

**STAR  
TAKER  
TAROT**



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TAKER  
TAROT

BY

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TO \*

AND TO THE MUSE WHO INSPIRES

ALL CREATION

AND TO MY CHILD ISAAC

WHO KEEPS MY BRAIN BUSY

# CONTENTS

o THE VOID	3
i THE ONE	5
THE SYSTEMS	8
z YIN AND YANG	9
3 TRIA PRIMA	13
THE CARDS	16



O

## THE VOID

*Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, when deeply practicing prajña paramita, clearly saw that all five aggregates are empty and thus relieved all suffering. Shariputra, form does not differ from emptiness, emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness, emptiness itself form. Sensations, perceptions, formations, and consciousness are also like this. Shariputra, all dharmas are marked by emptiness; they neither arise nor cease, are neither defiled nor pure, neither increase nor decrease. Therefore, given emptiness, there is no form, no sensation, no perception, no formation, no consciousness; no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no sight, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no object of mind; no realm of sight ... no realm of mind consciousness. There is neither ignorance nor extinction of ignorance... neither old age and death, nor extinction of old age and death; no suffering, no cause, no cessation, no path; no knowledge and no attainment. With nothing to attain, a bodhisattva relies on prajña paramita, and thus the mind is without hindrance. Without hindrance, there is no fear. Far beyond all inverted views, one realizes nirvana. All buddhas of past, present, and future rely on prajña paramita and thereby attain unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment. Therefore, know the prajña paramita as the great miraculous mantra, the great bright mantra, the supreme mantra, the incomparable mantra, which removes all suffering and is true, not false. Therefore we proclaim the prajña paramita mantra, the mantra that says: “Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha.”*

— Heart of Great Perfect Wisdom Sutra

Let's start with nothing. No cards. Empty table.

The void is the space of the reading.

Some say that the void is Saturn, in his aspect as Kronos, time, who rules the domain that all things happen in (but we'll meet him later.)

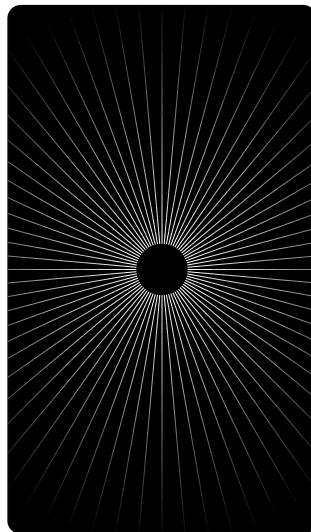
The sky is a void the planets move though, an empty hole that goes on forever.

Perhaps the back of the card is the void, the Ein Sof (the Infinite), Ayin (the Nothingness), who precedes all things.

Without nothing you cannot have anything. Without anything you cannot have something. Once you have something, well, now it's possible to have questions.

Before we start, ask yourself: do you really want to know? do you feel lucky? or if not, can you love your fate anyway?

Well, that's something.



I

## THE ONE

*Toward the One*

*The Perfection of Love,*

*Harmony, and Beauty*

*The Only Being*

*United with all the Illuminated*

*Souls*

*Who form the Embodiment of the*

*Master*

*The Spirit of Guidance*

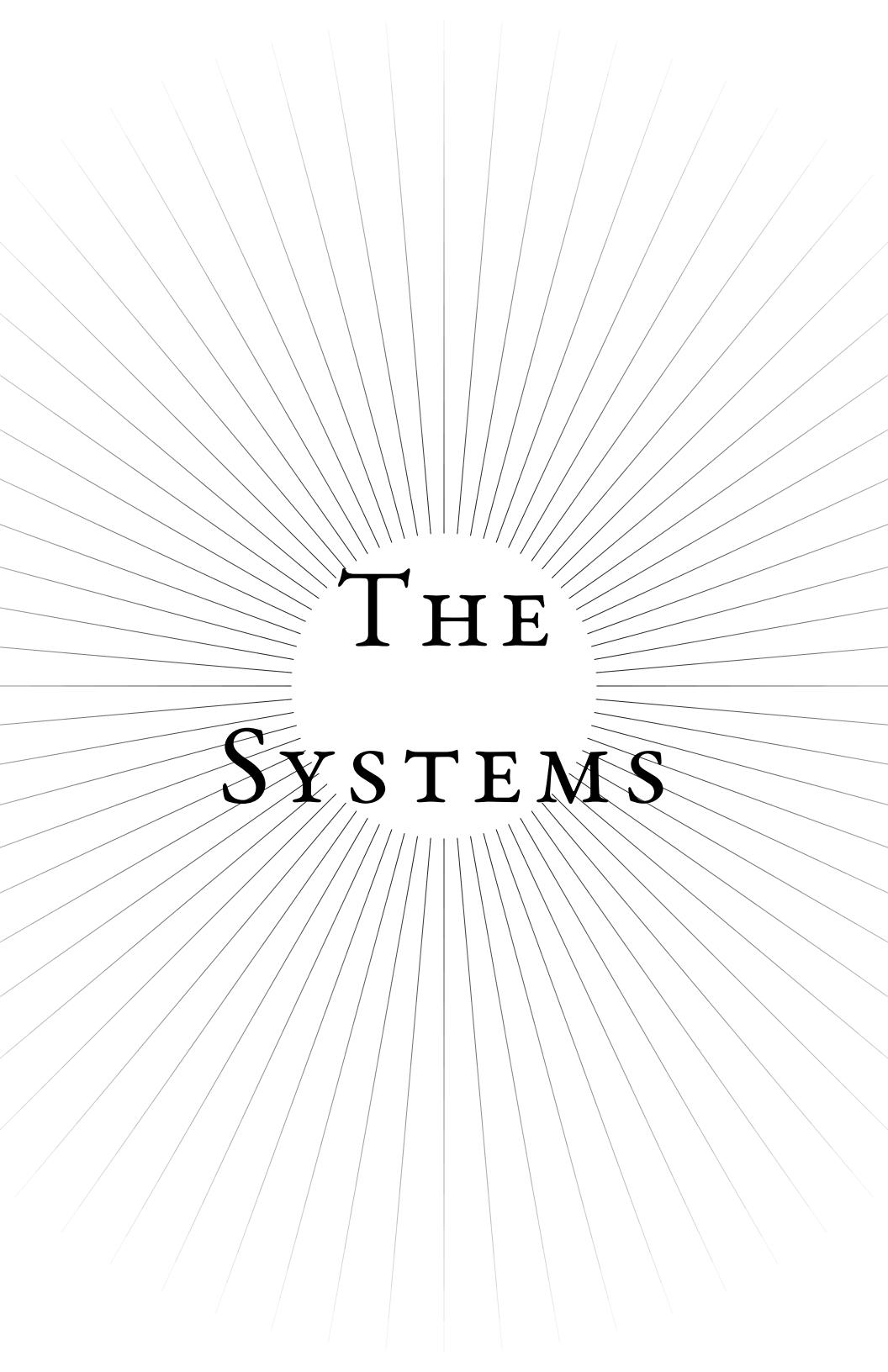
— universalist Sufi prayer of invocation

If you’re reading this, then my weird little deck is here in your hands, and you have a question like “what the hell is going on” or “why is it like this”. Let me start at the beginning.

My name is Jes, and I’m an astrolabist, which means I’m concerned with astronomy and astrology through the lens of how people understood them before the modern era: the math and mythology are deeply intertwined, and to get to the good stuff you need to understand a lot of interlocking systems. No particular part on its own is overwhelming, but all together is too much for the human mind to deal with. It is my hope that tarot can be a bridge between these different parts.

Tarot, despite its origins as a simple card game, took on esoteric connotations as various people noticed numerical coincidences in its structure, and gradually reinterpreted it to be a projection of some deep structure of the universe, or the human mind, or aspects of the divine, etc. The Tarot we know today is deeply astrological, as systematic mappings to the planets, zodiac, and ecliptic were used to design the illustrations on the most recognizable historical tarot decks. Many of those associations are obscure now, and one goal of this project is to try to bring them to the forefront.

Many people over thousands of years attempted to systematize the motion of the planets and the stars. They all made slightly different choices, but because they were all referring to the same real objects in the actual sky, similar patterns emerged in all of them. An extraordinary gift of our time is that information for cultures that once had sparse contact with each other are now freely available for anyone to read about. I have selected a few systems of astrology and divination to represent here, from a few of the world’s largest cultures — not because they are the best, but because they are well-documented, and an easy place to start. I lament that it is impossible to know every idea that was ever revered by any culture, but I have done my best to present the little sliver of the world’s knowledge that I have managed to understand. I hope you find them as beautiful as I do.



THE  
SYSTEMS



## YIN AND YANG

*Therefore there is in the Changes  
the Great Primal Beginning.*

*This generates  
the two primary forces.  
The two primary forces  
generate the four images.*

*The four images  
generate the eight trigrams.  
The eight trigrams determine  
good fortune and misfortune.  
Good fortune and misfortune  
create the great field of action.*

— The I Ching or Book of Changes,  
translated by Richard Wilhelm,  
rendered into English  
by Cary F. Baynes

This book is in two parts, the first part is concerned with the individual systems that appear on the cards, while the second part will examine each card individually, with reference to how each of those systems manifest on a particular card. Big picture, little picture. We'll start with the simplest system possible: duality.

Long before Alan Turing, John von Neumann, and Claude Shannon applied binary encodings to the problem of electronically processing information, masters of divination used binary logic to transform randomness into recognizable symbols. The inputs could be as simple as a coin flip or be composed of laborious rituals that could take the better part of an hour to generate a single figure.

The oldest such system is the I Ching, which originated in the Yellow River valley of China, around 1050 BCE. In this system, the two fundamental bits are yang lines and yin lines, the active and passive elements.

A remarkably similar system developed in West Africa where it is known as Ifá (or Fa, or Afa), and was transmitted to the Arab world where it was called *ilm al-raml* (“the science of sand”), and eventually reached medieval Europe where it became Geomancy. In this system, active and passive elements are marked as single (odd) or paired (even) dots.



YANG

YIN



ACTIVE



PASSIVE

ODD	EVEN
MALE	FEMALE
LIGHT	DARK
EXHALE	INHALE
TRANSMISSION	RECEPTION
LOUD	QUIET
SUMMER	WINTER
EXPLICIT	IMPLICIT
MANIFEST	POTENTIAL
MOVEMENT	REST

SUN	MOON
JUPITER	SATURN
MARS	VENUS



## TRIA PRIMA

*The Tao gives birth to One.*

*One gives birth to Two.*

*Two gives birth to Three.*

*Three gives birth to ten thousand things.*

— Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, ch. 42

*Know that all the seven metals are brought forth  
after this manner, out of a threefold matter, viz.  
Mercury, Sulphur, & Salt... For Mercury is the  
Spirit, Sulphur the Soul, and Salt the Body.*

— Paracelsus, *Of the Nature of Things*

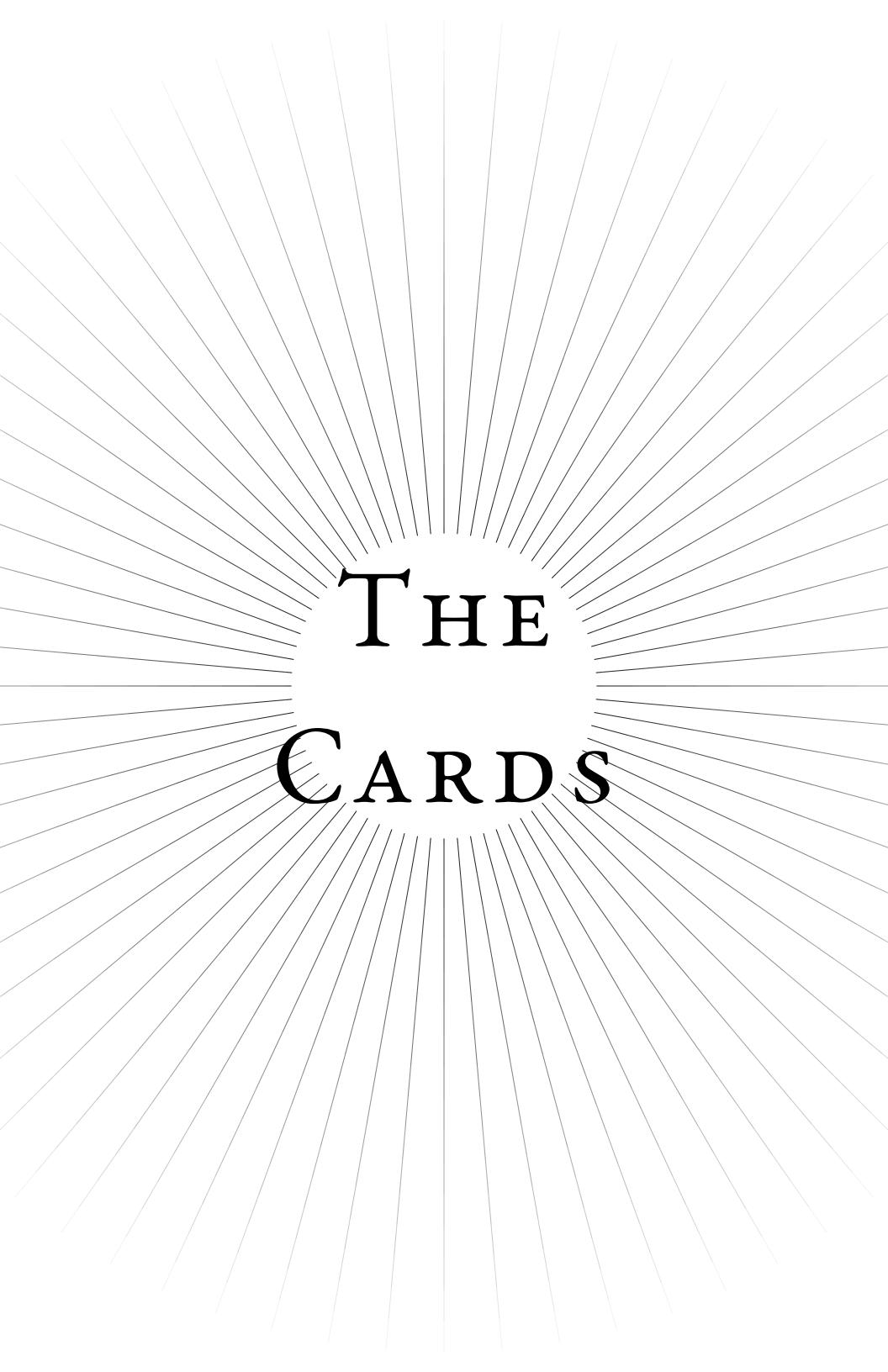
*Vata, pitta, and kapha —  
in equilibrium they sustain the body;  
disturbed, they destroy it.*

— *Ashtanga Hridayam* of Vaghbhata

*Three Mothers, Alef-Mem-Shin —  
Their foundation is the palm of guilt  
and the palm of innocence,  
and the tongue of edict decides between them.*

— *Sefer Yetzirah* 3:1





The  
CARDS



**WRITTEN  
IN THE  
STARS**