Acknowledgements and Clear Credit

Although my original Tarot of Cthulhu illustrations date from some time in the mid-1980s, they were first (partially) published in *Dubious Shards* (Ronin Arts, 2006). This is their first complete publication.

Similarly, all of the text material is original to this book.

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Feel free to follow the eldritch fun, read my half-baked opinions about film, tell me what you thought of this book, plead for a full 78-card Tarot (perhaps even one drawn by a real artist), and suggest more projects for me at my LiveJournal: **http://princeofcairo.livejournal.com.**

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I'd like to thank my father, who bought the first Tarot I ever saw, for not taking it away from me when I started messing around with it.

Thanks also to the first players to ever see these cards: Yancy York, Kevin Nelson, David Haunschild, Donald Dennis, John Foster, and Aaron Olowin.

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INTRODUCTION

"They had, indeed, come themselves from the stars, and brought Their images with Them."

-- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu"

I made it up.

It was sometime in the 1980s, I was running *Call of Cthulhu* on the weekends, and I wanted to mess around with the Tarot. So I thought up the basic correspondences between the conventional Rider-Waite deck (still by far my favorite Tarot) and the Mythos, making sure to darken and twist the generally sunny, optimistic Edwardian vision of A.E. Waite into something appropriately grim and Lovecraftian. Then I designed and illustrated the cards, and wrote "The Deck of Borellus" (named for the sorcerer who contributes the epigraph to "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward") into the next scenario of my campaign.

Every so often, one of the players would suggest randomly turning a card to see what the future held for their characters. I usually made sure the cards spoke sooth. The players stopped doing that after a while. All these years later, I'm still pretty pleased with it, although I regret not having made "The Book" one of the Major Arcana.

I've never used it for anything but a roleplaying aid, and I'm not sure that you could use a deck that's nothing but the Major Arcana for any kind of reliable Tarot divination, even to the extent that "reliable Tarot divination" isn't an oxymoron. Technically, after all, if it doesn't have 78 cards in it, it's not really a Tarot at all, but a "tarock." But feel free to try -- just don't go blaming me if it doesn't predict anything nice.

So much for truth.

Let us now flee into the peace and safety of the imaginary. The faintly stuffy introductory essay that follows this one, "The Tarot of Cthulhu -- A Hypothetical Provenance," is intended to give a kind of "in-character" or "in-game" fictional background for the cards. Naturally Sir Alexander's learned speculations may be true or completely mistaken, at your whim.

The brief descriptions and analyses of the cards are self-explanatory, as is the theoretical expansion of the deck to include the Minor Arcana. (If there is a great outcry, perhaps we will put together a Compleat Tarot of Cthulhu deck including all 78 cards. Or perhaps that would be needlessly tempting the Outer Ones.) There follows a brief discussion of using this Tarot in *Call of Cthulhu,* or more broadly in other Lovecraftian storytelling games.

The rest is up to you. So pick a card, any card.

THE TAROT OF CTHULHU

A HYPOTHETICAL PROVENANCE

By Sir Alexander Alleyn

Although the use of Tarot cards goes back at least to the Renaissance, and according to some documentation to the 1392 "Gringonneur" deck alleged to have been central to the insanity of King Charles VI of France, the so-called "Tarot of Cthulhu" is clearly a product of the twentieth century. The artistic vocabulary indicates an artist familiar with the works of both the Art Nouveau and Surrealist movements; the line work to some extent recalls Alphonse Mucha rather than Aubrey Beardsley, indicating a possibility of Continental training, or some time spent in France. However, given that the Rider-Waite Tarot deck of 1910 is likewise illustrated in a similar Art Nouveau style (by Pamela Colman Smith), the artist may have taken his inspirations from that source rather than any of the high arts. Some of the compositions, as mentioned, are reminiscent of early Surrealist works such as those by Giorgio di Chirico; it is unlikely therefore that the cards predate 1914, and are more likely to postdate 1920 or even 1929 when Surrealism became common artistic vocabulary with Magritte and Dali.

This is even more likely, given that the clumsiness and uncertainty of the line work indicates an amateur artist rather than a professional, and likewise a dilettante rather than one steeped in the avant-garde. The work, in short, is likely that of an occultist rather than an illustrator. The symbolic elements throughout the deck likewise indicate some degree of occult initiation or experience, from the quasi-Masonic white-and-black "chequy" floor of Card 0 "Azathoth" to the occasional use of alchemical and runic symbols. The names on the cards are likewise indicative of some occult purpose, as they differ in every particular from the conventional Tarot, with the last set of cards ("Algol" for the Star, "The Eclipse" for the Sun, "Doom" for the Final Judgment, and so forth) almost parodies of the traditional Arcana.

What occult purpose is difficult to ascertain. The various cards include nine proper names of recondite etymology. "Azathoth" is the titular deity in Massachusetts litterateur Edward P. Derby's 1919 poem-cycle *Azathoth and Others* (which likewise argues for a postwar date for the Tarot), a sort of demonic child-sultan. "Yog-Sothoth, Shub-Niggurath, Cthulhu," and "Hastur" appear in von Junzt's *Nameless Cults* (1909: Golden Goblin Press) as the postulated ur-entities worshipped in "the Elder World." The first two named appear to be variants of Uranus and Gaea, or of the Babylonian Abzu and Tiamat, cosmic parents (despite representing, respectively, the Magus and the Empress) of the lesser gods Cthulhu (apparently an underworld god, from the illustration) and Hastur (possibly a sky or mountain-god worshipped by shepherds). I should note that Professor Angell of Brown University postulated a worldwide "Cthulhu Cult" based on findings in Greenland and the South Pacific, but his refusal to publish his supporting data implies that he is over-interpreting the kind of occultist rumor that