes and already quickening with new growth.

Sometimes we cannot act, and must wait with trust until the Wheel turns or until it is turned under other hands. But sometimes we must grasp it and turn it ourselves, a risk filled with hope.

FOUR ELEMENT SONG

Power of Earth surround me,
Strength of Water flow in me,
Voice of Wind speak through me,
Fire of Life burn in me.



XI Strength

The shaman's ribs become smoldering bone flutes and her breath bubbles away in smoke as she faces the ordeal of initiation. She finds the limits of her endurance and reaches beyond them. A tutelary spirit directs the transformation, and her ribs are replaced with iron trumpets. A tiger helping-spirit appears in the form of a blacksmith's bellows and blows its breath into her heart. Her head radiates white light with hooks to recapture shattered soul fragments, which become fixed in the form of quartz crystals. She is not a passive observer, since it is her body's survival instinct that drives her spirit, and the strength of her spirit that renews her body and allows her to be transformed into a healer. Now she reaches behind her heart and breath, and finds power to draw upon to use for herself and others when the need is greatest.

The iron trumpets are similar to those used for protective rituals in West African blacksmith's societies. The crossed horns and the tiger belong to the Tibetan Buddhist protector Garba Nagpo, a blacksmith who rides a goat with crossed horns and carries a tigerskin bellows. The quartz crystals represent the shaman's power. Australian Aborigine shamans swallow quartz crystals or have them surgically implanted in their bodies as part of their initiatory ordeal.

The double-terminated scepter crystals in the picture are from an old streambed locality in Virginia. They are more complex in shape than New York's famous "Herkimer diamonds" but are from the same limestone formation.



XII Trance (The Hanged One)

She climbs an iron shaman's tree that is decorated with white cloth strips, a traditional offering for sacred trees in Siberia and in Britain. She seeks visions in the abode of Upper World spirits. She is pregnant with a shaman-daughter, a new project, a dream, or only with herself, and hangs unknowing and vulnerable between earth and sky. Her companions have disappeared, or perhaps she has sent them away so she can wait alone in the night rain. The inward way has vanished, but the outward path has yet to appear. Two labyrinths offer passage into the the Lower World. The left is the chakra-vyuha of India, a charm for protection in childbirth. The right is a "Baltic Wheel" from Germany, used for ritual dances. Two roots curl around a cave entrance. The left one is iron from a bloomery or primitive furnace. Rainwater has weathered it and revealed the woodlike grain of the metal. The right root is wood that groundwater has replaced with iron oxides, preserving details of bark and branch scars. In the damp soil of the cave entrance, iron becomes wood as wood becomes iron. There is no dramatic destruction and rebirth, only a gradual and almost imperceptible metamorphosis. The bird is a poorwill of the western U.S., a kind of nightjar related to the whip-poor-will. It is the only bird in the world that hibernates. It sleeps upside-down through several weeks of winter in a crack in the rocks, a hole in the earth, or a hollow tree. A night-flying insect eater, its summer call echoes over and over in dry prairie canyons at dusk. The shaman's mask is the bird's face, with its chant of power and huge dark eyes that track dusky moths in starlight.



XIII Death

The rusty mask shows the ultimate fate of all iron that is exposed to the earth's atmosphere. Oxygen and water vapor return the metal to the same oxide minerals that are pictured on the Ore cards, since iron silicate and sulfide minerals in rocks are transformed in the same way through weathering. The mask weeps corrosive tears of salt crystals, a reminder that Death - even when it is "natural" or welcome - is always a difficult and shocking change. Rusty steel is also a disturbing symbol of the destruction of civilization itself.

The skull sprouts crystals of vivianite, an iron phosphate mineral that forms when bone phosphates combine with iron oxide in water. Vivianite is the pigment blue ochre and the commercial "bluing" that protects steel. It gives a rare blue color to fossil bones and mammoth ivory. It sometimes crystallizes from ashes when a body is burned, forming the "jewel-like relics" of Tibetan Buddhism, the greenish-white glassy pebbles found in the ashes of funeral pyres. One of these pebbles hovers over the third eye of the mask. Below the skull are diagrams of human bone under the microscope. Details of the bone become a circle of flying vultures.

Any personification of Death is a mask, yet death also reveals truths that cannot be known any other way. The shaman learns to see this mask in her own face. The moment of death and the brief period of transition bring about strange fleeting transformations. A gate is open and the Otherworld intrudes upon everyday life as it does at no other time. There is much to be learned in facing this experience fully aware. It will energize the work of letting go and the difficult process of rebuilding and accepting new growth.

THE HOUSE OF BLUE EARTH

Where bones crumble into chalk
and blood dissolves in Riverwater,
Where the rusting Iron Gate collapses
among petrified tree roots,
Blue ochre fills the spiral crypt of a snail shell
with a cloud born of rust and ashes,
A map of the Hidden Land scrawled in the dust
On the threshold of the House of Blue Earth.

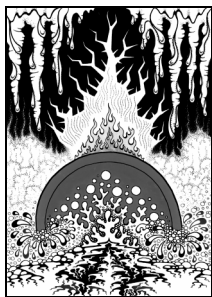
THE OLDEST RIVER

When someone you love dies, every creek and river that you
know becomes the Oldest River of all, the One with many Names,
and each gives a different tale of the Crossing. The River flows
through hollow Sky to star-filled Ocean. It sings through deep
places under the earth. Its source may be a rivulet of tears, or a
drop of blood that the water has washed clean of pain and iron,
leaving it clear as rain on the sea.

HOUSE OF RED EARTH

The House of Red Earth is built only of hematite,
Of iron oxide the color of blood and burning steel,
Of sandstone bridges and shale canyons
That give back the same light as Mars.
A redrock house of souls built the same way everywhere,
Handprints on every continent, saying
"This is who I am: I am Red Earth, I am Life."
It began so long ago that only the youngest of us
Still remember when the child Creekwalker found
A rusty pebble that no one yet called iron ore,
A rock that colored her hands and compelled her spirit
To paint creatures on a cave wall
Or spirals on a carved bone,
To trace patterns in ochre on the skin of dancers,
To brush streaks of red dust into a dead friend's hair,
A gentle uncomprehending offering that said
"One day I will follow you and know everything,
But then it will be too late to come back and tell the others.
Only your spirit is real now, but it speaks
To the stone in my hand."

From the CD-ROM, "Collecting and Using Mineral Pigments"
copyright 2001 by Lorena Babcock Moore.



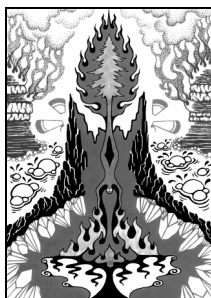
XIV Quench (Temperance)

A new forged iron bowl is quenched in cold water, creating a cloud of steam that cracks ice and melt icicles. Boiling water bubbles and hisses around the metal, which is glowing orange at first but turns dull red and finally dark gray as it cools. The round waterdrops and sharp ice mirror the bowl's transition from hot, soft and malleable to cold, hard and brittle. Quenching declares the forged shape perfect, consecrating the iron to its intended purpose. Hammering and quench-hardening gives the bowl a bright ringing sound that the raw metal did not have. Once the bowl is polished, it is returned to the forge and heated only until it turns black, then quenched in oil. Magnetite firescale combines with burnt oil to form a glossy black coating, a bit of alchemy that keeps the iron from rusting in water or discoloring in fire. If the metal is too cool, the firescale will not form. If it is too hot it will set the oil on fire, and the black finish will not stick. The elements work together to create the bowl. Their mystical union completes a fit container for their continued synthesis. It may be a healer's vessel for burning incense or scribbled paper, or for floating herbs in the cool water of a black scrying mirror. It may be a crucible for roasting ores or melting metals. A clay vessel has the same uses. It too is a product of the combined elements, and a potter's kiln is very similar to a gas forge. A clay bowl is earth shaped in water, hardened and finished in fire. An iron bowl is earth shaped in fire, hardened and finished in water. Because iron does not stretch, blacksmiths often compare forging iron to shaping clay. Under the hammer, copper curls unexpectedly and silver writhes with a mind of its own, but iron moves only according to the hammer's blow. But smiths and potters do not combine their crafts, though they may admire and collect each other's work. Clay and iron complement each other.



XV Molten Iron (The Devil)

She stands in the same position as the little girl in the Lodestone card. She has grown up and found a beautiful but potentially deadly source of raw power in a mesmerizing pool of molten iron. It offers inspiration and temptation, an overwhelming attraction that can teach her the joy in feeling alive or shrivel her soul and crumble her heart into lost fragments. She stands on a burning sheet of steel. The torn metal is beginning to melt into the pool except under her hands and feet, where it remains cool as she forms it into coils, symbols of her tenuous self-control. A giant centipede crawls up her back and into her hair. It represents rising energy that can be a source of health and creativity but brings chaos and illness if not used wisely. If she faces the inner surge of energy and the outer source of power with awareness and courage, she can find more life without harm to herself or others. If she does not face them, they become oppressive. She places herself and others in bondage to her ignorance, a path of separation that leaves nothing to fill the emptiness but fear. The rare and beautiful giant Sonoran Desert centipede (*Scolopendra heros*) grows to 8" long. It is bright orange with yellow legs and blue-black head and tail. A fast-moving predator of insects, its front legs are modified as fangs, and its poison is comparable to that of a scorpion. It is nocturnal and usually hides under rocks, and is rarely seen except on humid nights after summer rains.



XVI The Tower

Wildfire ignites the three fuels of ironworking - charcoal, coal, and petroleum - at their source in nature. A torching tree leaves a charcoal shell that will crumble into white ash. Coal seams explode in poisonous smoke, turning the creek into hot sulfuric acid. Fire and boiling acid enter deeper rocks and ignite oil that has pooled in limestone fractures lined with calcite crystals. The elements attack each other. Without fuel for the forge and smelter, the smith's craft ceases to exist, and her skills and magic lose all meaning. She becomes the fire that burns out as it consumes fuel and oxygen. The falling moth wings, striped like a tiny firefighting aircraft, represent her experience and the ability to travel and avoid danger. Shattered and useless, they blow away in the hot wind. Falling into fire without wings brings release. A door opens in the air, and the cooling ashes nourish strange life that can exist no other way. What was precious is stripped away, what was useful is exhausted, and what may be salvaged is yet unrecognized.

All metalworking is ultimately destructive for people and the earth. Charcoal is the only fuel that is potentially a renewable resource. But it needs whole forests to feed a smelter, and making it creates heavy smoke. Coal is more efficient and burns hotter, but its sulfurous smoke is toxic and creates acid rain. Coal mining is destructive and dangerous, and exposes sulfide-bearing rocks to weathering that produces the acid drainage that kills streams. (Oddly, the orange mineral deposits found downstream are pure iron oxides and iron sulfates that yield a nontoxic orange pigment powder when dried.) The most efficient but least abundant metalworking fuel is propane gas, which burns clean and hot, without smoke. But it is dangerously explosive, and air pollution is created during petroleum refining.



XVII The Star

A blazing iron meteor falls toward the sea during a meteor shower, while a basket star (*Gorgonocephalus*) rises from the depths. The sea star is a rare creature of cold arctic oceans. A woman stands on a banded iron ore outcrop and watches the sea star, while another stands on a rock full of star-shaped *Pentacrinites* crinoid fossils and watches the meteor. Each tries to attract the other's attention, yet each seems oblivious to the other. A third star of divine light unites their two visions. Two great unknowable places in nature, outer space and deep ocean, become one for a moment. The women are dressed in painted fish skin clothing in a style formerly worn by Arctic people on both sides of the Bering Strait. Bare feet show a comfortable connection with the earth that allows them to recognize the wonders appearing in sea and sky, and find the spark that lights a path of hope. They are watching a miracle, the numinous flash that illuminates the ordinary when least expected. They could be aspects of the same person: the active, outward-directed self, and the contemplative, introspective self. They could be strangers who find that they are sisters. They could be friends who have quarrelled, stunned by an opportunity for reconciliation when they have forgotten how to see each other.

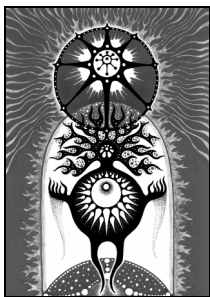
Crinoids are close tropical relatives of the sea stars. Both are Echinoderms, like sea urchins. They are abundant as fossils in some limestones, and the stalk fragments are disks that look like wheels or coins with four, five, or six-lobed flower-shaped holes in the center. Only *Pentacrinites* and a few others are actually star-shaped. Crinoid fragments that weather out of the rock are sometimes collected as beads, and in Kentucky they are called "Indian money."



XVIII The Moon

The coyote Moonback stands between two rare Moonwort ferns (*Botrychium lunaria* of subarctic grasslands). They form a ladderlike gate into the spiral halls of the Full Moon, an open window or eye on the Otherworld. The moon is also shown in eclipse, when it turns the color of hot iron. She talks to a coyote skull, speaking with an ancestor or visualizing her own skeleton in a shaman's exercise to focus the mind and spirit. Her backbone is made of crescent moons, with the seed of a Moonseed vine (*Menispermum canadense*) at the top. Her hands hold the water of the River that runs between worlds, stirring beauty and madness that brings recurring dreams, frightening delusions, and overwhelming emotion. There is no way out of the swirl of confusion except through the gate and behind the mask. The mask shows two contradictory aspects of the Moon Goddess as Coyote the Trickster. One hand beckons as her eye glows with invitation, the other is held up in warning as her closed eye defends her secrets.

Moonback was a real coyote with a black stripe like a long braid that ran from her ears to the tip of her tail, and a crescent of white fur over her shoulders. Though she disappeared about the time this picture was finished, her black-striped daughters and granddaughters still run singing through the stony desert washes near my house. During lunar eclipses, they howl to bring back the moon.



XIX The Sun

An iron figure stands on steel suns that are so hot that the metal has begun to glow red. Standing under a flaming iron sunwheel, she absorbs its energy as black iron does, until she begins to glow and become a sun herself, warmed by her own white-hot heart. She makes a door in the red wall of firelight, and controls her own crackling black blaze and cool white glow at will. She need not conserve her heat, but feels it streaming and radiating from a molten core.

She is the Burning Shadow that flames without being consumed, but grows and warms others. Yet she does not see herself as others do, so she perceives light and dark, hot and cold, increase and decrease, with different eyes. She may not always know whether there is too much light or not enough. She stands inside the furnace, under the smokehole, and looks out the door. The next card, XX - The Furnace, shows the view from the outside.



XX *The Furnace* (Judgement)

A starlike human figure of molten iron glows white in the door of a coiled furnace with a pomegranate chimney. She emerges from the spiral cave of testing, the red earth maze, the alchemist's athanor, the secret house of fire where raw ore is refined into pure metal. All that was impure is burned away. All that was unnecessary has run off as liquid glass, which can itself be refined and blown into beads and vessels. The dark green or black glassy silica slag that is poured off iron in the smelter is very similar to obsidian in composition and appearance. She blazes with the intense radiance of new iron, the ore of blood and human handprints now utterly changed, reborn in a stronger form. She greets the world with new understanding and purpose, glimmering with revelation. She guessed none of this before she entered the Mystery, the cold dark hole of the furnace, the burial mound of trial and transformation. Now she illuminates its doorway with her own light as she re-enters Life. The snake-haired White Goddess oversees all such changes, renewing herself as she sheds brittle and outgrown skins. She is the Milky Way, and the net of stars that she sprays across the sky is a path made of thousands of glowing furnaces whose bright hearts will ultimately give birth to iron as they cool and turn dark.



xxi *The World*

An iron figure dances and combines the elements in triumph upon the interlocking iron crystals of the earth's core. Her coiled legs spring out of the water as her bladelike mask pierces the sky and the spikes of her fingers spin fire. Her body opens like a bell to reveal a lodestone crystal at her heart. The child's mysterious pebble has become the lodestone that draws her unerringly to the magnetic heart of the earth, and the dancer's compass needle that keeps her aligned with its rhythm. She draws the four elements into herself with skill and synthesizes them in full knowledge and understanding. She has created herself, having experienced her limitations and fully explored the freedom that she has within them. She dances arrival, completion, and wholeness. Yet she is not static, and every part of her moves in balance, ready to begin a new journey on which she gives birth to a new road.

The criss-crossing lines behind her are Widmanstätten patterns of interlocking iron crystals. They are seen in many iron meteorites and rarely in certain types of steel welds. Iron meteorites are thought to be the shattered cores of proto-planets, so they are among the oldest objects in the solar system. Since the earth's core is mostly iron, geologists assume that it looks similar to iron meteorites.

NUMBER CARDS

THE MINOR ARCANA include the sixteen Spirit Guides and the forty Pips or Number Cards. Like playing cards, the latter are numbered Ace through Ten in each of four suits. Tarot suits correspond with the Four Elements. The Ironwing Tarot suits are named for basic blacksmithing motifs. Cards illustrate small sacred iron objects for the Four Elements that give ironworking its transformative power. Objects are different for each card. They were carefully chosen to reflect the meaning of the cards and to suggest the creative possibilities of iron. Objects become more sophisticated or difficult to make as the numbers ascend, and the shape and use of each object defines growth symbolism within a suit. Most objects are designs from my own work, but a few are magical items from traditional iron cultures. All are talismans, shaman's tools, and trade items. Many also have everyday uses. The objects are sacred not just because of their intended use, but because the material is precious and so are the smith's time, physical energy, and imagination.

ORES replace the traditional Aces. Each shows a different iron oxide mineral, with suit assignments based on the mineral's geologic environment. Each features an elaborately forged object to inspire the blacksmith's skill.

In a reading, Number Cards represent everyday motivations, moods, concerns, and activities. The number sequence identifies stages of development in a learning cycle expressed as the growth of elemental energy. The cycle can apply to a project, relationship, skill, spiritual search, or attitude. To interpret the cards, look at the number symbolism, the suit element, the appearance and use of the iron object, and any plants or creatures in the picture. If a number appears more than once, consult the corresponding card from the Major Arcana for additional insight. The universal ideas illustrated in the first ten Major Arcana parallel the more personal and specific themes of the Number Cards. (To see this, choose a number, pick out its Major Arcana and four Number Cards, and compare them with the descriptions and the Number Symbolism table.)

NOTE: Traditionally, Spikes/Wands = Fire and Blades/Swords = Air. A few decks (and readers) assign Spikes to Air and Blades to Fire. The Ironwing Tarot explores and honors this difference in the Eight of Spikes and Four of Blades, which can be read either way and are intended to help bridge the gap between the two systems.

NUMBER SYMBOLISM

ORE: Birth, source, and gift of the raw element.

TWO: Duality, balance, choice: Opportunity and responsibility (Fire), union of opposites (Water), attraction and conflict (Air), collaboration (Earth).

THREE: Creativity and evolving complexity: divine inspiration (Fire), nurturing source (Water), truth and revelation (Air), talent and practice (Earth).

FOUR: Stability; finding or creating sacred space. Protection (Fire), rest (Water), boundaries (Air), consecration (Earth).

FIVE: Disruption and lessons related to inexperience rather than outside influence. Challenges of timing (Fire), acceptance (Water), self-control (Air), grounding and confidence (Earth).

SIX: Shared success and a pause for reflection. Self-confidence and trust (Fire), memory (Water), planning and progress (Air), practical gifts and service (Earth).

SEVEN: Seeking a challenge from outside. Aspects of the shaman's initiation: confronting and claiming power (Fire), interpreting dreams and visions (Water), a trial or test (Air), using sacred tools (Earth).

EIGHT: Intense work that leads to change and growth. Innovative communication (Fire), release (Water), breakthrough (Air), perfection through repetition (Earth).

NINE: Achievement, arrival, ultimate expression of elemental energy: endurance (Fire), harmony (Water), alertness and complexity (Air), mastery and recognition (Earth).

TEN: Completion and transformation. The element in a specialized, overdeveloped, and restricted form. In shamanic work, the element applied to a specific purpose, often publicly or for the benefit of another: extraction or purification (Fire), fulfillment (Water), cutting off or banishing (Air), authority and leadership (Earth).

SPIKES - FIRE

Imagination, intuition, motivation, creativity.

Traditional: Wands, Clubs

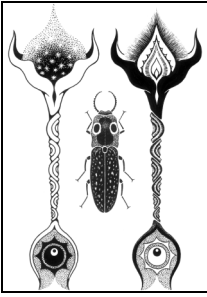
The tapered rod is a basic blacksmithing motif, and gives iron designs their energy and tension. The first step in many blacksmithing projects is *drawing out* a square-sided bar, or hammering it into an elongated point. During this process a square cross-section must be carefully maintained or the tip will crack. Once it has been drawn out, the bar can be twisted to add a sense of movement, or rounded by flattening the corners and hammering the piece while rolling it on the anvil. A tapered spike can ground energy like a root or a tent stake, radiate it like a branch or torch, or focus it like a thorn or pin. Spikes carry the illuminating, purifying, and protecting power of fire.

The ability of the Spikes to conduct heat and fiery energy increases with the numbers. The One, Two, and Three become increasingly complex in shape, and their lamps become more varied, but they are essentially light bearers that derive much of their energy from the fire they carry. Like the Three, the Four and Five work with quartz to produce their energy, though it is not the power of light. The Four locks in and amplifies protective energy. The Five brings creative fire in a new direction that is ultimately a dead end until the iron begins to glow with its own living light in the Six. In the Seven it gains the power to change shape and divide itself, taking flight in the Eight. The Nine and Ten both create and conduct energy, the Nine dispersing and fanning it outward and the Ten focusing it to a single point.



Ore of Spikes

A torch splits a boulder of Proterozoic "banded iron" ore, a metamorphic rock made of alternating layers of gray metallic hematite and red jasper (hematite-stained agate). The twisted spike draws fiery energy from the rock, the round pod concentrates it into light, and the antlers or branches radiate it as heat. Beyond the torch, ore glows in the furnace. The shape of the spike recalls the bar topped with an iron ball that is used to stir ore in the furnace and break up clinkers in the forge. The first of the Fire cards offers the gift of the self-purifying fire of the spirit and imagination, and the birth of inspiration and passion. HEMATITE (ferric oxide, Fe_2O_3) is the most abundant iron ore. It occurs in heavy gray metallic and lighter weight dark red nonmetallic forms. Because it is fully oxidized, it is one of the most stable minerals in the earth's crust. Before refining in the smelter, all raw iron ores must first be burned or "roasted" to drive off water and fully oxidize the rock until it becomes hematite. Hematite yields a dark red or purplish-black powder when crushed, which identifies all forms of the mineral and makes them valuable as the mineral pigment red ochre. As an artist's paint it is also called Venetian Red, Caput Mortuum, Indian Red, and other names. Like all iron oxide pigments, it is lightfast and nontoxic. It is used to color concrete and ceramics, and is an abrasive (jeweler's rouge) for polishing silver. Shiny black metallic hematite is used as a gemstone, but even this kind is dark purplish black when crushed.



Two of Spikes

A beetle watches between two torches, one of polished steel that sparkles with smoldering incense, and one of black steel that flames with scented oil. Each torch is split into two rootlike points that hold hidden suns to suggest that each side holds the seed of its opposite. One is not better or more desirable than the other. The lanterns are the complementary powers of knowledge and intuition, observation and imagination. Together they represent choice as a gateway into opportunity and responsibility. The beetle is the balance point, looking forward with its real eyes that are hidden, and appearing to look backward with the large false eyes on its thorax. The eye pattern is a disguise to fool or startle birds which would react quite differently to the beetle if its back were plain. So even though the beetle does not "see" with these "eyes" in the ordinary sense, they do affect its environment and give it an awareness that it would not otherwise possess. In this way they are similar to a shaman's "spirit eyes", a decoration or mask worn on the back of the head to indicate the ability to see in two worlds. The beetle is an Eyed Elater (*Alaus oculatus*) of the eastern U.S., a sun-loving click beetle that visits flowers. Click beetles can jump several feet when startled, making a clicking noise as the two thornlike projections on the back of the thorax snap against the elytra, the beetle's hardened forewings.



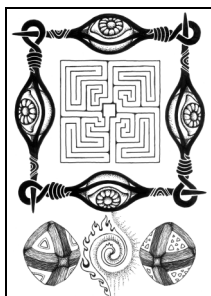
Three of Spikes

Three fantasy lamps illuminate the mysterious swirling dark of the imagination. They are reminiscent of the three-legged tripod upon which the ancient Roman sibyls sat when they uttered prophecy in their caves and shrines. The crystals form in cool water in limestone, a hidden connection with water that emphasizes the volatile nature of this card. An iron basket twist lantern holds a lightning bug in a temporary shelter decorated with sparkling quartz "dewdrop diamond" dipyrramids, a rare crystal form without prism faces. The tiny crystals are found in geodes and sometimes break loose, making the hollow stones rattle.

At its heart, the scepter quartz crystal has a dark oil-filled crystal that grew in hot petroleum-rich brine. The clear quartz overgrowth crystallized later in cool clean water. Smoking oil contains the power of prophecy in its fumes. The ancient oracle of Apollo at Delphi uttered her predictions in delirium while under the influence of toxic gases rising from petroleum pools in the rocks under her cave. Here the poison burns away and leaves a bright, hollow room within the crystal.

A spiked iron braid holds two glowing fluorescent geodes. They are beekite, a wavy-ridged variety of chalcedony that forms on geodes (and occasionally fossils) that have weathered out of the rocks and are lying loose in the soil. The silica on the surface of the stone dissolves and re-precipitates into eyelike whorls that fluoresce slightly purple in sunlight and glow green under a UV lamp.

The three lamps indicate creativity as magic or madness, the light of divine inspiration from an unexpected and unknown source. This light is drawn through the hot iron spikes, spiralling through the twists before it is caught and radiated with glittering clarity in the crystals.



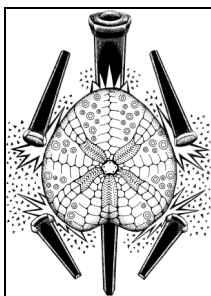
Four of Spikes

Four interlocked tent stakes enclose quartz pebbles that are carved or painted with "watching" eyes, creating a safe, impenetrable enclosure. Two natural octahedral diamond crystals form a doorway of adamantine purity, both transparent and reflective. Wherever the viewer stands, each crystal's ordered brilliance offers the focus of a four-sided pyramid. A whorl of purifying incense outlines a spiral entrance and exit path between the crystals.

The four iron spikes are sacred to Ogun, the West African orisha of iron, and are used for protective corner-marking around a house or property. The Tibetan phurba or "magic tent peg" (sometimes incorrectly called a dagger) is used in a similar way for pinning harmful spirits. The iron-wrapped river pebbles are similar to protective amulet necklaces worn by West African women. The eyes are from the European tradition of carving or drawing watching-eyes on doorposts and other items to keep away the "evil eye."

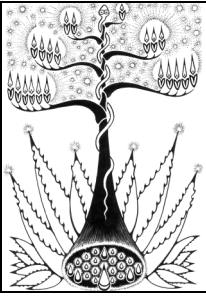
The maze design is from Roman mosaics. It is a unicursal maze with a single path to the center, but the four quadrants are traced one at a time, each in its turn. Here it represents the four directions and the center of a home or temple, a revitalizing sanctuary to which one can return again and again, a place that feels like the center of the world. A comforting place to visit, it can be limiting if used as a permanent dwelling, though without such a place, a house is just a camp. To find or create a sacred place is to make a home for the spirit.

This image also represents setting an intention or making a formal statement of desire or purpose, or returning to one's original inspiration during a creative project or spiritual work.



Five of Spikes

Five cut nails strike a flint, but no fire is born. Cut nails are the raw material for much of my jewelry. Sharp thin flakes of freshly-broken flint will start a fire when struck against clean steel, but the nails in the picture are still coated with magnetite firescale that flakes off when they hit the weathered surface of the round stone. The stone is a fossil *Micraster* sea urchin from British Cretaceous chalk. The famous flint nodules and fossils from the chalk are usually shiny black with a dull white hydration rind (a zone of soft, porous flint that has been partially dissolved in groundwater). Fossil sea urchins are one of the Druid "snake egg" charms mentioned in Pliny's *Natural History*. Thus they can represent a source of magical creativity born of the World Serpent. But fossil sea creatures are Water and Earth, and only reveal Fire when broken. Here great creative potential is temporarily thwarted by lack of knowledge and self-confidence, insufficient preparation, or use of the wrong tool. The creative spark gutters only in the wind of fear that it will catch fire and burn.

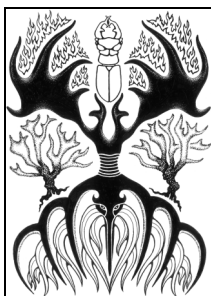


Six of Spikes

Six branches on an iron agave stalk bear sparkling seedpod lanterns. Six leaves and two young plants surround the stalk. Agaves or Century Plants grow in southwestern desert grasslands and are related to yuccas and lilies, not cacti. The rosette of heavy grayish green leaves grows to several feet high. Leaves are edged with stout thorns and tipped with spikes. After a decade or more of growth, the mature plant produces a tall woody stalk with pink, yellow, or fiery gold flowers. The torch-like flowerstalk can be seen for miles, blooming with the triumph of life at the Summer Solstice, inspiring optimism that is powerful enough to share. Nectar-feeding bats pollinate the flowers at night. The plant dies as the seed pods ripen, but small leaf rosettes or "pups" at the base of the plant continue to grow. Some flowerstalks produce tiny leaf clusters instead of seeds, showering the ground with the green stars of new plants that take root immediately and bring life to the dust.

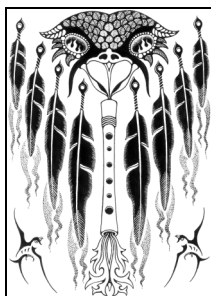
For years the plant stores the sun's energy in the form of sugar, and spends all its sweetness to produce the huge flowerstalk before dying. In this case, the swollen hollow base of the dead stalk fills with another kind of sweetness and hides a dripping honeycomb, while honeybees swarm like glittering sparks among the seedpods. Perhaps a huge black carpenter bee will excavate its home higher in the stalk, leaving tell-tale piles of sawdust. Slow and harmless, it will "come to the door" to investigate if you tap gently on its hole.

The hollow wind-rattled agave stalks hold the song of the grasslands. In southern Arizona, a few people make didgeridoos out of them. When blown and given the energy of the player's breath and life, the instruments make a fine booming sound with a wide range of tones.



Seven of Spikes

A stag beetle and a pair of tiny flaming iron antlers crown a shaman's ornamental hair comb. The antlers are shaped like those of the extinct Pleistocene Giant Elk *Megaloceros*. Below are two Carbon Antlers or Candlesnuff Fungi (*Xylaria hypoxylon*) that grow on rotten or burnt wood and look like charred black antlers covered in white ashes. The most experienced and powerful Siberian shamans once wore iron antlers on their caps as symbols of their ability to travel to the Otherworld, perhaps riding on the back of a deer spirit. This iron comb, warmed with her spiritfire, protects the top of the shaman's head, where her soul can enter and leave her body. It also protects her hair, since touching the hair can imply control over a person's soul. It draws power like an antenna, bringing awareness of the life force in the smallest, highest tree branch and grounding it in the shaman's body. She wins this ability through a journey that challenges her confidence as she travels, and stretches her imagination as she relates her story to others. She who accepts the internal challenge of initiation enters a secret place to confront and claim power.



Eight of Spikes

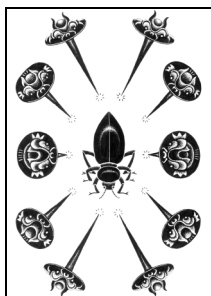
When the shaman calls the spirits and uses precise timing to focus power, the smoking iron feathers on her costume transform into real feathers for magical flight. A caracara spirit blows fiery music into a bird bone flute, a gift of inspired, innovative communication. The caracara is a rare southwestern grassland relative of the falcons. It is famous for preying on rattlesnakes but usually eats carrion. Intelligent and curious, it has a wild but confiding presence, like an American Garuda, the mythical benevolent vulture spirit of Tibetan and South Asian mythology.

The shaman's songs and stories inspire the people and remind them who they are. A shaman knows the languages of animals, plants, and the earth itself, and acts as a translator for the people. She may speak to the spirits using her own secret language. She knows that to name is to call, and sometimes her visions can only be described in ways that are mysterious to others, yet compelling and unforgettable. She sees when the time is right for a swift flight of inspired words that linger like the memory of a bonfire.



Nine of Spikes

Twisted hairpins decorated with hands generate magical heat in response to the rhythmic song of the cicadas. The shaman's ecstatic dance of endurance gives wings to one who journeys underground. Drawing on all resources and calling up reserves of energy, she holds creative power at its most intense, and transforms whatever she touches. Three cicadas crawl up the central pin: the wingless nymph has broken out of the ground and clings to the spike, its outgrown skin brittle and ready to burst. The newly-emerged adult rests and sings in the iron pod while its wings enlarge and harden, then flies off into the sunlight with the blessing of the hands that release it. This is *Magicicada septendecim*, the famous Periodical Cicada or "Seventeen Year Locust" of the oak forests in the eastern and midwestern U.S. It has a black body, transparent orange wings, and red eyes, and is not seen except in brood years, when its overwhelming ecstatic noise fills the midsummer forest with buzzing cascades and rhythmic hooting. The stout dark green Summer Cicada or Jarfly is larger and appears every year, rasping its sunset song under black-veined wings. It looks similar to the Asian cicada that is an ancient symbol of transformation and rebirth. Sonoran desert cicadas are small and steel-gray, and their buzzing songs vibrate through the saguaro forest in the white heat of high summer.



Ten of Spikes

A desert Pinacate Beetle (*Eleodes*) stands on its head in its typical defensive posture, trying to fend off ten malevolent black pins. Entomologists traditionally use black steel pins to mount dead insects for study. Such pins typically have very tiny heads, so it is not clear whether these pins are truly attacking the beetle, or merely facing off against each other in a beetle's nightmare. Their tips glitter with the feeble spark of overspent fire, exhaustion and burnout inspiring a weary defense. Or it could be the burden of defensive tension itself that needs release in a flare of pent-up energy.

At their most extreme, the pins can represent a long-term spiritual poison that shamans would interpret as an intrusion, a toxin that causes illness, emotional distress, or damage to the soul. Interpreted as a spirit or some type of foreign energy that has become lodged in the body, it is not necessarily bad in its own right. It can be a memory, an attachment gone awry, a recurring nightmare, or anything else that has taken root where it does not belong. Some shamans can extract such intrusions in the form of black pins or other small items, or they draw them out into a specially-prepared object, a bowl of fire or water, or a closed vessel. The extracted poison can then be destroyed or transformed without harm to anyone.

The picture is deliberately ambiguous, since the pins could represent the intrusion with the beetle as the shaman's helping spirit, or the beetle itself could be the intrusion with the pins as the shaman's power to destroy it.

COILS - WATER

Emotions, relationships, connections.

Traditional: Cups, Hearts

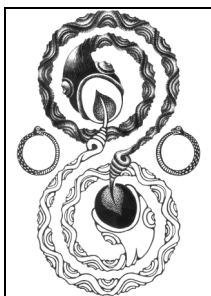
Coils are common in forgework designs and have many variations: flattened spirals, vertical-sided scrolls, and corkscrew vine tendrils. They have a fluid, inviting organic quality that recalls the healing power of flowing water. Small tight coils become loops and chain links, a powerful symbol of connection and interrelationship, whether it is with other people, the spirit world, or the land. Coils express the Water suit's flowing, emotional quality better than iron cups, although a few cards depict vessels in addition to coils where it is appropriate. Iron vessels have a deep, earthy hollowness, as static and solid as a water-worn rock. They embrace whatever is put in them, shutting out the world and providing a crucible for mysterious transformations.



Ore of Coils

Iron coils cradle the shell of a paper nautilus that holds a fountain splashing over bubbly-looking iron ore. The first of the Water cards offers the gift of the divine presence and a swell of emotion, the ability to see connections and adapt, and the birth of empathy. The paper nautilus (*Argonauta argo*) is a squidlike deep sea creature related to the *Spirula* cephalopod shown on the Shaman of Coils card. The paper nautilus is unique in that the males are tiny and have no shells, but the females secrete a large fragile white shell as a brood chamber for their eggs. Broken shell fragments wash up on Atlantic beaches after storms.

The iron ore is GOETHITE (ferrous hydroxide, $\alpha\text{FeO}\cdot\text{OH}$, pronounced "gertite"), the second most abundant iron ore. It occurs in dark brown metallic and yellowish brown nonmetallic forms. It is often found as small but heavy stream pebbles or ventifacts (wind-polished pebbles). It forms mostly in sedimentary rocks, especially sandstone and conglomerate, where it may replace wood or form coatings around quartz pebbles. It often crystallizes as rounded bubbly nodules of radiating needle-like crystals. This is called a "botryoidal" crystal habit, from a Greek word for a bunch of grapes. Hematite often crystallizes in this form, and so do many other minerals. Goethite is the mineral pigment brown ochre or raw sienna. Burnt sienna is raw sienna that has been heated or "calcined" to oxidize some of the goethite to hematite. Most "rust" is goethite.



Two of Coils

The One coil replicates itself, finding a mirror and a companion.

Two twisted steel snakes, one shining black and one bright polished, hold eggs in their mouths. They assist each other's hatching and devour each other's tails, forming a mutual attraction of opposites, a double Uroboros. The ending of one attachment flows into the beginning of another, and both are entwined as part of a single cycle, a flowing exchange of energy between poles. It can mean anything from a brief meeting to a serious healing interaction that will either dissolve or metamorphose into a more powerful but different relationship when its immediate purpose is served. The shaman heals herself and honors the power of those who ask for help. The wounded healer in the shaman's heart unites with the seeker's hidden strength.

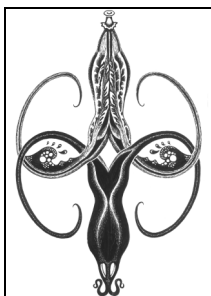
This pattern of many continuously reversing twists is made on an eight-sided bar. It is more difficult to work than a four or six-sided bar, since it is closer to round in shape and there is less flat metal to grip. Before each twist is made, the hot metal must be quenched as far as the previous twist so it does not change shape. Only the current twist remains hot and moves. The bar is kept straight, and is only curled into a spiral when all the twists are done.



Three of Coils

The energy of the Two, spiralling back and forth in partnership, creates a sacred whirlpool Source and hatches the means to carry and share its power.

A three-sided dipper and a three-legged cauldron wait beside a sacred well. Bubbles float in the dark water under windows in the well cover, between a triskele of coils that forms a handle. The water is alive, creeping through fractures in the rock, the hidden flow echoing under hollow hills, then rising and bubbling into the light through a hole in the stone. The well is the source of life and community, a reminder of the people's dependence on nature and each other, and a metaphor for an inexhaustible source of healing to which anyone can return at any time. The cover protects the water, the dipper brings it up for use, and the cauldron allows it to be used and shared. The two triskele spirals are offerings to the well, recalling the Iron Age iron rings and other votive objects found in European bogs. Water is not drawn from the sacred well without making a gift to its source. Keeping this balance is one of the shaman's tasks. When she offers her healing skills to others, she allows elemental power to flow through her without draining her own strength. Later she returns alone to her personal source of healing to rededicate herself.



Four of Coils

The whirlpool is stilled, the vessels are dry and open to the sun and air, and the coils unfurl from their dance or lock together in rest.

A hornpod or Devil's Claw entwines with its iron replica, two vessels for new life holding the hope of seeds and memory of water, but not yet the promise of rain. They speak of the gift of isolation, even when it is disguised as loneliness, and the need to listen to one's own heart even while in communion with another. The interlocked pods hold temporary stillness in a time of patience and voluntary withdrawal. In the desert, the dry heat and intense sunlight are as essential to life as the rain. Prayers for rain are inappropriate, since the rain always returns in its own time. Until then, the desert's deep strength, like a sheet of dark iron under the dusty earth, trusts and waits.

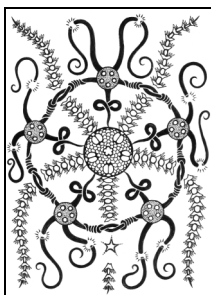
The Devil's Claw or Unicorn Plant (*Proboscidea*) blooms in desert washes after the summer monsoon storms. Although the stonelike seeds must have rain in order to sprout, the plants will not grow unless the midday soil and air temperature is close to 100 degrees. The pink or yellow fragrant flowers produce fuzzy green pods with a long curved "horn". When the pods ripen, the horn splits into two (rarely four) curved hooks. The hooks catch on the legs of passing animals, transporting the pods and scattering seeds. The Tohono O'odham Indians cultivate the pods for basketweaving.

SAGUARO SKELETON DREAM

In the black volcanic mountains
I came to a saguaro's grave.
Resigned to pain and rot, it may have fallen
With a heavy gasp, swollen with winter rain.
Or maybe the black slime illness carried off the flesh,
Leaving the creaking skeleton
To shatter in a monsoon stormwind.
The fallen one has as much presence on the ground
As it had in the now-empty air,
The arms once upraised to the sun in trance or prayer
Now embracing the ground with equal reverence.

I will stretch out on the ghostwood poles,
Fit my hands to the arm ribs,
Rest my feet on the rootknobs.
Bright heat will settle on my back like a sheet of copper.
Ravens will not know my hair
From the haze of cobwebbed spines.
Huge rainmaker beetles will drop out of thunderclouds
And find shelter under my fingers.
My vertebrae will collapse
Among snakeskins and silver cactus bones,
Just before the floodwater carries it all down the wash
In an ecstatic torrent of sand.

We will rise as hornpods and hummingbirds.
Our spiritwalk will follow Jaguarundi's tracks.
We will dance with gray hawks and red dragonflies.
Our songs will ripen and rattle on the wild gourd vine.
Coyote will sing them
When She calls the ocotillo flowers
Out of the illusion of death.



Five of Coils

Attracted to each other, the coils of the Four awaken to intertwine in an elaborate chain of knots and riveted disks. But some coils are still too fragile for such complicated joinery, and they snap under the stress.

A broken chain of iron brittle stars surrounds a living brittle star with a broken arm. A brittle star's arms are fragile and break off easily. They can regenerate but are never as long or flexible as the original. The iron arms on the chain are made of high-carbon spring steel, which is strong enough to use for tiny detailed forgework. But the delicate arms shattered when the steel was quenched at too high a temperature. Spring steel cannot be quenched while still glowing orange or it will become brittle. It must be buried in sand or earth and cooled slowly to soften or "normalize" the steel and release the stress of forging. After that it can be reheated and quenched in oil to harden it. The chain is still linked together, so it is not completely destroyed, but contemplating the damaged links only brings the disappointment of loss and the urge to abandon something that is too fragile to work with. This kind of stress interferes with healing. With a change in expectations, the chain could be salvaged and made into something different, or started over from a stronger position.



Six of Coils

The tangled broken loops of the Five disengage and reshape themselves into a single related sequence of natural growth that changes easily as it develops.

Iron bangle bracelets are forged into the shapes of Giant Kelp (*Macrocystis pyrifera*), the huge brown coldwater algae of the Pacific Ocean. Each bracelet shows one or two parts of the seaweed: the holdfast (rootlike bulb that anchors the young plant to rocks), leaflike blades, gas bladders that keep the mature plant afloat, and the coils of new growth. Each bracelet has different variations, and collectively they form a rhythmic, wavelike series that remains connected as it grows, just like the living seaweed. New growth, curling like tendrils toward the light, often recalls old memories. Deep memories remain as part of the body, rooted like the stonelike holdfast with its tentacles. But they find purpose or release in clear flute music, the rhythm of surf and currents, and the smooth embrace of delicately rippled iron around a strong arm.



Seven of Coils

The flowing waves of the Six constrict into a circle of tight coils, even turning inward to form a vessel.

Water spills from a covered iron bowl forged in the shape of a seven-tentacled jellyfish. The graceful fantasy vessel is ultimately too small and restrictive, so the water pours out, bringing confusion and a sense that reality is slipping away. A live Moon Jellyfish escapes. The bowl's shape is attractive but it lacks the symmetry of living jellyfish, which have an even number of tentacles. Jellyfish are lovely but insubstantial, impossible to hold or even see clearly, and some of them sting. When left to float free and not grasped tightly or forced into a rigid form, their beauty is one of the soothing mysterious wonders of the ocean, from which true dreams and oracular visions emerge.

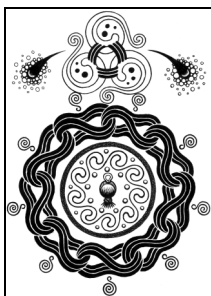
The harmless Moon Jelly (*Aurelia aurita*) lives in northern and temperate oceans worldwide, and in some years thousands of them form cloudlike swarms for a few midsummer weeks, then disappear. In a single night, hundreds of them may wash up on a sandy beach, a strandline of full moon bubbles that vanishes by noon.



Eight of Coils

The circle of illusions in the Seven is dispelled, the bowl overturned, the coils loosened.

A skate hangs poised for flight above an iron replica of its shiny black egg case. Skates are small, shallow water relatives of rays and sharks. The coils once anchored the egg case to a safe place, but with the skate's hatching, they have come loose from their attachment and are disordered, since the case is no longer needed. Nearly invisible on the sandy seafloor, the skate is born with the ability to flutter swiftly through the water, but it will not feel or know this until it leaves the egg case. In the natural process of growth, something once necessary is being left behind before it becomes a trap. Although an emotional echo may remain, a solitary quest begins for greater depth and a wider perspective.



Nine of Coils

After long exploration, the freedom of the Eight finds its perfect expression.

A chain with nine double links and coiled charms surrounds a nine-spiral shaman's mirror that hangs from one of the triskele offerings from the Three of Coils. The chain is an ancient Central Asian design. This one is part of a horse ornament from Afghanistan. The coiled wire charms (copper, silver, or black steel) are the first metalwork that I learned. Siberian and Central Asian shamans use a small round metal mirror for divination, seeing spirits, and finding lost souls. Most mirrors are bronze or iron antiques from China, where they were made for two thousand years. Where these are unavailable, hammered copper mirrors are made locally. Pouring water over the mirror clarifies the shaman's vision. In return for the triskele gift, the sacred well provides a mysterious artifact, and the ultimate healing power of water grants a wish, completes interlocking connections, and restores a soul.



Ten of Coils

The interlocking loops of the Nine come to life and begin to revolve, summoning an entity greater than themselves.

A chain of iron snails creeps in a swirling endless circle. Its flexible coolness and smooth polished coils are soothing to touch and contemplate. Its movement conjures a snail spirit, the essence of its wholeness, that carries the chain forward in harmony. The pieces are permanently interlocked, without beginning or end, and in joining together they create something more powerful than a handful of links. The chain and its snail-spirit bear a whirlpool of natural cycles. They are consecrated to this use in healing individuals and groups that wish to regain the balance of the spiral.

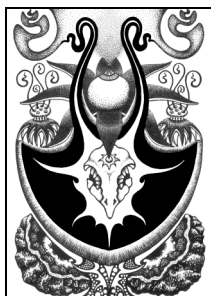
This card can indicate a long-term relationship, stability and accord within a group of people, or the satisfying completion of something in which one has invested a great deal of emotional energy, and that now acquires a life of its own. It can also mean an attachment or emotional task whose purpose is now fulfilled.

BLADES - AIR

Intellect, thought, conflict, analysis.

Traditional: Swords, Spades

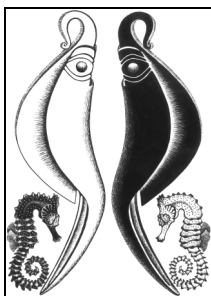
Bladesmithing or knifemaking uses so many specialized techniques and skills that it is a craft in itself, requiring precision, careful planning, practical design, and knowledge of metallurgy. The quality and usefulness of the finished blade depends on the smith's knowledge and control of different types of steel, specialized forging and finishing techniques, temperatures of forging and quenching, and ways to test for weakness at every stage of the blade's creation. Blades pictured on the cards are not weapons exclusively, but have everyday and sacred uses. They represent clarity of thought and sight, defensiveness and separation, intellectual challenge, constructive conflict, and rational problem-solving.



Ore of Blades

A chopper with curly handles splits a concretion, a layered sedimentary nodule similar to a geode, spilling a puff of sun-gold powder on the air. The first of the Air cards offers the gift of the heart of a split stone. Exposed instantly, it bursts the dark open like a flash of truth or a surprising insight, and reveals the hidden treasure of a new idea. The shape of the blade recalls the Ace of Spades in a standard card deck. It is engraved with a red-tailed hawk skull. Above the blade, earthstars scatter yellow ochre-colored spores on the wind, offering them to the sky like sacred smoke. The earthstars are *Geastrum fimbriatum* and the rare multi-pored *Myriostoma coliforme*. Earthstars are specialized puffballs that look more like tree seeds or sea creatures than fungi. The thick outer rind splits into rays that curl back and elevate the papery inner spore sac. Another species, *Astraeus hygrometricus*, is called the Water Measurer because it curls up when dry and opens in wet weather.

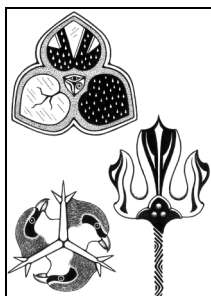
LIMONITE and YELLOW OCHRE are informal names for several soft, amorphous-looking yellowish minerals that are difficult to tell apart and often occur together. They form lightweight powdery nodules in soils and sedimentary rocks that are exposed to water and air. Mostly goethite, they also include other hydrous iron oxides (jarosite etc.), iron sulfates, and iron carbonate (siderite). They are low grade but abundant "bog ore" and the only common yellow mineral pigment. In India, yellow ochre it is called "gold clay" and used as a cosmetic.



Two of Blades

The handle of the One folds into enclosing sheaths as the blade splits in two and recognizes its division.

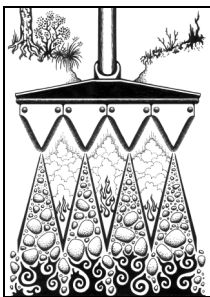
These two 19th-century Chinese fisherman's knives, shaped like small fish or seahorses, are simple masterpieces of "primitive" blacksmithing. The knife would have been tied to the fisherman's sash, since his clothing had no pockets. The sturdy blade swings freely on a single rivet through the podlike handle, and is used for cleaning fish and opening shellfish. Double lines are chiselled around the rivet to make it look like a fish eye. The long point is for untying knots in nets, so these knives can cut through trouble but are better used to delicately unravel it. They are ready for useful work, but to preserve peace they do not engage each other. Much knowledge remains hidden. This is a time to stay watchful, clarify intentions, and study mechanisms, not take risks with details. It is time to respect privacy or to be together but work separately in peaceful silence. It is a time to know what to lovingly reveal and what to keep hidden to avoid conflict, to reconcile ideas or just agree to disagree.



Three of Blades

The blades of the Two open, their edges curling with energy, as the enclosing handles become a third seeking blade.

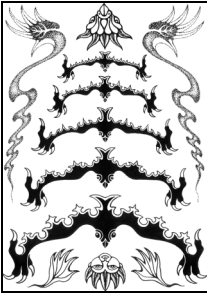
A dangerous-looking triskele of shrikes and thorns is ready to whirl into the heart. A trident flashes three double-bladed words of truth, and a shattered mirror of illusion falls into the night rain. High in a tiny attic room, a heart-shaped trefoil window illuminates three sources of loss: one pane missing, one cracked, and one broken. Three corresponding eyes watch from the center of the frame: one eye open, one closed, and one half open. Even the fear of "What if...?" is exposed as a delusion. Shrikes are uncommon gray predatory birds, masked like raccoons, that impale their prey on thorns. They look like tiny hawks but are Passerines (songbirds), and are more closely related to the mockingbirds they superficially resemble. They prefer grasslands and old fields where there are plenty of thorn bushes and a clear view from an exposed twig. The trident is one of several iron tools used in Tibetan Buddhism to cut through illusions that are obstacles to growth and faith.



Four of Blades

The curving, curling blades of the Three dispel a storm but shatter into four pieces. The salvaged fragments are wrought together in a simple defensive tool.

A wildland fire rake cuts a furrow through soil and sand to expose cool wet pebbles that smoldering, creeping fire cannot cross. This U. S. Forest Service tool is used only in the Southeast. It is light but efficient, and individual blades can be quickly replaced if broken. A fireline must cut through leaves, roots, and humus to expose "mineral soil", the nonburning zone of sand, clay, and rocks (often damp even if the surface is dry) below the accumulated flammable organic matter. It establishes a boundary between what can be protected and what must be given up for lost. To define a safe place, the firefighter must know her limits as well as those of the tool and the barrier she builds. Then she can turn her back on the line and rest, recover stability, and perhaps prepare a defense.



Five of Blades

The triangular beaklike blades of the Four have scattered and grown spiky serrated edges.

From below, she contemplates a shaman's ladder of hawk-shaped sawblades arranged for a feat of mental endurance. To ascend, she must become like a hawk, and either fly over the blades or climb without injuring her feet. This is a difficult and potentially dangerous situation, or at least an intellectual puzzle. She must enter unavoidable conflict and make decisions without needed information. If she can turn the blades into wings, the ladder will vanish with her flight. Otherwise, she gathers courage at the bottom, and with each rung that she ascends, the blades grow smaller and less menacing. One at a time, she gains another useful tool to assist her with the next step, and one more weapon against failure. At the top, she applies what she learned, and grows feathers.

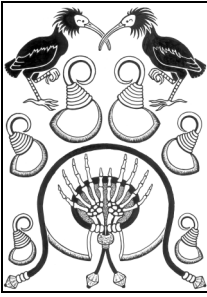


Six of Blades

Having learned to soar, the winged blades of the Five come to rest beside still waters, becoming a bird whose bladed beak cuts new designs from an old map.

On the left is a sandhill crane of the prairie marshes, and on the right is a great blue heron of rivers and wooded swamps. They stand with entwined necks and beaks on a pair of steel scissors with bird handles, representing an intellectual partnership using rational thought, new ideas, and untried methods to solve problems. The swimmer's six-feathered bird mask represents the role of the nature spirits in scientific work. Her six-oared boat embodies the knowledge, trust, and careful planning that carried her on a journey of discovery. Now she leaves it with confidence and swims peacefully to a mysterious new shore.

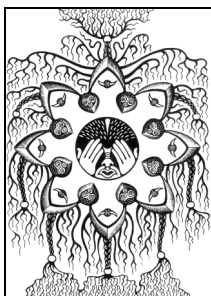
Cranes and herons both carry the soft gray colors of winter clouds. Cranes wander through the central U.S. in winter, the flocks feeding and resting in corn fields from Arizona to Kentucky, circling and trumpeting the ancient song of vanished prairies. Herons are solitary hunters of fish and crayfish, guardians of shores and rivers, standing motionless on one leg on a muddy bank or croaking a warning before taking flight from a dead branch and sending it crashing into a swamp pool.



Seven of Blades

The scissors and beaks of the Six create patterns of growing complexity, requiring more blades and a tighter grip with both hands.

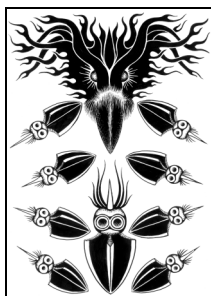
African forged and wire-wrapped finger knives surround a wrist knife with a beaded leather cord that protects or reveals the blade. Two skeletal hands wear the blade, a shaman's gift of power after the trial of initiation. The finger knives test and identify strength and weakness. This shaman's test is primarily intellectual, forcing her to seek out diverse and unusual sources of information. In doing so she learns to recognize real and perceived forms of manipulation. The conflict may appear to be with someone else, but it is within herself, like the mirrored birds facing off in a dance or ritualized combat. The Bald Ibis or Hermit Ibis (*Geronticus eremita*) was once found throughout Europe and Africa but is now very rare and confined to a small part of Morocco. It has iridescent black feathers and a bare red head and beak, giving it a resemblance to its close cousin, the Turkey Vulture.



Eight of Blades

Manipulating the blades of the Seven requires sacrifice and is vulnerable to interference. Spreading like a circle of tailfeathers, the blades reorganize into a trap or a doorway.

A woman with shorn hair covers her face, unwilling to see the braids hung like trophies from the blades of a throwing star, or the ring of staring faces. But the sabotage is within her mind, and the power she has given up is only symbolic. Disorientation reveals the true path. The hole in the center of the bladed disk is a window to freedom if she is willing or able to look for a way out. The staring faces are only empty masks peering through the weapon's finger grips. They vanish when a capable hand grasps the blade. When hung on a pole, the star becomes a wheel, and a harmless garden tool for cutting through the tangle of self-doubt and temporary outside interference that binds her like rotting roots. When two or three of the blades are hung together, they interlock and work even better, and when they turn in unison, ringing against each other, the singing steel frightens intruders from the garden, whether feathered or human.

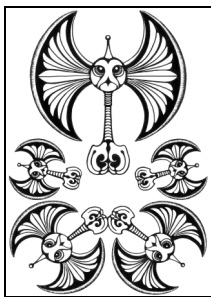


Nine of Blades

The tight ring of blades in the Eight bursts in a puff of feathers and multiplies, flying in all directions.

A raven mask, her eyes glowing with concentration, confronts a swarm of arrowheads. She tries to see them all at once, and finds them multiplied, since each has three blades. Is she their sender or their target? Raven could easily be either one. Or does she merely hoard them, intrigued by the cold gleam of their edges? She is a collector of strange objects, an intelligent problem-solver and an expert flier who rolls upside down for fun as she dances on swirling air currents. The arrowheads have eyes that might be for seeing their way, but the holes are vacant. They are for whistling, not watching. In the wind of flight, they scream in triumph or warning, agonized or exulting. In a situation of such changing complexity, only the movement itself has meaning.

The arrowheads are ancient Chinese and Scythian whistling arrows. The triple beaklike iron blades are ornamented with round bone beads carved with bird's eyes for soundholes.



Ten of Blades

The flitting arrows of the Nine regroup for attack or escape in a high-speed vortex.

The labrys is an ancient double-bitted axe of uncertain origin and purpose. It has the look of a ritual or cult object, since it is too dangerous for any practical cutting use, and too clumsy to make a good weapon. The wide blades resemble the chopper on the Ore card but are much larger. The forging of two matched curved blades on a balanced handle is a nervewracking test of the bladesmith's concentration, endurance, metal knowledge, and design experience.

Here the axes resemble owls, and the blades bear etched feather designs. Whirling double-edged thoughts and words hone tension to a final, brittle edge. The winged blades take flight and cut down all, while the talons are poised to carry off whatever is left. But the talons are also handles with a sure grip. If caught midflight in a steady hand, the catcher wins a nearly circular blade to slice a new way ahead, and keen eyes to glimpse an opening in the night air.

BELLS - EARTH

Physical body, possessions, work, wealth.

Traditional: Discs, Pentacles, Coins, Diamonds

Bells are usually cast from molten metal, especially iron, brass, or bronze. They can also be fabricated from thin sheet metal, including copper, steel, silver, and gold. Historically, forged iron bells are rare except in Siberia, where small ones were made for shamans, and in West Africa, where they have many shapes and are used as musical instruments and magical objects. Forged iron bells have a unique dark sound that recalls the anvil's ring, the voice of the black metal. Small bells of many types have been used around the world as protective decorations on clothing or animals, as cult offerings at sacred sites, and as money or trade objects. They have the same ancient universal appeal as beads or gemstones. In shamanic traditions, bells are used to communicate with the dead, attract helpful spirits, and frighten away unfriendly ones.

The Bells on the cards are inspired by the shapes of various plants, and several also have historical counterparts. They progress from two simple discs struck together, to ancient pellet bells with the source of their sound hidden in the dark, to open domes with elaborate clappers, to combinations of flower and pod forms that have no clappers but derive their sound and power through interaction with each other.



Ore of Bells

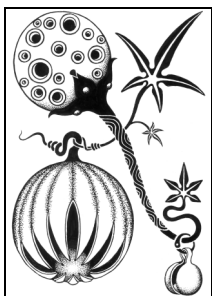
A bell in the shape of a seedpod hangs over shiny black magnetite crystals. The flowers and pods are the Ice Plant, Ghost Flower, or Indian Pipe, *Monotropa uniflora*, a pure white translucent plant with no chlorophyll. A tiny relative of the Madrone, it was once common in rich deciduous woods in the eastern and central U. S., but is becoming rare since it prefers old forests and cannot grow in disturbed soil. The hanging flowers turn up as the seedpod blackens and ripens. The first of the Earth cards offers the gift of the earth's eternal strength and comfort, the seeds of growth and health, and the birth of beautiful created objects.

MAGNETITE (ferrous oxide, Fe_3O_4) is metallic black, as hard and heavy as steel itself. It is the firescale that forms on steel in the forge. It is a common but minor constituent of many igneous and metamorphic rocks, and is abundant as layers or nodules in certain rare igneous rocks and in ore deposits of copper and other metals. All magnetite will attract a magnet, and this is sufficient to identify it. Hematite and a few other black metallic minerals look similar but are nonmagnetic. Magnetite crystals sometimes partially alter to hematite. Called martite, these octahedral crystals are dark reddish black and nonmagnetic. Lodestone magnetite specimens are natural magnets themselves. Magnetite is a major constituent of "black sand" deposits found on beaches and in creeks, rivers, and desert washes in areas of igneous or metamorphic rocks. Look for black streaks in light colored quartz sand. A magnet will separate the tiny octahedral crystals from the other minerals and yield a concentrate that can be used as iron ore or ground into a cold black mineral pigment. The pigment retains some of its magnetic property even in thin layers of watercolor paint. It is sold as an artist paint as Mars Black or Lunar Black.



Two of Bells

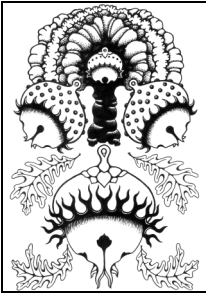
These small iron cymbals are forged from two flat discs, one blackened and one polished. They are similar to the hammered bronze relics found in the ruins of Pompeii and the cast iron or brass tingsha bells used in Tibetan Buddhist ceremonies. As cymbals they are struck flat or slid against each other to make metallic snapping sounds. One cymbal is held in each hand with the chain hanging between them. As tingsha or tiny gongs, only the edges are struck, giving a sustained hard ring. The edges of this set have been split and curled for a more intense sound. A riveted chain keeps them together. The links and rivets, like the bells themselves, form a practical partnership. Without such a collaboration for a specific purpose, there would be no sound or rhythm in the metal. The moving balance between opposites - dark and light, movement and stillness, sound and silence - awakens the player and the listener.



Three of Bells

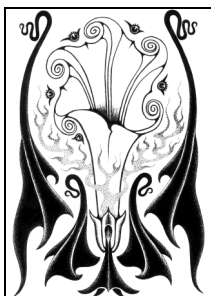
The round wild desert gourd with hand-shaped leaves inspires three types of primitive pellet bells. Variations on a simple natural shape show skill that holds the seeds of more challenging projects. All three bells are forged out of sheet metal but are made using different techniques, and each interprets the gourd design in its own way. The bell rattle with a forged tendril handle has holes to amplify the sound of whatever moves inside. The gemlike jingler on the handle is an ancient type of bell. Similar clay examples from South America predate metalworking. The claws on the large bell look like the stripes on an unripe gourd, and allow the pellets to be exchanged for different sounds.

The Coyote Gourd or Fingerleaf Gourd (*Cucurbita digitata*) is a delicate climbing desert vine with dark blue-green leaves, long coiled tendrils, and yellow trumpet flowers. The vine sprouts after summer rains and withers within a month, leaving the bitter thin-shelled gourds ripening in the sand.



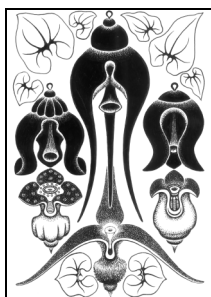
Four of Bells

Bells in the shape of Bur Oak acorns hang below a bracket fungus that grows on oak trees. The richly-ornamented bells hold the promise and grounding power of real acorns, and create sacred space wherever they are used. Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) has the largest of all acorns, and the heavy cup is edged with a unique fringe of mossy spines. It is a Mississippi Valley tree that is the common oak throughout much of the Midwest, growing in open grassland rather than forest. The fungus is Ling Chih or Reishi Mushroom (*Ganoderma lucida*) which grows on deciduous trees in North America, Europe, and Asia. Its nearly identical relative, *G. tsugae*, grows on fallen hemlock trees. It is a traditional Chinese medicine that is revered for its value as an immune system stimulant and general cure-all. Its deep purple stalk is as gnarled as an oak root and its beautiful red ochre fan-shaped cap shines as if varnished. It destroys living trees but also returns dead trees to the earth, enriching the soil for sprouting acorns. The acorns and fungus are the seeds and destruction of sacred groves, but only if they are left to grow. They are also precious in their own right as food and medicine, but their value disappears in rot if they are merely hoarded.



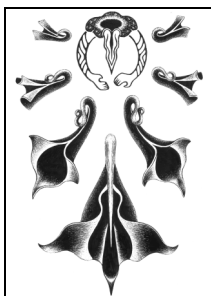
Five of Bells

Five bells in the shape of Sacred Datura flowers surround a living flower that opens in response to the heat of the newly-forged iron, a strange and miraculous interaction between a natural object and the art that it inspires. Like the flower, the bells hold the living warmth and life of the earth, although this can be hard to recognize at times. The flower blooms at night, a white spiral trumpet fringed with coiled tendrils. The deep purple throat of the funnel gleams like an eye. At midday the flower is a withered rag on a poisonous plant whose prickly seedpods tumble in the dust. When first taken from the forge, the bells do not ring, and the dull noise of rough firescale on hot metal clinks like failure. But polishing uncovers the bright sound. By cool moonlight, the bells brighten and ring, and the flower unfurls and breathes out the perfume of a medicinal plant whose smoke cures lung ailments. The worst poverty is separation from the land, but touching the earth, even very briefly, brings renewal.



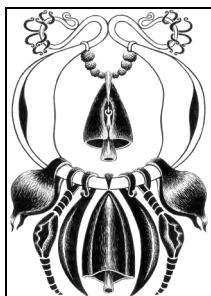
Six of Bells

Three urnlike Wild Ginger flowers bloom below the bells they inspired. The six sacred vessels offer each other an exchange of gifts of the senses. The flowers bring their scent, color, and pattern, and the bells bring their sound and permanence. The form and symmetry of the bells and flowers mirror each other. The bells are forged from flat triangles hammered over a hole in the anvil. But the final shape is neither flat nor empty, but full and round to resonate with the clapper which is also hollow and flared like a flower. At the center is the most common species, *Asarum canadense*, which has a single purplish-brown flower between two fuzzy leaves that die back in the winter. The other two are rare evergreen species that have rosettes of glossy leaves and many flowers. *Asarum shuttleworthii* has large spotted flowers like jars with flaring rims, and *Asarum virginicum* has tiny brown juglike blooms. The Wild Gingers, also called Heartleaf and Birthroot, are endemic to the Southern Appalachian old growth forest. All have thick fingerlike roots that smell and taste like the unrelated commercial gingerroot. The sturdy flowers grow close to the ground and are nearly invisible under the heart-shaped leaves. A close look reveals delicate green, brown, or maroon mouths springing out of the earth.



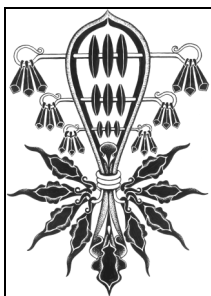
Seven of Bells

Cone bells have no clappers and make noise only by striking against each other. They are used on Siberian and Central Asian shaman's costumes, drums, and string instruments, and are often hung in pairs. The two tiny bells at the top of the picture are traditional Siberian style, and the others are variations that I have forged. The hands on the steel link are ready to lock together. The bells are finished and perfect, ready to manifest their "soul" through use. If they are not gathered onto the ring and claimed for their intended purpose, they will make no sound, and will scatter and become lost. The effort and materials in them will go to waste. The ring is decorated with a woodland fungus that is shaped like the bells: *Craterellus cornucopioides*, called Trumpet of Death because of its purplish black color and Horn of Plenty because of its shape and because it is edible. But what is ripe now will decay if not harvested. In order to honor the materials and creative energy in a sacred object or tool, it must be put to the work that gives it power, even if it becomes worn out or damaged. It has no meaning if it is merely admired. Iron ornaments on traditional Siberian shaman's costumes are believed to be alive, and to have souls that prevent the iron from rusting. Most iron objects, including jewelry and tools, do not rust if they are used regularly, but only if they are neglected.



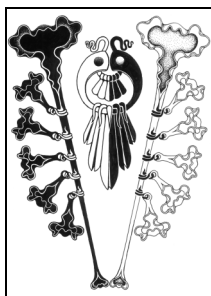
Eight of Bells

A West African anklet holds traditional dance bells made with the precision, grace, and organic vigor that is typical of old African iron. In silver and goldsmithing, the elongated hollow pod shape is called a spiculum. When hammered from sheet metal it is quite difficult to make. It is easier to form in iron, but creating so many variations requires skill that only comes with repetitive practice, attention to detail, love of the work for its own sake, and the ability to make a sacred ritual out of a routine task. The anklet itself has two podlike sides that hold rattling pellets. The two center bells have clappers and can be used alone. The top one, hung from a strand of iron beads, is a heavy plate curled into a cone. The bottom one is made from two thin sheets folded over at the edges. The four long pods are hollow and make noise as they strike against each other. Traditional anklets, belts, or necklaces may hold dozens of these pod bells in various shapes and sizes. The two round bells are usually held in the hand and struck with an iron thumb ring. This instrument, called a frikiwa, is played to accompany drummers. The bells are not just ornaments or noisemakers. All of them have iron's spiritual power for strength and protection, and its practical value as currency.



Nine of Bells

A steel sistrum or bell-rattle holds nine pairs of hammered sheet metal discs, nine pod bells, and two sets of nine cone bells made from curled sheet metal triangles strung on sliding steel rods. Its wealth of bells proclaims the mastery of several complicated designs and forging techniques. The product of many hours of solitary work, its sound now showers listeners with the abundance and mystery of the Goddess, who blesses a sacred instrument that feeds the spirit in lively play or solemn ritual, a masterpiece that becomes a beloved treasure. Crowded with noisemakers, this instrument has a very short handle, suitable for holding in the hand or mounting on a stick. The intricate design achieves the ultimate goal of the bell-smith's craft: making the fullest use of limited resources in an elaborate and unique instrument that sounds as beautiful as it looks. The sistrum is best known as an ancient Mediterranean ritual rattle that was widely used but is specifically associated with Isis, the Egyptian cat goddess Bast, and the ecstatic dances of the Maenads. Based on archaeological examples and the instruments depicted in ancient pictures and statues, this type of sistrum was made with a cast bronze handle and u-shaped top that was drilled for several sliding rods made of copper, bronze, or iron. Hammered iron discs were sometimes strung on the rods. But the sistrum, like the drum or the flute, is a widespread instrument of ancient origin that has had many variations through time and around the world. It can be as simple as a child's toy made from a handful of shells strung on twisted grass on a forked stick, or as elaborate as an ornamented pole for carrying in processions and hung with cymbals, bells, rattles, and ribbons.



Ten of Bells

These black iron and polished steel bell-rattles are abstract versions of the Buryat shaman's "horse sticks" that are sometimes used instead of a drum. The horse stick is a specialized type of sistrum. Traditionally the stick is of wood or iron with a carved wood or cast bronze horse head at one end and a hoof at the other, with copper or iron cones attached to hooks along the shaft. Sometimes feathers and small animal skins are hung beside the bells. Horse sticks are symbols of the blacksmith's wealth and skill and the shaman's authority, and thus represent material security and spiritual power for the entire community. Here the bells are of my own design, inspired by flowers and fungi. One rattle is for the "black" shaman's Lower World journey, and one is for the "white" shaman's Upper World flight. Between the bells and their spike handles hangs a horse ornament or shaman's pendant with coils and feather-shaped blades, a hook to unite the two bell-rattles and a design to unite the elements in the last of the forty Number Cards.

The shaman's title is not assumed, but given when she shares her work with others and is unafraid to be what the spirits have made her. Once she is accepted, her magic and even some of her helping spirits belong to her tribe or clan as well as to herself. This is why shamanism is often a hereditary occupation, although shamans without such background may also be called. If she has no tribe, the spirits guide her solitary travels and allow her to reach those who ask for her help on the road.

SPIRIT GUIDES

These sixteen cards are traditionally called Face Cards or Court Cards, and are often assigned two elements, one for the suit and one for the rank. Rank titles vary from one deck to another, but those from the Rider-Waite-Smith Tarot and its derivatives are probably the most familiar: Page, Knight, Queen, and King. In the Ironwing Tarot, they are Apprentice, Gatemaker, Madrone, and Shaman. Elemental assignments are the same as those in the Crowley-Thoth Tarot. The Spirit Guides depict four idealized stages of a woman's growth in the skills and mysteries of the smith's craft and the shaman's calling. Although based on traditional Tarot Court Cards, the Spirit Guides do not represent personality types, physical traits, roleplayers in a power struggle, character flaws, or personality disorders. Instead, they are personifications of helpful, practical power: messengers, pathfinders, teachers, and guardians. Teacher and student define one another in the Apprentice and Madrone, while the Gatemaker both unites and separates them, representing independent study or self-taught work. The Shaman is utterly solitary in her interactions with the spirits, yet her ability to work on behalf of others confers her identity and authority. All sixteen cards are aspects of a single person...YOU. In a reading, they represent the questioner: you or the person for whom you are reading. At the same time, they may represent other people, events, or stages of a relationship or project. If you see aspects of a particular person reflected in a card, remember that this is changeable and depends on your perspective. Such assignments should be specific to a single reading or exercise.

EXERCISE: Meeting the Spirit Guides

Lay out the sixteen Spirit Guide cards as shown below.

HORIZONTAL: SUITS & ELEMENTS (left to right): Fire - Water - Air - Earth

VERTICAL: RANKS (top to bottom):

Apprentice/Earth

Gatemaker/Air

Madrone/Water

Shaman/Fire

1. Within a Suit: Which themes are common to all four cards? What progressions can you find? Each suit depicts the same "person" in different roles. You can see this in the faces and in the other symbols on the card. The young honest face of the Apprentice is self-absorbed as her Earth-centered work demands. The mature face of the Madrone is attentive to others, controlled yet complex with Water-born emotions. The stylized iron Gatemaker holds the sharp intensity of Air, and the eyes of one transformed in Fire look through the Shaman's mask.

2. Within a Rank: How do the cards relate to each other? What might they say to each other?

3. Which One is You? Which card seems the most familiar or approachable? Which is the most alien? Why? How does this change as you use the cards and come to know them?

4. Double Elements: How do these cards express their extremes?

They may suggest a need to develop the element, or an unusual abundance of it that needs to be used.

Earth of Earth - Apprentice of Bells

Air of Air - Gatemaker of Blades

Water of Water - Madrone of Coils

Fire of Fire - Shaman of Spikes

5. Suit Elements and their Characteristics

SPIKES - Fire: They radiate attraction and warmth, and inspire movement and intensity: the Apprentice's joyful spark, the Gatemaker's comforting glow, the Madrone's glittering warmth, and the Shaman's powerful blaze.

COILS - Water: They both soothe and magnify emotions. The Apprentice's pure refreshment, the Gatemaker's drenching yet bewildering emotional release, the Madrone's strong flow and subtle currents, and the Shaman's immense tide.

BLADES - Air: They study and analyze, collect knowledge, and clarify thoughts and communication: The curious Apprentice, the fierce Gatemaker, the austere Madrone, and the solemn Shaman.

BELLS - Earth: Survivors who thrive in the material world, bringing a sense of the sacred into work and everyday life: the Apprentice's avid collecting and experimenting, the Gatemaker's careful craftsmanship, the Madrone's practical generosity, and the Shaman's lack of material attachment that draws wealth and distributes it.

6. Pairs of Elements - Rank and Suit: Some complementary patterns and their opposites. Can you find other examples?

Earth of Fire & Fire of Earth:

The Apprentice of Spikes calls a small winged shadow creature into a circle of river pebbles, while the Shaman of Bells grows wings to carry shades beyond the River.

Earth of Water & Water of Earth

The Apprentice of Coils visits a pure spring to bring water into light, while the Madrone of Bells uses water to shape living rock in the darkness of a cave.

Earth of Air & Air of Earth

The Apprentice of Blades shapes a cold blade from a single winter leaf, while the Gatemaker of Bells grows a proliferation of unlike flowers in the shady forest and the desert sun.

Air of Water & Water of Air

The Gatemaker of Coils views the wide waters of emotion, while the Madrone of Blades guards their hidden source.

Air of Fire & Fire of Air

The Gatemaker of Spikes uses the hottest wildfire, while the Shaman of Blades uses the icy flame of deepest cold.

Water of Fire and Fire of Water

The Madrone of Spikes awakens a thunderstorm, pulling rain and lightning to her chosen place, while the Shaman of Coils finds her way through smoking remnants of a hurricane across the vast sea.

APPRENTICE - Earth

Traditional: Page, Princess

Apprentices are Daughters of Earth, bound to the land but drawn to explore their elements as they learn to use the tools of their craft. Each has a task appropriate to her element. They are students who are not yet ready for initiation, so they do not work with hot iron, but only with clay, ore, or cold metal. Their downcast eyes focus on the work that absorbs their attention and on the earth that sustains them, but they also use the phases of the moon to track the seasons and other natural cycles. Their work is easy but essential, and uses their energy and enthusiasm to build skills, confidence, and maturity.

PURPOSE: Apprentices are curious, innocent dreamers and messengers who assist those who are starting a project, learning a skill, exploring the earth, entering a new phase in life, or looking at an old situation in a different way. They show how to accept risks and welcome new beginnings.

Apprentice of Spikes:

She makes and tends fire for forge, camp, and hearth.

WAXING MOON of expansion and brightening.

Apprentice of Coils:

She finds springs and carries water for quenching hot iron and for drinking, bathing, and healing.

FULL MOON of exploration and dreaming.

Apprentice of Blades:

She applies the study of form and pattern in nature to the design of beautiful functional tools.

WANING MOON of consolidation and withdrawal.

Apprentice of Bells:

She identifies and collects iron ore for smelting and paint pigments, and coal and charcoal for fuel.

DARK MOON of isolation and introspection.



Apprentice of Spikes Earth of Fire

She uses a flint striker and a steel tent stake to start a small fire that is contained within a ring of waterworn river pebbles, a bit of simple, useful earth magic. Her unbound hair reflects her feral spirit, and it is entwined with clean-smelling Sweetgrass since she has chosen the Fire Shaman's path of purification. Also called Holy Grass, *Hierochloe odorata* is an aromatic sacred plant that grows in northern grasslands in Europe, Asia, and North America. Once the cut grass dries and its perfume develops, the leaves are brought indoors and spread on the floor, plaited into braids and hung on the wall, or burned to clear the air with their sweet scent. The rope on the tent stake represents self-sufficiency and independence. With her connection to the earth and the ability to kindle fire, she creates her home wherever she makes camp. The glowing spark ignites her imagination and attracts a moth with eyed wings (*Automeris cecrops*, a Sonoran Desert species whose poisonous spiny caterpillars feed on oaks). In creating light, she must confront the shadows that appear. The moth personifies her fears and the wild, enchanting mysteries that are partly illuminated in the tiny flame of her rising power. She is aware of potential dangers in the dark, but her sense of adventure guides her search for an animal ally. The warmth of her fire lures small cats and makes domestication possible, even as the light identifies her as human and separates her from the wild jaguar spirits who watch and wait for her to grow strong enough to meet them.



Apprentice of Coils Earth of Water

She wears a coiled silver headband in hair that ripples like a flowing creek. She pours springwater from a spiral-eyed black clay jar into an iron cauldron adorned with more spirals. The water will quench hot metal, cool burns, and refresh the spirit. She holds precious drinking water in her hand and awakens to the Water Shaman's power to soothe and heal. She is sensitive to moods and atmospheres, and explores everything through emotions. When threatened she retreats to her personal source of spiritual and emotional purity, whether it is in nature, other people, or herself. She finds her way unerringly through the forest to where the sacred spring, source of water and life, flows from the rising moon. In its misty spray, rare ferns surround her, and she sees hidden connections that reveal sacred meaning in nature, leading her naturally to divination. She uses the cauldron of water as a "black mirror" for moonlit scrying. The clay jar and the iron vessel are both ancient Chinese designs, over 2000 years old. The Walking Ferns (*Camptosorus rhizophyllus*) grow only on limestone near springs in the Appalachians. Their name comes from the way the coiled leaftips sprout new plants, forming a carpet of tiny evergreen leaves on wet mossy rocks. They can survive only in clean flowing water.



Apprentice of Blades Earth of Air

In one hand she holds a Winter Orchid (*Aplectrum hyemale*) with its single white-veined leaf and a root that looks like a quartz pebble. In the other hand she holds a primitive iron knife that is designed to look like the plant. The orchid's flowers decorate her hair, which is worn in a severe but elaborate style that reflects her fascination with symmetry and detail. Serious and intelligent, she loves knowledge for its own sake, exploring the natural world as a scientist. She has just begun to walk the path of the Wind Shaman, the Interpreter of Nature. She studies the balance between form and function, observation and measurement, planned symmetry and spontaneous creative chaos. She offers her breath to the earth and plays the *xun*, an ancient Chinese clay vessel flute. It is decorated with a Winter Orchid seedpod, and the notes she plays become more pods scattering seeds. Her knife is an ancient Eskimo iron *savik* from northwest Greenland, made from a meteorite flake hammered cold between basalt boulders and set in a carved bone handle. Like the knife, the Winter Orchid is a unique blade made to endure the cold alone. It grows in moist deciduous woods in the eastern U.S. The bluish-green leaf sprouts in September, survives winter under the snow, and withers in May when the stalk of tiny purple and yellow flowers appears. The related Cranefly Orchid (*Tipularia discolor*) grows in pine woods. Its leaf has black spots and is bright purple underneath, and its flowers appear in August. These orchids, like several other Appalachian spring wildflowers, have nearly identical Asian relatives (*Tipularia japonica* and *Oreorchis patens*) in mountain deciduous forests of the Himalayas, Japan, and the Russian Far East.



Apprentice of Bells **Earth of Earth**

She uses a mortar and pestle to grind iron ore for pigments and smelting. Her braids show one of her simple practical skills. Her hair is tied with antique Chinese tiger bells that are used on shaman's clothes throughout Asia, pellet bells with soft hollow voices that speak to cave spirits in the dark. To work in a sacred place without interruption, she retreats to a natural sandstone rockhouse in the forest. A rock arch or bridge further separates her from the ordinary world as she sets out on the Earth Shaman's path as a guide into the Underworld. She grinds brown metallic goethite pebbles collected from the creek and stacked into cairns. Filled with white quartz pebbles, the ore is abundant in the sandstone as nodules, ribbonlike layers, and petrified wood. The rounded quartz pebbles and sand are from veins in Appalachian metamorphic rocks, carried west in a long-lost river and deposited as delta sediments 400 million years ago. Now this honeycomb-weathered sandstone forms spectacular cliffs and arches in southern Illinois, Ohio, and eastern Kentucky. There is coal in the crumbly shale above it, and she gathers this along with forest fire charcoal as fuel for the forge and furnace. She is drawn to collect and study all of earth's treasures but generously uses or gives away her finds. They are her work and her self, and this communion gives her patience, concentration, and determination.

GATEMAKER - Air

Traditional: Knight, Prince

Gatemakers are Initiates of Air who seek knowledge, the most precious treasure of any craft and the one most easily lost. Through practice and self-discipline, their understanding and control has deepened until they have *become* their craft and are made of iron. They are protective iron gates that separate the useful, domesticated elements from their wild and often dangerous counterparts. Because of their many creative challenges and possibilities, gates are popular projects with blacksmiths and are among the most elaborate and complex examples of the craft. Because of its formal beauty and its essence of finality, the Iron Gate is a symbol for death in Siberian, ancient Greek and Roman, and some Christian traditions. The Gatemaker may be self-taught or have a teacher, but works independently on her chosen path and develops her own style. She is accountable for her work but does not yet lead others or seek recognition. She solves problems and gains essential knowledge with every new challenge, and her creativity has a strong intellectual aspect.

PURPOSE: Gatemakers direct those who are deeply involved in a project, learning a difficult skill, or working through transitions. They don't just guard the way, they create it. As aspects of *She Who Touches and Changes*, they show how to eliminate obstacles, control a rapidly changing situation, recognize personal power, and channel potentially destructive energy in useful ways.



Gatemaker of Spikes

Air of Fire

Her iron body is a protective vessel for the domesticated fire of heart, hearth, and home. She is crowned with sewing needles that form the ribs of a magically fringed fan decorated with fiery celestial symbols of stars and suns. The fan is used to stir up the fire and to clear the air of all that is stale or harmful. It is also a privacy screen that brightens any camp or dwelling, and its magical beauty protects tent walls and house windows. Beyond her tamed haven, the most severe and dangerous aspects of wildfire are raging in the pyrocumulus clouds, firewhirls, and ash devil that form above her head. She easily attracts this kind of intensity, but can also control it with her original and innovative ideas. In her creative work she follows the nomad's tradition of art and magic in everyday functional objects. Her tools are precious iron needles that were twice born in air and fire: forged, air cooled, polished, and heat treated to be strong and sharp. Her clothing, blankets, and tents do more than just keep out the rain, cold, and sun. Their embroidered or woven designs are inspiring and comforting, impervious to fear and harmful spirits. Beautiful for their own sake, they are empowered with her visions and perhaps with the traditional and familiar sacred designs of her people. In this way she creates a home for others as well as for herself. The two black widow spiders turned white when she claimed them as helping spirits, and they taught her how to twist her hair into ropes for the shaman's ascent to the starry path of the Milky Way. She climbs the ropes into the sky far above the wildfire, and returns safely with new visions that give spirit and power to her creative work, her home, and her life.



Gatemaker of Coils **Air of Water**

Her face peers from a thicket of iron vine tendrils in a cypress swamp, while two egrets fly overhead out of the mist. Dreamy and contemplative, she looks out at the wide river or the windy lake, taking in the vastness of the water's ever-changing moods and colors. The scene could be anywhere on the Mississippi River from Louisiana to southern Illinois. The bald cypress trees grow in the swamp forest where trembling earth meets dark water. A swollen hollow trunk and vertical projections or "knees" that arise from the roots allow the trees to breathe and keep them from drowning.

She calls the huge plankton-feeding paddlefish from the depths. *Polyodon spathula* is among the largest and most ancient freshwater fish, but it is becoming rare due to overfishing and pollution. This harmless, graceful swimmer is the spirit of the unspoiled waters of the Great Lakes and midcontinent rivers, and she weeps for a lost world. The lights hanging over her head are the interlocking starlike bones of the "paddle" that disarticulate and wash up on gravel bars when the fish dies. Her tears awaken a water lotus, symbol of the love that heals and gives soul to works of art. She is unafraid to feel, since this is the source of her creativity. Her gifts are songs and poetry that share emotions, dreams, memories, and imaginary worlds with others in healing beauty.



Gatemaker of Blades Air of Air

The steel blades of her fingers form her ribcage, opening to the winds and covered in icicle daggers from the swirling arctic stormclouds that become her breath. Two curved blades resembling falcon talons symbolize her bold but defensive nature, and conjure the predatory bird spirits that bring a focus to her restless intellect. She wears an iron falcon like a helmet, and the face above her head is an image of her concentration and the force of her thoughts. It is ideas that motivate her, not emotions or objects. A worthy challenge sends her thoughts whirling with interlocking plans and possibilities. Her warrior's mind delights in guiding their complexity towards a meaningful goal. A forceful but intimidating communicator, she directs anger and disorder into constructive action and can be a powerful advocate, but can also attack with the falcon's deadly speed. She is able to speak and act rationally in a difficult situation, and is willing to say and do what others will not. She understands the power of words to unite or divide, to release anger when there is no other choice, or to break through the impossible.



Gatemaker of Bells

Air of Earth

She is a bell forged in the shape of the flower, leaves, and seedpods of Virginia Snakeroot, *Aristolochia serpentaria*, a medicinal Pipevine from the southern Appalachians. The tiny plant's common name comes from its purplish brown flower, which looks like a snake head. She seems to be asleep or lost in thought, but she is always growing. Her work is slow but rich and complex, and she gives it her loving, careful attention, completely absorbed in what she makes and in the creative power of the changing earth. She moves at the pace of green growth according to the seasons, sometimes exuberant, sometimes nearly hidden. The results of her work swell with their own life like seeds or chrysalids, ready to open out and fly. She draws on her roots to give them wings. Although shaped like a fragrant flower, she sprouts Pipevine leaves as if she were the plant's gnarled, human-shaped root. Flowers of three other Pipevine species surround her: *A. coryi* (Spotted Pipevine) and *A. erecta* (Swanflower) from Texas, and *A. watsonii* (Desert Pipevine) from Arizona and California. Desert Pipevine's blackish purple leaves are nearly invisible among gravel in the bajada washes where it sprouts after a little rain. All Pipevines are food plants for the Pipevine Swallowtail butterfly (*Battus philenor*), whose horned chrysalids are shown above the butterfly dancer. Pipevines are close relatives of the wild gingers (*Asarum*) on the Six of Bells card. Small and nearly invisible so close to the ground, the flowers have the presence of sacred jars, pipes, or trumpets because of their rich earthy colors and unique shapes. The heart-shaped or arrow-shaped leaves are shining dark green and purple. The voice of earthsmoke breathes through the singing bells of the flowers.

MADRONE - Water

Traditional: Queen

Madrones are Mothers of Water who combine emotional depth with understanding. They balance relationships and community responsibilities with solitary creative work. They are mature artists and accomplished teachers with authority, confidence, and wisdom. The Madrone knows her own worth and that of her work. She has mastered her craft and perfected a specialty, and others seek her out because she creates sacred space wherever she works or lives. The tiny mask she wears represents her soul as reflected in her work and in those she teaches. The title "Madrone" comes from the Arizona madrone tree (*Arbutus arizonica*). It grows in Sonoran Madrean evergreen woodland from the Sierra Madre in Mexico to the "sky island" mountain ranges of southern Arizona and southwest New Mexico.

Never abundant, madrones grow singly or in small groves among evergreen desert oaks, Arizona cypress, Apache pine, and other trees that are unique to this rare type of forest. They evolved in the warmer, wetter climate that existed here before the Ice, and are related to the rhododendron, mountain laurel, and sourwood trees of the southern Appalachians.

For the purpose of the cards, the name includes the Arizona madrone's better-known sisters, the Pacific madrone (*A. menziesii*) and Texas madrone (*A. xalapensis*), and her little sisters, Manzanita and Uva Ursi (*Arctostaphylos*). Her name is related to the Spanish "madre", Latin "mater", and English "mama". She is the Great Mother who nurtures projects and relationships as well as people, and Her presence is especially strong in this tree whose new bark and fingerlike branches are the color of sacred red ochre, and whose gnarled roots and trunk have pearly gray bark with a delicate snakeskin pattern. She is crowned with shining evergreen leaves, clouds of white urnlike flowers, and clusters of medicinal red berries that are favorites of birds and black bears. Her unique feminine presence is wise, sweet, and undeniably wild, since she resists cultivation.

PURPOSE: Madrones provide compassionate wisdom about relationships and collaboration. They inspire those who have mastered a skill or craft and are now developing a specialty, directing others, or teaching.



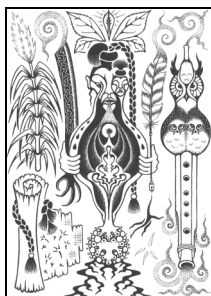
Madrone of Spikes Water of Fire

With her hair scattering static electric sparks, she holds an elaborately forged rod that grounds lightning and generates a *fulgurite*, a tubelike vessel of lightning-sintered sand grains. Her body is a madrone tree with smooth branches and pearly bark. She shelters a Sapo or Spadefoot Toad (*Scaphiopus couchii*) and scatters toad eggs and tadpoles into rain pools at her roots. Sapos are Sonoran Desert toads that spend most of the year sleeping underground, and only emerge for a few weeks during the summer monsoons to lay eggs in temporary pools. For a few nights a year, their haunting, echoing calls are the voice of a miracle returning to the desert in the rainy dark. This Madrone calls her children with thunder, awakens them with lightning flashes, and nourishes them with summer rain. She is the shower of sparks that begins a new project or relationship, and the soothing reassurance that allows it to grow. She is established, sustaining warmth and the sparkling light of enthusiasm. She is also the mysterious pool that glimmers under tangled tree roots, the dark water of desire that awakens thirst. She has long since learned to create and protect her own sacred living space. Rooted in the Mother's mountains, her round hollow trunk and shining branches define "home" for forest dwellers and visitors alike, from butterflies to wandering jaguars to those who seek and honor the remote groves.



Madrone of Coils **Water of Water**

Madrone flowers drift like seafoam in her coiled hair as she releases a leatherback sea turtle hatchling into the safety of open water. The leatherback's strong broad shoulders swim all the oceans, carrying the reflected night sky on her back. Her flexible shell is made of tiny bone plates covered in supple blue-black skin for diving. She is the color of the deep sea night, adorned with constellations and galaxies of starry white spots. This Madrone's world of bottomless depths and swirling light light allows her to connect and feel everything. Entranced by tiny floating creatures as transparent and fragile as dreams, she becomes a raft of sunlit seaweed and embraces them. Her hands are Gulfweed (*Sargassum*) that shelters all the delicate tropical life of the Gulf Stream, the great River-in-Ocean that brings warm water to the cold north Atlantic. The sunlike Button Jellyfish (*Porpita*) is bright turquoise with a glassy wheel-shaped float. The Blue Glaucus sea slug and Violet Janthina Snail are two of its predators. The snail lives and hunts while floating on its own raft of bubbles. The Ocellated Crab (*Portunus sebae*) is named for the false eyes on its shell, which represent this Madrone's mirror-like qualities. She is difficult to know or see clearly because she reflects the subconscious of anyone she meets. Because of this, she may find others hard to reach. But she knows when to move closer, when to dive and let go, and when to float with the current.



Madrone of Blades **Water of Air**

Crowned with the serrated blades of madrone leaves, she holds a pattern-welded cane knife and an owl feather pen with a steel nib. The knife is for cutting Giant Reed (*Arundo donax*) to make papyrus for writing and musical instruments such as the huluxiao, a Chinese gourd and reed pipe. The gourd is painted with her totem, a Great Horned Owl with two chicks. Ancient writing wanders like bird tracks from her pen. Wise and intense, she has seen and learned much, but has also sacrificed and suffered in order to gain knowledge. She records all she learns on a papyrus scroll tied with one of her own braids. Her emotions are deep and complex but under tight control and directed towards creative and intellectually challenging activity. Her mind is her gift and her weapon. She cuts through obstacles with careful planning and thoughtful action while organizing a maze of details. She offers wise, objective insights. But her wisdom and experience are often won in grief and difficulty, which has made her the keeper of the source of the River that flows between worlds. This is the Oldest River, the One with many names, the water of death and life, memory and unbreakable oath, and utter forgetfulness. She reveals its source as a comfort to those who seek her out in pain.

SHAMAN: Fire**Traditional: King**

Shamans are Tamers of Fire, shapeshifters with animal masks who live and work in two worlds. Keeper of mysteries and creator of ritual, expert on timing and power, the Shaman has an innate connection with nature and is able to see from the perspective of the Middle World of everyday life, the bright Upper World of the flying spirits, and the shadowy Underworld of the dreaming ancestors. She forges an iron bridge to the Otherworlds and lives surrounded by spirits that are visible only to her. This separates her from ordinary people, so she works alone except when she is asked for help. In her relationships with others, she represents self-control, responsibility, a realistic self-image, and authority as designated by others, not self-proclaimed.

PURPOSE: Shamans watch over those who are engaged in spiritual work. They also guide ending and completion, healing, facing fears, and solitary projects. Although each of the Shamans is assigned a specialty, their work overlaps and divisions are not absolute.

Shaman of Spikes: Purifier

Purification of people, places, or objects. Awakenning the life force. Driving out fear or harmful spirits. Healing by extraction of intrusions.

Shaman of Coils: Healer

Healing the spirit and the subconscious. Listening with compassion. Entering, recognizing, and balancing emotions. Restoring lost or fragmented souls.

Shaman of Blades: Guardian

Exploring, honoring, and guarding the sacred places in nature. Wise, rational counsel, unclouded by emotion. Scientific knowledge with spiritual awareness.

Shaman of Bells: Psychopomp

Guiding the dead to the Otherworld. Releasing what is outworn and accepting transformation. Attracting, recognizing, and dispersing wealth and possessions. Identifying and initiating new shamans.



Shaman of Spikes Fire of Fire

She is a mountain lion crowned with honey locust thorns and seedpods, and wears a necklace of fossil lion teeth. Honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) is a midcontinent tree that reaches its greatest size and prickliness in Kentucky, Ohio, and southern Illinois, where it grows among black locust in the border between forest and grassland. Elsewhere it is a rare creekbank wanderer, one or two trees appearing unexpectedly in a wooded ravine in Virginia, a Sonoran Desert cienega, or among red cedar and ponderosa pine in the escarpment forest of the High Plains. Its huge branched thorns and rattling pods form an inviting thicket between worlds. The Fire Shaman is the life force itself, the passion for existence and the will to live. She impales shadows with her blazing torch, banishing fears and purifying the darkness. She dissolves nightmares with balls of the the mysterious cold phosphorescence of the night forest, the green "foxfire" of fungi and glow-worms. She uses the honey locust in autumn ceremonies that combine both kinds of fire, the sparking thorns and the smoky purple pods with their sweet yellow pulp that is ripe when it is rotten, at its best after the first frost. In a similar spring ceremony, she makes a circle of Black Urn cup fungi to conjure a Luna Moth. *Actias luna* is a familiar large moth of deciduous forests in the eastern U.S. Its big translucent green caterpillars feed on oaks and other trees. The mushrooms (*Urula craterium*) grow on burned or rotten wood in early spring. Their ash-gray spores rise in hissing clouds. When the cups fill with rainwater, purification is complete, and a reborn spirit rises in the form of a pale green moth with silver moon-eyes on its wings.



Shaman of Coils Fire of Water

Her face is a loggerhead sea turtle skull crowned with a magnetite crystal for tracking the earth's magnetic field. It also represents the Pole Star or "Sky Nail" that guides celestial navigation. Living sea turtles have tiny magnetite crystals in their heads that are thought to help them find the way back to their nesting beach. This Shaman can wander the wide ocean or sound the trackless, frightening waters of the spirit world and return home safely with a healing song, a strange deep sea spirit helper, or a lost soul riding on her back. She does not drown in the depths of emotion or burn in the fire of pain, but combines the two elements wisely into the energy of compassionate action. She weeps for those who are beyond her help or who will not ask for it when they come to her. She weeps because she is alive, as a sea turtle weeps to keep sand out of her eyes when she comes to shore to lay eggs. Her iron manta ray mask holds floating shells of *Spirula* cephalopods, tiny squidlike creatures that glow like lighting bugs. The manta's eyes stare into the eyes and tentacles of a giant squid from the abyss, a guide among seafloor mountains and chasms. Hands of charred driftwood rise out of the waves, cypress roots that were burned in a swamp fire and swept out to sea in a storm, holding the smoldering memory of a hurricane. Mantas are pelagic and do not usually swim close to shore, but rarely they will leap and fly in the surf. A manta can lift the spirit of one who runs on the beach, and carry it as easily as driftwood before setting it gently down at the edge of the waves.



Shaman of Blades Fire of Air

Masked as a Snowy Owl, she holds claw-shaped ceremonial knives on poles adorned with masks of her spirit helpers. The poles indicate her role as finder and guardian of the earth's sacred places, and she uses them when mapping hidden lines of power, guiding others, or marking new paths or sites to explore. She is a naturalist and interpreter who offers scientific knowledge in the form of chants, tales, and magical songs. Resisting emotional entanglements, she is a keen observer and an attentive listener. She relies on intellect and experience to give her an overview of complicated situations, and speaks only when it is necessary. Her words are rational, truthful, and luminous. They uncover the heart of a problem and end conflict. An expert on the geography of all worlds, she uses an owl bone spiritcatcher to capture and return lost souls with her breath. Her journeys take her farther into the Upperworld than she is able to fly, so she calls the pale smoke-bridges that appear when she burns a piece of reindeer antler under the horned moon. Her feathers hold the shimmering clarity of new snow. The Snowy Owl nests in the Arctic but is an erratic winter visitor to the U.S. She can turn up anywhere, yellow eyes glowing like the polar moon, glacier feathers vanishing in frost and a few words of poetry.



Shaman of Bells

Fire of Earth

A dancing Turkey Vulture plays primitive percussion instruments, travelling to other worlds on their ancient rhythms. Her skull is an egg hatching a baby vulture shaman, since she finds those who are called to the shaman's path and guides them through initiation. In Siberia, the Eurasian Black Vulture is the mother of shamans. Old World vultures are related to hawks, but New World vultures are related to ibises (see Seven of Blades). The Turkey Vulture eats only carrion, and her scientific name, *Cathartes aura*, means the "golden purifier" for the iridescent sheen on her dark brown feathers. An expert glider, she circles on the thermals that rise over rivers and canyons, and perches totem-like with wings spread wide, sunning herself. She lives in the Upperworld but her children are hatched in dark stone hollows at the entrance to the Underworld. She watches for the stillness of death, and as Eater of the Dead she is a guide for wandering ghosts. She initiates rot but clears away decay and poison, releasing the chemicals of life back to the earth, freeing spirits and preparing the way for new life.

She plays instruments from ancient Mediterranean tradition. The clattering bones are cut from sheep, cow, horse, or elk ribs. The rattles are dried pomegranates with iron handles and a dipper gourd painted like a pomegranate. These associate her with Roman Pluto and Mongolian Erlik, rulers of the Underworld and gods of wealth. Since she does not grasp material wealth tightly, it flows easily to her and she scatters it freely. A tambourine with jingling iron discs carries souls across the Oldest River, either in return to life after illness or on their final journey to the Hidden Land. The iron bells she wears are forged from her own feathers, for this is Ironwing herself, continually transforming herself through her work with the earth, the spirits, and her craft.

BONE COLLECTOR

For those who call me Vulture's child,
Roadside necromancer,
Remember I know
The tatty ghouls will come for me too,
My own hair will be made new in feathers
The color of rotting acorns
Yet shining.

VULTURE TOTEM

She-Vulture, my guide into dark rooms behind the sky:
I heard your sunfaded feathers creaking
When you turned and recognized me.
Eyehunter, rocking in the air,
Spiral dancer over the Oldest River,
Your feathers weigh more than your bones.
Without talons, you need be no warrior.
In the egg you inherit all.
Silent one, eater of the dark, your head is the Red Earth.
Your feathers are charred bone, weathered bronze,
Last winter's acorns.
You have been called the Shining One Who Purifies,
Yet all shrink from your faded black cloak,
Though it is jewelled with scarabs and edged with gold.
Beauty too strange for most, no healer for the living,
Treading heavily under a weight of fear, you work
Despised, worshipped, or merely necessary,
To free a soul from a broken house of flesh.
From stagnant shadows in a cracked cliffhouse
You view your eternities with mild brown eyes,
Resigned to the carrion cradle, the skeleton temple,
The divining well that tastes of millipedes and rot,
A black mirror in an old branch scar that gives you
A clear view of both sides of the Oldest River.
You are bonelight of the returning moon.
Dusty vagabond on all roads to death,
Ragged psychopomp,
Worn gatekeeper to the Hidden Land,
Sure flyer on an old, high path:
I have felt your soaring shadow across my back,
So I will treasure your wingfeathers.



The Ironwing Tarot

Art and text copyright © 2004
by Lorena Babcock Moore
www.mineralarts.com