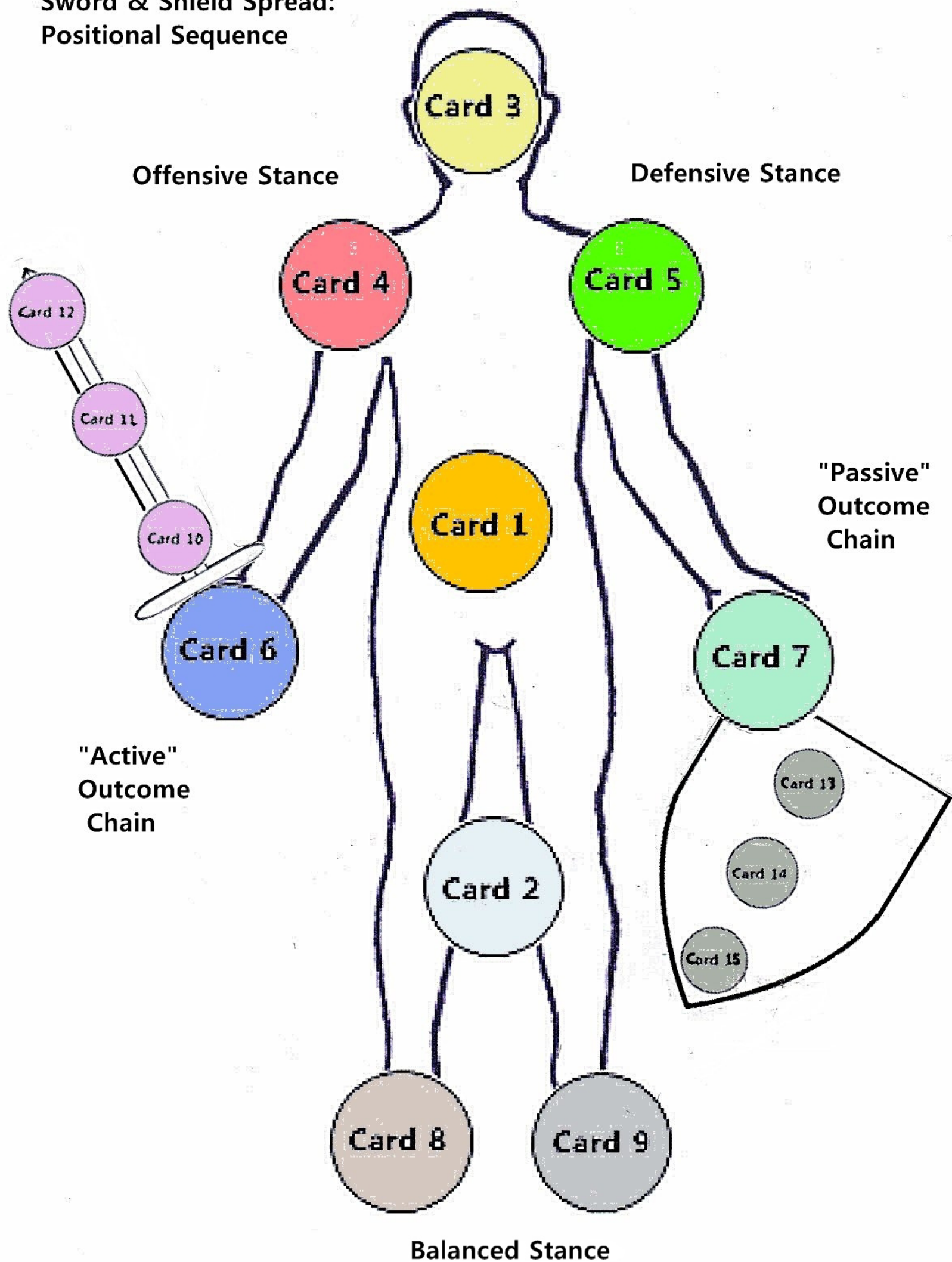


Sword & Shield Spread: Positional Sequence



The “Sword & Shield” Active/Passive Outcome Comparison Spread

The objective of this spread is to show the advantages to be gained or lost – both immediate and long-term – in adopting either an active, authoritative “combat” stance or a passive, noncommittal “wait-and-see” attitude toward resolution of the matter in question. It acknowledges that, while failing to act in a timely and forthright manner can often be a recipe for disaster, in some cases “doing nothing” might be the best option available.

The human figure common to all of the attached diagrams represents Adam Kadmon, the “Heavenly Man” of esoteric Hebrew mysticism, who stands within the qabalistic Tree of Life facing out toward the viewer. Thus, the right arm (at the left side of the picture) portrays the “strong arm” or “sword arm” embodying the idea of decisive action and controlled force as its operative principle, while the left arm (on the right) serves as the “weak arm” or “shield arm” carrying a more cautionary and defensive meaning. In a reading, the “active” right-hand path would be emphasized when a highly disciplined, self-directed approach to the situation is favored by the cards, while the “passive,” self-contained quality of the left-hand path promotes a more intuitive, nuanced (possibly “other-directed”) orientation to circumstances.

The central column (positions #1, #2 and #3) provides a “signature” of the querent's present intellectual, egoistic and emotional orientation toward the situation. Harsh, weak or ill-dignified cards in any of these positions could indicate where the querent has a conceptual “blind spot” in understanding the future consequences of any contemplated action or, conversely, any willful inaction.

The top triad (positions #3, #4 and #5) shows whether the querent is mentally predisposed (position #3) toward, or could benefit more fully from, a forceful “take charge” approach (position #4) or a more understated, refined response (position #5). Harsh, weak or ill-dignified cards in one leg of the triad could suggest that the other leg may be more worthy of pursuit. In extreme cases, “the lesser of two evils” could be the only viable choice.

The bottom triad (positions #2, #8 and #9) reflects the “foundation” or history of the matter, from both an emotional (positions #2) and a pragmatic (positions #8 and #9) perspective. It shows whether the querent is optimally centered (position #2) and grounded (positions #8 and #9) to carry the matter forward successfully into the future. Harsh, weak or ill-dignified cards in any of these positions could reflect flaws in the querent's apprehension of the root cause(s) for any present difficulties, thus potentially complicating recovery.

The middle triad (positions #1, #6 and #7) describes “where the action is” in terms of satisfying the querent's need for self-realization (position #1), either through taking matters firmly in hand (position #6) or in letting circumstances grind to their ultimate conclusion without strenuous interaction (position #7). Once again, a harsh, weak or ill-dignified card in one extremity of the triad could suggest that exploring the opposite path may be more productive.

The left “outcome train” representing the querent's active involvement (and decisive intervention as indicated by the upraised “sword hand”) is comprised of positions #3 and #6, supported or undermined by the condition of the card in position #8. Positions #10 through #12 provide a developmental view of the long-range consequences of the outcome portrayed by position #6, and are considered optional for purposes of the immediate judgment. Harsh, weak or ill-dignified cards in any of these “outcome” positions could testify against mounting an initiative in that particular direction, or at least argue in favor of additional safeguards and assurances for success.

The right “outcome train” reflecting the querent's reliance on circumstances to work themselves out in a satisfactory way (via intentional deflection or avoidance of conflict as shown by the lowered “shield hand”) includes positions #3 and #7, supported or undermined by the condition of the card in position #9. Positions #13 through #15 offer a long-range projection for this outcome similar to that described for the “active” train, and are also optional. The “resident” Trump and suit cards (see below for an explanation) in many of these passive “outcome” positions are already inherently uncompromising and difficult, so the only likely modification of their core meaning would be via the appearance of powerfully favorable cards in these locations; harsh, weak or ill-dignified cards here would simply “dig a deeper hole” without alleviating the underlying stresses.

The point of the reading is to determine which of the two paths - the "active" or the "passive" - offers the best prospects for success, as shown by the quality and degree of integration among the three outer, vertical "function" cards in each set. The left side of the layout (symbolized by the forthright, aggressive "sword arm") contains even-numbered, "balanced" positions with a more "positive," male polarity in the base Trumps of the "theoretical model," while the right side (symbolized by the protective "shield arm") contains odd-numbered ("seeking balance") positions modeled by base Trumps that are more "passive" and female/neutral in polarity. This contrasts the qualities of offense/resistance on one hand and defense/acceptance on the other.

The idea is to compare the two "motivation" cards (#4 and #5), the two "execution" cards (#6 and #7) and the two "support" cards (#8 and #9) to see which vertical chain "hangs together" best as a convincing "story-line" that offers the least arduous path to the querent's goal. The central column (positions #1, #2 and #3) is more "attitudinal," showing how well-situated the querent is in mental/emotional terms to face the situation. The card in position #3 ("conscious orientation") may reinforce one or the other of the "motivation" cards by shared nature, element or astrological value, starting the reading down that particular path, while card #2 ("subconscious orientation"), as part of the "foundation of the matter," may favor the quality of the card in position #8 or #9, emphasizing its emotional "edge" in the querent's game plan. The querent's sense of self-confidence (card #1) may be most attuned to an assertive stance (card #6) or a more composed one (card #7).

Handled this way, in "zones" or coherent segments, once the pros and cons of each combination are weighed against one another and the most favorable stance emerges, reading this spread is no more complex than any 5-card layout, assuming only a short-term answer is needed. If the question is "How will it go with 'X' next week?" the reading can stop at card #6 or #7 as the outcome. If the question is "How will my first week on the job go, and then develop over the next six months?" the "outcome extensions" (cards #10, #11 and #12 or #13, #14 and #15) would be read as a narrative progression showing "the rest of the story."

An understanding of the numerological, astrological and elemental associations of each position in the spread, as illustrated in the system diagrams that follow, is crucial to getting the most out of the interpretation. Furthermore, each position has been assigned either a single Trump card or a complementary pair of Trumps, and in some cases a set of court or minor suit cards, the purpose of which is to illuminate the underlying philosophy behind the interpretive meaning of that position. The idea here is that any drawn card landing in a particular position within the spread will take on a portion of the quality of the card which resides there in the theoretical model. In some cases, the added emphasis will reinforce the positive or negative nature of the transient card, while in others the two could work at cross-purposes or even effectively cancel one another out.

Following is a brief explanation of the chief attributes of each position:

Significator card: Placed beneath position #1, it is usually (but not always) a court card chosen to represent the querent's interests in the matter. (Selecting it from a separate deck is advisable to keep the 78-card "reading deck" whole.) It should be read primarily in concert with the modifying influences of the cards in positions #1, #2 and #3. Do those cards enhance or enfeeble the basic energy of the Significator? One emphasis will encourage the querent to strike out optimistically into the future, while the other will simply promote foot-dragging.

Position #1: As the "covering" card, it is entirely solar in nature (Sun and Strength resident) and also embodies the vigor of the Knights and the equilibrium of the Sixes. It shows the querent's fundamental sense of self-reliance in managing the the circumstances of the situation or question, and how he or she experiences its impact most viscerally. Whether the querent's reaction to this input translates into increased confidence or a debilitating inertia depends on the favorable or unfavorable testimony of the cards immediately surrounding it.

Position #2: The emotional and spiritual – perhaps karmic - "root" of the matter, highlighted by the foundational presence of the Moon and the High Priestess as well as the complementary imprint of the Nines and Twos, it encompasses all manner of subconscious and unconscious prior "baggage" brought forth into the light of day by the evolving situation. It often supplies key clues to understanding the hold the matter has on the querent's conscious attention.

Position #3: Reflects the querent's intellectual orientation toward the matter, earmarked by the concordance of two elemental Air Trumps, the Star (Aquarius) and the Fool (pure essence of Air), as well as the enterprising verve of the Aces. It includes all types of logical reasoning and rational understanding about the situation:

insights, inspirations, creative and innovative mental constructs, lofty visions and aspirations (aka “hopes and wishes”), philosophical viewpoints, etc, all of which can be brought to bear on resolution. It often produces the cognitive “spark” that ignites the twin fires of revelation (the “Aha!” moment) and comprehension that are essential to achieving the most satisfying result.

Position #4: Corresponding to the Emperor and the adventurous drive of Aries and its ruler, Mars, along with the administrative acumen of the Kings and the stable platform of the Fours, it supplies the motivational urge behind assuming a strong, authoritative posture when confronting the situation. A sympathetic card in this position bodes well for an outcome based on the use of reasonable and justifiable force to assure success. A less supportive card here may indicate that an excess or surfeit of force would allow that success to slip out of reach, and might also encourage pursuing an alternative, less aggressive angle.

Position #5: Amiable Venus infuses the Empress (resident here) with a benign acceptance of whatever may come; nature's preferred way is gradual emergence of the most pleasing and nurturing outcome, without artificially forcing the issue. This rather meandering, non-judgmental approach can seem profoundly frustrating in a culture weaned on decisive action as the ultimate “Swiss Army Knife” for any problem-solving scenario. A certain stoic fatalism attends any such course of blatant non-action; it takes a strongly sympathetic card in this position to recommend entertaining such a self-effacing policy, often as a last resort when more direct action looks unfeasible. The Queens and the Threes echo this placidity; the former are steady but static, while the latter reinforce the idea of gradual organic growth.

Position #6: Energized by a twin jolt of Mercurial dexterity and improvisational zeal (the Gemini-inflected Lovers [characterized as Zain” or “sword” in Hebrew] and that Mercury mainstay, the Magician), it is the perfect decision-making agent for the rather ponderous deliberative faculties of the Emperor. This is the “sword-wielding hand” that cuts to the quick in a penetrating and incisive way, laying bare the inner workings of the situation in a logical and coherent manner. Even a mildly sympathetic – or perhaps even neutral – card here could very well carry the day, or at the very least cut any losses if the enterprise doesn't pan out as intended. A more strongly supportive card would almost guarantee success, especially if the Emperor's intentions have been correctly translated into action. The fresh-faced ingenuity of the Pages and the Mercury correlation of the Eights complete the compelling picture of “grace under fire.”

Position #7: Poised and impartial Libra (in which the implacable planet Saturn is exalted) holds sway here in the form of Justice, also the perfect tool for the graceful wiles of the Empress in furthering her non-confrontational but no less impassioned agenda. Venus rules judicious Libra as well, which is the seventh sign of the zodiac while Saturn is the seventh planet of the solar system and 7 is the number of the (Saturnian) law; the Sevens of the tarot deck reside here as well. Like all of the Air signs, there is a certain calculating coldness to the action of Libra (although somewhat blunted by the charms of Venus) that serves the goals of Justice well. As far as handling the demands of the situation at hand, the decisiveness of Libra – unlike that of Gemini and Mercury – is more deliberate and formal, often demanding something in return for its consideration. About the best that can be expected from a weak or neutral card here is to receive a fair shake and perhaps get off lightly. An overwhelmingly positive card like the Sun or the Chariot would fare better in persuading Justice to favorably dispose of the querent's plea. Landing on one's feet with no visible scars might be seen as a pleasantly appealing outcome for such a trying adventure.

Position #8: The more positive of the two “pillars” that form the figurative bedrock of the situation, its operational motif is both practical and traditional, as would befit its dual assignment to the Hierophant and the Hermit, the former invested by moist, soft, earthy, Venusian Taurus and the latter by dry, tough, restrained, Mercurial Virgo. Together, the pair could be viewed as being both constructive and instructive in their role of supporting the execution of the Emperor's grand plan, as carried out by the card in position #6. In the midst of the battle implied by having taken an authoritative, forceful stance in the matter, the querent could reliably look here for confidence-building affirmation, assuming a card sympathetic to the elemental nature of the two resident Trumps (such as the Empress or the World) falls here; a less fortunate card might leave the storeroom locked and the shelves bare of sustenance. The two more settled and sober – thus more affirmative - of the Tens, the 10 of Cups and the 10 of Pentacles, also call this location home. They repeat the conservative emphasis of the two Trumps. In aggregate, the testimony paints a picture of “putting one's best foot forward” in service to the cause.

Position #9: The more “negative” (as in passive) twin of position #8, it is tenanted by the Devil, the Hanged Man, and the two more problematic of the Tens, the footsore, overburdened 10 of Wands and the stark, drastic 10 of Swords. The Devil carries the connotation of hard-nosed Capricorn and its ruler, stubborn Saturn, while the self-absorbed, distracted Hanged Man is associated with elemental Water; although they share the inert polarity of the Trumps in position #8, they have their own consuming issues and are less constructively supportive of the Saturnian labors of Justice in administering the “hands-off” approach to resolution. They are on the whole “muddier” and more conducive to creating flawed “feet of clay” as described in Nebuchadnezzar's biblical dream. Looking here for reinforcement, the querent is apt to be sorely misled by the Devil and disappointed by the Hanged Man, both of whom may feel that “just desserts” are due. They symbolize a fatal defect in the assumed solidity of the earthen footings due to the admixture of too much weakening water with the brick-maker's clay. The anecdotal vignette is one of “making a false step” that even an unstintingly optimistic card (like the Star) landing here would be hard-pressed to shrug off. A harsh, weak or ill-dignified card might well be irredeemable.

These nine positions constitute the full scope of the basic reading, with the immediate outcome shown by either position #6 or position #7 depending on which path the querent chooses to pursue. If a long-range projection of the consequences of the initial outcome is desired, positions #10 through #12 in the “active” chain or positions #13 through #15 in the “passive” chain can be read as a “story” describing future developments within the same theme. In keeping with its more forthright focus, the “active” extension is dominated by the presence of cards connected to expansive Jupiter: Temperance (home to the sign of Sagittarius, which Jupiter rules), the Wheel of Fortune by direct association, and the Chariot (which harbors Cancer, Jupiter's sign of exaltation); these cards imply an underlying emphasis on steady growth and forward momentum driven by the mental stimulus of Mercury issuing from position #6.

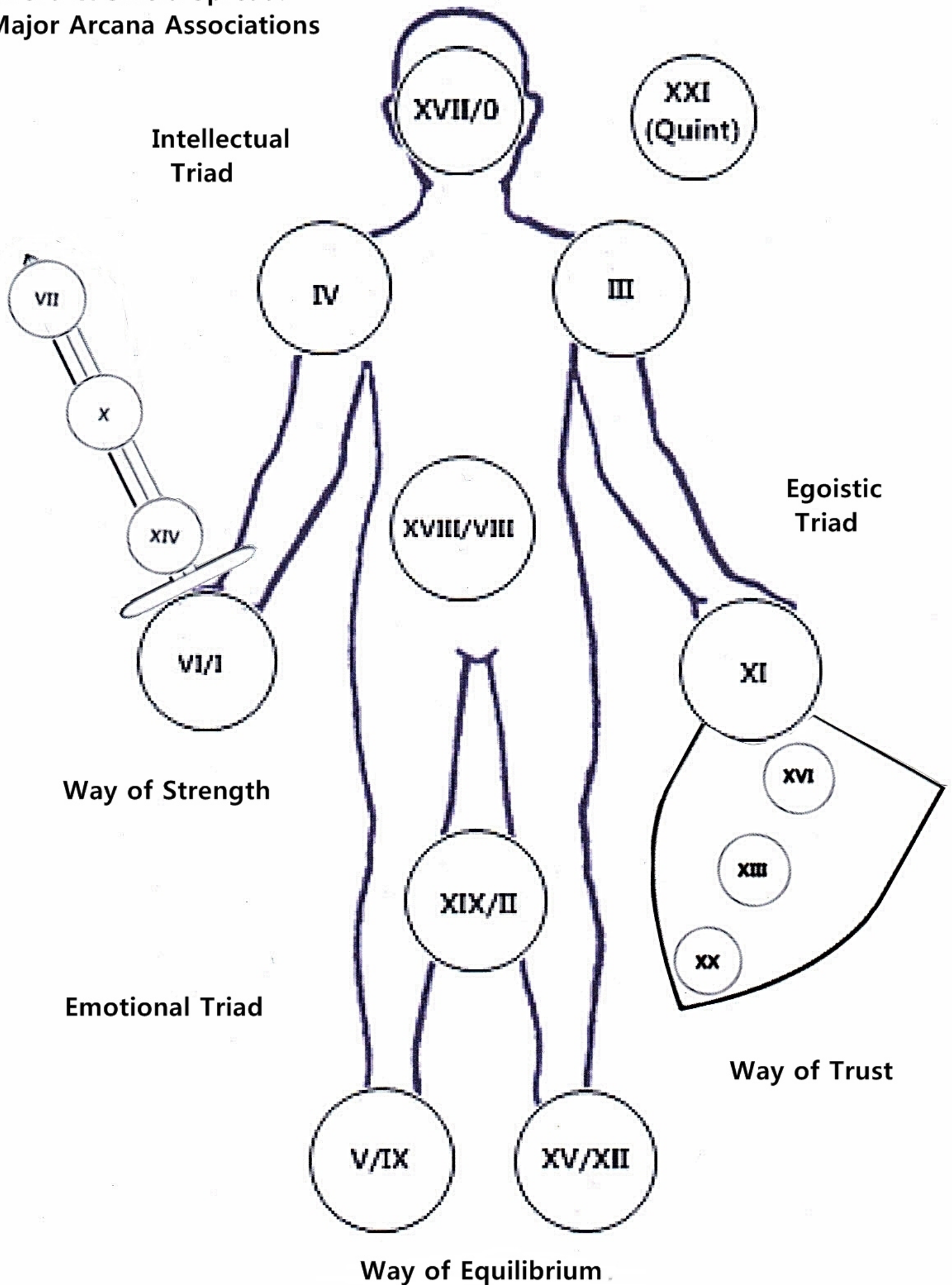
The more cautionary “passive” extension is imbued with the intensely energetic but unruly and unprincipled nature of fiery Mars: the catastrophic Tower by direct association, somber Death (its sign, Scorpio, is ruled by Mars), and redemptive Judgement, which partakes of the cleansing qualities of elemental Fire (and in some systems is assigned to volatile Uranus), which is entirely in accord with the often cathartic unpredictability of Mars (and Uranus). What stable growth there is would be by fits-and-starts, as if Mars never fully reconciled to the verdict handed down by Justice. It wants to go its own way, thereby representing a reactionary departure rather than a fully aligned, cooperative progression as was seen in the “active” case. Mars is unconvinced by Libra's dictates from position #7, so the implication is that Justice won't necessarily have the final say in the long-term result. That honor would be delegated to the “quintessence” card as described below.

Trump XXI, the World, is not represented within the theoretical model, and its unassigned position is populated by performing a “quintessence” calculation on the cards within the dominant outcome chain, as a “roll-up” summation of the series. The thought behind this is that the World is the ultimate “end of the matter” card and should not be relegated to either an “active” or “passive” role within the model; rather, it should stand apart and be available as an interpretive archetype in either case. Treating it as an axiomatic force unto itself, with appropriate input from the relevant chain, seems to be common sense.

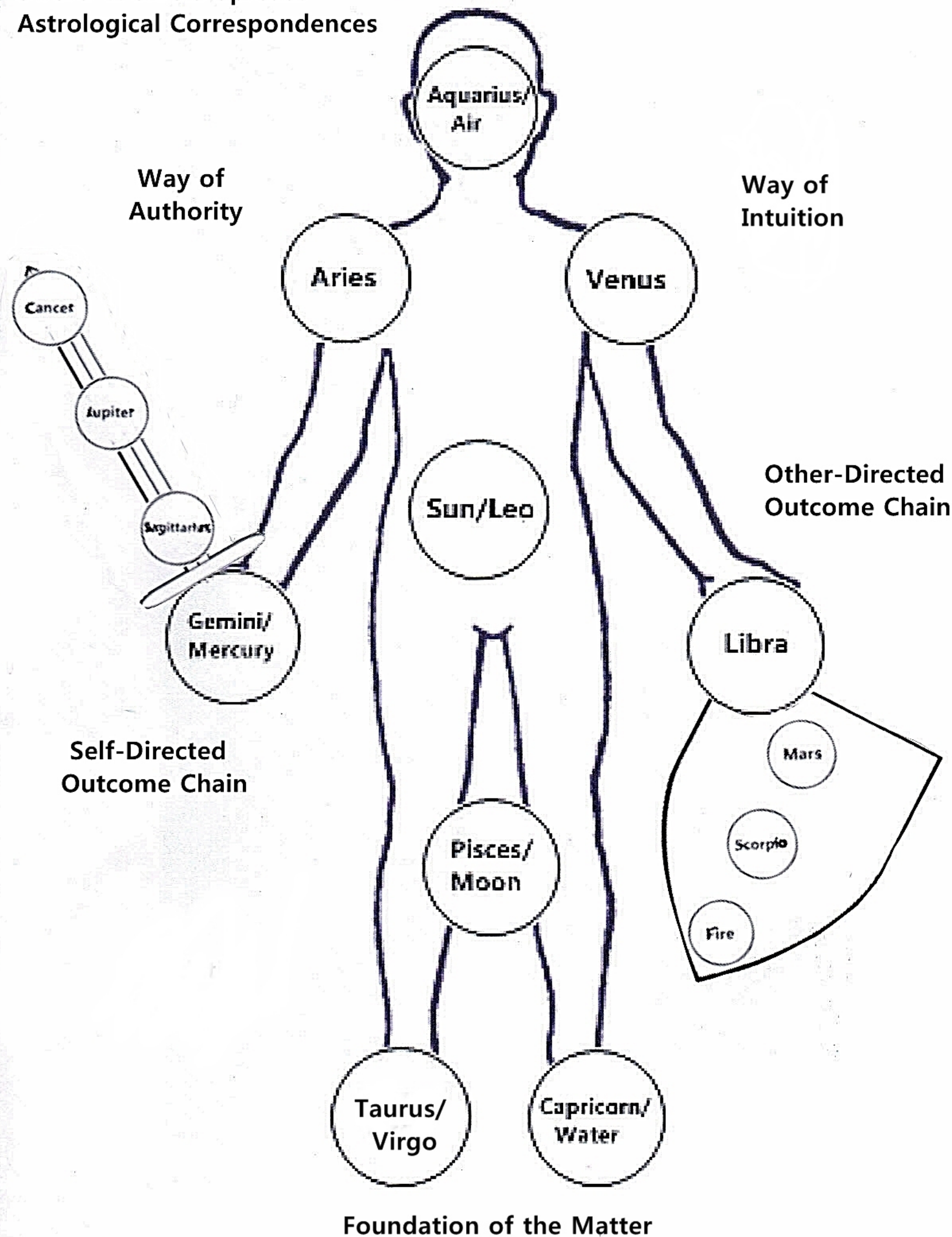
A “quint” card is a single Major Arcanum card derived through numerical manipulation of the numbers assigned to each of the cards in the target population. Trump card and minor card numbering is obvious, but court cards are unnumbered; some readers assign them the numbers 11 through 14 (Page through King), a practice that is recommended here. The card numbers are added together to arrive at a total and then reduced to obtain a number that falls within the range of 1 to 22, either by a process known as “numerological reduction,” in which the digits of the final number are added together and condensed (repeatedly if necessary), or by “casting out nines,” removing groups of 9 until the same result is achieved. The final step is to offer an analysis of the Trump card revealed by the derived number as a symbolic “last word” of high-level advice for the querent.

Since this operation can never reduce the outcome to zero, customary practice has been to assign the Fool to the number 22, where it was actually placed in some 19th century models. A newer wrinkle takes advantage of reversed cards in the spread by *subtracting* their numbers as part of the calculation, potentially arriving at zero (the Fool) or even a negative result which can be viewed as the “quint” card itself being reversed. This approach is also recommended since it allows the Fool to assume its modern place in the sequence of Major Arcana cards while also availing the reader of the enhanced scope of meaning represented by reversal.

Sword & Shield Spread: Major Arcana Associations



Sword & Shield Spread: Astrological Correspondences



**Sword & Shield Spread:
Court and Minor Cards**

