

The Uncarrot Tarot

Now this is a very old project.

I'm not sure how old I was when I drew these cards. Possibly twelve or thirteen. I know I had them with me during my second CTY session, but I'm not sure what year that was, either. Hm. I was drawing Moopsball hammers, which I didn't learn about until ninth grade, so perhaps I was as old as fifteen. It couldn't have been later than that, however.

I decided to draw a Tarot deck. Everybody should. I had just figured out shading of curved surfaces, and the idea occurred. How long could it take, anyway? Drawing two or three cards a day?

Well, I wound up with 93 cards, so I guess it took a couple of months.

Materials: a stack of 4x6 index cards, cut in half, and a mechanical pencil. Also an eraser, although not a very good eraser. I later sprayed the cards with fixative, but I didn't do a great job of that either. I treat them gently. They couldn't stand up to real use.

The cards are full of the symbolic allegory of my youth -- or something. Really, the memes that I was enthusiastic about back then. The Elvish alphabet; computers (meaning *1983* computers); tropes from science fiction. The four main suits are Hammers, Disks, Pencils, and Silly Hats.

I couldn't draw people (and I still can't). With the exception of a couple of hands, there are no human forms here. Instead, I blatantly ripped off [Tom Wham's](#) cartoon characters from the board game [Awful Green Things From Outer Space](#). (From TSR then, Steve Jackson now. See also [AGT fan page](#).) They were easy to draw, okay?

(This probably makes the Uncarrot Tarot the largest collection of Awful Green Things fan art in existence. Unless someone is even stranger and more obsessive than me.)

Uncarrot Tarot: Annotations

The title of the deck is a simple word funny. "Uncarrot" and "Tarot" look like they should rhyme, but they don't. When an unsuspecting stranger tries to say "Uncarrot Tarot", he stumbles, because which way is "Tarot" supposed to go? I found this amusing when I was a teenager, and I still do.

Here is the [Instructions card](#). It's all the interpretation you get. I think I once had a more detailed interpretation sheet, but it's long lost.

I intended the four main suits to be basically parallel to the traditional Tarot suits. Hammers are weapons, like Swords; Pencils are Wands, and are further connected to the traditional Wand attribute of intelligence; Silly Hats are shaped like Cups; and Disks, well, Disks are Disks.

Then there are secondary suits, which are deliberately incomplete -- only a few of each -- and two different ranks of trumps. The Major Arcana are the traditional sort, with archetypical figures and scenes. The Meta, or Extremely Major Arcana, are comments on the very idea of a Tarot deck.

The Hammers, by the way, are not just generic hammers: they are plastic squeaky-head hammers. These are the primary weapons from the game of [Moopsball](#), invented by Gary Cohn, which I read about in the sci-fi collection *Orbit 18* (ed. Damon Knight). (As of June 2005, I have posted the [Rules of Moopsball](#), with the author's permission. Yay!)

The five species that crew the *Znutar* (in the Awful Green Things game) are here associated with the card suits. The Pencils have Frathms, the Disks have Redundans, the Hammers are Snudlians, and Silly Hats are worn by Smbalites. (The fifth race, from Snudl-2, show up on a few cards in the Miscellaneous and Major Arcana.) The Mascot and the Robot also make appearances, of course.

I used Tolkien's Elvish alphabet (the Tengwar) on many of the cards. I was quite good at reading and writing these letters back in junior high school. Note that I use the Sindarin vowel arrangement, in which a vowel mark over a letter indicates a *preceding* vowel. This is more appropriate to English, in which many words begin with vowels but few end with them.

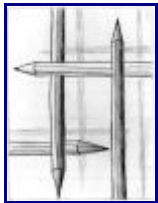
Notes on particular cards:



The Title

The title card of the deck is a card like any other. You leave it in the deck when doing a reading. (Years later, I found the same practice in the game of Zarcana.) The labyrinth is generated by the usual algorithm.

Pencils



Four of Pencils

There really are four pencils.



Knight of Pencils

Ooh, a partially-erased face shows up in the scanning.



Knave of Pencils

I like the Evil Eyebrows.

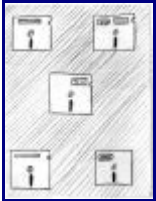
Floppy Disks

Two of Disks



The device of my teenage dreams: the Disk Zorcher, an absolutely perfect floppy duplicator. No copy-protection can foil hardware that replicates the magnetic pattern bit-by-bit! (The folly of youth. And an interesting contrast of attitude. These days I write software for a living, and the idea of piracy makes me furious.) The labels read "Zorcher", "Go", "Original", "Blank".

Five of Disks



The label is nonsense, sorry.

Six of Disks



"S.S..." (for Sadistic Software)

Seven of Disks



"Penqueriel"

Knight of Disks



Of course, the only kind of armor a Redundan could wear.

Knave of Disks



This is before Macintosh. I lusted after a tablet as the perfect input device, not a mouse. (Note that the tablet is actually a flat-panel display as well. I'm still waiting for *that* development.)

King of Disks



A Redundan throne can't have a solid back.

Hitchhiker of Disks



Very definitely an Apple tied up in string. And the correct kind of floppy drives.

Hammers



Ace of Hammers

The first card I drew! (As you can tell by the erase lines.)



Knight of Hammers

Such a great "action shot".



Knave of Hammers

Knives wear black cloaks, although this one is split high to allow for the tail. Knives also attack people from behind. Those are frisbees that the Redundan is trying to defend himself with.



Hitchhiker of Hammers

My perspective needed work.



Ace of Silly Hats

People keep calling this one the "Two of Feathers". Sigh.

Silly Hats



Five of Silly Hats

Rotating propellor beanies!



Knight of Silly Hats

The scimitar is straight out of Martin Gardner's *Aha* puzzle book. It's a good thing it's not in a sheath, because it could never be drawn out! (I wish I remembered what the symbol on the knight's silly helmet meant.)



Knave of Silly Hats

Black cloak *and* he's twirling his moustache. Couldn't be more evil.



King of Silly Hats

The crown of the King of Silly Hats is the silliest crown one could possibly imagine. I put ankhs on it, for some reason.



Hitchhiker of Silly Hats

Monorail station.

Miscarcana



Five of Kings

All five species, including the rarely-seen Snudlian-2.



King of Fives

Anyone can see the throne is pentagonal. But did you notice that the the portrait shows five people?



Two of Protractors

"Protractors" is a slight pun; each suit contains a "ruler", after all... I didn't go so far as to put the Ruler of Protractors in the deck.

Meta Arcana



The Blank

Piers Anthony's tarot had a blank "ghost" card; I could do no less.



The Big Black Thing

Sort of the opposite of the Blank.

Major Arcana



The Captain

All of the display screens are from *Sundog*, an old Apple starship-trading-and-fighting game. Very fine game.



The Card

The Roman numeral XXIV (24) is meant to imply an ordering of the Uncarrot trumps. Of course, there is no such ordering, and only the Card and the Misprint have numerals. The darkening, spiralling effect is from Hofstadter's comments in *GEB* about pointing a camera at its own monitor.



The Dancer

From Ann Maxwell's *Fire Dancer*.



The Demon

I never did figure out how to draw flames well.



The Doctor

No comment necessary. Except for the robotic Mascot. Oh, and I think he's holding a Sonic Toothbrush.



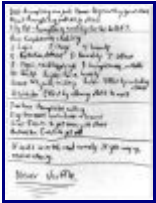
The Genius

The badge says "ARML", for Atlantic Regional Math League, a math competition that I competed in back then. Above it is a round badge showing the outline of a hypercube. The five Platonic solids are (badly) drawn on the chalkboard; but I have entirely forgotten the significance of the symbols on the clock.



The Hanged Man

The legs of the Rider-Waite Hanged Man form a cross. The tentacles of this Redundan form part of a pentagram. (Well, I thought it was clever at the time.)



The Instructions

Disk: Accomplishing own goals

- Hammer: Doing something against others
- Pencil: Accomplishing goals set by others
- Silly Hat: Accomplishing something for the hell of it.
- Ace: Completeness, stability
- 2: Logic
- 3: Change
- 4: Insanity
- 5: Protection, defense
- 6: Normality
- 7: Offense
- 8: Magic, weird happenings
- 9: Incompleteness, unstable
- 10: Sanity
- Knight: Force, honesty
- Knave: Wit, guile, trickery
- Ruler: Effect by controlling others
- Hitchhiker: Effect by allowing others to work
- Trashcan: Accomplishes nothing
- King: Increases control over Cosmos
- Five: Events to get even with others
- Protractor: Events to get odd
- If card is inverted, read normally. If right-way up, reverse meaning.
- **Never shuffle.**



The Marble Machine

I love marble machines. If I ever build a house, it will have a marble machine strung all through it.



The Maze

This is a Praser Maze, as you can tell from the hedges and teleporters and gates.



Misprint

See, the cardstock got folded in the printing press...



The Nerd

He wears a pickle in a pickle-holster, his garments have many pockets, and he's got the Corellian Pinstripe on his pants. I don't know what this means, but I have some vague memory that this card was originally titled the Pickle-Master. ("Blong!") The background is architecture from the study rooms of the Shadek-Fackenthal library of Franklin and Marshall College, PA. (The study rooms have since been remodelled and converted to offices. I am sad.)



The Pickle

I never quite knew whether this was the Pickle, a major arcanum, or just the Ace of Pickles.



The Planet

Voltornion, seen from space. Most of the planet should be dark, given the angle of the sun, but so what?



The Robot

I seem to have erased part of the body and forgot to redraw the floor stripe. The stripe is probably part of some puzzle. This is the Znutar's Robot, but "buzz, whirrrr" is the sound made by the robot in *Zork 2*.



The Supernova

Probably a reference to Ann Maxwell's *Fire Dancer*, although I recently re-read Sylvia Louise Engdahl's *This Star Shall Abide*, which I was also familiar with when I drew

this.



Transfer

A not completely terrible anatomical drawing from the Sime/Gen novels, by Lorrah and Lichtenberg.

I do hereby state that I am who I have been, and can be reached at erkyrath@eblong.com for the foreseeable future.



Andrew Plotkin

Also, [let it be known that I am sometimes Zarf.](#)

March 6, 2001.

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