

Sample file

Curse of the Yellow Sign

Act 2: Calling the King

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Playtesting & Feedback

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Inspiration

The King in Yellow and the Yellow Sign are creations of Robert W. Chambers.

The Yellow Sign depicted here was designed by Kevin Ross.

A tip of the mask to Shirley Jackson, Stephen King and Stanley Kubrick.

Act I.

Tuxedos and gowns find their places
But the program gives no warning
The lights dim and the play begins
The violet of morning

In Carcosa

The sun bleeds in the East
The Hyades sing their dying throes
The stars rise to claim their prize
The Queen's song still echoes

In Carcosa

Songs of sorrow songs of pain
Masked and disguised
All hope has fled The Queen in Red
Her Fate is crystallized

In Carcosa

The Queen grows weary of wordy games
Her daughter dances delusioned
Her son sings her songs but her heart belongs
To the mists and illusions

Of Carcosa

The audience shifts uncertain
What is rhyme and what is reason
Uneasy in their seats but the play is not complete
They begin to suspect treason

In Carcosa

At midnight a Stranger calls
The Queen is unsurprised
O King in Tatters the clock is shattered
He turns to us with his awful eyes

Act II.

I am the last and terrible King

Have you found the Yellow Sign?

(Yhtill! Yhtill! Yhtill!)

The damning wisdom that I bring

Have you found the Yellow Sign?

(Yhtill! Yhtill! Yhtill!)

The Phantom of Truth dispels

Have you found the Yellow Sign?

(Yhtill! Yhtill! Yhtill!)

All the Heavens and all the Hells

Have you found the Yellow Sign?

(Yhtill! Yhtill! Yhtill!)

Peel away the mask, the pale facade

Have you found the Yellow Sign?

(Yhtill! Yhtill! Yhtill!)

And fall into the hands of the Living God

Overture

In the early 1980's, Richard and Sylvia Brennan were the talk of Hollywood. The husband/wife team created three films together: all three nominated for multiple awards, all three blockbusters. Anything they touched turned to gold.

Then, the couple suddenly divorced. While the press speculated on a cause, the couple confirmed nothing. Since then, Sylvia's career has degenerated to support roles in mediocre romantic comedies. Her life has been a whirlwind of alcohol, drugs and failed affairs while Richard's last two films were commercial and critical successes.

Now, ten years after their divorce, Richard has begun a new project. Keeping with tradition, he has invited his usual crew of actors to a secluded location for a read-through of his new script. One of those actors is his ex-wife, Sylvia Brennan.

Alone in the Colorado wilderness, they begin to read through the script... an adaptation of the infamous play, *The King in Yellow*.

Calling the King is a one-night scenario for *Call of Cthulhu*. The scenario itself is almost bereft of rules. We have a rough map of the abandoned hotel where Brennan holds his reading and the character stats, but other than those essentials, the entire event is in the hands of the players. The psychodrama that's about to unfold will keep the players quite busy.

As with other *Curse of the Yellow Sign* scenarios, there are no monsters, no Library Use rolls, no archeology, no clues to find, no spells and no cultists. There is only one blasphemous book and that's the cursed play itself. As the actors and director read through the play, a doorway begins to open between our own universe and... another place. A dangerous place. The characters—and players—are about to come face-to-face with an ancient and powerful idea. An idea with teeth. An idea with an endless hunger.

Calling the King is not a linear adventure. Instead, it is more like a sandbox game: you have characters and an environment and certain events that occur, but there is no step-by-step, clue-by-

clue progress. I'll give you all the information you need to play in the sandbox (including Locations, NPCs, etc.), but once the scenario gets started, it's really up to you and the players to move the plot forward.

A Friendly Warning

This is an incredibly demanding scenario, both on the players and on the Keeper. On the other hand, when it works, your players will come away with an experience they won't forget.

I'm going to do my best to give you every tool you need to make it work. I've run the scenario a few times, found some really effective techniques. You'll find them all over this book.

Background

Richard and Sylvia's divorce, while very private, was also very painful. It wasn't an ugly, screaming affair. Instead, the couple simply drifted apart. While they still loved each other, they were no longer in love. They tried to maintain the bond, but slowly, their marriage simply failed. Eventually, Sylvia asked for a divorce. Because he loved her, and did not want to cause her any more pain, Richard relented.

Since then, Sylvia's life has become a self-destructive mess. Still wounded by what she saw as a betrayal of the marriage, she has driven herself into a dark spiral of drugs, alcohol and sex. Richard, on the other hand, has used that same energy to create two of his darkest and most emotional films. His ex-wife's fall has not gone unnoticed. He still cares for her, still hopes for her. He watches her waste her talent and wants to bring her back from the edge of the abyss. That's why he's called for this read-through. And that will be his last mistake.

It is now December 10, 1999.

Richard has arranged with his regular crew of actors to put on a kind of psychodrama. He knows his wife is close to suicide and he hopes to create a scenario that will shock her out of her depression. All the actors—except Sylvia—are in

on the plan. Richard has arranged for a copy of *The King in Yellow* to be delivered to an abandoned Colorado hotel. He will tell the actors he wants to make a horror film based on the play. They will read through the pages—something no-one has done for over one hundred years—and create the greatest horror film ever produced.

He has also arranged for a special effects crew to create an atmosphere of horror and dread... and murder. The play is known to drive men mad—superstitious nonsense that Richard does not believe—and as they read through the play, actors will slowly “go mad.” One of them will even turn into a raging psychopath and “murder” the other actors. Richard hopes this scenario will break Sylvia’s depression, remind her of the passion she once had, and return her to the woman he remembers... and still loves.

Of course, you and I know what’s wrong with Richard’s plan. The play really *will* drive the actors insane. One of them even to the point of the darkest madness. And, in reading the play, the actors and director will open a portal to a realm where fiction and reality are not so clearly defined. They will *become* the characters they portray and allow other things to pass through the gate as well.

Scenario vs. Adventure

Calling the King is not an “adventure.” That word has a particular connotation I’m trying to avoid.

Most people think of Call of Cthulhu adventures as mysterious monster hunts full of clues, blasphemous books, unspeakable monsters, cultists and desperate violence. This series of scenarios has none of that. Instead, we are using isolated locations and small groups of people thrown into situations they are unprepared to deal with. In Digging for a Dead God, we had a small group of soldiers dealing with an ancient and powerful entity bent on driving them mad. In Calling the King, we’ll be dealing with a similar situation, but the circumstances are very different.

What’s Going to Happen?

Putting six highly emotional and sensitive human beings in a place as haunted and dangerous as the Glennwood Grand Hotel is bad enough. But we’re also going to expose them to *The King in Yellow*. That makes everything worse.

As the actors read through the play, a doorway opens: a doorway between the “imaginary” world of the play and our own “real” world. Slowly, the actors and the characters begin to merge together. The Hotel transforms into the Queen’s castle in Alar and the desolate halls begin to fill with unearthly, masked revelers. At midnight, the Queen commands all remove their masks...

We’ll look at the details below.

Preparation

For most roleplaying adventures, the characters usually take a back seat to the plot. *Calling the King* is different: it is *entirely* character driven. Not only that, but the characters’ backgrounds and motivations are *heavily* intertwined.

Preparation is essential to making this scenario work. I *highly* suggest giving your players the sheets a few days before you play so they can go over their character backgrounds and roleplaying notes and get a good feel who they will be playing.

I’m not being cute about this. The better prepared your players are before going into this thing, the more rewarding the result will be.

Also, make sure each person has a name card. Nothing kills the atmosphere more than the questions, “What’s your character’s name?” and “Who are you again?” I’ve provided name cards in the back of the book. Make sure your players use them.

The Return of the Man in Black

As in the previous Curse scenario, the Man in Black is an omnipresent figure. In *Digging for a Dead God*, he was an entity that exists because conscious thought exists. The ancient race discovered in that scenario had a name for him, but his name has changed here. Tonight, he shall be called the Phantom of Truth. The Dreaded King. The Last King. He who brings the End of the World.

Again, I wore my black suit (black tie, black shirt, black everything) and my Yellow Sign pin. (You can find a link on www.johnwickpresents.com/yellow for the place I got mine. And no, I don't get any money from their site. They just make a kick ass Yellow Sign pin and I wanted to throw some eyes their way.) When the MiB showed up, I also wore a black veil and a white harlequin mask. In the dim light, the mask took on a life of its own, seemingly floating in the darkness.

He arrived on the scene after the reading of the play's overture (see *The King in Yellow Excerpts* below). I've put a whole section on using the MiB in the *Advice* section at the end of this book.

Themes

I have two big themes running through this adventure. We will explore these themes through the characters we portray. The conclusions we draw from the questions presented are up to us.

The Fragility of Love

Like other manmade concepts, love is a misunderstanding of the true nature of the universe. At least, in a universe where Lovecraft's concepts are alive and well. Love isn't just an illusion, it's a *delusion*. An emotion brought on by chemicals in our brains that causes us to see the world through a distorted filter. Nothing else, nothing more.

All too often, we reinforce this delusion with stories that are no more sophisticated than children's tales. Hollywood spews out romantic comedies, re-assuring us that "love conquers all." Love does not conquer all. Love is just as fragile

as any other human emotion, any other human concept. As soon as we encounter the true nature of the universe, we understand how weak and pathetic our concepts are. And "true love" is no exception.

Love isn't magical. Love isn't special. It's just like any other emotion. You feel jealous, you feel hatred, you feel anger, you feel afraid... you feel love. All of these things fade with time. Why is hatred less "magical" than love? Why is jealousy less important than love? All of them are nothing more than chemical reactions in our biological brains.

Nothing more, nothing less.

