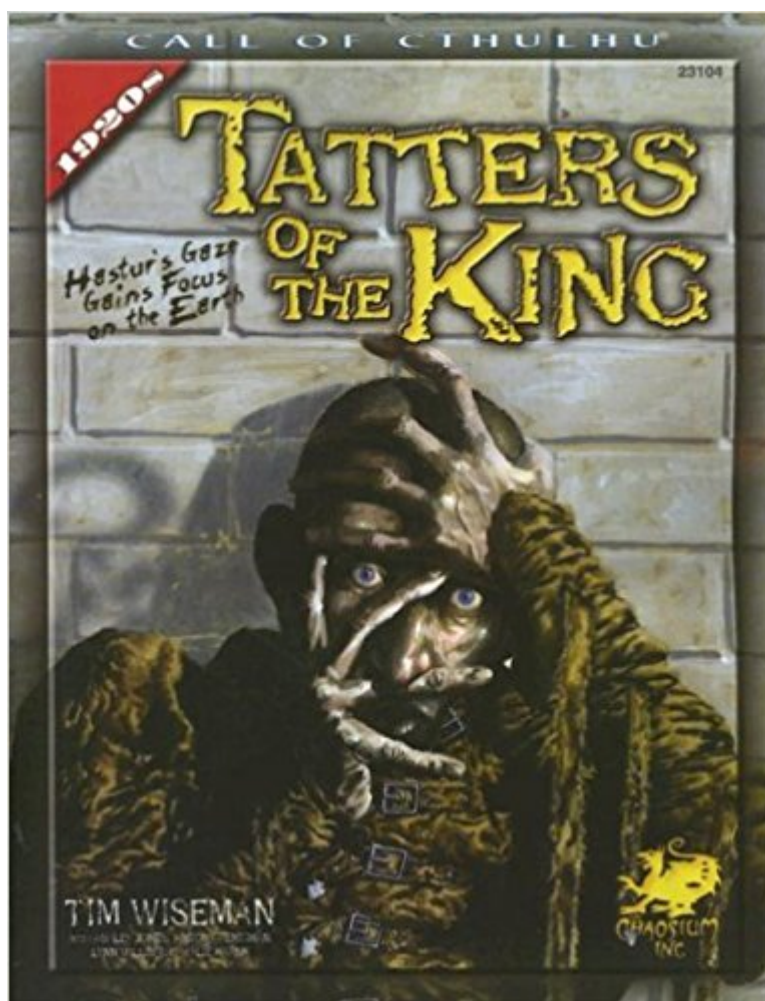


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Tatters Of The King: Hastur's Gaze Gains Brief Focus Upon The Earth (Call Of Cthulhu Horror Roleplaying)



Synopsis

IT IS OCTOBER 1928. London is the capital of an empire covering a quarter of the globe and governing one quarter of the human race. The people busy themselves with concerns of politics and government, finance and production, work and recreation. How fragile things are. What ignorance there is. There are those who engage in different pursuits who would see an inhuman power come to Earth such that it would make mundane activity seem like a last twitch before dying. Over this winter its taint emerges: the sensitive and the weak feel it first. Few know the source, but some welcome it unconsciously finding in it an enexamined thrill. Artists work is strangely influenced, and they mine this vein of creativity. Many exhibitions this season feature similar images: a social gathering gripped by repressed panic; a lake or marsh cloaked in mist; a presence just off-canvas. New fiction and theatrical releases offer scenes of upheaval and confusion that never reach a climax. Seances and mediumistic exhibitions bring untoward results and end in disruption. Others feel new lines of communication opening; some claim God is talking to them. All feel the lure of the stars. TATTERS OF THE KING is a Call of Cthulhu campaign suitable for four to six investigators: ideally one should be a psychoanalyst or alienist and published in this field, and one or more of the others should be involved in the creative arts. It is convenient if the investigators live in or near London, but one or all can be foreign-based if they are prepared to travel to Britain to address events. Detailed advice on options for involving the player characters is provided.

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Customer Reviews

It is October 1928. London is the capital of an empire that covers a quarter of the globe and contains a quarter of the human race. The population busies itself with its concerns of politics and

government, finance and production, work and recreation. But how fragile things are. What ignorance there is. For there are those who are engaged in quite different pursuits. Those who would see an inhuman power come to Earth that would make such activity seem merely a last dance before dying.

The King in Yellow, Hastur, has long been an inspiration for, and an element of, the Cthulhu Mythos of HP Lovecraft. There have been any number of great works on the subject, from the original, decadent work by Chambers, to some modern materials on the same subject (check out Chaosium's "The Hastur Cycle" anthology or the "New Tales of the Yellow Sign" by Robin Laws). All incredibly disturbing. This work, a gaming supplement for the now classic RPG Call of Cthulhu, is a fun, challenging work that tries to capture the dreamy, disturbing feel of the original stories. Creepy encounters with lunatics, unsettling rambles in wild country, evocative line drawings and sketches that help set the mood. The work is, overall, very well done and weaves two separate strains of Cthulhu Mythos in one volume. These interconnected tales would offer months of fun for a weekly gaming group. If the work has a drawback, it is the use of somewhat prosaic monsters/encounters, especially during the first book, which is unfortunate considering the scope and challenge of the campaign as a whole. Still, the work is well written and, apart from a few discrepancies between NPC descriptions and the statistics provided, technically solid.

I used to detest the Yellow King. Now I seek him out wherever his gaze falls. If you like the disturbing and unwritten world of Robert Chambers' classic and its literary progeny, this is the adventure for you. Call of Cthulhu is a great game and this is a great, multi-part, multi-year adventure.

Chaosium gets a bad wrap from CoC die hards, because they produce so little new work, and are outshone by licensees on a regular basis. This campaign, however, is an incredibly rich and well-composed effort. Exceptional in its ability to take you into a brilliantly textured setting populated by fascinating and complex characters. The maps and interior illustrations are superb. Not a fan of the cover art. Those who like pulpy gunfights and hurling sticks of dynamite at Cthulhu critters should look elsewhere, but those seeking a rewarding investigation and roleplay playground will enjoy this masterpiece.

Extremely well written and thought out, this adventure is a total delight for everybody to play. It is

perfectly laid out for the keeper and extremely exciting for the players. I've run it close to 7 times now as a one off campaign with different groups and everybody absolutely loves it. An adventure on a massive scale, it is incredibly tense and easy to follow for everybody involved, never have I had more fun DMing Call of Cthulhu. Buy this if you want one of the best 1920s adventures out there.

I run a Living Arcanis campaign, which also contains Freeport. With a wealth of material at my disposal, I decided to pick up Tatters of the King (TOK) to see how I could fit it into my campaign. I should point out that this is a long playtest review that contains spoilers galore. To help clarify what I did differently in my campaign, I will use a PLAYTEST tag. Tatters of the King is a massive Call of Cthulhu adventure that details the invasion of Hastur on Earth. It's Hastur's grand oeuvre, presenting him as a Cthulhu-like entity, as the King in Yellow, and as a husband deity to Shub-Niggurath. Four cultists, each participating in a different path to bring about Hastur, attempt to contact him, only to go their separate ways. It's up to the player characters (PCs) to stop them. Montague Edwards and Lawrence Bacon made an Unspeakable Oath with Hastur. Edwards regenerates, Bacon never sleeps. Alexander Roby is inexorably tied to Carcosa and the Yellow Sign, and only he can summon it to Earth. Malcom Quarrie is the most dangerous and the most committed to bringing the King in Yellow to Earth. The four unknowingly have a rival cultist in their midst, one Wilfred Gresty, who worships Shub-Niggurath and doesn't buy any of this "bride of Hastur" stuff. The adventure begins with an opening night of the play, The King in Yellow, that drives people mad who witness it. There's an after-party held in celebration of the success of the event, wherein the PCs get to meet the author, Talbot Estus, and his players. A great introduction to the insanity to follow. [PLAYTEST: I placed the events in Freeport. Two of the PCs were present and ultimately escaped the madness that ensued. They returned in time to attend the opening night reception. There, one PC (Sebastian the sorcerer) decided Talbot Estus, was too dangerous to live and murdered him in cold blood.] In the mean time, the PCs are tasked with getting their friend, Alexander Roby, out of an insane asylum at the behest of Doctor Trollope. There were murders in the prison blamed on Roby, although how he committed them is impossible to tell. In reality, Edwards, who posed as a guard in the prison, committed the murders. The PCs are encouraged to interview Roby, who provides a telling prophecy both for the end of the campaign and of Doctor Trollope's death. [PLAYTEST: I changed Doctor Trollope to be Kham the psychic warrior/rogue's father. I made Roby a childhood friend of Kham to provide more relevance. I also inserted a few adventures here involving finding Kham's father and a side jaunt into a "The Thing"-like adventure. The PCs witnessed a strange summoning involving nine monoliths and were attacked by byakhee.

It also started to snow, unheard of in tropical Freeport. I made it a point of having an incarnation of the King in Yellow tell Kham that "he was the key." With Trollope knowing too much, Edwards' chief henchman, Michael Coombs, assassinates him. The PCs receive a posthumous note from Trollope indicating that Roby predicted his death with a spell. Wilfred Gresty, a rival cultist of Shub-Niggurath, slips one of the PCs a note about Lawrence Bacon's whereabouts with the intent of catching him in the act of draining the homeless of their life force. [PLAYTEST: Having Trollope be Kham's dad infused the adventure with a lot of emotional energy. Once he connected Bacon to his father's murderer, Kham tracked down the cultist and a showdown ensued, resulting in Bacon falling off a bridge into icy water. One cultist down, three to go!] A subsequent search of Bacon's home reveals a group of ghouls living in Bacon's basement. [PLAYTEST: In my campaign, ghouls were created through an addictive drug called ghoul juice. It wasn't too much of a stretch that Bacon was both a drug dealer as well as a dealer in antiquities. Kham, with no regard for his own safety, barely escaped with his life.] Determined to summon Hastur, Edwards breaks Roby out of prison. The next connection is an obituary for Bacon, written by none other than Aleister Crowley. The PCs are expected to visit Crowley and wheedle information out of him about Montague Edwards. [PLAYTEST: As a real-life analogue, Crowley had no place in Arcanis. So I went all out, turning him into the front man for a sadistic cult. They kidnapped one of the female PCs. This culminated in a battle in Crowley's basement, who eventually gave up the information they sought but escaped penalty due to his social and political connections.] Hot on the trail of Edwards, the PCs journey north only to discover that Roby succeeded: Carcosa has been summoned to Earth. Coombs plays a cat-and-mouse game with the PCs until they finally kill him. They then track down Roby and Edwards just in time to see Edwards summon thousands of byakhee and Hastur himself. [PLAYTEST: Kham killed Edwards easily, but was unable to stop the summoning. There are several ways to stop it, but I went for the dramatic approach. Roby demanded Kham throw him a pistol in self-defense--in reality, Roby knew he was the key to closing Carcosa. So he shoots himself. Ilmare and Kham barely escaped with their lives. The town left behind was utterly obliterated by Carcosa and Hastur's appearance. Three cultists down, one to go!] Time passes. The PCs meet Gresty, presumably when he's in prison. He reveals information about Shub-Niggurath and its rivalry with the Brotherhood of the Yellow Sign. He also provides a link to events happening at Nug's Farm. There, Hillary Quarrie, the wife of Malcolm, is in fact the heir-apparent to the Shub-Niggurath priesthood. Only Gresty lusts for her power, creating an inevitable showdown. This is the single-most exciting part of the campaign, with the PCs going toe-to-toe with a Dark Young. Only a ritual cast by Hillary saves them. Using information gleaned from Hillary, the PCs travel to

Milan. There, they met up with Thomas Villiers, who ultimately betrays them with another byakhee. This in turn reveals where Malcolm disappeared to: Drakmar, in Tibet.[PLAYTEST: Fortunately, Arcanis has portals that span the planet, so I skipped what I consider to be the most boring part of the adventure: long overland travel. The PCs resumed the adventure at the Monastery at Te, wherein they met Carlo Schippone, a crack shot. They made short work of him and journeyed onward to meet the Horror from the Hills. And that horror is Chaugnar Faugn. The PCs didn't do anything stupid, although the adventure makes much of what happens if they do. Surrounded by Tcho-Tchos, the PCs were dutifully ushered past Chaugnar Faugn into the Plateau of Leng, where they met Malcolm Quarrie at last. Only Quarrie is a pacifist. Bound and determined to summon the King in Yellow, Sebastian convinced Quarrie that they are aligned in their goals. This worked for a little while until Shantaks attack. That's when Sebastian used the opportunity to kill Quarrie in cold blood. See a pattern here?] Finally, the PCs meet the King in Yellow. He simply asks who will lead him to Earth. PCs who hesitate...DIE.[PLAYTEST: Kham, convinced that this was his burden to bear, agreed at first...then changed his mind. The King slit his throat. Sebastian was up next. He planned to lead the King astray. And so he did, leading him back to Carcosa and taking Sebastian (at least temporarily) out of play. The adventure left the PCs feeling like they had lost even though they had saved the world.] TOK is an excellent series of adventures, marred occasionally by the usual Cthulhu foils: assuming investigators will be naive or helpless (these days, most investigators carry guns and in my D&D game, they carry really heavy firepower in the form of spells), spending way too much time on overland travel, and an overemphasis on how PCs can avoid going insane by closing their eyes...a decidedly unheroic thing to do that shouldn't work anyway. But when TOK hits its mark, it really makes for memorable sessions. The moral quandaries that the PCs regularly faced made for exciting play, and the fever pitch of the Dark Young showdown is magnificent...unfortunately it has very little to do with the main plot (it's essentially internequine squabbling with a completely unrelated cult). There are plenty of notes and props, all of them useful. Especially intriguing are the nightmares that the PCs experience and the means of conveying the King in Yellow's telepathy (it involves cue cards). All of this made for evocative scenes that kept my PCs guessing. Best of all, TOK plays for keeps. While the sacrifice of two PCs was a serious blow, it FELT like the conclusion to a series. And given the grand tour of Hastur and his ilk, we all appreciated the ending.

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