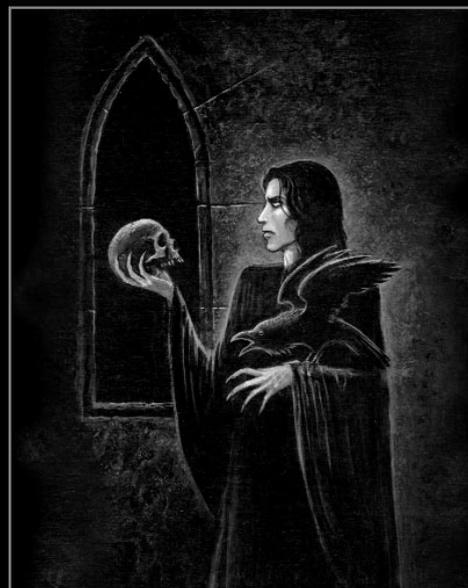




JOSEPH VARGO

Joseph Vargo began his career as a professional artist in the mid-1980s. He quickly established his own style with his numerous paintings of seductive vampires and leering gargoyles who dwell in a mist-shrouded realm where night holds eternal dominion. When he created Monolith Graphics in 1991, Vargo was at the forefront of the gothic movement. Throughout the years, he has spread his dark wings over other artistic domains to establish his name in the realms of music and literature as well.





DARK LITERATURE

In 1999, Vargo and seven other writers collaborated on an ambitious venture to create an illustrated book of short stories that revolved around a central gothic theme. The resulting anthology, *Tales from the Dark Tower*, told the story of vampires, gargoyles and ghosts, that inhabit a medieval castle known as the Dark Tower. “I wanted to create a cast of dark and brooding characters that my audience could identify with,” Vargo reveals. “Even though the tales are set hundreds of years ago, many of the characters portray the ultimate gothic fantasy, living in haunted castles and crypts, surrounded by gargoyles and ravens.”

Vargo, Christine Filipak, and several writers from *Dark Realms Magazine* such as Joseph Iorillo, and Jalone J. Haessig contributed their writing talents to the book, and plan to work together on a follow-up in the coming year. “A sequel to the book, entitled *Beyond The Dark Tower* is planned for next year. I’ve already drafted several of the stories, as well as drafts for the third and final book in the *Dark Tower* trilogy which is slated for a later date.”

GOTHIC ART

Monolith has recently released Vargo’s first art book, *Born of the Night; The Gothic Fantasy Artwork of Joseph Vargo*, which features over 100 of his most popular gothic images as well as dozens of rare works, sketches and variant versions of several of his paintings. The book also offers commentary from Vargo as well as excerpts from short stories and poems based on his art. “The book actually only contains about half of my work. A second art book will be released within the next few years that will feature a lot of my early fantasy paintings of sensuous women, dark warriors, dragons and other mythical creatures as well as my newest gothic pieces. I still have a large body of personal work that has never been published.”

In 2002, Vargo released *The Gothic Tarot*. The deck has received critical acclaim from tarot groups and readers worldwide, and Monolith plans on releasing a companion book for the deck in the future.





MUSIC FROM THE SHADOWS

After creating a gothic identity for the local band Midnight Syndicate, and producing and directing their two breakthrough albums, Vargo parted ways with the band over artistic differences and returned to creating the gothic sound that he had originally envisioned. In 2003, Vargo teamed with fellow musician William Piotrowski to compose, perform and produce their first CD, *Darklore Manor*, an eerie concept album that takes listeners on a musical journey through the haunted halls of a Victorian mansion with a sinister history.

For Nox Arcana's second album, *Necronomicon*, the band looked to the works of horror writer H.P. Lovecraft to create a spellbinding tribute to his Cthulhu Mythos. The CD contains some of the band's darkest and most ominous music, accompanied by ritualistic chanting and eerie sound effects. The album has been deemed the official soundtrack to the Cthulhu Mythos by several Lovecraft organizations and is sold by Chaosium Games as a soundtrack to their *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying game.

Even before *Necronomicon* was released, Nox Arcana was back in the studio laying down tracks for *Winter's Knight*, a ghostly symphony for the winter season. "This is our most diverse album to date," Vargo confides. "It incorporates our dark orchestrated music with a wider spectrum of instruments and vocal arrangements."

In addition to vocals from Vargo, Piotrowski and Filipak, the band utilized acoustic guitars and mandolins as well as the talents of guest vocalists, such as Jeff Endemann of the progressive metal band Seven, gothic poet Eric Gustafson, and Michelle Belanger of the goth band URN.

"I've been friends with Michelle for several years," Vargo relates, "but it took awhile to get her into the studio with us. By the time we were ready for her, she was busy on a cross-country tour promoting her book *The Psychic Vampire Codex*. We finally scheduled a date in late April, and Cleveland was hit by a freak snowstorm that day. It was very strange, but it really added to the winter mood of what we were recording."

Nox Arcana's latest musical nightmare, *Transylvania*, whisks listeners away to the shadowy land of vampires, witches and other sinister creatures of the night.

"Bram Stoker's *Dracula* was a major influence for William and I while we were writing the music for this CD. The album incorporates ghostly choirs and haunting melodies with a dark European quality, as well as percussive gypsy rhythms and eerie sound effects including howling wolves, wailing spirits, and screeching bats. Many of the tracks convey an Old World romantic theme, however, there are some powerful, dark orchestrations as well."

The album will also include more of Vargo's dramatic voice-over work to lay the foundations for some of the themes. The *Transylvania* CD is due for release this Halloween.



"I love creating things from my own imagination, be it art, music or literature. Whereas writing is more of a hobby to me, I'm much more serious when it comes to my career as an artist and musician. Although I've been putting a lot more time into my music over the past few years, art has always been my primary passion."



DARK HORIZONS

So what does the future hold for this multi-talented artist and his creative team? "William and I are already working on the next Nox Arcana CD, *Carnival of Lost Souls*. The music and storyline will transport listeners to a creepy old-time carnival that harbors living nightmares and sinister secrets.

"I also have a passion for creating games and puzzles, and I've been developing a gothic horror computer game over the past few years. I hold these lavish, murder-mystery style Halloween parties, and each year has a different theme and story, such as a haunted asylum, or a witch's curse. I've even based some mysteries on the works of Poe and Lovecraft. My guests are invited to explore my home, unlocking rooms and pieces of the mystery along the way. The ultimate project for me would be to build a gothic manor that would act as a weekend retreat where the guests would become involved in a live-action supernatural mystery."

Monolith Graphics has recently opened a dark sanctuary for creative minds. Join the Monolith Forum online and meet other dark souls to discuss various gothic topics as well as Vargo's artwork and the music of Nox Arcana. To gain access to the Forum, visit either website at: www.MonolithGraphics.com www.NoxArcana.com