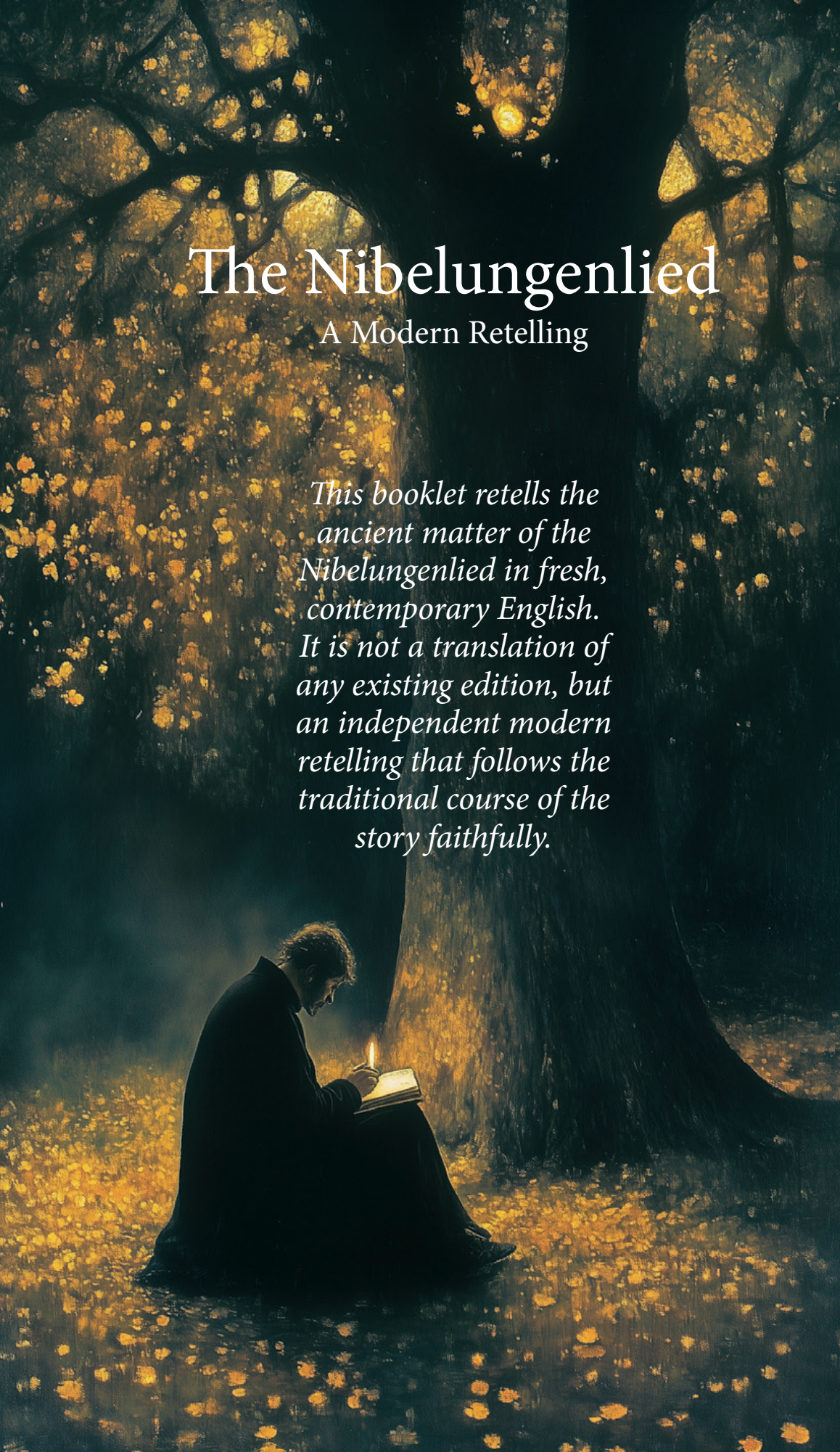
Nibelungen Tarot

Guidebook

The Nibelungenlied

A Modern Retelling

This booklet retells the ancient matter of the Nibelungenlied in fresh, contemporary English. It is not a translation of any existing edition, but an independent modern retelling that follows the traditional course of the story faithfully.



The King's Son from Xanten

On the Rhine, in the city of Worms, King Gunther ruled with his brothers Gernot and Giselher over the people of Burgundy. Their mother was Queen Ute, and their wisest counselor was the shrewd, unyielding Hagen of Tronje. Their sister Kriemhild was said to be the fairest woman of her age — so fair that heroes courted her fame before ever setting eyes on her.

Far to the north, in Xanten, Siegfried grew to manhood in those same years, son of King Siegmund and Queen Sieglinde. He was young, bold, of flawless bearing, and possessed of a strength that astonished even seasoned masters of arms. Once grown, he could no longer rest content within his father's safe halls. Something called him out into the world, to seek glory.

He too had heard of Kriemhild's beauty, and her image would not leave him. His parents warned him against the journey to Worms, for Gunther's court was powerful. But Siegfried would not be dissuaded. With a small, richly equipped company he set out for Worms, resolved either to win Kriemhild's hand or to prove himself in battle for her sake.

The Dragon and the Hoard

Before Siegfried ever came to Worms, he had already done deeds that carried his name far and wide. On an earlier journey he had encountered a terrible dragon laying waste to forests and villages. Siegfried slew it after a grim struggle and, on an old counsel, bathed in its blood. From that day his skin was hard as horn: no blade could pierce it — save for a single spot between his shoulders, where a linden leaf had fallen and left the skin unguarded. No one but he knew of this weakness.

On another journey, Siegfried had won the hoard of the Nibelungs: a treasure beyond measure in gold and gems, guarded by the dwarf brothers Schilbung and Nibelung, who had fallen out over its division, and by the cunning dwarf Alberich. Siegfried first tried to settle their quarrel, was then drawn into a fight over the treasure, and defeated Alberich as well, who yielded to him, in exchange for his life, a cloak of invisibility — a garment that rendered its wearer unseen and granted him the strength of twelve men besides his own.

So Siegfried came to Worms: a hero no blade could wound, master of a treasure without measure and a cloak beyond price — equipped with everything a man could wish for, and yet, unknowing, already carrying within him the seed of his own ruin.

Arrival in Worms

When Siegfried and his companions appeared before the gates of Worms, King Gunther sent his trusted Hagen of Tronje to receive the stranger. Hagen, shrewd and well-travelled, recognized Siegfried at once by his bearing and his armor, and told Gunther of his deeds: the slain dragon, the captured hoard, the cloak that rendered its wearer invisible. So the stranger was led to court with every honor.

Gunther welcomed him warmly, yet Siegfried, young and impetuous, first challenged him to single combat over land and crown. Only when Gernot and the courtiers intervened did he set his combativeness aside and accept the invitation to remain as guest and sworn companion at the court.

A year passed in which Siegfried fought at the side of the Burgundians and won admiration on every side. Yet Kriemhild, for whose sake he had truly come, he did not see even once in all that time, for the king's daughter lived, as custom demanded, within the inner chambers of the court. Siegfried bore this hardship with patience, hoping for an occasion yet to come.

Then messengers came from the Saxons and the Danes, threatening war. Gunther called his men to arms, and Siegfried offered to lead the Burgundian host. In two hard-fought battles he, together with Hagen and Gernot, overcame the enemy kings Lüdiger of Saxony and Lüdegast of Denmark, bringing the Burgundians

a splendid victory without taking any grave wound himself — a triumph that at last secured his renown in Worms.

Kriemhild and Siegfried

To celebrate the victory over Saxons and Danes, Gunther held a great court festival, to which princes from many lands were invited. So that Queen Ute and her daughter Kriemhild might grant the returning heroes due honor, Kriemhild was asked to step forth from her chambers and walk among the assembled knights — and so at last what Siegfried had silently hoped for through the long year came to pass: he beheld Kriemhild for the first time face to face, in a hall filled with candlelight and music.

Her beauty surpassed all he had imagined through long nights of longing. When she greeted him before all the guests with gracious words and offered her hand in token of honor, his face colored with joy and confusion, and for a moment the hero, usually so ready of speech, found none. In the days of feasting that followed he was permitted to walk at her side, to speak with her, to accompany her to Mass, and to enjoy her nearness, though no open word of love passed between them — and yet everyone at court who saw the two together, even for a moment, knew that something precious and irreversible had taken root between them.

Siegfried remained long in Worms, continuing to serve the Burgundian kings in friendship and unshaken loyalty, yet the true purpose of his journey — to win Kriemhild as his rightful wife — he still had not openly declared, for he lacked the proper occasion to speak before the assembled court. Then one day word reached Gunther of a queen across the sea, whose beauty nearly equaled Kriemhild's, but whose strength was without equal and of fearsome renown: Brünhild, Queen of Iceland.

The Wooing of Brünhild

Brünhild was no ordinary woman, but a ruler of superhuman, almost uncanny strength. Whoever wished to win her hand first had to defeat her in three perilous contests — a stone-throw, a long jump following that throw, and a spear-cast — and no suitor had yet succeeded. Whoever lost the contest lost his life as well, for such was the merciless condition Brünhild set for all who came to court her.

Gunther, inflamed by the report of her beauty and her wealth, resolved to woo her despite the danger, though he was by no means a match for her superhuman strength. In this predicament Siegfried offered to help him — on one clear condition: should the wooing succeed, Gunther in return would at last give him Kriemhild as his wife. Gunther, relieved and grateful, agreed at once.

Together with Hagen and his brother Dankwart, the four sailed across the sea to Iceland, where Siegfried, to conceal his true origin and power, passed himself off as nothing more than Gunther's vassal.

In the contests themselves, the true miracle of deception unfolded: Siegfried, hidden and unseen beneath his cloak of invisibility, stood close at Gunther's side and was in truth the one who hurled the heavy stones, leapt far beyond the mark, and cast the spear with tremendous force, while Gunther merely mimicked the outward motions of these feats of strength. So it appeared to Brünhild and her court that Gunther had overcome her in honest, open contest by his own power. Astonished, humbled, and stripped of the power that had defined her, Brünhild finally agreed to follow her supposed conqueror to Worms and become his wife there.

Two Weddings

The voyage back to Worms passed without mishap, the ships gliding home upon favorable winds, and on the Rhine a double wedding feast was prepared with great splendor: Gunther was to marry Brünhild, and Siegfried was at last to receive Kriemhild as his wife, exactly as had been promised him. When the two couples were brought together before the assembled guests amid music and rejoicing, Brünhild could not hold back her tears —

she had believed that a man of Gunther's rank would never give his own sister to a mere vassal, and the sight of the two side by side struck her as deeply wrong. A first shadow of doubt fell across her heart, though she could not yet say why.

On the wedding night, the full extent of the deception was revealed at last: Brünhild, who had lost nothing of her strength despite her apparent defeat in Iceland, resisted Gunther fiercely, bound him fast with her own girdle, and hung him from a hook in the chamber for the whole night, leaving him helpless until morning. Shamed and desperate, Gunther came to Siegfried again the next day and begged for his help once more, admitting that he could not master his own wife by his own strength.

The following night Siegfried crept, again hidden beneath the cloak of invisibility, into Gunther's chamber, overcame Brünhild in the darkness by his own great strength after a fierce struggle, and secretly took from her a ring and a girdle as tokens before yielding his place in the dark chamber to Gunther. Only after that night did Brünhild lose her superhuman strength for good and become an ordinary woman, subject to her husband like any other — without ever learning who had truly overcome her, or that it had happened twice.

The events of that night were not to remain hidden forever, for Siegfried, years later, carelessly gave the ring and the girdle to

Kriemhild, as a small and seemingly harmless gift between husband and wife — a gift that would later lead, through no fault of its own, to a catastrophe of the gravest consequence for them all.

Years of Peace

After the wedding, Siegfried and Kriemhild returned together to Siegfried's homeland, to Xanten in the Netherlands, where Siegfried's father Siegmund soon, in recognition of his son's many deeds, handed over to him the crown and rule of the land, retiring himself into a peaceful old age. There the two lived many happy years in honor and unclouded affection, ruling wisely together, and Kriemhild bore a son, whom they named Gunther, in honor of her Burgundian brother, a gesture of goodwill between the two houses. At the same time, in Worms, a son was also born to Brünhild and Gunther, whom they named Siegfried, in honor of their famous friend and in memory of the alliance that had brought them together.

The two royal households lived thereafter apart in distance, separated by many days' journey, and outwardly in peace, yet within Brünhild's heart no true rest was to be found, no matter how the years passed. She could not understand why Siegfried, whom she still believed to be nothing more than Gunther's vassal, never once came to the court at Worms to render the

service owed him by that rank, and why it was to him, of all men in the world, that the king's own royal sister had been given in marriage instead of to some prince of equal standing. This question gnawed unceasingly at her pride and gave her no peace, waking or sleeping.

At last she pressed her husband so long and so insistently that he agreed, if only for the sake of peace in his own household, to invite Siegfried and Kriemhild to a great and splendid feast at Worms, so that Brünhild might finally settle the matter once and for all in her own mind. Gunther, unwilling to endanger the hard-won peace between the two courts over what seemed to him a trivial question of rank, nonetheless sent messengers with a warm and sincere invitation to the Netherlands. Siegfried and Kriemhild, entirely unaware of the misfortune that truly lay hidden behind this friendly invitation, accepted gladly and set out with a stately retinue on the long road to the Rhine.

The Quarrel of the Queens

The feast at Worms was magnificent, with tournaments and music and gifts exchanged among the assembled nobility, and for several days all seemed to pass in perfect courtly harmony, with no hint of the storm gathering beneath the surface. But one evening, as the two queens stood together before the great cathedral, richly dressed, watching their husbands walk in solemn procession to the

service, the quarrel that had long smoldered in secret between them suddenly flared, needing only the smallest occasion to erupt into open conflict.

Brünhild declared stiffly that Siegfried was merely Gunther's vassal and must therefore yield precedence to the king, as befit a subject. Kriemhild, deeply wounded in her pride for her own noble and equal husband, objected fiercely and proclaimed loudly that Siegfried was by no means a subject, but in truth mightier than Gunther himself — and to prove these bold words, she went so far as to reveal the closely guarded secret of the first wedding night: that it had been Siegfried who had once secretly overcome Brünhild, and that she, Kriemhild, possessed the ring and the girdle as proof and keepsake.

Brünhild was utterly and irrevocably humiliated by this revelation. Exposed before the entire court as a betrayed and, in essence, conquered woman, she wept bitterly with shame and demanded satisfaction from her husband Gunther and from the loyal Hagen for the disgrace done to her. Hagen, who placed Gunther's honor and the standing of the royal house above all else, swore silently in that moment that Siegfried must pay for this grave insult with nothing less than his life. From that hour on he thought unceasingly of a treacherous way to kill the hero without ever letting suspicion openly fall upon the Burgundian royal family.

Hagen's Plan

Hagen knew that Siegfried could hardly ever be defeated in open, honest combat — his skin was as unyielding as hardened horn, his strength nearly superhuman. Only at that one carefully guarded spot between his shoulders, where the linden leaf had once fallen, could he be dealt a mortal wound at all. Yet this secret was known to no one but Siegfried himself and one other person: his wife Kriemhild.

With treacherous, carefully feigned kindness, Hagen won back Kriemhild's lost trust over the following days, pretending that he wished to shield Siegfried with special care in the war that supposedly threatened, and that for this he needed to know exactly where Siegfried might truly be in danger amid the chaos of battle. Kriemhild, in her complete innocence and out of pure, wifely concern for her husband, betrayed the fatal weak spot between his shoulders to Hagen without the slightest suspicion — and, so that Hagen might surely recognize it amid the heat of battle, sewed a small, inconspicuous mark of fine silk onto Siegfried's hunting garment, exactly over that fateful spot.

To create a credible pretext for his planned deed, Hagen spread a rumor of a supposedly renewed threat of war against the Saxons, and invited Siegfried, seemingly as one last cheerful diversion before the campaign, to an extended hunt in the dense Odenwald forest.

Siegfried, ever unsuspecting and ready for any service to a friend, agreed cheerfully and without the least foreboding — though Kriemhild, the night before, was troubled by heavy, dark premonitions and frightening dreams, and tried urgently to warn him, though entirely without success.

The Hunt in the Odenwald

Early the next morning a great and cheerful hunting party set out into the wide Odenwald forest, among them King Gunther, the grim Hagen, and the unsuspecting Siegfried, accompanied by numerous huntsmen, hawks, and hounds straining eagerly at their leashes. The day began like any other great hunt: Siegfried again proved by far the most skillful and strongest of all the hunters present, felling bears, wild boar, and even a lion over the course of the day, seemingly without effort and with inexhaustible, almost playful strength, so that the others could only watch in astonishment and murmur admiringly among themselves at each new feat.

When the hunters finally gathered for a well-earned midday rest beneath shady trees, laying out the game they had taken, Hagen complained with feigned surprise that in the haste of departure they had forgotten to bring wine down to the resting place, though casks of it stood cooling nearby, and proposed, seemingly innocent, a race to a nearby, cool spring to

see who among them could still outrun the rest despite the day's exertions. Siegfried, ever eager for any contest and sensing no danger in his friend's suggestion, ran ahead of the others still wearing his heavy hunting gear and reached the spring first, far before the rest, laughing at his own easy victory.

He waited there politely before drinking himself, patient until the king too had bent down to the water — one last, touching sign of his unshaken loyalty to the royal house he called friend, and of the trust that had never once wavered in him. But in that very decisive moment, as Siegfried bent unsuspecting deep over the clear water of the spring to drink, setting aside his sword and shield as no danger seemed near, Hagen seized from behind Siegfried's own discarded spear, aimed with a steady, cold hand precisely at the small silken mark between his shoulders, and drove it home with all the force he could summon.

The Death of Siegfried

The thrown spear pierced Siegfried exactly at the one vulnerable spot on his otherwise invulnerable body. Mortally struck, he leapt up once more with his last strength, and having no fitting weapon at hand but his shield, struck the treacherous Hagen down with it once more with all his remaining force, before all strength finally drained from his limbs. Bleeding, he collapsed among the bright flowers of the clearing.

With the last strength left to him, he cried out, dying, against the terrible betrayal that had just been done to him — not in open, honest combat, as befit a hero, but through cowardly treachery, carried out by a man he had always trusted as a loyal friend and almost as a brother. With a breaking voice he turned to Gunther and begged him urgently, despite all that had happened, never to cast Kriemhild aside, but to continue to grant her protection and honor at court. Then his voice fell silent, and the greatest, most glorious hero of his age was dead, in the bright sunlight of the forest.

The huntsmen carried his lifeless body back to Worms secretly, late in the night, and laid it, as if by chance, directly before Kriemhild's door, as though a supposed nocturnal attack by unknown robbers might conceal the true guilt. But when Kriemhild found her husband's dead body in the early morning, she knew at once, with terrible certainty, whose dark work this truly was. And when, at the open grave, the men of Burgundy passed in solemn procession before the body laid out for viewing, Siegfried's old wounds suddenly began to bleed anew the moment Hagen drew near — an ancient, unmistakable sign that put an end to every last doubt about the true perpetrator.

Kriemhild's Mourning

Kriemhild's grief over the loss of her husband knew no bounds. She had Siegfried buried in a magnificent, costly grave at Worms and remained, though her entire family tried to console her, at his side day and night, unable to grasp or come to terms with what had happened. Her brother Gunther, and even the otherwise so unyielding, cold Hagen, tried repeatedly in the years that followed to reconcile with her outwardly, yet Kriemhild suspected — indeed, in her heart already knew — who truly stood behind this treacherous murder, even if she did not yet speak it aloud.

After some time, Gunther finally managed to persuade her toward an outward reconciliation with the court, though this stemmed more from political necessity than from any true forgiveness on her part. Kriemhild remained thereafter, against her own true will, at the court in Worms, though at least the vast hoard of the Nibelungs, which Siegfried had once won and left to her as a bridal gift, was finally handed over to her in full — an immense wealth with which she now generously surrounded herself, deliberately winning new, devoted followers and friends at court to strengthen her own position.

Hagen soon recognized in Kriemhild's growing standing and influence a serious danger to the sole rule of the Burgundian royal family. With cold, calculating cunning he finally persuaded

Gunther to strip the entire treasure from her again, against her declared will. The precious hoard was thereupon seized from her and secretly sunk in the depths of the Rhine, at a spot known only to Hagen, so that Kriemhild could never find it again. Through this second betrayal she lost not only her husband, but also the last tangible legacy of his love for her — and her deep-seated hatred of Hagen grew unstoppably from that bitter day on, year after year.

Etzel's Suit

Years passed. Kriemhild lived as a widow in Worms, outwardly withdrawn, inwardly filled with a deep, silent bitterness she took great care to conceal from the world around her. Then word reached the mighty Hunnish king Etzel, far off in his own vast realm, of her beauty and her high rank, and since his first wife had died some years before, he sent his trusted vassal Rüdiger of Bechelaren all the way to Worms to formally court Kriemhild's hand on his behalf.

Kriemhild hesitated for a long time at first. To marry a second time seemed, given the weight of her grief and the years she had already spent mourning, almost unthinkable to her. But Rüdiger, a man of unimpeachable honor known and respected in many lands, promised her solemnly and with earnest words that at Etzel's mighty court she would receive every

honor and power a queen could wish for, and would want for nothing all her days — and in her deeply wounded heart, at these words, a thought gradually stirred that she at first revealed to no one: as the wife of the most powerful king in the known world, she would one distant day at last possess the means and the armies to take the long-overdue revenge for Siegfried's death.

She finally accepted Rüdiger's honorable suit and traveled with a great and richly laden retinue far into the land of the Huns, where King Etzel received her with immeasurable splendor and sincere affection and soon made her his wife before his assembled nobles. Before long she bore him a son, whom they named Ortlieb, and in the years that followed she was both highly honored and secretly feared as the mighty queen of the Huns, ruling at Etzel's side with quiet authority. Yet through all the years she spent at Etzel's court in seeming happiness, the gnawing thought of Siegfried's death and of Hagen's unforgiven betrayal never truly left her, no matter how far from the Rhine she had traveled.

The Invitation

After many years as queen of the Huns, Kriemhild finally set in motion the plan she had secretly prepared and turned over in her mind ever since her marriage to Etzel: she urged Etzel to invite her brothers and the assembled knighthood of Worms to a great and splendid

feast at his court, supposedly only to see her family again after so many years apart. Etzel, suspecting nothing of his wife's true intent, gladly sent messengers bearing rich gifts to the Rhine.

In Worms itself, the invitation stirred divided feelings. Gunther and Gernot were generally inclined to accept the honorable invitation and to honor the important alliance with the mighty Etzel. Hagen, however, warned in the clearest terms: he alone truly knew Kriemhild and knew that she had never, in all those years, truly forgiven the old betrayal of Siegfried. He therefore urgently advised against the journey to the land of the Huns. But the younger, impetuous knights, chief among them Giselher, openly accused him of cowardice in their recklessness, and, stung by wounded pride, Hagen finally declared himself ready, against his own better judgment, to risk the dangerous journey after all — not out of confidence in a good outcome, but only because he chose to face the looming danger without fear.

So at last a proud, splendidly equipped army of Burgundians set out, led by the three kings Gunther, Gernot, and Giselher, accompanied by the unbending Hagen, the young and valiant minstrel Volker with his famous fiddle, and many other brave knights — marching toward an unstoppable ruin, of which most of them had not the faintest notion.

The Journey to the Huns

On the long road to Etzel's court, the Burgundian army had to cross the broad, rushing Danube. On its bank they encountered mysterious water-women, who warned Hagen urgently: of all who now journeyed into the land of the Huns, only the accompanying chaplain would return alive; all the others were fated to die. Hagen, wishing to test the truth of this dark prophecy with his own eyes, secretly tried shortly afterward to drown the unsuspecting chaplain in the river — and indeed the devout cleric, though he himself could not swim, reached the saving shore unharmed as if by a miracle. From that moment Hagen knew with final certainty that their doom was sealed, yet he kept this knowledge from the others and led the army onward regardless.

Further along the road, the Burgundians were received with great hospitality by the noble margrave Rüdiger of Bechelaren. Rüdiger, a man of proverbial, unimpeachable honor, entertained his weary guests splendidly and, in his warmth, even betrothed his own daughter to young Giselher — a fateful alliance that would soon plunge him into a terrible, almost unresolvable crisis of conscience, for he was at the same time bound to Etzel by an old and solemn oath of loyalty.

When the exhausted army finally arrived at Etzel's splendid court, it was received at first with pointedly outward courtesy and great pomp.

Kriemhild, however, could barely conceal her deep-seated, long-nursed rage the moment she caught sight of Hagen among the arrivals, and at their very first meeting asked him openly whether he had happened to bring the stolen Nibelung hoard along with him — a barbed question that left no doubt that the old enmity between them remained, after all these years, entirely alive.

The First Clash

In the first days at Etzel's court, Kriemhild tried cautiously to gather support for the revenge she had secretly nursed for so long, sounding out one warrior after another, but even among the Huns, many seasoned fighters hesitated to rise openly against such renowned and honored guests. In the end, though, she succeeded in persuading her own brother-in-law Blödel, Etzel's younger brother, with the tempting promise of land and riches beyond his own modest holdings, to launch a treacherous attack on Hagen's brother Dankwart and his small retinue, who were dining apart from the kings in a distant hall of the palace, unaware of any danger. A bloody, merciless slaughter followed, in which, of the Burgundians present in that hall, only Dankwart survived, and, drenched in blood from head to foot, stormed into the great banquet hall where Gunther and the other kings sat with Etzel and Kriemhild at what had, until that moment, seemed a peaceful feast.

When Hagen learned from his brother, in a few breathless words, of the betrayal and the bloodshed already done, his long pent-up rage suddenly burst all bounds at once. Before the horrified eyes of everyone present, he drew his sword and, in blind fury, struck down little Ortlieb, the young son of Etzel and Kriemhild, right at the banquet table where the boy had been sitting between his parents — a deed of such unspeakable horror that in that single instant every last hope for a peaceful outcome was shattered forever, beyond any hope of repair. Within a few heartbeats the splendid hall, still strewn with the remains of the feast, turned into an outright battlefield: knight against knight, desperate Burgundians against vastly outnumbering Huns, amid the ruins of what had once been so grand and joyful a celebration.

The Battle in the Hall

What had begun as a feast the day before turned within the shortest span of time into one of the most terrible slaughters of the old heroic tales. The badly outnumbered Burgundians barricaded themselves desperately in the great hall, while Kriemhild and Etzel from outside relentlessly sent ever more warriors against those trapped within. Volker, the valiant fiddler, fought that night with his sword as fearlessly as he had once played with the bow of his fiddle, and Giselher and Gernot too performed feats of heroism that were sung of

long after their deaths. Kriemhild finally had the entire hall set ablaze, in the cruel hope that those trapped inside would perish in the flames. But the knights survived even this trial, pressing themselves against the walls and holding off the burning, collapsing timbers with their shields; with no water to be had, they quenched their thirst, in their extreme need, even with the blood of the fallen. The next morning, the survivors, utterly exhausted yet unbroken in spirit, rose once more to fight.

In this extreme distress, Kriemhild finally asked even her own loyal vassal Rüdiger, who through his earlier hospitality and his daughter's betrothal was closely bound to the Burgundians, to take up arms against them. Rüdiger, torn between his old oath of loyalty to Etzel and his true friendship with the guests, realized that whichever path he chose, he would lose his honor in the end, and resolved, with a heavy heart, to obey his liege lord. In the battle that followed, he fell at the hand of his friend Gernot, whom he himself had mortally wounded shortly before — both men died in the end by the very swords each had once given the other as a gift.

Dietrich's Warriors

When the noble Rüdiger had fallen at last, struck down by the very man he called friend, even Dietrich of Bern, who lived as an honored guest at the Hunnish court and had until then,

with great and deliberate effort, kept himself and his men entirely out of the bloody fighting consuming the hall, could no longer stand idly aside. His own warriors, chief among them the old and seasoned weapon-master Hildebrand, demanded in fury a reckoning for Rüdiger's death, with whom they had been bound in friendship for many years, and pressed into the hall against Dietrich's will to finally take up the fight against the Burgundians themselves. In this last, tremendous clash, nearly every warrior on both sides fell within a short time; of Dietrich's once so proud retinue, only old Hildebrand remained, bloodied and spent.

By the end of that terrible, fateful night, of the once so proud and seemingly unconquerable Burgundians, only two remained: King Gunther himself and the unbending Hagen of Tronje. Dietrich of Bern, who until the last had struggled desperately for a peaceful resolution, now finally stepped himself, sword drawn, into the ravaged hall, openly challenged the two last survivors to single combat, and overcame, only with great effort and at the very limit of his strength, first the exhausted Hagen and then Gunther as well. He took both captive rather than killing them outright, as he could easily have done, and finally handed them over to the waiting Kriemhild, in the sincere hope that she would now, since they were after all defeated and utterly defenseless, show them mercy and spare their lives.

Kriemhild's Revenge

But Kriemhild knew no mercy in that moment, however much she may once have longed for it in years past. She had the bound Hagen thrown at once into a dark dungeon and went herself, once more, in person, to ask him one final time where the sunken hoard of the Nibelungs lay hidden. Hagen told her, coldly and with utter defiance, that he had once sworn a solemn oath never to reveal the hoard's hiding place as long as even one of his rightful lords still lived — and since Gunther still lived at that hour, he would go on keeping silent, just as stubbornly as he had all the years before. At this, Kriemhild, in boundless, cold fury, had her own brother Gunther beheaded without hesitation, and carried the head herself, by the hair, down to Hagen in the dungeon, to prove to him with this terrible gesture, beyond all denial, that his last living lord was now truly dead.

Yet Hagen, defiant and proud to his very last breath, told her only that now no one left alive in the whole world, save himself and God alone, knew where the legendary treasure truly lay hidden, and that this final secret would now die with him forever. Seized by a raging, boundless despair and by hatred nursed for years without release, Kriemhild then took up with her own hands the famous sword of Siegfried, Balmung, which Hagen had once taken as bloody spoils of war, and with it struck off the head of the bound and utterly defenseless man herself, without anyone's help.

The End

This deed — a woman killing a bound, already defeated opponent with her own hands — struck everyone present with horror. Even among the Huns, who had until then served Kriemhild faithfully, outrage rose at such cruelty. Old Hildebrand, Dietrich's weapon-master, could not bear the sight: he declared it an unbearable disgrace that so great a hero as Hagen should have had to die at a woman's hand, drew his sword, and struck Kriemhild down on the spot.

So, in that same night, ended the last survivors of a story that had once begun with the love between Siegfried and Kriemhild: betrayal had followed betrayal, revenge had followed revenge, until of the once so glorious courts at Worms and in the land of the Huns scarcely more than grief and ruin remained. Etzel and Dietrich of Bern, who both survived, were left standing amid the dead, with no answer to the question of how love, pride, and a single betrayal could have grown into so vast a catastrophe. So ends the old tale, which to this day speaks of the impermanence of all splendor and of the inescapability of fate.

This retelling is an original modern narrative based on the story of the medieval Nibelungenlied and on public-domain classical sources; it is not a translation of any protected modern edition.

Major Arcana

0 – The Fool
Siegfried the Innocent

Element/Astrology: *Air / Uranus*

UPRIGHT: Beginnings, innocence, spontaneity, free spirit

REVERSED: Recklessness, naivety, holding back, poor judgment

Classic Meaning: The Fool marks a leap of faith — new beginnings taken with innocence, spontaneity, and total trust in the unknown.

Nibelungen Context: Siegfried steps out from Xanten into a world he cannot yet read — bold, carefree, and fated, unaware of the betrayal that waits at its end.

Lore: The young Siegfried leaves Xanten with little more than his sword and the courage of the naive. The world lies before him like an open song — full of wonders, dangers, and unforeseen trials. He does not yet know betrayal or death. Every step is a leap into myth.

Description: Siegfried strides away from Xanten with a fearless smile, golden cloak catching the wind. Dragon scales rest in his satchel, forest creatures gather at his feet, and a white falcon circles above — innocence and destiny moving as one.

I – The Magician
Mime the Smith

Element/Astrology: *Air / Mercury*

UPRIGHT: Manifestation, skill, resourcefulness, focused will

REVERSED: Manipulation, scattered energy, untapped talent, trickery

Classic Meaning: The Magician concentrates knowledge, tools, and disciplined will to turn a possibility into a deliberate act of creation.

Nibelungen Context: Hidden beneath the forest, Mime works as both maker and watcher, making his skill a force whose purpose is not entirely open.

Lore: Deep beneath the forest roots, Mime strikes his iron. He knows the secrets of smithing and survival — but his knowledge is not free from guile. From his fire arises Siegfried's sword, but also the seed of distrust. Knowledge given is never without cost.

Description: Deep in a forest forge, the dwarf-smith raises a hammer over a glowing sword on an ancient anvil. Runes, magical tools, dragon bones, and alchemical scrolls surround the firelit workspace, while Mime watches Siegfried from concealment.

II – The High Priestess
Brünhild in Isenstein

Element/Astrology: *Water / Moon*

UPRIGHT: Intuition, mystery, hidden knowledge, inner wisdom

REVERSED: Secrets, confusion, blocked intuition, withdrawal

Classic Meaning: The High Priestess counsels stillness and intuition, inviting understanding through what remains veiled rather than what is plainly declared.

Nibelungen Context: On her mountain fortress, Brünhild's distant gaze turns access to her presence into a test of patience and perception.

Lore: In Isenstein, Brünhild reigns as guardian of ancient knowledge and hidden powers. Her silence is no weakness but a trial. Between veil and sword lies her truth — a truth only the worthy may see. In her withdrawal lies the secret of the ancestors.

Description: Brünhild sits alone on a stone throne atop a misty mountain fortress, a partial veil drawn across her face. Ancient scrolls, burning torches, moon emblems, and runes surround her as icy wind moves through the silence.

III – The Empress
Ute of Burgundy

Element/Astrology: *Earth / Venus*

UPRIGHT: Nurturing, abundance, creativity, maternal strength

REVERSED: Dependence, neglect, creative block, smothering

Classic Meaning: The Empress embodies fertile care, creative abundance, and the sustaining strength that protects growth without needing to command by force.

Nibelungen Context: From the balcony of Worms, Ute's attentive bearing frames her as a watchful mother within a royal house shaped by lineage.

Lore: Ute, the queen mother, rules not with the sword but with heart and wisdom. She is root and guard alike — keeper of the family, voice of measure amid the frenzy of power. In her hands lies the quiet balance between becoming and passing away.

Description: Queen Ute stands on a balcony of Worms castle amid roses and silver embroidery, holding a spindle and a letter. Vines wind behind her in patterns of ancestry and destiny, softening the strength of her watchful posture.

IV – The Emperor
King Gunther of Burgundy

Element/Astrology: *Fire / Aries*

UPRIGHT: Authority, structure, leadership, protection

REVERSED: Tyranny, rigidity, domination, poor leadership

Classic Meaning: The Emperor establishes order through authority, responsibility, and clear boundaries, asking power to serve stability rather than mere control.

Nibelungen Context: Seated at Worms among advisers and knights, Gunther presents rule as a public burden that demands loyalty as well as command.

Lore: Gunther, ruler of Burgundy, bears the burden of his kingdom on his shoulders. He strives for power and order, struggles with pride and responsibility. His will shapes the fate of his people.

Description: King Gunther sits on a mighty throne in Worms castle, dressed in royal armor marked with heraldic symbols. Advisers and knights gather around him while subtle emblems of rulership glow behind his stern, commanding gaze.

V – The Hierophant
Volker von Alzey

Element/Astrology: *Earth / Taurus*

UPRIGHT: Tradition, guidance, spiritual wisdom, shared values

REVERSED: Dogma, conformity, rebellion, outdated beliefs

Classic Meaning: The Hierophant represents inherited teaching and trusted guidance, showing how ritual, custom, and counsel can give a community its moral shape.

Nibelungen Context: Before noble guests, Volker‘s harp gives his guidance a ceremonial form, joining the authority of counsel to the memory held in song.

Lore: Volker, the wandering minstrel and advisor, bridges the old rites and sacred traditions. His music is wisdom and solace, his counsel a thread connecting past and future.

Description: Volker von Alzey plays a harp in a grand hall filled with noble guests. Sacred symbols are embroidered on his robes, and colored light through stained glass falls across the scene of ancient ceremony.

VI – The Lovers
Siegfried and Kriemhild

Element/Astrology: *Air / Gemini*

UPRIGHT: Love, union, harmony, choice

REVERSED: Imbalance, disharmony, misalignment, broken trust

Classic Meaning: The Lovers speak of wholehearted union and a choice made in alignment with one's deepest values, where intimacy and responsibility meet.

Nibelungen Context: Beneath their rose-wreathed arch, Siegfried and Kriemhild are shown in a private moment whose tenderness stands against the larger forces around them.

Lore: The pure and passionate bond between Siegfried and Kriemhild is the heart of their fate. Love is both their salvation and their tragedy — a sacred union blessed and cursed by the gods.

Description: Siegfried and Kriemhild embrace beneath a golden arch entwined with roses. Soft light surrounds them as they hold each other's gaze, with delicate emblems of union and destiny arranged around the pair.

VII – The Chariot
Siegfried‘s Triumphant Ride

Element/Astrology: *Water / Cancer*

UPRIGHT: Determination, victory, willpower, momentum

REVERSED: Lack of control, aggression, obstacles, defeat

Classic Meaning: The Chariot is disciplined momentum: opposing forces are directed by resolve, allowing ambition to move decisively through resistance.

Nibelungen Context: In the surge of his ride across the battlefield, Siegfried‘s white steed and shining armor make forward motion the dominant image of the scene.

Lore: Siegfried rides victorious, unstoppable and resolute. His chariot is the triumph of will, conquest over obstacles, and the unstoppable force of destiny.

Description: Siegfried rides a magnificent white steed through a battlefield, his golden armor bright beneath flying banners. Dragons and runes ornament his chariot as wind drives the whole scene forward in a rush of movement.

VIII – Justice
Hagen von Tronje

Element/Astrology: *Air / Libra*

UPRIGHT: Justice, truth, accountability, fairness

REVERSED: Unfairness, dishonesty, avoidance, imbalance

Classic Meaning: Justice demands clear sight, accountability, and an honest weighing of consequences, reminding us that every decision carries its due result.

Nibelungen Context: Standing beside the calm Rhine with sword in hand, Hagen gives the card an image of judgment that is firm, impersonal, and impossible to evade.

Lore: Hagen is the iron guardian of order and justice, even when harsh and relentless. His verdicts are final — shaping life and death in the name of law.

Description: Hagen von Tronje stands sternly beside the Rhine, holding a sword as the river flows calmly behind him. Scales of justice appear in the background, balancing against his unwavering expression.

IX – The Hermit
Walther von der Vogelweide

Element/Astrology: *Earth / Virgo*

UPRIGHT: Solitude, introspection, guidance, inner wisdom

REVERSED: Isolation, loneliness, withdrawal, lost direction

Classic Meaning: The Hermit withdraws from noise to seek a guiding truth, finding wisdom through reflection, patience, and a quieter kind of attention.

Nibelungen Context: Beneath an oak in autumn, Walther‘s solitary act of writing makes poetry the visible companion of his search for insight.

Lore: Walther withdraws into silence to find deepest wisdom. His verses are bridges to inner truth, his life a quiet path to insight.

Description: Walther von der Vogelweide sits alone beneath a grand oak tree, writing by candlelight. Autumn leaves swirl around him while a soft glow picks out the stillness of his contemplative shelter.

X – Wheel of Fortune
The Nibelungen Wheel

Element/Astrology: *Fire / Jupiter*

UPRIGHT: Change, destiny, turning point, opportunity

REVERSED: Resistance, bad luck, delays, loss of control

Classic Meaning: The Wheel of Fortune marks the turning of circumstance, where change arrives beyond personal control and invites a new response to fate.

Nibelungen Context: The heroes are placed directly upon the wheel's moving spokes, so individual lives appear caught within a vast motion of light, storm, and change.

Lore: The wheel of fate turns endlessly and mercilessly. Heroes rise and fall — their destinies intertwined with cosmic forces. Everything is change and eternal cycles.

Description: A giant ornate wheel carved with runes and dragons turns beneath a stormy sky. Heroes appear along its spokes as light and shadow travel across the wheel's richly worked surface.

XI – Strength
Kriemhild‘s Inner Power

Element/Astrology: *Fire / Leo*

UPRIGHT: Courage, patience, compassion, inner strength

REVERSED: Self-doubt, weakness, impatience, insecurity

Classic Meaning: Strength is calm courage rather than force, mastering fear through patience, compassion, resilience, and confidence in one‘s inner resources.

Nibelungen Context: In a garden where roses grow beside thorns, Kriemhild‘s composed stance beside the lion turns endurance into a distinctly personal presence.

Lore: Kriemhild bears the strength of a lioness in her heart. Despite pain and betrayal, she holds courage and fierce determination. Her power is gentle yet unbreakable.

Description: Kriemhild stands resolutely in a garden of roses and thorns with a lion at her side. Golden light surrounds her fierce yet compassionate gaze, warming the flowers and the animal‘s mane.

XII – The Hanged Man
The Sacrifice of Sigune

Element/Astrology: *Water / Neptune*

UPRIGHT: Surrender, new perspective, sacrifice, pause

REVERSED: Stagnation, resistance, martyrdom, indecision

Classic Meaning: The Hanged Man asks for a willing pause and a changed perspective, showing that release and sacrifice can make room for insight.

Nibelungen Context: Suspended from the sacred tree in twilight, Sigune is presented in stillness rather than struggle, with closed eyes amid the glowing runes.

Lore: Sigune‘s sacrifice is the surrender that brings new vision. In letting go, she gains the wisdom that transcends pain and reveals hidden truths.

Description: Sigune hangs upside down from a sacred tree in the twilight, her eyes closed in serene acceptance. Softly glowing runes circle her suspended figure against the dim branches and evening air.

XIII – Death
The End of Siegfried

Element/Astrology: *Water / Scorpio*

UPRIGHT: Transformation, endings, release, renewal

REVERSED: Resistance, stagnation, fear of change, unfinished grief

Classic Meaning: Death closes a necessary chapter and clears the ground for transformation, teaching that release is the threshold through which renewal enters.

Nibelungen Context: At the Rhine‘s edge, the broken sword and fading flowers place Siegfried‘s fallen form within a scene of solemn finality.

Lore: The inevitable end arrives with dignity. Siegfried‘s death marks the passage from heroism to legend, from life to eternity. In every end, a new beginning is hidden.

Description: Siegfried lies fallen by the edge of the Rhine beside a broken sword. Fading flowers and deep shadows frame the quiet scene in a restrained palette of melancholy and reverence.

XIV – Temperance
Hagen and Kriemhild‘s Conflict

Element/Astrology: *Fire / Sagittarius*

UPRIGHT: Balance, moderation, patience, harmony

REVERSED: Excess, imbalance, conflict, impatience

Classic Meaning: Temperance seeks a measured blending of opposites, asking for patience, moderation, and the practical harmony that prevents extremes from ruling.

Nibelungen Context: The space between Hagen and Kriemhild is filled with water and flowers, making their face-to-face encounter appear poised on a fragile visual balance.

Lore: Between power and mercy, revenge and forgiveness, the Burgundians‘ hearts sway. Temperance is hard but necessary to prevent downfall. Balance is fragile as glass.

Description: Hagen and Kriemhild face one another amid flowing water and delicate flowers. Firelike warmth and icy tones meet across the scene, held in a tense, fragile harmony.

XV – The Devil
Alberich the Dwarf

Element/Astrology: *Earth / Capricorn*

UPRIGHT: Bondage, temptation, materialism, shadow self

REVERSED: Liberation, release, reclaiming power, breaking patterns

Classic Meaning: The Devil exposes the attachments and desires that bind us, confronting the seductive pull of power, possession, and fearful dependence.

Nibelungen Context: In the depths of his treasure-filled cave, Alberich stands amid visible riches whose dark atmosphere makes possession feel enclosing rather than free.

Lore: Alberich symbolizes temptation, greed, and dark power. His influence is alluring but binds the soul in chains. He warns of the price of power paid with freedom.

Description: Alberich stands in a subterranean cave crowded with treasure and magical shadows. A dark aura gathers around the dwarf, casting both gleaming metal and rough stone into a seductive, threatening glow.

XVI – The Tower
The Fall of Burgundy

Element/Astrology: *Fire / Mars*

UPRIGHT: Upheaval, revelation, sudden change, collapse

REVERSED: Avoided disaster, fear of change, delayed upheaval, rebuilding

Classic Meaning: The Tower brings a shocking break in false security, exposing what cannot stand and forcing a painful but clarifying awakening.

Nibelungen Context: The destruction is fixed in the heart of Worms itself, where fleeing faces and a lightning-struck tower make catastrophe immediate and public.

Lore: The mighty tower falls in fire and ruin. Pride and betrayal bring swift ruin. From destruction comes harsh awakening — the shattering of illusions.

Description: Worms castle collapses in flames and smoke as lightning strikes its tower. Shocked figures flee beneath the falling structure, surrounded by fire, debris, and a sky choked with chaos.

XVII – The Star
The Hope of the Survivors

Element/Astrology: *Air / Aquarius*

UPRIGHT: Hope, healing, renewal, inspiration

REVERSED: Despair, discouragement, disconnection, lost faith

Classic Meaning: The Star restores faith after hardship, offering healing, renewal, and a clear guiding light for the path that follows devastation.

Nibelungen Context: Along the quiet Rhine, the survivors turn their faces upward, while lilies at the water‘s edge give the scene a gentle, living foreground.

Lore: After devastation, hope shines like a bright star in the night. The survivors look to new beginnings and healing — a promise that life endures beyond loss.

Description: A radiant star shines above the Rhine and reflects in calm water below. Survivors gaze upward among lilies and smaller stars, their figures held in a cool, luminous night landscape.

XVIII – The Moon
Mystery and Fate

Element/Astrology: *Water / Pisces*

UPRIGHT: Illusion, intuition, uncertainty, the subconscious

REVERSED: Clarity, released fear, deception, confusion

Classic Meaning: The Moon leads through uncertainty, dreams, and shifting appearances, asking intuition to navigate what the rational eye cannot yet resolve.

Nibelungen Context: The dark forest and river become a nocturnal maze, with shadowed figures and wolves creating a path whose direction remains obscured.

Lore: The moon reveals and conceals, casting shadows of doubt and guiding through the unknown. Fate‘s mysteries are not meant for the clear eye but the patient heart.

Description: Eerie moonlight falls across a dark forest and river while shadowy figures move beneath the trees. Wolves howl in the distance, and uncertain paths disappear into the pale light and heavy darkness.

XIX – The Sun
The Glory of Victory

Element/Astrology: *Fire / Sun*

UPRIGHT: Joy, success, vitality, clarity

REVERSED: Delayed success, pessimism, low vitality, clouded joy

Classic Meaning: The Sun brings open joy, confidence, and vitality, illuminating achievement with the warmth of clarity, shared celebration, and renewed life.

Nibelungen Context: The victorious knights, blooming flowers, and playing children gather beneath one sunrise, making the battlefield appear transformed by daylight.

Lore: The sun crowns the day with triumph and joy. Light banishes darkness, and the future shines bright. Victory brings life and warmth to the world.

Description: A golden sun rises over a battlefield and shines on victorious knights. Blooming flowers brighten the ground while children play in the warm light of the new day.

XX – Judgement
The Reckoning at the Rhine

Element/Astrology: *Fire / Pluto*

UPRIGHT: Reckoning, awakening, renewal, absolution

REVERSED: Self-doubt, avoidance, harsh judgment, denial

Classic Meaning: Judgement is a call to awaken, review the past honestly, and answer for it, opening the possibility of renewal through clear recognition.

Nibelungen Context: At the Rhine, figures rise from the water beneath trumpeting angels and balanced scales, turning the riverbank into a scene of public reckoning.

Lore: The final reckoning calls all souls to account. Past deeds come to light; truth is laid bare. Redemption or ruin await — the end is also a new beginning.

Description: Figures rise from the Rhine's waters with faces lifted in awe. Angels blow trumpets above them while balanced scales hover overhead in a solemn vision of light, water, and gathered souls.

XXI – The World
The Legacy of the Nibelungs

Element/Astrology: *Earth / Saturn*

UPRIGHT: Completion, unity, fulfillment, integration

REVERSED: Incompletion, lack of closure, stagnation, unfinished business

Classic Meaning: The World completes a long cycle in wholeness, integrating its lessons into a finished pattern and opening a mature sense of belonging.

Nibelungen Context: The saga is held as a single woven image, with the world tree at its center and every heroic figure drawn into the same enclosing design.

Lore: The saga comes full circle — the legacy of heroes, love, betrayal, and fate is woven into the fabric of the world. Completion and unity are reached through the eternal story of the Nibelungs.

Description: A grand tapestry shows Nibelungen heroes and legends entwined in an eternal dance around a central world tree. Golden patterns flow outward across the woven surface, uniting the figures in a complete ornamental design.

Minor Arcana
Suit of Cups

Ace of Cups
Kriemhild‘s Awakening

Element/Astrology: *Water (Cups)*

UPRIGHT: New love, emotional awakening, openness, intuition

REVERSED: Blocked emotions, missed connection, emptiness

Classic Meaning: The Ace of Cups overflows with fresh emotional beginnings, an open heart ready to receive love in its purest form.

Nibelungen Context: In a garden of roses, young Kriemhild first feels the stirring of love that will one day reshape her entire fate.

Lore: Kriemhild holds a radiant cup in a rose garden, the beginning of emotional awakening.

Description: Kriemhild stands among blooming roses, cradling a golden cup that glows faintly with inner light. Delicate Art Nouveau vines curl around her figure, framing a moment of tender, romantic promise.

Two of Cups
Sacred Union

Element/Astrology: *Water (Cups)*

UPRIGHT: Partnership, mutual attraction, harmony, commitment

REVERSED: Imbalance, separation, tension, broken trust

Classic Meaning: The Two of Cups signifies a reciprocal bond in which affection, trust, and emotional understanding flow equally between two people.

Nibelungen Context: Kriemhild and Siegfried's shared gesture gives their fated unity a private, harmonious form, even as destiny will bind love to loss.

Lore: Two hearts meet—Kriemhild and Siegfried form an unbreakable bond.

Description: In a secluded garden, Kriemhild and Siegfried face one another and exchange ornate cups. Delicate vines climb around them, while floral motifs and flowering plants fill the intimate green setting.

Three of Cups
Celebration at Court

Element/Astrology: *Water (Cups)*

UPRIGHT: Celebration, friendship, community, shared joy

REVERSED: Isolation, overindulgence, gossip, strained friendships

Classic Meaning: The Three of Cups celebrates the warmth of friendship, communal support, and the happiness created when affection is freely shared.

Nibelungen Context: The Burgundian court is shown at a pause of trust and fellowship, a bright social moment whose fragility belongs to the larger tragedy.

Lore: Joy in the rose garden—the women of court share celebration and trust.

Description: Three noble ladies stand in a rose garden with their cups lifted high. Their laughter is set amid rich courtly ornament, blooming flowers, and festive details that crowd the sunny scene.

Four of Cups
Withdrawal

Element/Astrology: *Water (Cups)*

UPRIGHT: Apathy, contemplation, discontent, missed opportunity

REVERSED: Reengagement, awareness, acceptance, renewed interest

Classic Meaning: The Four of Cups portrays emotional weariness and inward reflection, warning that a needed offer or possibility may go unnoticed.

Nibelungen Context: Kriemhild's refusal turns the card's closed heart into an image of grief narrowing her view, leaving new hope beyond her attention.

Lore: She turns away—Kriemhild rejects what is offered.

Description: Kriemhild sits alone beneath a tree, her body angled away from a single cup extended by an unseen hand. The quiet ground, shaded branches, and her withdrawn pose create a sparse, melancholy image.

Five of Cups
Mourning

Element/Astrology: *Water (Cups)*

UPRIGHT: Grief, loss, regret, disappointment

REVERSED: Acceptance, healing, forgiveness, moving forward

Classic Meaning: The Five of Cups acknowledges sorrow and regret after loss, while suggesting that not every source of comfort has disappeared.

Nibelungen Context: Beside Siegfried's tomb, Kriemhild's mourning gives the card's grief its irreversible weight and lets sorrow become the ground from which vengeance grows.

Lore: At Siegfried's grave, the cups lie shattered—loss reigns.

Description: Kriemhild kneels beside Siegfried's tomb in deep mourning. Spilled wine darkens the ground among overturned cups, while the grave and broken vessels dominate the sorrowful scene.

Six of Cups
Remembrance

Element/Astrology: *Water (Cups)*

UPRIGHT: Nostalgia, childhood, innocence, happy memories

REVERSED: Stagnation, living in the past, immaturity, idealization

Classic Meaning: The Six of Cups returns to childhood memory, tenderness, and the simple joy of familiar bonds that shape the heart.

Nibelungen Context: The young Kriemhild and her brothers place this remembered innocence before the tale's later sorrow, making family joy a luminous contrast to what follows.

Lore: A return to innocent days—the past remembered through joy.

Description: Young Kriemhild and her brothers gather in a blooming courtyard as children play with small golden cups. Flowers surround the open space, giving the family group a bright and nostalgic setting.

Seven of Cups
Illusion

Element/Astrology: *Water (Cups)*

UPRIGHT: Illusion, fantasy, choices, temptation

REVERSED: Clarity, focus, realistic choices, resolve

Classic Meaning: The Seven of Cups presents alluring possibilities and asks for discernment when desire, fantasy, and temptation obscure a clear choice.

Nibelungen Context: Before Kriemhild, visions of love, power, wealth, and revenge turn the card's many options into a perilous emotional reckoning.

Lore: Temptation surrounds—visions of power, love, and revenge shimmer before her.

Description: Kriemhild faces seven floating cups, each carrying a distinct vision: Siegfried, a crown, a serpent, fire, gold, vengeance, or a rose. The suspended cups surround her in a shimmering, dreamlike field of images.

Eight of Cups
Departure

Element/Astrology: *Water (Cups)*

UPRIGHT: Letting go, departure, search, emotional withdrawal

REVERSED: Avoidance, fear of change, aimlessness, returning

Classic Meaning: The Eight of Cups marks the difficult decision to leave an unfulfilling emotional situation and seek a more meaningful path.

Nibelungen Context: Kriemhild's solitary departure shows the classic act of release darkened by sorrow, with the road ahead leading away from emotional fulfillment and toward revenge.

Lore: She walks away—leaving what no longer fills her soul.

Description: Cloaked in sorrow, Kriemhild turns her back on a row of cups and walks into the distance. A stormy horizon opens beyond her, while the abandoned vessels remain in the foreground.

Nine of Cups
Dream of Love

Element/Astrology: *Water (Cups)*

UPRIGHT: Wish fulfillment, contentment, pleasure, satisfaction

REVERSED: Dissatisfaction, indulgence, disappointment, empty wishes

Classic Meaning: The Nine of Cups is the card of a cherished wish fulfilled, bringing pleasure, emotional comfort, and a sense of personal abundance.

Nibelungen Context: In Kriemhild's moonlit chamber, the card's satisfaction survives only as a dream of Siegfried, held close by memory after she has been wounded.

Lore: In her dreams, he still lives. Her heart, though wounded, glows with memory.

Description: Kriemhild rests in a chamber of velvet and moonlight, dreaming of Siegfried. Nine cups glow around her, their light catching the soft fabrics and deep shadows of the room.

Ten of Cups
Fulfillment

Element/Astrology: *Water (Cups)*

UPRIGHT: Harmony, family, lasting happiness, emotional fulfillment

REVERSED: Broken harmony, family conflict, disconnection, shattered dreams

Classic Meaning: The Ten of Cups represents enduring emotional harmony, loving family bonds, and the shared happiness of a life made whole.

Nibelungen Context: Kriemhild among her kin gives this image of complete belonging the poignancy of a brief perfection, poised just before the fall named by the tale.

Lore: For one shining moment, all was harmony.

Description: In the Burgundian court, Kriemhild stands surrounded by her family in a peaceful gathering. An arch of ten golden cups rises above the kin, framing the ordered courtly scene.

Page of Cups
Giselher

Element/Astrology: *Water (Cups)*

UPRIGHT: Sensitivity, sincerity, creative intuition, new feelings

REVERSED: Naivety, emotional immaturity, escapism

Classic Meaning: The Page of Cups carries a message of the heart, a young and open spirit exploring love, art, and intuition without cynicism.

Nibelungen Context: Giselher, youngest of the Burgundian princes, still believes in good faith and gentle bonds untouched by the coming tragedy.

Lore: Giselher is the embodiment of youthful sincerity. His gentle nature reflects the pure heart that seeks connection and believes in the good.

Description: Giselher stands by a calm river holding a delicate cup, roses at his feet and soft waves catching the light. His dreamy gaze looks toward a hopeful, still-unwritten future.

Knight of Cups
Gunther

Element/Astrology: *Water (Cups)*

UPRIGHT: Romance, charm, idealism, emotional pursuit

REVERSED: Moodiness, deception, disappointment, unrealistic ideals

Classic Meaning: The Knight of Cups follows the heart with grace and imagination, bringing an invitation, a romantic pursuit, or a diplomatic quest for emotional truth.

Nibelungen Context: Gunther‘s careful ride turns the knight‘s idealism into a ruler‘s dilemma, as dignity and heartfelt desire remain tempered by restraint and duty.

Lore: Gunther pursues love and recognition with dignity, yet his path is shaped by restraint and duty.

Description: King Gunther rides a white horse through a flowering field in ceremonial armor. He holds a silver cup with care as blossoms spread around the horse and his composed, noble figure.

Queen of Cups
Ute

Element/Astrology: *Water (Cups)*

UPRIGHT: Compassion, intuition, empathy, emotional depth

REVERSED: Insecurity, emotional overwhelm, martyrdom, dependence

Classic Meaning: The Queen of Cups offers compassionate understanding and deep intuition, holding steady emotional space for others with receptive wisdom.

Nibelungen Context: Ute‘s quiet presence makes the queenly archetype a source of Burgundian strength, nurturing her family through care rather than command.

Lore: Ute is the quiet wellspring of strength within the Burgundian family. Her intuition nurtures those around her with calm presence and deep care.

Description: Queen Ute sits in a richly decorated Burgundian chamber, pressing a golden cup close to her heart. Flowing fabrics, lily motifs, and her calm, wise eyes fill the ornate interior.

King of Cups
Rüdiger von Bechelaren

Element/Astrology: *Water (Cups)*

UPRIGHT: Emotional balance, compassion, diplomacy, wise leadership

REVERSED: Emotional manipulation, coldness, volatility, poor counsel

Classic Meaning: The King of Cups unites emotional maturity with measured leadership, using compassion, fairness, and calm judgment to guide difficult situations.

Nibelungen Context: Rüdiger‘s warm, composed authority embodies the card‘s diplomatic balance while placing him between court and common people, loyalty and feeling.

Lore: Rüdiger leads with empathy and justice. His decisions flow from a place of heartfelt wisdom and responsible stewardship.

Description: Rüdiger von Bechelaren stands with a large ornate cup, his warm gaze directed across a gathering of courtly figures and commoners. The formal setting surrounds his graceful, calm figure with a sense of balance.

Minor Arcana
Suit of Swords

Ace of Swords
The Iron Will

Element/Astrology: *Air (Swords)*

UPRIGHT: Clarity, truth, breakthrough, decisive action

REVERSED: Confusion, falsehood, mental fog, poor judgment

Classic Meaning: The Ace of Swords brings a clean mental breakthrough: truth cuts through uncertainty and gives the will the focus to make a firm, consequential decision.

Nibelungen Context: In Hagen's armored grasp, the raised blade makes the suit's first act one of deliberate resolve, setting fate in motion through a decision that admits no hesitation.

Lore: A sword rises over the river—Hagen's choice is made.

Description: A dark blade rises above a misty stretch of the Rhine, gripped by an armored hand. An iron crown hovers over the sword while ravens wheel through the pale sky. Cold river mist, black metal, and the circling birds give the scene a severe, commanding aspect.

Two of Swords
Stalemate

Element/Astrology: *Air (Swords)*

UPRIGHT: Indecision, truce, difficult choice, guarded balance

REVERSED: Confusion, emotional release, stalemate, information overload

Classic Meaning: The Two of Swords describes a guarded pause between competing truths, when peace is maintained only by postponing a difficult choice and holding emotion at bay.

Nibelungen Context: Kriemhild and Hagen face one another in a moment before betrayal, turning the card's suspended decision into a silent conflict in which neither side yields resolution.

Lore: Two enemies, silent and poised—resolution withheld.

Description: Kriemhild and Hagen stand opposite one another in a moonlit courtyard. Both figures are blindfolded and armed, held rigidly apart beneath the night sky. Stone walls, silver moonlight, and their unmoving weapons make the open space feel taut and enclosed.

Three of Swords
The Betrayal

Element/Astrology: *Air (Swords)*

UPRIGHT: Heartbreak, sorrow, betrayal, painful truth

REVERSED: Healing, forgiveness, recovery, repressed pain

Classic Meaning: The Three of Swords names the piercing clarity of heartbreak, when loss and betrayal expose a wound that cannot be avoided or softened by illusion.

Nibelungen Context: With Siegfried lost, Kriemhild's grief becomes the turning point from love toward vengeance, giving this familiar image of heartbreak its enduring and personal consequence.

Lore: The heart shatters—Siegfried is lost.

Description: Three swords pierce a large heart set against a storm-dark sky. In the distance, Kriemhild weeps beneath the broken clouds. The sharp blades, red heart, and rain-heavy horizon form a stark image of a wound laid bare.

Four of Swords
The Tomb

Element/Astrology: *Air (Swords)*

UPRIGHT: Rest, retreat, recovery, contemplation

REVERSED: Restlessness, burnout, stagnation, forced action

Classic Meaning: The Four of Swords offers a necessary withdrawal from struggle, asking for stillness, recovery, and clear reflection before the mind can return to action.

Nibelungen Context: Within a Burgundian tomb, the card holds the stillness before fate‘s wheel moves again, leaving open whether this pause belongs to reflection, death, or renewal.

Lore: Rest before renewal—death or reflection?

Description: A knight lies motionless inside a Burgundian tomb beneath a stained-glass window. Swords hang in a row above the recumbent figure, while colored light falls across stone and armor. The quiet chamber is spare, enclosed, and entirely still.

Five of Swords
Hollow Victory

Element/Astrology: *Air (Swords)*

UPRIGHT: Conflict, hollow victory, selfish gain, tension

REVERSED: Reconciliation, lingering resentment, escalation, regret

Classic Meaning: The Five of Swords warns that a victory gained through conflict, humiliation, or self-interest can leave isolation behind it and make triumph feel like defeat.

Nibelungen Context: Hagen's solitary stance gives ruthless success its proper cost: what is won without honor is already compromised, even before the storm closes over the battlefield.

Lore: He stands victorious—but alone.

Description: Hagen stands beneath rising storm clouds with three swords gathered in his hands. Two defeated knights walk away across the open ground behind him. The three blades, retreating figures, and darkening sky leave the central victor sharply isolated.

Six of Swords
The River Crossing

Element/Astrology: *Air (Swords)*

UPRIGHT: Transition, passage, moving on, mourning

REVERSED: Resistance, unfinished grief, baggage, difficult transition

Classic Meaning: The Six of Swords marks a sorrowful passage away from turmoil, carrying grief forward while seeking the quieter ground of transition, healing, and acceptance.

Nibelungen Context: Siegfried's funeral journey turns movement across the Rhine into passage through mourning, ferrying a lost hero from immediate sorrow into the permanence of legend.

Lore: The soul is ferried into legend.

Description: A funeral boat moves across the grey Rhine beneath a low, overcast sky. Siegfried's shrouded body lies aboard as silent mourners row the vessel onward. Dark water, muted cloth, and the small boat's steady course dominate the restrained scene.

Seven of Swords
Theft of the Hoard

Element/Astrology: *Air (Swords)*

UPRIGHT: Deception, strategy, stealth, hidden motives

REVERSED: Confession, exposure, self deception, failed plans

Classic Meaning: The Seven of Swords concerns covert action and tactical self-interest, asking whether cleverness has become evasion and whether a hidden plan can remain concealed.

Nibelungen Context: Hagen's concealed treasure and hidden weapons make strategy visibly double-edged here: the act advances through secrecy, while its unseen consequences twist the threads of fate.

Lore: Hidden acts twist the threads of fate.

Description: Hagen moves through the shadows of a dim cave with treasure tucked beneath his cloak. Several swords are hidden nearby among the darkness and stone. The narrow cavern, muted gold, and partially obscured figure create an image of secrecy and stealth.

Eight of Swords
The Trap

Element/Astrology: *Air (Swords)*

UPRIGHT: Restriction, helplessness, self-limitation, inner blocks

REVERSED: Release, new perspective, self acceptance, freedom

Classic Meaning: The Eight of Swords depicts a mind confined by fear and self-limitation, where escape remains difficult to see because the apparent prison is sustained from within.

Nibelungen Context: Kriemhild's grief and silence give the card's inner restrictions a story-bound form: her will seems held fast, though the prison itself is presented as an illusion.

Lore: Her will is bound—yet the prison is illusion.

Description: Kriemhild stands with her eyes bound inside a ring of eight upright swords. Twisted brambles surround the ground and close around the space between the blades. The blindfold, vertical steel, and tangled thorns create a dense, enclosing frame around her.

Nine of Swords
Nightmare

Element/Astrology: *Air (Swords)*

UPRIGHT: Anxiety, guilt, despair, sleeplessness

REVERSED: Hope, recovery, confronting fear, inner turmoil

Classic Meaning: The Nine of Swords gives shape to private anguish: guilt, fear, and despair multiply in the night until the mind cannot find rest or escape its own visions.

Nibelungen Context: Kriemhild's waking nights make the card a chamber of accumulating vengeance, each vision adding weight to the storm that has not yet broken.

Lore: The night brings no peace.

Description: Kriemhild lies sleepless in a dark chamber beneath nine swords suspended above her bed. Shadowy visions gather around the room while the bedclothes and walls disappear into darkness. The hovering blades and deep, confined interior make the night feel oppressive and airless.

Ten of Swords
Final Blow

Element/Astrology: *Air (Swords)*

UPRIGHT: Ruin, finality, painful ending, collapse

REVERSED: Recovery, resistance, survival, inevitable end

Classic Meaning: The Ten of Swords brings an exhausted cycle to its absolute conclusion, acknowledging a devastating defeat while revealing that no further fall remains possible.

Nibelungen Context: The fallen hero makes betrayal's finality unmistakable: fate shows no mercy, and the ending divides the glory of a hero from the violence that has brought him down.

Lore: The hero is gone—the blade of fate has no mercy.

Description: A fallen hero lies pierced by ten swords, his cloak soaked in twilight. Ravens gather in the sky above the body as the surrounding light fades. The dense arrangement of blades, dark birds, and twilit horizon creates an image of irreversible finality.

Page of Swords
Ortwin

Element/Astrology: *Air (Swords)*

UPRIGHT: Curiosity, vigilance, alertness, mental agility

REVERSED: Gossip, haste, suspicion, scattered thought

Classic Meaning: The Page of Swords brings an inquisitive, watchful intelligence, ready to test ideas and respond quickly, though youthful sharpness may outrun caution or experience.

Nibelungen Context: Ortwin embodies the first stirrings of suspicion in the Burgundian world: loyal and quick-minded, he meets challenge with an impulsiveness that can become the spark before a storm.

Lore: Ortwin is bold and inquisitive, always testing limits. His mind is quick, though not always cautious—the spark before the storm.

Description: A youthful Burgundian warrior stands alert with his sword ready in his hand. Wind catches Ortwin's cloak as he looks outward with sharp, curious eyes. His upright stance, drawn weapon, and moving fabric give the figure a quick, challenging energy.

Knight of Swords
Dankwart

Element/Astrology: *Air (Swords)*

UPRIGHT: Swift action, bold speech, ambition, courage

REVERSED: Recklessness, aggression, impatience, scattered energy

Classic Meaning: The Knight of Swords rushes toward a cause with forceful conviction, representing swift action and brave defense of ideals, but also the danger of speed without restraint.

Nibelungen Context: Dankwart‘s charge gives the card‘s martial urgency the fierce commitment of a brother who strikes first and remains loyal unto death.

Lore: Dankwart acts swiftly and with purpose, driven by loyalty and a code of honor.

Description: Dankwart charges into battle with his sword raised high. Storm clouds mass behind him, and flashes of lightning strike across his armor. The forward-rushing warrior, lifted blade, and bright metal set against the storm fill the image with violent momentum.

Queen of Swords
Brünhild

Element/Astrology: *Air (Swords)*

UPRIGHT: Independence, intellect, discernment, clear boundaries

REVERSED: Bitterness, coldness, isolation, cruelty

Classic Meaning: The Queen of Swords represents independent judgment and unclouded discernment, speaking truth with strong boundaries even when experience has taught the heart to remain guarded.

Nibelungen Context: Brünhild is caught between vengeance and honor, making the Queen's guarded clarity a posture of control where pain might otherwise speak for her.

Lore: Brünhild commands with a cold fire. Her pain sharpens her mind, and her pride protects her heart.

Description: Brünhild, Queen of Iceland, sits on a high stone throne with a sword laid across her lap. Icy air surrounds her, and runes mark the space around the throne. Her noble but wounded expression, rigid seat, and pale setting give the composition a cold, formal grandeur.

King of Swords
Etzel

Element/Astrology: *Air (Swords)*

UPRIGHT: Leadership, logic, authority, moral judgment

REVERSED: Tyranny, manipulation, coldness, harsh judgment

Classic Meaning: The King of Swords governs through reasoned authority, using analysis, discipline, and moral judgment to make decisions whose effects extend beyond private desire.

Nibelungen Context: Etzel stands as the calculating power drawn into a ruin shaped by justice and mourning, his command reaching beyond the battlefield through decisions that carry imperial weight.

Lore: Etzel governs with calculated authority. He is the strategist of empires, whose decisions ripple far beyond the battlefield.

Description: Etzel stands tall inside a war tent with a sword at his side. Strategic maps are spread around him, and loyal warriors gather within the tent. His analytical gaze, upright bearing, and the ordered maps make the interior feel like a place of command and judgment.

Minor Arcana
Suit of Wands

Ace of Wands
Hero‘s Flame

Element/Astrology: *Fire (Wands)*

UPRIGHT: Inspiration, initiative, creative force, new opportunity

REVERSED: Delays, lack of direction, burn-out, missed opportunity

Classic Meaning: The Ace of Wands announces a surge of creative force, inviting bold initiative and the courage to begin a promising new venture.

Nibelungen Context: On a mountaintop beneath an ablaze sunrise, Siegfried‘s raised flaming staff turns an inward impulse into a visible call to heroic action.

Lore: The first spark. Siegfried lifts the staff—his journey begins.

Description: Siegfried stands on a mountaintop, raising a staff wreathed in flame. Wind streams through his cloak while the sunrise sets the sky aflame around him.

Two of Wands
Vision

Element/Astrology: *Fire (Wands)*

UPRIGHT: Planning, progress, discovery, personal power

REVERSED: Fear of change, poor planning, limited options, indecision

Classic Meaning: The Two of Wands is the moment of planning beyond the familiar, when personal power weighs a future vision against the safety of what is known.

Nibelungen Context: From a high wall, Siegfried can survey distant mountains with a scroll in hand, making the horizon a deliberate choice rather than a mere dream.

Lore: Stillness before movement—a choice of paths.

Description: Siegfried stands between two upright staffs on a high wall. He holds a scroll and gazes across distant mountains, his path stretching outward beyond the fortress.

Three of Wands
Quest

Element/Astrology: *Fire (Wands)*

UPRIGHT: Expansion, foresight, exploration, opportunity

REVERSED: Delays, obstacles, lack of foresight, frustration

Classic Meaning: The Three of Wands brings expansion through foresight, showing that a purposeful first step can open distant opportunities and a wider field of action.

Nibelungen Context: As Siegfried crosses wild country toward the dragon's distant shadow, the quest's promise lies beyond the route already visible beneath his feet.

Lore: The journey begins—bold and dangerous.

Description: Siegfried travels through untamed lands, passing three staffs planted along the path. A dragon's shadow appears in the distance, while a fire-colored glow burns on the horizon.

Four of Wands
Return

Element/Astrology: *Fire (Wands)*

UPRIGHT: Celebration, harmony, homecoming, stability

REVERSED: Instability, cancelled celebration, home conflict, transition

Classic Meaning: The Four of Wands celebrates a secure pause of harmony, welcome, and shared joy after effort has created a place to return to.

Nibelungen Context: Siegfried's arrival among banners and torches places Kriemhild within a public reunion, where the brightness of home is briefly made ceremonial.

Lore: Celebration and harmony—brief and bright.

Description: Siegfried returns home beneath an arch made by four staffs. Banners and torches surround a joyful gathering, and Kriemhild meets him amid the reunion.

Five of Wands
Rivalry

Element/Astrology: *Fire (Wands)*

UPRIGHT: Competition, conflict, challenge, differing goals

REVERSED: Avoiding conflict, compromise, inner tension, disorder

Classic Meaning: The Five of Wands reveals the friction of competing aims, where challenges and clashing approaches demand energy without yet producing a clear winner.

Nibelungen Context: Beneath castle towers, Siegfried watches young knights test themselves in mock combat, allowing the scene's playful contest to carry sharper undercurrents.

Lore: The contest begins—some train, others test.

Description: Young knights clash wooden staffs in mock combat below castle towers. Siegfried observes with interest as the moving figures face one another in the open space.

Six of Wands
Triumph

Element/Astrology: *Fire (Wands)*

UPRIGHT: Victory, recognition, confidence, reward

REVERSED: Egotism, lack of recognition, self-doubt, fall from grace

Classic Meaning: The Six of Wands signals victory made visible, bringing earned recognition, confidence, and the public reward that follows a successful effort.

Nibelungen Context: Riding through Worms with a raised staff and laurel crown, Siegfried receives acclaim from a crowd whose rose petals make honor into a spectacle.

Lore: The hero receives his crown—honor earned.

Description: Siegfried rides triumphantly through Worms, wearing a laurel crown and holding a staff aloft. People cheer along his route as rose petals fall around the victorious rider.

Seven of Wands
Resistance

Element/Astrology: *Fire (Wands)*

UPRIGHT: Defense, courage, perseverance, conviction

REVERSED: Giving up, overwhelm, vulnerability, exhaustion

Classic Meaning: The Seven of Wands asks for courage in defense of a hard-won position, meeting pressure with conviction, perseverance, and a refusal to retreat.

Nibelungen Context: Alone on a rocky slope, Siegfried answers approaching attackers with a blazing staff, while a ring of fire isolates his stand from the ground below.

Lore: The lone stand—he defends what is just.

Description: Siegfried stands on a rocky slope and fends off attackers with a staff burning at its tip. Fire circles his feet as figures press toward him from below.

Eight of Wands
Acceleration

Element/Astrology: *Fire (Wands)*

UPRIGHT: Speed, momentum, communication, swift progress

REVERSED: Delays, confusion, miscommunication, scattered energy

Classic Meaning: The Eight of Wands brings events into rapid motion, carrying messages, travel, and progress forward with a speed that leaves little time for hesitation.

Nibelungen Context: Eight flaming staffs cut across a golden sky as Siegfried rushes along a forest path, joining the human figure and the flying signs in one urgent direction.

Lore: Everything moves—too fast to grasp.

Description: Eight flaming staffs fly like arrows through a golden sky. Below them, Siegfried dashes along a forest path, his figure caught in swift forward motion.

Nine of Wands
Endurance

Element/Astrology: *Fire (Wands)*

UPRIGHT: Resilience, vigilance, persistence, boundaries

REVERSED: Exhaustion, defensiveness, paranoia, burnout

Classic Meaning: The Nine of Wands honors resilience under strain, urging vigilance and persistence when past hardship makes one guarded but still capable of standing.

Nibelungen Context: Within the upright ring of nine staffs, Siegfried leans on one staff, making a stark, guarded boundary visible around the solitary figure.

Lore: Wounded but resolute, he endures.

Description: A battered Siegfried leans on a staff and looks outward with guarded resolve. Nine other staffs stand upright around him, enclosing his solitary figure.

Ten of Wands
Burden

Element/Astrology: *Fire (Wands)*

UPRIGHT: Burden, responsibility, hard work, pressure

REVERSED: Overload, delegation, release, burnout

Classic Meaning: The Ten of Wands shows achievement becoming heavy, as responsibility, hard work, and accumulated obligations threaten to overwhelm the person carrying them.

Nibelungen Context: Against a twilight background, Siegfried's slow steps beneath ten bundled staffs make the physical cost of heroic striving impossible to overlook.

Lore: The hero bears the world—but for how long?

Description: Siegfried carries a heavy bundle of ten staffs across his back. His steps are slow beneath their weight, and twilight fills the background behind him.

Page of Wands
Helmwige

Element/Astrology: *Fire (Wands)*

UPRIGHT: Enthusiasm, discovery, exploration, creative message

REVERSED: Impulsiveness, lack of direction, bad news, immaturity

Classic Meaning: The Page of Wands brings an eager spark of discovery, carrying a creative message and the restless enthusiasm to explore an unfamiliar call.

Nibelungen Context: As a Valkyrie maiden on a rocky hill, Helmwige pairs a burning staff with fire and wind, making her arrival an image of alert, youthful motion.

Lore: Helmwige is the spark of inspiration. She carries the whisper of destiny and the wild curiosity of divine will.

Description: Helmwige stands on a rocky hill holding a burning staff. Her hair moves in the wind, while fire surrounds her against the exposed height.

Knight of Wands
Hildebrand

Element/Astrology: *Fire (Wands)*

UPRIGHT: Passion, adventure, confidence, bold action

REVERSED: Impulsiveness, recklessness, anger, haste

Classic Meaning: The Knight of Wands charges toward adventure with passion and confidence, bringing decisive action that is inspiring yet inclined to outrun caution.

Nibelungen Context: Hildebrand rides through flames with a spear in hand and cloak billowing behind him, setting the card's appetite for bold action in relentless motion.

Lore: Hildebrand leads with fire in his blood. He is the seasoned warrior whose actions inspire and teach by example.

Description: Hildebrand rides through flames with a spear in his hand. His cloak billows behind him, and his eyes blaze with purpose as he moves forward.

Queen of Wands
Gerlind

Element/Astrology: *Fire (Wands)*

UPRIGHT: Confidence, charisma, independence, leadership

REVERSED: Jealousy, insecurity, self-doubt, demandingness

Classic Meaning: The Queen of Wands embodies confident independence and magnetic leadership, using warmth, presence, and self-trust to command a room without diminishing others.

Nibelungen Context: In a gilded hall, Gerlind's upright bearing and flame-entwined staff turn the visual language of court into an emblem of confidence and independence.

Lore: Gerlind shines with fierce elegance. She commands respect not through fear, but through clarity of purpose.

Description: Gerlind stands strong and commanding within a gilded hall. She holds a staff entwined with flame and lilies, her proud posture filling the formal interior.

King of Wands
Dietrich von Bern

Element/Astrology: *Fire (Wands)*

UPRIGHT: Vision, leadership, boldness, mastery

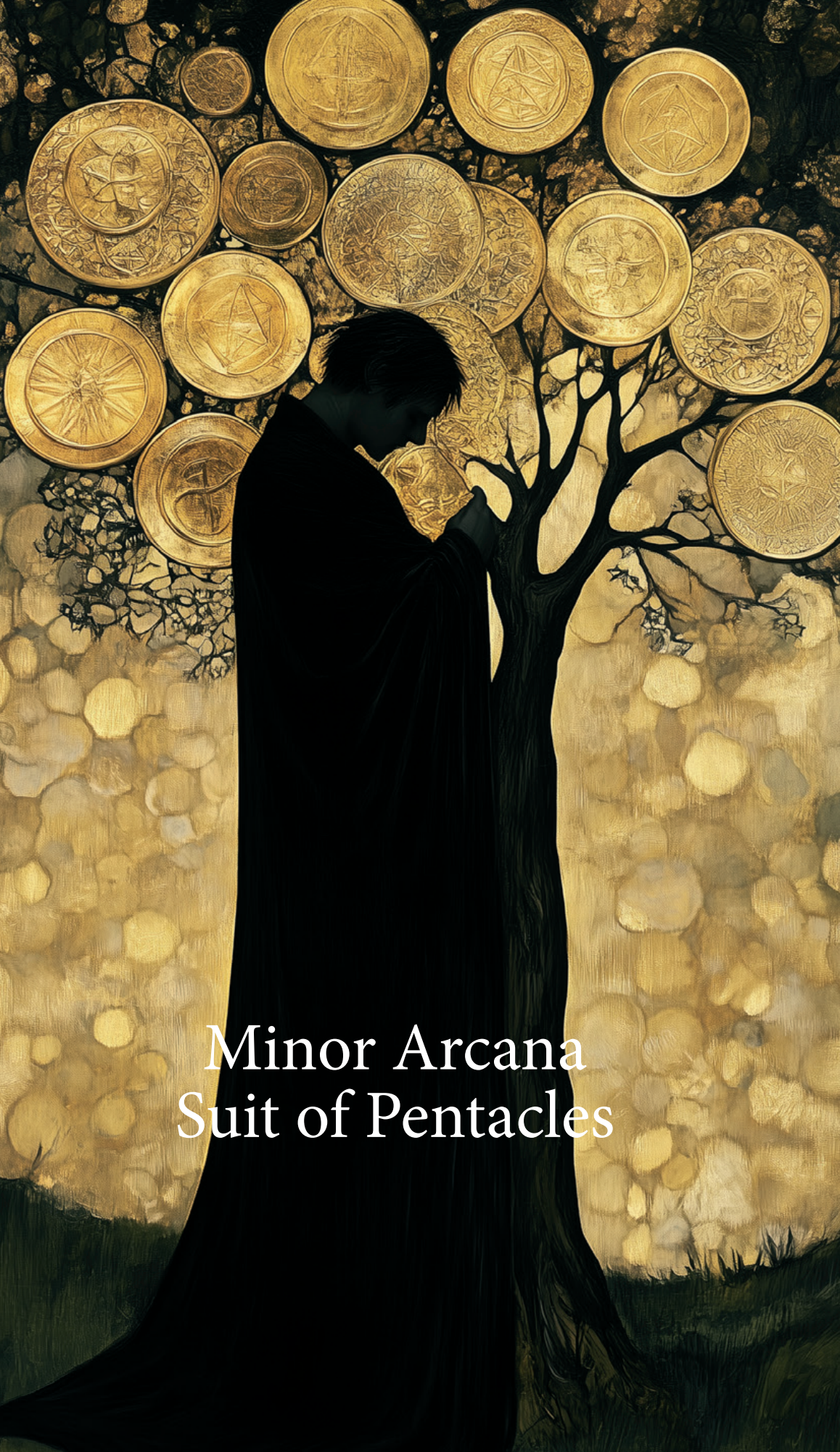
REVERSED: Arrogance, impulsiveness, domination, unrealistic aims

Classic Meaning: The King of Wands directs vision into decisive leadership, combining boldness, mastery, and an expansive sense of purpose that can move others to act.

Nibelungen Context: On a mountain overlook, Dietrich's red-and-gold cloak, upright staff, and fire at his feet compose a regal frame for fearless command.

Lore: Dietrich leads with conviction and vision. He is the hero who sees beyond the horizon and dares to pursue it.

Description: Dietrich von Bern stands on a mountain overlook in a regal cloak of red and gold. He holds a staff as fire blazes at his feet, his gaze fixed on the distance.



Minor Arcana
Suit of Pentacles

Ace of Pentacles
The Hidden Treasure

Element/Astrology: *Earth (Pentacles)*

UPRIGHT: Opportunity, prosperity, security, material beginning

REVERSED: Missed opportunity, scarcity, poor planning, instability

Classic Meaning: The Ace of Pentacles opens a practical new beginning, offering the seed of prosperity, security, and tangible opportunity when it is carefully cultivated.

Nibelungen Context: This buried treasure makes material promise part of an inheritance concealed beneath the earth, where new opportunity is already bound to legacy and burden.

Lore: Deep in the earth lies promise—of growth, of gain.

Description: A golden pentacle rises from an open treasure chest set deep within the earth. Soft roots curl around the shining coin and chest, emerging from the dark soil in a warm, subterranean glow.

Two of Pentacles
Balance of Power

Element/Astrology: *Earth (Pentacles)*

UPRIGHT: Adaptability, balance, resourcefulness, flexibility

REVERSED: Overcommitment, imbalance, disorganization, overwhelm

Classic Meaning: The Two of Pentacles calls for flexible, alert management of changing demands, keeping resources and responsibilities in motion without losing one's footing.

Nibelungen Context: Alberich's measured juggling makes wealth and duty visible as twin claims on his attention, suggesting that power can only be held through continual calculation and adjustment.

Lore: Wealth and wisdom spin—can both be held?

Description: Alberich stands under torchlight in a cavern, juggling two golden pentacles before him. One coin glows with wealth and the other with duty, while the cavern shadows frame his calculating eyes.

Three of Pentacles
Crafting the Crown

Element/Astrology: *Earth (Pentacles)*

UPRIGHT: Teamwork, craftsmanship, skill, collaboration

REVERSED: Poor teamwork, lack of skill, disharmony, unfinished work

Classic Meaning: The Three of Pentacles honors skilled collaboration, showing how careful planning and distinct talents combine to create work that no single hand could complete alone.

Nibelungen Context: The crown's making places the hoard's splendor in a forge shared by many workers, turning the card's cooperative craft into the foundation from which great wealth is fashioned.

Lore: No great work stands alone.

Description: Three dwarves work around a great crown in a smoky forge, each absorbed in a separate task. Glowing pentacles hover above them as firelight and smoke surround the tools, metal, and crown.

Four of Pentacles
The Hoard

Element/Astrology: *Earth (Pentacles)*

UPRIGHT: Control, security, conservation, possessiveness

REVERSED: Greed, release, insecurity, loss of control

Classic Meaning: The Four of Pentacles seeks safety through holding tight to what has been gained, but its guarded stance can turn stability into fear, isolation, and possessiveness.

Nibelungen Context: Before the treasure, Hagen embodies a keeper whose protection has narrowed into enclosure, making the hoard a visible test of whether control serves its owner or consumes him.

Lore: He guards it—but who guards him?

Description: Hagen sits before a treasure hoard with his arms closed around four pentacles held protectively against him. A dark shadow rises behind his seated figure, while gold lies clustered at the edge of the scene.

Five of Pentacles
Outcast

Element/Astrology: *Earth (Pentacles)*

UPRIGHT: Hardship, isolation, insecurity, exclusion

REVERSED: Recovery, support, renewed hope, improvement

Classic Meaning: The Five of Pentacles depicts material or emotional hardship, the lonely feeling of being shut out from warmth, aid, and belonging during a difficult passage.

Nibelungen Context: Set outside the Burgundian hall, this image brings exclusion to the threshold of a noble household, where the visible comfort within remains painfully beyond reach.

Lore: Left behind, though the light still burns.

Description: Two cloaked figures shiver outside the Burgundian hall as snow falls around them. High above, a glowing pentacle-shaped window shines from the hall, separated from the figures by the cold exterior wall.

Six of Pentacles
Generosity

Element/Astrology: *Earth (Pentacles)*

UPRIGHT: Generosity, charity, fairness, reciprocity

REVERSED: Strings attached, debt, inequality, exploitation

Classic Meaning: The Six of Pentacles concerns the fair movement of resources between giver and receiver, asking whether generosity, need, and power are held in genuine balance.

Nibelungen Context: Rüdiger's open-handed exchange joins noble guests and Hun warriors in one scene, making the card's fairness a public act whose grace may carry obligations beyond the gift itself.

Lore: Giving as power, giving as grace.

Description: Rüdiger extends golden pentacles to noble guests and Hun warriors gathered before him. His open hands flank a scale of fairness, and the coins catch the light amid the assembled figures.

Seven of Pentacles
Patience

Element/Astrology: *Earth (Pentacles)*

UPRIGHT: Patience, assessment, investment, long-term growth

REVERSED: Impatience, poor return, frustration, wasted effort

Classic Meaning: The Seven of Pentacles invites a pause for patient assessment, weighing effort already invested against the gradual growth that has not yet reached its harvest.

Nibelungen Context: Giselher's still watch over the laden tree turns waiting into a personal discipline, placing reflection and endurance beneath the late light before any result can be claimed.

Lore: The harvest takes time.

Description: Giselher stands beside a tree bearing seven golden coins, his hands folded behind his back. Late sunlight falls across his patient face, the branches, and the round coins hanging among the leaves.

Eight of Pentacles
Mastery

Element/Astrology: *Earth (Pentacles)*

UPRIGHT: Diligence, mastery, apprenticeship, attention to detail

REVERSED: Perfectionism, monotony, poor workmanship, lack of focus

Classic Meaning: The Eight of Pentacles represents devoted practice, in which repeated, attentive effort develops a craft from early study into dependable mastery.

Nibelungen Context: The dwarf's rune work gives this disciplined labor a precise, material form: each ring is shaped under focused hands, one deliberate mark contributing to the greater hoard.

Lore: Through repetition, greatness is shaped.

Description: A dwarf carves runes into golden rings with concentrated hands, lit by nearby candles. Eight pentacles lie in a precise row beside the work, their ordered surfaces bright against the workspace.

Nine of Pentacles
Contentment

Element/Astrology: *Earth (Pentacles)*

UPRIGHT: Independence, abundance, self-sufficiency, refinement

REVERSED: Dependence, financial setbacks, isolation, overindulgence

Classic Meaning: The Nine of Pentacles celebrates earned comfort and independent abundance, the cultivated ease of someone who can enjoy beauty, security, and the fruits of steady work.

Nibelungen Context: Gotelind's peaceful garden shifts wealth away from hoarding and toward a self-possessed domain, where abundance appears as a quiet, lived condition rather than a display of power.

Lore: Peaceful in her domain, she needs no more.

Description: Gotelind walks peacefully through a garden where golden pentacles hang from the trees like fruit. Her robe is embroidered in earth tones, set among foliage and the softly ordered space of the garden.

Ten of Pentacles
Legacy

Element/Astrology: *Earth (Pentacles)*

UPRIGHT: Legacy, family, inheritance, lasting security

REVERSED: Family conflict, instability, broken legacy, financial loss

Classic Meaning: The Ten of Pentacles signifies enduring foundations—family, inheritance, and shared material security that can shelter several generations and outlast one lifetime.

Nibelungen Context: In the Burgundian hall, a gathered household makes continuity visible through generations, banners, and children, presenting the family name as the lasting form that wealth may support.

Lore: The house stands—the name endures.

Description: Three generations gather inside a great Burgundian hall beneath banners and golden pentacles. Dogs and children play around the assembled family, filling the hall with movement beneath the overhead emblems.

Page of Pentacles
Margrave Eckewart

Element/Astrology: *Earth (Pentacles)*

UPRIGHT: Study, reliability, ambition, practical learning

REVERSED: Procrastination, inexperience, lack of focus, impracticality

Classic Meaning: The Page of Pentacles brings a grounded beginning in study or work, approaching practical opportunity with patient attention, reliability, and a willingness to learn.

Nibelungen Context: At the castle gate, Eckewart makes the Page's first step a watchful act of service, standing between the solid foundations of the household and the wider world beyond them.

Lore: Eckewart is rooted in duty and trust. He is the guardian of foundations, loyal and grounded in every action.

Description: Eckewart stands watchfully at a castle gate, holding a pentacle etched with runes. His firm but kind expression is framed by stonework and earth motifs that surround the entrance.

Knight of Pentacles
Bloedelin

Element/Astrology: *Earth (Pentacles)*

UPRIGHT: Duty, perseverance, reliability, steady progress

REVERSED: Stagnation, stubbornness, boredom, resistance to change

Classic Meaning: The Knight of Pentacles advances through persistence rather than speed, committing himself to duty, routine, and the careful completion of what must be done.

Nibelungen Context: Bloedelin's steady ride makes endurance a visible quality of service, his unwavering movement across the plain carrying loyalty onward even when the path offers no quick reward.

Lore: Bloedelin is methodical and loyal, a quiet force. His strength lies in persistence and unwavering service.

Description: Bloedelin rides a heavy warhorse across a golden plain, carrying a shield marked with a pentacle. The horse moves at a steady pace beneath him, with the open land extending behind the mounted figure.

Queen of Pentacles
Gotelind

Element/Astrology: *Earth (Pentacles)*

UPRIGHT: Nurturing, resourcefulness, stability, practical care

REVERSED: Neglect, self sacrifice, insecurity, domestic imbalance

Classic Meaning: The Queen of Pentacles unites practical competence with warm care, creating comfort, stability, and generous provision through attentive stewardship of everyday resources.

Nibelungen Context: In Gotelind's courtyard, earthly abundance is made intimate and sustaining: the same rooted care that tends the garden also gives the household a calm center in dark times.

Lore: Gotelind nurtures both garden and hearth. Her abundance comes from practical love and rooted generosity.

Description: Gotelind sits in a sunlit courtyard with a pentacle resting in her lap. Vines and fruit surround her, while her warm eyes and calm expression are held within the bright garden setting.

King of Pentacles
Alberich

Element/Astrology: *Earth (Pentacles)*

UPRIGHT: Wealth, leadership, security, financial mastery

REVERSED: Greed, materialism, corruption, financial insecurity

Classic Meaning: The King of Pentacles represents mature command of material life, using experience, resources, and responsibility to build lasting security and dependable success.

Nibelungen Context: Seated as lord of the treasure hall, Alberich gives the card's authority a secretive, ancient setting, where wisdom and wealth are guarded together under the weight of their true cost.

Lore: Alberich is the keeper of earthly power. He rules through wealth and wisdom, guarding secrets with silent strength.

Description: Alberich sits on a throne of gold and stone in a treasure hall, holding a glowing pentacle. Shadowy wealth and ancient runes surround the throne, with the coin's light standing out against the dark interior.