



# gothic tarot

In issue 10 we featured the wonderful work of gothic fantasy artist Joseph Vargo and Monolith Graphics. Back then Joseph was busy working on The Gothic Tarot. Well, now it is complete and *Bite me* is delighted to showcase his work again.



## What is The Gothic Tarot?

This dark and elegant deck contains both the Major and Minor Arcana, each card fully illustrated by fantasy artist Joseph Vargo. The deck includes all 78 cards, rendered in full color.

## Explain the concept of your tarot.

"The original concept was to only create full illustrations for the 22 cards of the Major Arcana and to utilize repetitive design elements of the four suits to illustrate the Minor Arcana. However, the more research I did into the symbolic representations of classic Tarot decks, I decided to commit to a full-scale project of creating individual illustrations for each of the 78 cards.



## How is this tarot deck different from others?

I had seen other Tarot decks by popular fantasy artists that were simply a collection of random images unrelated to the meanings of the specific cards. These decks, though aesthetically pleasing on the surface, were completely impractical. I didn't want people to look at my deck and say "Cool art, but this guy doesn't know a thing about the Tarot". I wanted to create a moody and visually alluring tarot deck that could easily be used for fortune telling."



## How long did it take for you to complete the work?

"The deck contains all of my most popular images that had previously been featured in calendars and posters, as well as other paintings from my private collection. I also created several new works specifically for The Gothic Tarot. In some instances existing paintings were altered to fit the concept of a specific card, but in other cases new artwork had to be created to express the card's traditional meaning. Although the project took less than a year to go from conception to completion, The Gothic Tarot represents more than ten years of work."

## How did you choose the Suits?

"Since there are so many decks in existence and each has its own subtle variations, there are some options in naming the suits. I had to decide whether to go with wands or staffs, coins or pentacles. I eventually decided on wands and pentacles because they best represented the Old World mysticism that I was striving to capture."

## Were there any special influences?

"The Rider-Waite deck is probably the most widely used deck of the modern day. The instructional text was researched and written by Arthur Edward Waite, and the black and white illustrations were drawn by Pamela Colman Smith, based on Waite's descriptions. This deck was fairly consistent with earlier Tarot decks like the Tarot of Marseilles and was the first one to illustrate the minor arcana with artistic depictions as opposed to symbolic designs. I used the Waite deck as a preliminary guide in order to stay true to the established divinatory meanings of the Tarot."

I utilized vampires, gargoyles, ghosts and dark angels for my main characters in order to convey a gothic mood, and tried to incorporate the designs of the suits into the artwork whenever possible to make the work more cohesive."



## Why have you used the Realm Icon that appears on the backs of the Gothic Tarot cards?

"The Realm Icon represents a convergence of the forces of the universe, specifically the forces of light and dark. In the mythos established in Tales From The Dark Tower, the Realm Icon marks the tower as the earthly arena where angels and demons appeal to the mortal strengths and weaknesses of humans to sway them towards order or chaos."

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The Gothic Tarot may be purchased from:

**US**

Monolith Graphics  
[www.monolithgraphics.com](http://www.monolithgraphics.com)

**UK**

In Dark Decorum  
[www.indarkdecorum.com](http://www.indarkdecorum.com)



Turn to the centre pages for a special gothic tarot centre spread!



art

Joseph Vargo is a gothic fantasy artist and writer who lives in Cleveland, Ohio, USA. His portfolio consists of more than 300 original works of art.

## VAMPIRES

I have always been captivated by the allure of vampires. I've researched vampire lore and found the various legends fascinating, but their existence is yet to be proven.

Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* is my favorite vampire film. It was a first-rate production filled with dark and beautiful visual elements. Some of my other favorite vampire films are *Near Dark*, *Queen of the Damned*, *Interview with the Vampire*, and *Blade*. As for books, I'm more into Lovecraft and Poe. Most of the modern vampire literature I've read left me feeling unsatisfied—that's why I found the 'Tales From The Dark Tower' project so appealing. It gave me a chance to elaborate upon my interpretation of the vampiric characters I had created in my artwork.

My style is to render the characters with a sinister elegance while establishing a gothic mood with architectural elements such as gargoyles, columns, archways and tombstones. I try to depict all the most appealing aspects of vampires in my paintings - the beautiful, the horrific, the sensual, and the tragic. Though no single piece illustrates all of these characteristics at once, 'Dark Tower' represents the ultimate dark and brooding male vampire, whereas 'Possessed' depicts the alluring female vampire, revelling in the night. 'Vampire's Kiss' exemplifies the aspects of passion, seduction and surrendering to the dark.

## DARK SHADOWS

As a youth I tended to gravitate toward horror movies, monster models, and anything that could possibly warp my young and impressionable mind. My sister and I used to rush home from

school to watch the old *Dark Shadows* TV series. I was constantly drawing, and the subject matter was usually some sort of monstrous creature.

## HALLOWEEN

Halloween has always been my favorite holiday, of course. I throw elaborate parties every Halloween that are like murder mystery role-playing adventures. Each year is based on a different theme such as the works of Poe or Lovecraft, and I turn my home into a haunted mansion, cursed

museum, insane asylum or whatever suits the story line. The guests are invited to explore my entire house from attic to cellar, unlocking rooms and dark secrets along the way.

## MYTHS

Many of my ideas and inspirations are from ancient myths and legends, others are purely products of my imagination. For most of my fantasy pieces I usually don't render intricate backgrounds, preferring instead to establish a mood with dramatic shadows and color. I utilize a lot of different techniques and mediums, such as watercolors and oils, but prefer to paint with acrylics dry. I also do a lot of rendering in pencil.

## INFLUENCES

My major artistic influence is fantasy art icon Frank Frazetta. His work is seething

with energy, and has a dark, primal quality to it. He is a master at capturing the action just before a fateful encounter, right when your adrenaline begins to rush. I am also inspired by H.R. Giger and British artist Simon Bisley.

## DISILLUSION

I'm pretty much a self-taught artist. I attended art school but left after one semester. Their ideas of fine art were completely the opposite of what mine were. I expected to hone my skills and learn to paint like the Masters. Instead the curriculum consisted of nurturing undisciplined expressions of creativity against a wall. It was a disillusioning experience, and I did very little artwork in the following five years. Eventually, though, I returned to art and began training myself.

## MONOLITH GRAPHICS

In 1991, Joseph established Monolith Graphics and began to sell fantasy art prints and T-shirts of his own design at Renaissance fairs. "I started out with some images of dragons and

warriors, but before long I began introducing some of my old favorites, such as skeletons, vampires and gargoyles, into our product line. This darker, new direction was well received, and the gothic prints and shirts eventually became our most popular merchandise."

## FUTURE PROJECTS

Joseph is currently working on The Gothic Tarot. This deck will include all 78 cards, rendered in full color. He also plans a computer game based on the diabolical puzzles of Dr. Arcana, and quite possibly a movie or two.

With thanks to Peter Iorillo

[www.monolithgraphics.com](http://www.monolithgraphics.com)  
opposite page: Succubus

