

The Elements of Elements as Represented in The Court Cards of The Tarot

Key: The tables below use the Crowley Thoth attributions. The names of the cards correspond as follows (Thoth = Contemporary)

Knight = King
Queen = Queen
Prince = Knight
Princess = Page

	The fiery part of...	The watery part of...	The airy part of...	The earthy part of...
...Fire	Knight of Wands Explosions, thunder, directed eruption, pure flame.	Queen of Wands Volcano, lava, boiling oil.	Prince of Wands Hot air, gases.	Princess of Wands Coal fire, open, camp fire, altar fire, outburst of Spring, smoke, products of combustion
...Water	Knight of Cups Flooding. 'a pelting rain, a gushing spring', a water drop that penetrates the rock.	Queen of Cups Still water, reflection of reflection, pure water.	Prince of Cups Steam, sea breeze, crushing wave, foaming liquid, rain.	Princess of Cups Crystals, fertile water, Ice.
...Air	Knight of Swords Storm, wind, hurricane.	Queen of Swords Rainy clouds, cloud, fog, mist.	Prince of Swords Air.	Princess of Swords Dustdevil, dusty mist, dust cloud, turning things to stone, "fixation of the volatile".
...Earth	Knight of Disks Earthquakes, gravitation, fertilisation, process of growing, Agriculture, lava, desert, forest fire.	Queen of Disks Life giving water, nourishing rivers, Inundation of the Nile, swamps, bogs.	Prince of Disks Fertile soil, Cultivated soil, farm land, mining (intellect applied into earthy matters).	Princess of Disks Ground and all its 'produce', all stuff on it, mountains, hills, valleys.

Description and Qualities of the Card from Aleister Crowley, "The Book of Thoth."

Knight of Wands

- **Title:** The Lord of the Flame and the Lightning. The King of the Spirits of Fire.
- **Element:** The fiery part of Fire
- **Description:** "He is a warrior in complete armour. On his helmet for a crest he wears a black horse. In his hand he bears a flaming torch; a flame also in his mantle; and upon the flames does he ride. His steed is a black horse leaping."
- **Interpretation:** "The moral qualities appropriate to this figure are activity, generosity, fierceness, impetuosity, pride, impulsiveness, swiftness in unpredictable actions. If wrongly energized, he is evil-minded, cruel, bigoted and brutal. He is in either case ill-fitted to carry on his action; he has no means of modifying it according to circumstances. If he fails in his first effort, he has no resource...The Querent is advised to be apprehensive, yet cool, resolute and energetic: to beware of untimely action, but to go forward with tense confidence in his own ability."

Queen of Wands

- **Title:** The Queen of the Thrones of Flame
- **Element:** The watery part of Fire
- **Description:** "Her crown is topped with the winged globe and rayed with flame. Her long red golden hair flows down upon her armour of scaled mail. She is seated upon a throne of flame, ordered into geometrical light by her material power. Beneath the throne the surging flames are steady. She bears a wand in her left hand; but it is topped with a cone suggestive of the mysteries of Bacchus. She is attended by a couchant leopard upon whose head she lays her hand. Her face expresses the ecstasy of one whose mind is well in-drawn to the mystery borne beneath her bosom."
- **Interpretation:** "The characteristics of the Queen are adaptability, persistent energy, calm authority which she knows how to use to enhance her attractiveness. She is kindly and generous, but impatient of opposition. She has immense capacity for friendship and for love, but always on her own initiative. There is as much pride in this card as in the Knight, but it lacks the spontaneous nobility which excuses that error. It is not true pride, but self-complacent vanity and even snobbery. The other side of her character is that she may have a tendency to brood, come to a wrong decision thereon, and react with great savagery. She may be easily deceived; then she is likely to shew herself stupid, obstinate, tyrannical. She may be quick to take offence, and harbour revenge without good cause. She might turn and snap at her best friends without intelligible excuse. Also, when she misses her bite, she breaks her jaw!"

Prince of Wands

- **Title:** The Prince of the Chariot of Fire
- **Element:** The airy part of Fire
- **Description:** "He is a warrior in complete armour of scale mail, but his arms are bare on account of his vigour and activity. He wears a rayed crown surmounted by a lion's head winged, and from this crown depends a curtain of flame. On his breast is the sigil of To Mega Therion. In his left hand he bears the Phoenix wand of the Second Adept, the wand of Power and Energy, while with his other arm he reins the lion which draws his chariot, the chariot which is fortified by a wheel radiating flame. He rides upon a sea of flames, both waved and salient."
- **Interpretation:** "The moral qualities appropriate to this figure are swiftness and strength. But he is sometimes inclined to act on impulse; sometimes easily led by external influences; sometimes, especially in trifles, a prey to indecision. He is often violent, especially in the expression of an opinion, but he does not necessarily hold the opinion about which he is so emphatic. He states a vigorous proposition for the sake of stating it. He is in fact very slow to make up his mind thoroughly on any subject, but always sees both sides of every question. He is essentially just, but always feels that justice is not to be attained in the intellectual world. His character is intensely noble and generous. He may be an extravagant boaster, while slyly laughing both at the object of his boast and at himself for making it. He is romantic, especially in matters of history and tradition, to the point of folly, and may engineer "stunts" or play elaborate practical jokes. He might select some inoffensive nobody, and pursue him for years with every weapon of ridicule) as Swift tormented the unhappy Partridge, all without the least animus, ready to give the shirt off his back, should his victim be in need. His sense of humour is omnivorous, and may make him a mysterious figure, dreaded without reason by people who actually know nothing about him but his name—as a symbol of Terror. This is due to the influence of the last decan of Cancer upon this card. One of his greatest faults is pride; meanness and pettiness of any kind he holds in infinite scorn. His courage is fanatically strong, and his endurance indefatigable. He is always fighting against odds, and always wins in the long—the very long—run. This is principally due to his enormous capacity for work, which he exercises for its own sake, "without lust of result"; perhaps his haughty contempt for the world at large—which however coexists with profound and ecstatic respect for "every man and every woman" as "a star"—is responsible for this. When this card is badly dignified, the character degenerates. Each of the qualities mentioned above is found in its antithesis. There is great cruelty in him, partly sadistic and partly due to callousness arising from indifference—and, in a sense, laziness! So too he may be intolerant, prejudiced and idle—principally because it saves trouble. He may furthermore be an empty boaster and a great coward."

Princess of Wands

- **Title:** The Princess of the Shining Flame. The Rose of the Palace of Fire.
- **Element:** The earthy part of Fire
- **Description:** "The Princess is...shewn with the plumes of justice streaming like flames from her brow; and she is unclothed, shewing that chemical action can only take place when the element is perfectly free to combine with its partner. She bears a wand crowned with the disk of the Sun; and she is leaping in a surging flame which re-calls by its shape the letter Yod."
- **Interpretation:** "This card may be said to represent the dance of the virgin priestess of the Lords of Fire, for she is in attendance upon the golden altar ornamented with rams' heads) symbolizing the fires of Spring. The character of the Princess is extremely individual. She is brilliant and daring. She creates her own beauty by her essential vigour and energy. The force of her character imposes the impression of beauty upon the beholder. In anger or love she is sudden, violent, and implacable. She consumes all that comes into her sphere. She is ambitious and aspiring, full of enthusiasm which is often irrational. She never forgets an injury, and the only quality of patience to be found in her is the patience with which she lies in ambush to avenge. Such a woman, ill-dignified, shews the defects of these qualities. She is superficial and theatrical, completely shallow and false, yet without suspecting that she is anything of the sort, for she believes entirely in herself, even when it is apparent to the most ordinary observer that she is merely in the spasm of mood. She is cruel, unreliable, faithless and domineering."

Knight of Cups

- **Title:** The Lord of the Waves and the Waters. The King of the Hosts of the Sea.
- **Element:** The fiery part of Water
- **Description:** "He is clothed in black armour furnished with bright wings which, together with the leaping attitude of his white charger, indicates that he represents the most active aspect of Water. In his right hand he bears a cup from which issues a crab, the cardinal sign of Water, for aggressiveness. His totem is the peacock, for one of the stigmata of water in its most active form is brilliance."
- **Interpretation:** "He is graceful, dilettante, with the qualities of Venus, or a weak Jupiter. He is amiable in a passive way. He is quick to respond to attraction, and easily becomes enthusiastic under such stimulus; but he is not very enduring. He is exceedingly sensitive to external influence, but with no material depth in his character. When the card is ill dignified, he is sensual, idle and untruthful. Yet with all this he possesses an innocence and purity which are the essence of his nature. But he is, on the whole, so superficial that it is hard to reach this depth."

Queen of Cups

- **Title:** The Queen of the Thrones of the Waters
- **Element:** The watery part of Water
- **Description:** "She is represented as enthroned upon still water. In her hand she bears a shell-like cup, from which issues a crayfish, and she bears also the Lotus of Isis, of the Great Mother. She is robed in, and veiled by, endless curves of light, and the sea upon which she is enthroned conveys the almost unbroken images of the image which she represents."
- **Interpretation:** "Her image is of extreme purity and beauty, with infinite subtlety; to see the Truth of her is hardly possible, for she reflects the nature of the observer in great perfection...The characteristics associated with this card are principally dreaminess, illusion and tranquillity. She is the perfect agent and patient, able to receive and transmit everything without herself being affected thereby. If ill-dignified, all these qualities are degraded. Everything that passes through her is refracted and distorted. But, speaking generally, her characteristics depend mostly upon the influences which affect her."

Prince of Cups

- **Title:** The Prince of the Chariot of the Waters
- **Element:** The airy part of Water
- **Description:** "He is a warrior partly clad in armour, which seems, however, rather a growth than a covering. His helmet is surmounted by an eagle, and his chariot, which resembles a shell, is also drawn by an eagle. His wings are tenuous, almost of gas...In his right hand he bears a Lotus flower, sacred to the element of Water, and in his left hand is a cup from which issues a serpent...Beneath his chariot is the calm and stagnant water of a lake upon which rain falls heavily."
- **Interpretation:** "On the one hand, elasticity, volatility, hydrostatic equilibrium; on the other hand, the catalytic faculty and the energy of steam...The moral characteristics of the person pictured in this card are subtlety, secret violence, and craft. He is intensely secret, an artist in all his ways. On the surface he appears calm and imperturbable, but this is a mask of the most intense passion. He is on the surface susceptible to external influences, but he accepts them only to transmute them to the advantage of his secret designs. He is thus completely without conscience in the ordinary sense of the word, and is therefore usually distrusted by his neighbours. They feel they do not, and can never, understand him. Thus he inspires unreasonable fear. He is in fact perfectly ruthless. He cares intensely for power, wisdom, and his own aims. He feels no responsibility to others, and although his abilities are so immense, he cannot be relied upon to work in harness...To such people good will, sincerity, and right mating are the essentials of success; their danger is overweening ambition."

Princess of Cups

- **Title:** The Princess of the Waters. The Rose of the Palace of the Floods.
- **Element:** The earthy part of Water
- **Description:** "She is represented as a dancing figure, robed in a flowing garment on whose edges crystals are seen to form. For her crest she wears a swan with open wings...She bears a covered cup from which issues a tortoise. She is dancing upon a foaming sea in which disports himself a dolphin, the royal fish, which symbolizes the power of Creation."
- **Interpretation:** "She represents the power of Water to give substance to idea, to support life, and to form the basis of chemical combination...The character of the Princess is infinitely gracious. All sweetness, all voluptuousness, gentleness, kindness and tenderness are in her character. She lives in the world of Romance, in the perpetual dream of rapture. On a superficial examination she might be thought selfish and indolent, but this is a quite false impression; silently and effortlessly she goes about her work."

Knight of Swords

- **Title:** The Lord of the Winds and the Breezes. The King of the Spirits of Air.
- **Element:** The fiery part of Air
- **Interpretation:** "[H]e is the wind, the storm. He represents the violent power of motion applied to an apparently manageable element... He represents the idea of attack. The moral qualities of a person thus indicated are activity and skill, subtlety and cleverness. He is fierce, delicate and courageous, but altogether the prey of his idea, which comes to him as an inspiration without reflection. If ill-dignified, the vigour in all these qualities being absent, he is incapable of decision or purpose. Any action that he takes is easily brushed aside by opposition. Inadequate violence spells futility."

Queen of Swords

- **Title:** The Queen of the Thrones of Air
- **Element:** The watery part of Air
- **Description:** "She is enthroned upon the clouds. The upper part of her body is naked, but she wears a gleaming belt and a sarong. Her helmet is crested by the head of a child, and from it stream sharp rays of light, illuminating her empire of celestial dew. In her right hand, she bears a sword; in her left hand, the newly severed head of a bearded man."
- **Interpretation:** "She is the clear, conscious perception of Idea, the Liberator of the Mind... The person symbolized by this card should be intensely perceptive, a keen observer, a subtle interpreter, an intense individualist, swift and accurate at recording ideas; in action confident, in spirit gracious and just. Her movements will be graceful, and her ability in dancing and balancing exceptional. If ill-dignified, these qualities will all be turned to

unworthy purposes. She will be cruel, sly, deceitful and unreliable; in this way, very dangerous, on account of the superficial beauty and attractive ness which distinguish her."

Prince of Swords

- **Title:** The Prince of the Chariot of Air
- **Element:** The airy part of Air
- **Description:** "The figure of this Prince is clothed with closely woven armour adorned with definite device, and the chariot which bears him suggests (even more closely) geometrical ideas. This chariot is drawn by winged children, looking and leaping irresponsibly in any direction that takes their fancy; they are not reined, but perfectly Capricious. The chariot consequently is easy enough to move, but quite unable to progress in any definite direction except by accident. This is a perfect picture of the Mind... In his right hand is a lifted sword wherewith to create, but in his left hand a sickle, so that what he creates he instantly destroys."
- **Interpretation:** "A person thus symbolized is purely intellectual. He is full of ideas and designs which tumble over each other. He is a mass of fine ideals unrelated to practical effort. He has all the apparatus of Thought in the highest degree, intensely clever, admirably rational, but unstable of purpose, and in reality indifferent even to his own ideas, as knowing that any one of them is just as good as any other. He reduces everything to unreality by removing its substance and transmuting it to an ideal world of ratiocination which is purely formal and out of relation to any facts, even those upon which it is based."

Princess of Swords

- **Title:** The Princess of the Rushing Winds. The Lotus of the Palace of Air.
- **Element:** The earthy part of Air
- **Description:** "[S]he appears helmed, with serpent-haired Medusa for her crest. She stands in front of a barren altar as if to avenge its profanation, and she stabs downward with her sword. The heaven and the clouds, which are her home, seem angry."
- **Interpretation:** "She brings about the materialization of Idea. She represents the influence of Heaven upon Earth... The character of the Princess is stern and revengeful. Her logic is destructive. She is firm and aggressive, with great practical wisdom and subtlety in material things. She shews great cleverness and dexterity in the management of practical affairs, especially where they are of a controversial nature. She is very adroit in the settlement of controversies. If ill-dignified, all these qualities are dispersed; she becomes incoherent, and all her gifts tend to combine to form a species of low cunning whose object is unworthy of the means."

Knight of Disks

- **Title:** The Lord of the Wide and Fertile Land. The King of the Spirits of Earth.
- **Element:** The fiery part of Earth
- **Description:** "This warrior is short and sturdy in type. He is clothed in great solidity of plate armour; but his helmet, which is crested with the head of a stag, is thrown back, for at the moment his function is entirely confined to the production of food. For this reason he is armed with a flail. The disk which he bears, moreover, is very solid; it represents nutrition. These characteristics are borne out by his horse; a shire horse, solidly planted on all four feet, as was not the case with the other Knights. He rides through the fertile land; even the distant hills are cultivated fields."
- **Interpretation:** "Those whom he symbolizes tend to be dull, heavy and preoccupied with material things. They are laborious and patient, but would have little intellectual grasp even of matters which concern them most closely. Their success in these is due to instinct, to imitation of Nature. They lack initiative; their fire is the smouldering fire of the process of growth. — If ill-dignified, these people are hopelessly stupid, slavish, quite incapable of foresight even in their own affairs, or of taking an intelligent interest in anything outside them. They are churlish, surly, and jealous (in a dull sort of way) of what they instinctively realize is the superior state of others; but they have not the courage or intelligence to better themselves. Yet they are always irritably meddling about petty matters; they interfere with, and inevitably spoil, whatever comes their way."

Queen of Disks

- **Title:** The Queen of the Thrones of the Earth.
- **Element:** The watery part of Earth
- **Description:** "The Queen of Disks is throned upon the life of vegetation. She contemplates the background, where a calm river winds through a sandy desert to bring to it fertility. Oases are beginning to shew themselves amid the wastes. Before her stands a goat upon a sphere. There is here a reference to the dogma that the Great Work is fertility. Her armour is composed of small scales or coins, and her helmet is adorned with the great spiral horns of the markhor. In her right hand she bears a sceptre surmounted by a cube, within which is a three-dimensional Hexagram, and in her left arm is curved her proper disk, a sphere of loops and circles interlaced. She thus represents the ambition of matter to take part in the great work of Creation."
- **Interpretation:** "She represents passivity, usually in its highest aspect... Persons signified by this card possess the finest of the quieter qualities. They are ambitious, but only in useful directions. They possess immense funds of affection, kindness, and greatness of heart. They are not intellectual, and not particularly intelligent; but instinct and intuition are more than adequate for their needs. These people are quiet, hard-working, practical, sensible, domesticated, often (in a reticent and unassuming fashion) lustful and even debauched. They are inclined to the abuse of alcohol and of drugs. It is as if they could only realize their essential happiness by getting outside themselves. — If ill dignified, they are dull, servile,

foolish; they are drudges rather than workers. Life for them is purely mechanical; and they cannot rise, or even seek to rise, above their appointed lot."

Prince of Disks

- **Title:** The Prince of the Chariot of Earth.
- **Element:** The airy part of Earth
- **Description:** "Clothed in light armour, his helmet is crowned with the head of a bull; and his chariot is drawn by an ox, this animal being peculiarly sacred to the Element of Earth. In his left hand he holds his disk, which is an orb resembling a globe, marked with mathematical symbols as if to imply the planning involved in agriculture. In his right hand he bears an orbed sceptre surmounted by a cross, a symbol of the Great Work accomplished; for it is his function to bring forth from the material of the element that vegetation which is the sustenance of the Spirit itself."
- **Interpretation:** "The character denoted by this card is that of great energy brought to bear upon the most solid of practical matters. He is energetic and enduring, a capable manager, a steadfast and persevering worker. He is competent, ingenious, thoughtful, cautious, trustworthy, imperturbable; he constantly seeks new uses for common things, and adapts his circumstances to his purposes in a slow, steady, well-thought out plan. He is lacking almost entirely in emotion. He is somewhat insensitive, and may appear dull, but he is not; it so appears because he makes no effort to understand ideas which are beyond his scope. He may often appear stupid, and is inclined to be resentful of more spiritual types. He is slow to anger, but, if driven, becomes implacable. It is not very practicable to distinguish between the good and evil dignities in this card; one can merely say that, in case of his being ill-dignified, both the quality and quantity of his characteristics are somewhat degraded. The reaction of others to him will depend almost entirely upon their own temperaments."

Princess of Disks

- **Title:** The Princess of the Echoing Hills. The Lotus of the Palace of the Earth.
- **Element:** The earthy part of Earth
- **Description:** "Her crest is the head of the ram, and her sceptre descends into the earth. There its head becomes a diamond, the precious stone of Kether, thus symbolizing the birth of the highest and purest light in the deepest and darkest of the Elements. She stands within a grove of sacred trees before an altar suggesting a sheaf of wheat, for she is a priestess of Demeter. She bears within her body the secret of the future. Her sublimity is further emphasized by the disk which she bears; for in the centre thereof is the Chinese ideogram denoting the twin spiral force of Creation in perfect equilibrium; from this is born the rose of Isis, the great fertile Mother."
- **Interpretation:** "The characteristics of an individual signified by this card are too various to enumerate; one must summarize by saying that she is Womanhood in its ultimate

projection. She contains all the characteristics of woman, and it would depend entirely upon the influences to which she is subjected whether one or another becomes manifest. But in every case her attributes will be pure in themselves, and not necessarily connected with any other attributes which in the normal way one regards as symbolic. In one sense, then, her general reputation will be of bewildering inconsistency."

Procedure

The utilisation of these court cards in metaphor interpretation is easy enough, the problem lies within the practitioner's ability to stay out of the subjective diagnostic reasoning that is common to tarot use. i.e. Card X means Y will happen.

As you will have seen in the writings on "The Hurts" and the tarot trump, "The Hermit", the cards are less about divination and more about collating the archetypal symbolism that are ever present in our modern use of metaphor.

So, if we were to find ourselves metaphorically 'up in the air' in the classic metaphor where we could feed back the following idioms:

- You are not grounded.
- You lack adequate support.
- You take yourself very lightly

We could explore the qualities of the card that match that metaphor, which looking at our chart above, we would see is the Prince of Swords. Turning to that section in the book of Thoth we would see the following interpretation:

"A person thus symbolized is purely intellectual. He is full of ideas and designs which tumble over each other. He is a mass of fine ideals unrelated to practical effort. He has all the apparatus of Thought in the highest degree, intensely clever, admirably rational, but unstable of purpose, and in reality indifferent even to his own ideas, as knowing that any one of them is just as good as any other. He reduces everything to unreality by removing its substance and transmuting it to an ideal world of ratiocination which is purely formal and out of relation to any facts, even those upon which it is based."

You will certainly have noticed the following line in the description which matches the description of being 'up in the air' perfectly: *"The chariot consequently is easy enough to move, but quite unable to progress in any definite direction except by accident."*

It is wise to avoid attributing these qualities directly to the person, but rather these qualities are those that would give rise to the metaphor. i.e. when you do these particular qualities, you are likely to find yourself 'up in the air'.

What we are seeking with this level of work in balance and harmony to the elements. So we need to know which elements are opposite and which are complementary.

Opposites:

Fire – Water
Earth – Air

Complementary:

Fire – Air

Water – Earth

So, with the Prince of Swords being “air of air”, we could consider the qualities of “earth of earth” which would be the Princess of Disks, the qualities of whom is:

"The characteristics of an individual signified by this card are too various to enumerate; one must summarize by saying that she is Womanhood in its ultimate projection. She contains all the characteristics of woman, and it would depend entirely upon the influences to which she is subjected whether one or another becomes manifest. But in every case her attributes will be pure in themselves, and not necessarily connected with any other attributes which in the normal way one regards as symbolic. In one sense, then, her general reputation will be of bewildering inconsistency."

At this point there are a number of things you can do, but what I recommend for now is this. Assuming your metaphor was 'up in the air', what is your *reaction* to the above description and type of person? What is that like? i.e. elicit metaphor for your reaction and then explore that metaphor.

The presence of the air-of-air metaphor ('up in the air') suggests a possible lack of integration between the qualities of the Prince of Swords and the Princess of Disks, so we would look at creating a parts integration or an 'alchemical marriage' between the two.

I recommend you begin by examining your own metaphors for the four elements, the elements-of-elements and their combinations. Familiarity with the court cards and their elemental attributions is made easier when you learn the following (*I've added in some alchemical labels too*):

Fire	Wands	Knight <i>The father of the element</i>	Will, determination, drive
Water	Cups	Queen <i>The mother of the element</i>	Creativity, emotion, reproduction
Air	Swords	Prince <i>The son of the element</i>	Intellect, thought, consciousness
Earth	Disks	Princess <i>The daughter of the element</i>	Physical world, body

As a rough guide here are some common metaphoric experiences and their court card attribution.

"It's like I am in a volcano."	Watery part of Fire	Queen of Wands
"I'm surrounded by farm land."	Fiery part of Earth	Knight of Disks
"I'm in a tornado."	Fiery part of Air	Knight of Swords
"On top of a mountain."	Earthy part of Earth	Princess of Disks
"It's like my chest is going to explode."	Fiery part of Fire	Knight of Wands