



Joseph Vargo is a well-known American Gothic painter, writer and musician. From the start of his artistic career up to now, he expressed himself through all these mediums trying to pursue with an exquisite versatility his artistic goals. Joseph Vargo is living proof that Gothic fantasy genre is not dead but it seems now to be more alive and expressive than ever. Joseph Vargo's creations have a dark, romantic sensuality that one can find only in the pure Gothic creations of the first Gothic writers, like Bram Stoker and Edgar Allan Poe. In this exclusive interview you can learn some things about the artist, his influences, his work and his plans.

#### 1) To begin with, what is Gothic for you?

I mainly define the term "Gothic" in the traditional sense. The things that immediately come to mind are gargoyle-encrusted cathedrals and castles, mist-shrouded graveyards with ornate tombstones, as well as gothic literature such as the works of Bram Stoker and Edgar Allan Poe, and gothic horror imagery such as vampires and ghosts.

In a broader sense, the term "Gothic" also represents any style, fashion or work of art that reflects a dark and somber beauty. There is something very mysterious about the night and things that are cloaked in shadows. Many people feel that those who surround themselves with such a gloomy atmosphere are sad or depressed, but the truth is that they feel empowered by the darkness. I, myself don't dwell in the shadows all of the time, but I do feel most comfortable there.



**2) What have been your influences? Are there any particular writers, musicians that have inspired you?**

My primary artistic influence has always been the legendary fantasy artist Frank Frazetta. His paintings are seething with raw power and energy, but they also have a dark beauty. All of my early paintings have strong, dark fantasy overtones inspired by his work. Two other influential artists are Simon Bisley, and H.R. Giger.

As far as music is concerned, I mainly listen to rock and metal, but I have always been inspired by the soundtrack work of John Carpenter (Halloween, The Fog, Prince of Darkness), Danny Elfmann (Edward Scissorhands, Batman), and Jerry Goldsmith (The Omen, The 13th Warrior). If you listen to any of the Nox Arcana CDs, you may notice some of these influences, as well as a touch of classical composers such as Beethoven.

As for writers, I have paid musical homage to some of my favorites. The themes of three of our albums, Necronomicon, Transylvania, and Shadow of the Raven, are respectively based on the works of H.P. Lovecraft, Bram Stoker and Edgar Allan Poe.

I also love horror, fantasy and dark mystery films and computer games. Some of my favorite movies are The Crow, Brotherhood of the Wolf, Bram Stoker's Dracula, and The Lord of the Rings trilogy.







**3) Some years ago you worked with Midnight Syndicate. Now you are part of Nox Arcana. Could you tell us a few words about your musical career?**

I took piano lessons for a few years when I was very young and always liked to make up my own songs. When I was in my late teens, I formed several different rock and metal bands and performed as the lead singer. After that, I spent the next several years pursuing my artistic goals. In the late 1990s, I returned to creating music and developed a gothic concept soundtrack. I worked with Midnight Syndicate to create their two breakthrough albums, then left the band and moved on to form my own musical project.

I formed Nox Arcana to continue my original vision without any artistic restrictions or limitations. For the past five years, I have worked with fellow composer and musician, William Piotrowski, who is also a fantastic studio engineer. The amazing thing is that he was only 15 years old when we recorded our first CD. We now have eight full-length albums that we have written, recorded and produced. We perform all of our own compositions, but we've also worked with various guest vocalists, including gothic author Michelle Belanger, heavy metal singer Jim Hamar from the bands Breaker and Nightcrawler, and guitarist and vocalist Jeff Endemann.



#### 4) How do you pick the themes for Nox Arcana's CDs?

Each of our CDs centers around a dark tale or legend, and we convey the theme with music, creepy narratives and a CD booklet filled with artwork. For our first release, Darklore Manor, we began with a common gothic theme, in this case a haunted house, then we developed a legend and curse surrounding the family that lived there and began writing themes for the ghosts that haunt the mansion.

For our Necronomicon album, we turned to H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos and wrote a concept album that paid homage to his legendary book of shadows. As a fan of Lovecraft's work, it was very important to me to be accurate in every detail and really convey a sense of mysticism and brooding horror.

Our next CD, Winter's Knight, was a bit of a departure from our horror-based concepts. I had always wanted to create a darker alternative to the traditional Christmas carol albums, so I developed a concept that centered around a ghost story that takes place on the eve of the winter solstice. For Transylvania we turned to the world of gothic literature, and elaborated upon Bram Stoker's classic novel, Dracula.

The concept for Carnival of Lost Souls was partially inspired by Ray Bradbury's "Something Wicked This Way Comes," but the story and creepy carnival attractions were our own original ideas. The theme centers around a sinister carnival, called the Circus Diabolique that rises from the shadows every 100 years, wreaking havoc on those who dare to attend.

William and I both enjoy the sword and sorcery genre, so we decided to create an epic fantasy soundtrack that told the tale of dragons, knights, dark magic and a legendary quest with our Blood of the Dragon album. The CD, booklet, and disc itself all hold the cryptic pieces of an actual quest to discover the fabled Treasure of the Four Crowns.

Our latest concept album, Shadow of the Raven, explores the morbid and melancholy tales of Edgar Allan Poe.

Every time we set out to convey a specific theme, we use different instruments and musical styles to capture an authentic mood. Some of our pieces are very different from one another, but they all have our own original dark flair.

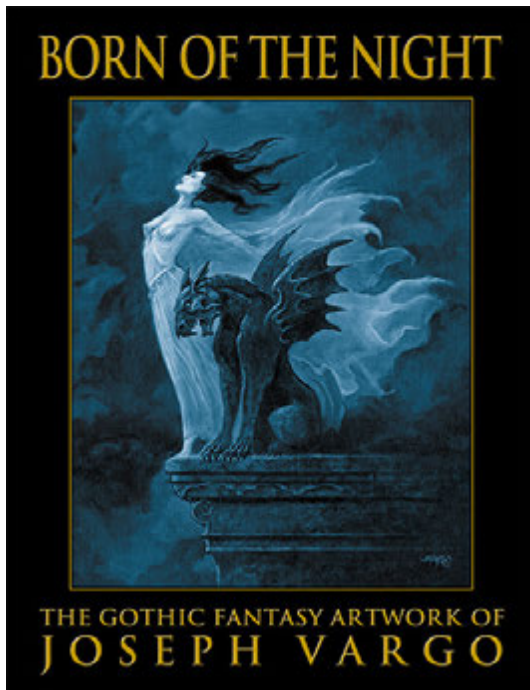


**5) All of these years you are one of the most influential representatives of Gothic Art. It is though only the last few years that Goth culture has started being that much popular. What do you think about that? Has this affected your artwork?**

I am very glad to see that more people are embracing the dark beauty of the gothic culture. Because it opposes many mainstream ideas, it really is a style that allows people to express themselves as individuals. I have always done exactly what I want to do and will continue to do so. Even though I have



worked very hard at my artistic pursuits, I feel very fortunate to have met with such success. I get a lot of great comments from my fans and these really inspire me to do my best. I am pleased to know that I have had an influence on many emerging artists, writers and musicians.



**6) Apart from being a musician, you are also a painter. Could you tell us a few words about your painting artwork?**

I worked as a freelance illustrator for several years in the late 1980s. In 1991, I began Monolith Graphics to self-publish and market my gothic fantasy artwork on t-shirts, posters and calendars. In the beginning, I mainly marketed my artwork and wares at Renaissance Faires and local shops. In 1992, graphic designer Christine Filipak came on board, and the business has been growing steadily ever since.

In 1997, we opened an art gallery called The Realm to showcase the finest in gothic and fantasy art. In 2000, Monolith Graphics published the book *Tales from the Dark Tower*, an illustrated collection of 13 gothic tales based on the characters in my most popular works. The book includes stories of vampires, ghosts and other things that go bump in the night, all set in and around a haunted gargoyle-encrusted castle known as the Dark Tower. In addition to creating the artwork for this book, I also wrote and co-wrote several of the stories. In 2000, we launched the publication of *Dark Realms Magazine*, a quarterly periodical that explores the shadows of art, music and culture. I create all the magazine cover art and have written numerous articles as well. Over the next few years we created and published *The Gothic Tarot*, *Madame Endora's Fortune Cards* and the art book, *Born of the Night*, which contains over 100 of my gothic fantasy paintings and drawings. Presently the line of Monolith merchandise includes posters, t-shirts, stickers, calendars, postcards, books, writing journals and music CDs.

**7) In 2002, you have presented in the market Gothic Tarot, which has been created by Christine Filipak and you. How has this come up and what is your relationship with Occultism?**

I have always held a fascination with all things dark and mysterious. I received a Tarot deck as a gift when I was thirteen years old and I was completely intrigued by the artwork of each card. As I worked on various projects throughout the years, I always wanted to create my own Tarot deck that would appeal to people who shared my gothic interests. In 2002, I began assembling the Gothic Tarot from my existing body of work. Much of the art had to be altered to capture the exact meaning of each card, but I also had to create several new pieces. I worked closely with my partner, graphic designer extraordinaire Christine Filipak, to turn my paintings into an effective Tarot deck. We later created a completely original deck

called Madame Endora's Fortune Cards, which was based on much of Christine's art. We get numerous letters from people who use both decks, telling us how much they enjoy the artwork and also that the readings they get are amazingly accurate.

I did an extensive amount of research into the history of Tarot cards while I was designing the Gothic Tarot. I also worked with writer Joseph Iorillo to create a companion book, The Gothic Tarot Compendium, which gives details behind the artwork and reveals the cryptic symbolism of each card.



**8) Vampires, werewolves, ghosts and all the kinds of exotic creatures are part of your artistic world. Do you believe in their physical existence as well or do you think that they are but figments of imagination?**

I don't believe that these legendary creatures truly exist, at least not the way they are depicted in popular myths, but I do have an open mind concerning ghosts and the paranormal. I highly value imagination and fantasy, and I love taking inspiration from literature and mythology. I think that some of these legends have a basis in fact, but the true stories have been exaggerated and embellished throughout the years.

**9) Generally, do you believe in the paranormal? Have you ever experienced anything that cannot be interpreted by the rules of physics?**

I do believe that there are many mysteries in life that we do not yet comprehend. There is a lot of compelling evidence to support various paranormal theories, but there is no indisputable proof to verify any of them at this time. I have had many friends and family members that have had premonitions and ghostly experiences, but I have never experienced such phenomena myself. I really wish I could experience something like this first-hand.

**10) You are a highly creative artist engaged with many different mediums and projects. Do you have a favorite medium?**

That's a very good question. I get a great amount of satisfaction from each of my artistic pursuits, and though I don't have a favorite medium, they each have their own rewards. Art gives instantaneous feedback. People look at a painting, and within a few seconds they begin to tell you what they like about it. It's interesting to watch people view my paintings in a gallery. Some people gravitate toward specific pieces of art. Many people have told me that they were drawn to certain paintings from across the room. I love to hear them describe how their favorite works make them feel.

Music inspires a mood that you can revisit again and again. It stirs deep emotions and memories and is often very inspirational. Of all my artistic labors, I enjoy writing music the most.

Writing fiction allows me to describe my visions in much more detail than a painting allows. But no matter how descriptive a story is, it still leaves the reader to use his imagination to visualize exactly how everything looks and sounds.



**11) What comes up next for Joseph Vargo and Nox Arcana? Are there any future plans that you would like to share with us?**

The next Nox Arcana album is titled Grimm Tales. It will explore the dark realm of fairies, goblins, witches and childhood nightmares. The songs are recorded and we are working on the studio mixes right now. We've already written some music for the next two Nox Arcana CDs as well. Within the next few months we'll be launching JosephVargo.com which will showcase hundreds of paintings, many of which have never been published or put on display before. In the meantime, I will be working on two more books, a sequel to Tales from the Dark Tower, and a new collection of contemporary horror stories. After that, I'd like to work on a gothic computer game and eventually some film projects that we've been developing.

**12) Lastly, could you send a message to all the friends of Metafysiko.org?**

Greetings friends,

If there is one bit of wisdom that I can share with other creative minds, it's this: The power to attain your artistic goals lies within you. Don't rely on other people to make your dreams come true. Take control of your own destiny and work hard every day to improve your skills and make your desires a reality. Be ready when opportunity knocks on your door. Only those who are driven will leave their mark on this world.

Darkest wishes,  
Joseph Vargo.

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For more information about the artist and his work you can visit the following links:

- [www.monolithgraphics.com](http://www.monolithgraphics.com)
  - [www.noxarcana.com](http://www.noxarcana.com)
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