

# CARCOSA



*Lost Cities, Fallen Empires  
and the Language of  
Archaic Astronomy*

N. KENNINGTON

*Strange is the night where black stars rise,  
and strange moons circle through the skies,  
but stranger still is  
lost Carcosa.*

- Robert W. Chambers, *The King in Yellow*

YOU HAVE SEEN THE BLACK TOWERS RISE. YOU HAVE GLIMPSED THE TATTERED MANTLE. HE IS COMING! HE IS COMING!

GATHER YOUR CULT AND BRING FORTH CARCOSA - HOME TO THE KING IN YELLOW! WITH HIS GIFTS AND THE RIGHT STARS YOU CAN BRING IT HERE.

In Carcosa, you will summon the city of the Tattered King, one tile at a time! Use your cultists to tap ley lines, conduct rituals and explore the districts of Carcosa itself. If your cultists displease you, you can sacrifice them to the dark waters of Lake Hali for the pleasure of the King.

Only the most devious leader will be able to marshal his cult through The Coming of Carcosa and earn the right to wear the Pallid Mask!

## COMPONENT LIST.

- 84 Carcosa tiles
- 4 Hastur tiles
- Cult mat
- 36 cultists
- 4 prophets
- 8 thugs
- 1 stranger
- 24 Ritual Stone tokens
- 4 Chapter House cards
- 4 Forbidden Lore cards (x5 languages)
- 1 Rulebook
- 5 art cards



## COMPONENTS AND SETUP.

### Map Tiles.

There are 88 tiles in total. Have a look through them.

*What have you found?*

I see domes and towers.

These are **Districts** of Carcosa!



*Bring them forth  
and the KING  
will reward you!*

I see tendrils of crackling power.

These are **Ley** lines.



*With these we will  
fix Carcosa to our  
shallow reality.*

I see stone circles, and symbols that hurt  
my eyes.

These are **Ritual Sites**.



*Perform for the  
KING and He  
will come!*

I see cold dark water.

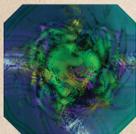
You see **Lake Hali**.



*Sacrifice to it and  
please the KING!*

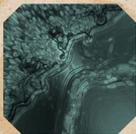
I see whirlpools of terrible energy.

These are **Confluxes**.



*They may empower  
simple ley lines!*

There are 84 tiles depicting ley lines,  
districts of Carcosa and ritual sites - most  
of which float in the dread waters of  
Lake Hali. These tiles have a "fixed" side  
and an "unstable" side:



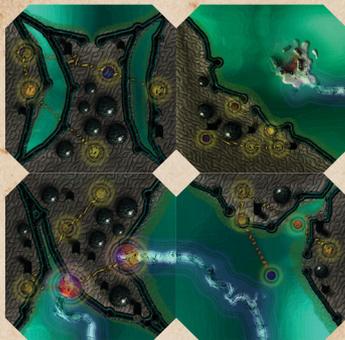
Initially they will be placed unstable side up but soon the strange powers of the  
black stars will secure them in place (and you'll get to flip them).

*Have you found the  
YELLOW SIGN?*

*Do not dwell on  
its presence.*

There are four tiles that show a strange symbol instead of an "unstable side".  
On the other side of these 4 tiles are map sections that represent Hastur - the  
heart of Carcosa. Place them in a square in the center of the playing area with  
the map side showing. You must obey the normal rules for tile placement  
(see Gameplay on page 6).

This is one way you could arrange them:



There are others - for who can know the true landscape of lost Carcosa?

### *The Cult Mat.*



This large, folding tile has two areas.

The Occult Power Track curls around the edge of the mat. On this, your cult will advance as its power grows.

On one side of the mat (marked with an "L"), the track is shorter.

*The King is close!*

Games with 4 cult players (or any group desiring a **short game**) should use this side.

On the other (marked with "LXX"), the track is longer and cults will have to work harder to bring forth the King. This side can be used

for smaller groups (2 or 3 players) or experienced players who find using the "L" side always results in a "King Rises" victory.

*Have you found the  
YELLOW SIGN?*

In the centre of the mat, your cultists have prepared the ritual chamber!

There are areas chalked on the ground for up to six piles of tiles. Shuffle all the tiles (except for Hastur) and split them evenly to form piles within the chalk marks, unstable side up. The number of piles depends on the number of players:

Note that with three players the piles will be slightly uneven.

PILES	PLAYERS
4	2
5	3
6	4

## Chapter House Cards.

These cards depict the rooms where mad cultists are sent to recover. Each player should be given one. It contains an "Asylum" area and a "Recovery Room".

## Forbidden Lore Cards.

These cards provide reminders of key rules. Each player should be given one.

## Cultists.

These are represented by wooden "meeples". There are 10 cultists in each of the 4 colours representing one player's cult. These should be distributed to the players as a "ready pool" next to their Chapter House.

Each player should then place cultists in the following areas:

- One cultist **STANDING UP** in the center of the Yellow Sign. This is their **Prophet**.
- One cultist **STANDING UP** next to the Occult Power track. This is their **Oracle**.
- Three cultists **LYING DOWN** in the center of the Yellow Sign. These are potential cultists they may be able to recruit later!
- One cultist **LYING DOWN** in the Asylum area of their Chapterhouse. This cultist is insane, but will recover over time!
- Once cultist **STANDING UP** in the Recovery Room of their Chapter House. This cultist has recently recovered from insanity, but is not quite stable enough to be trusted!



## Short Game Rule

If you are playing a short game (described above), only place 2 cultists on the Yellow Sign - leaving 4 in your ready pool.

After all this, each player should have three cultists remaining, which they keep in their "ready pool".

## Ritual Stones.

These stones may be imbued with occult power drawn from ley lines during the game. Each player should be given a "set" of 6 (numbered II to VII) and place them number side **DOWN** in front of them.



## GOAL OF THE GAME.

One after the other, players will use their cultists to bring forth Carcosa by placing tiles.

One tile at a time, a magnificent landscape of ritual sites, ley lines, towers and domes will be created and expanded. You will place your cultists on these sites to gain occult power for the glory of Carcosa. Power is gained during the game and may be important in the final reckoning. The Cult with the most power may earn the right to wear the Pallid Mask as Chosen of the King or even summon Him into the world.

The game ends immediately when one of the following occurs:

1. Two of the stacks on the Yellow Sign have been depleted - "A Cult Ascends".
2. One cult summons the King in Yellow himself - "The King Rises".

Both of these are detailed in END GAME below.

## GAMEPLAY.

Carcosa is played in clockwise order. Determine the first player in a manner sure to please the King in Yellow (e.g. the player who last dreamt of stars or sacrificed something). Starting from the first player, take the following actions before turn passes to the next player clockwise:

### *Use a Ritual Stone.*

At any point during your turn, if you have an imbued ritual stone, you may flip it numbered side down to trigger its effect. After expending a ritual stone, a Cult's Prophet must be returned to their ready pool until they next select a tile. The ritual stones and their effects are described on page 13.

### *1. Recover Sanity.*

All cultists in the current player's Recovery Room move to their ready pool, then all cultists in the player's Asylum move to their Recovery Room.

### *2. Select a Tile.*

The player **MUST** take one tile from an unoccupied stack on the Yellow Sign and place their Prophet on top of the stack. The player may not take from a stack that already has a Prophet on top of it.

### *3. Place or Replace a Tile.*

The active player may look at both sides of the tile, but does not have to show it to anyone else (once they look, they must place **THAT** tile!). They then place the tile, unstable side up, to continue the landscape. The placed tile must share a side with at least one other tile already placed and ley lines, districts and water must link. (It does not matter if the tiles are fixed or unstable!)



*This  
CANNOT  
be!*

*The ley line on the right of the existing tile cannot connect to the district on the left of the new tile.*



*This may  
be!*

*The ley line on the right of the existing tile connects to the ley line on the left of the new tile.*

OR

Replace an existing UNSTABLE tile as long as it does not “break” the landscape and is not inhabited by a cultist. The replaced tile should be returned to the Yellow Sign at the bottom of the stack with the least tiles. (If tied, the active player chooses.)

#### 4. Place a Cultist.

If a feature on the tile the active player has just placed is unoccupied (including sections of that feature on other tiles), they MAY place one cultist from their ready pool onto it. (This is explained in more detail, with examples, below.)

They can only place one cultist per turn (but see the ritual stone effects on page 13 if you want to break that rule!)

Placed cultists not only prevent an unstable tile from being changed, they can also generate power for your cult as listed on the following page.

## 5. Resolve Tile.

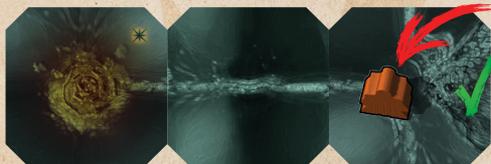
Each placed tile may cause various effects from gaining occult power to devouring your unfortunate cultists! Read each of the sections of “Drawing Power” below for more information.

# DRAWING POWER.

## Ley lines.

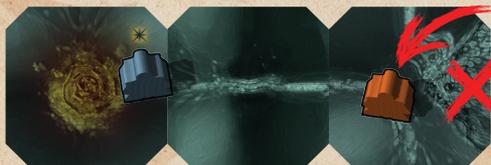
### PLACING A CULTIST

After placing the tile, you *MAY* place one of your cultists from your ready pool on one of that tile’s ley line segments unless that segment is joining another section of ley line that is already controlled by a cultist (of any player).



### Examples:

The Orange Cult has just summoned the rightmost tile and can place a cultist on the ley line.



The Orange Cult has just summoned the rightmost tile but cannot place a cultist on the ley line as it is already controlled by the Blue Cult. They could still place a cultist on the District or sacrifice one to Lake Hali (see below).

### COMPLETING A LEY LINE

If both ends of a ley line are closed - ending in a conflux, ritual site or district, or if it creates a “closed loop” - it may bring a boon to the Cult who controls it as well as stabilising the area around it.

### DETERMINING CONTROL

The Cult with the most cultists on the ley line may be blessed with a boon. If there is a tie, the King is pleased by the struggle and both may gain a boon.

### GAINING A BOON

Flip all the tiles belonging to that ley line to their fixed side if they aren’t already.

Note: this might stabilise part of a district or even cause a ritual site to stabilise causing terrible, wonderful things to occur! If so, see RITUAL RITES below and resolve them *Now*.



If the ley line ends in a **Empowered Conflux**, those in (or sharing) control also advance their Oracle one space on the Occult Power Track for each tile of the ley line.

Next, those who controlled the ley line may imbue a single ritual stone whose size (written in roman numerals on the imbued side) is equal to the length of the ley line they have completed.



They have  
**FOUND** the  
Yellow Sign!

Finally, all cultists on the completed ley line are driven mad and sent to their Chapter's Asylum.

### Advanced Rule

AFTER your first game, the following additional rule should be used:

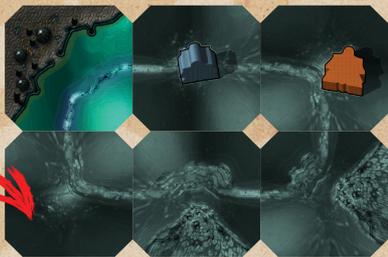
A cult leader may empower stones whose total does not exceed the ley line length.

For example, if a cult completes a ley line of length 6, they may empower a single size 6 stone, or a size 2 and a size 4 stone.

#### Examples:

The Blue Cult places the bottom left tile to create a closed loop. The following then occurs:

1. All 5 unstable tiles are flipped to their fixed side.
2. The blue cultist may empower a ritual stone. As there is 6 tiles in the ley line they may select any one from DON THE MASK to CALL THE LEGION.
3. The blue cultist is driven mad and sent to its Chapter's Asylum.



The purple cult places the bottom left tile creating a ley line connecting a ritual site and a district.

The following then occurs:

1. All 3 unstable tiles are flipped to their fixed side.
2. The blue ritualist **MUST** complete the ritual site as detailed below, gaining power and possibly causing the orange sacrifice and the blue ritualist to be devoured.
3. The purple cult may empower a DON THE MASK, WE ARE LEGION or GLIMPSE THE BEYOND ritual stone.
4. The purple cultist is driven mad and sent to its Chapter's Asylum.



## RITUAL SITES.

### *Placing a Cultist.*

After placing the tile, you *MAY* place one of your cultists as a ritualist at the ritual site to beg power from the King in Yellow.

### *Completing the Ritual.*

The ritual will complete when the tile stabilises **REGARDLESS OF WHAT CAUSED IT**. Ritual Sites will automatically stabilise when they are surrounded by tiles (unstable or fixed) in all eight directions. In addition, the ritual site can be stabilised by a connected ley line or nearby district stabilising.

### *Determining Control.*

There can only be one ritualist at a ritual site, so that player's Cult will gain power regardless of who triggered its completion. Others may gain power from a terrible sacrifice!

### *Gaining Power.*

Flip the ritual site to its fixed side. One of two things may occur depending on what is on the other side of the tile:

**The King Is Pleased!** The ritualist's cult must advance their Oracle one space on the Occult Power Track plus an additional one for each surrounding tile. The ritualist is driven mad and sent to its Chapter's Asylum.



**Behold the Feaster!** The monstrous tentacles of the Avatar of the King appear! The ritualist's cult must advance their Oracle one space plus an additional one on the Occult Power Track for each surrounding tile, then the ritualist and any sacrifices in the connected waters of Lake Hali (see Sacrifices below) are **devoured**.

Place devoured cultists, **lying down**, in the center of the Yellow Sign, then each player advances their Oracle four spaces on the Occult Power Track for each of their cultists devoured.

*Example:*

The Blue Cult summons the center-left tile and completes the central Ritual Site. The ritual site is stabilised and the tile flipped. The blue oracle advances NINE PLACES. If a Feaster is revealed, the ritualist and the rightmost Blue Sacrifice are devoured, advancing the Blue Cult a FURTHER EIGHT PLACES. The orange sacrifice is also devoured and also advances FOUR PLACES.

The leftmost blue sacrifice is blocked from being devoured by the ley line between them.



*They still yearn for  
Its embrace!*

## DISTRICTS.

### *Placing a Cultist.*

After placing the tile, you *MAY* place one of your cultists in that district unless that segment is joining another district that is already controlled by a cultist (of any player) - just like with ley lines.

### *Completing a District.*

A district will stabilise automatically when it is surrounded by walls and there are no gaps inside.

### *Determining Control.*

The Cult with the most cultists inside the walls may draw power from the district. If there is a tie, the King is pleased by the struggle and both may draw power - starting from the active player and moving clockwise around the table.

### *Using Power.*

Those who gained power first advance their Oracle two spaces on the Occult Power Track for each tile of that district.

Now flip all the tiles belonging to that district to their fixed side if they aren't already.

Next, if any tiles in the district contain a theatre, players with a cultist in the district may recruit one cultist per theatre if they have any lying down in the centre of the Yellow Sign.

Finally, all cultists in the complete district are driven mad and sent to their Chapter's Asylum.



*They have found  
the Yellow Sign!*



## SACRIFICES.

### *Placing a Cultist.*

After placing any tile, instead of placing your cultist on a feature, you *MAY* sacrifice one of your cultists to the dark waters of Lake Hali.

Place a cultist LYING DOWN in an area of water. No-one controls the waters of dread Hali - so multiple cults may place sacrifices in a single connected body of water but you can still only place one cultist total on the tile you have just placed!

#### *Example:*

The Blue Cult has just summoned the bottom left tile. They could place a tile on the ley line, but not the district (as this is already controlled by their cultist). There is also two areas of water where they could sacrifice a cultist on either side of the ley line. They select the right side and place a cultist lying down in the water to await a Feaster's embrace!



### *A Terrible Fate.*

Sacrifices will not be driven mad in the normal way. They will either be devoured as part of a ritual completion (described in Ritual Sites above) or merely scored at the end of the game (described below). Think carefully before you make a sacrifice, particularly early in the game!

## IMBUED RITUAL STONES.

At any point during your turn, if you have an imbued ritual stone, you may flip it numbered side down to trigger its effect. You may only have one ritual stone of each type at any time. They have the following effects when used:

**Don the Mask (2+):** The casting player may move all their mad and recovering cultists to their ready pool.



**We Are Legion (3+):** The casting player may add an additional cultist from their ready pool to any uncontrolled feature on any tile.



**Glimpse the Beyond (4+):** The casting player may fully examine every tile in their Prophet's stack then return them in an order they choose.



**A Mask Betrayed (5+):** The casting player may move any number of Prophets to either another stack or their owner's ready pools.



**Call the Legion (6+):** The casting player may move any one of their lying down cultists to standing up in their ready pool.



**Shape the Beyond (7+):** The casting player may fully examine every tile in their Prophet's stack, reorder them if they desire, then select one and place it next to their Chapter House. This tile may be played during this or a later turn as an extra tile.



After expending a ritual stone, a Cult's Prophet **MUST BE** returned to their ready pool until they next select a tile.

## END GAME.

### *A Cult Ascends.*

*The twin suns sink beneath the lake, the shadows lengthen - take all you can from the watching minds - take control of Lost Carcosa!*

When two of the stacks on the Yellow Sign have been depleted and their tiles resolved, each player must advance their Oracle on the Occult Power track according to the following rules:

- Each open ley line they control (or share control of) is worth one power per tile.
- Each incomplete ritual site they control is worth one power per adjacent tile.
- Each incomplete district they control (or share control of) is worth one power per tile (not two!)
- Each of their sacrifices not devoured is worth one power (not four!)
- Each imbued ritual stone they have is worth one power (regardless of type)

The Oracles may have to start a second "lap" of the track to total their power completely. Any Cult working on *The King Rises* may start to gain power again at this stage (but any power they "lost" while working on *The King Rises* remains lost).

After final scoring, the Oracle with the most power, regardless of who ended the game, takes control of Carcosa and may wear the Pallid Mask!

### *The King Rises.*

*He will bless this world! Bring him forth! YOU have the power - you must! He comes! HE COMES!*

When an Oracle reaches the end of the power track, they cannot gain nor lose power and must conduct the summoning ritual.

From this point, whenever a cultist from that Cult is driven mad, instead of sending them to their Chapter's Asylum, place them **STANDING UP** on The Yellow Sign.

If a single cult manages to get three standing cultists on The Yellow Sign **BEFORE** two stacks are depleted, they successfully complete the ritual and the King In Yellow comes forth to survey His new domain!

That Cult wins and there is no "final scoring" stage.

## ARCANE LORE.

*What does the coloured tint and black stars on the backs of some of the tiles mean?*

The slight yellow tint and the four pointed star means that there is a slight chance of something wonderful or terrible happening when that tile is flipped. The strong yellow tint and eight pointed star means there is a good chance of something happening.

*What are the pattern of squares on the unstable sides of the tiles for?*

These are used in the solo-play rules. You can ignore them in the 2 - 4 player game, though very new players may wish to think of them as a (very!) rough indicator of value.

*Can I pass / not place a tile?*

No.

*I cannot place a tile. What do I do?*

This is almost impossible in normal play - you may get in a situation where you cannot place a tile to benefit yourself, but you must still place a tile. However if it does occur, and all other players agree, place the impossible tile on the bottom of the smallest stack and draw the next tile.

*How many cultists can I place on the tile I have just placed?*

Zero or one.

*The tile I am about to place will stabilise immediately, do I get to put a cultist on it?*

Yes. You place the tile, then you may place a cultist on it, then it is checked for stabilising etc.

*Can I place a cultist on an unoccupied tile that was placed earlier?*

Not without the use of a ritual stone. You can only take control of an uncontrolled feature on the tile you have just placed.

*A theatre has been revealed by a ley line nearby stabilising. Is its effect triggered now?*

No. The theatre is only triggered when its containing district is completed but now is a good time to start to fight for control of that district!

*Does the We are Legion ritual mean there can be two cultists on a single tile?*

Yes, but they will be on different features.

*When I place an extra tile gained from the Shape the Beyond ritual, do I get to place a cultist on it?*

Placing the cultist is stage 4 of your turn, so it is possible to place a cultist on the extra tile, but only if you have not yet placed one or resolved a tile in your turn. Of course, other ritual stones allow you to place extra cultists...

*Can I activate a ritual stone if it will have no effect?*

Yes. However, you will still have to move your Prophet back to your ready pool.

*I'm getting enough power this turn to start the King Rises ritual. What happens to my cultists that go mad in this turn?*

Look at the order of resolution - you generate power, move your Oracle, then your cultists go mad. Therefore, you start the ritual and the cultist that tipped you over move, standing up, to the Yellow Sign. It is possible, though highly unlikely, for a player to complete the track, start and finish The King Rises in a single turn.

*What happens to my cultists who are devoured while I'm conducting The King Rises?*

They are devoured. They do not count for the final ritual and the power you would have gained is lost.

*Who is supposed to have added the hand-written annotations in the rulebook? Is it the author? The King? The Stranger?*

There are no annotations in the rulebook.

*There are 8 small coloured tokens, what are they for?*

These are intended as accessibility aids. You could use them to mark the tile each player placed last. You could use them to note tiles or a general area that you need to remember is important to you (or pretend that it is!).



*There are feasters with "slots" cut in them on punchboards 9, 10 and 11. What are these for?*

Fun. They come in pairs - slide one "top" and "bottom" together to make a "pop-up" feaster that can be placed on a revealed feaster after it has devoured everyone. (We had some unused space on the last few punchboards.)

*What is the elephant for?*

It's free.

## CARCOSA: THE THUGS

*Someone overtook and passed me.*

*He never turned, but there was the same deadly malignity in his profile that there had been in his eyes.*

*- Robert W. Chambers, The King in Yellow*

Some are called to the service of The Tattered King, yet their minds are not strong enough for His great works. They can be trusted for only simple tasks, but sometimes that is enough!

CARCOSA: THE THUGS is a mini-expansion for Carcosa.

### *Setup*

Each cult leader should take one grey Thug figure and place it in their ready area. The remaining thugs are added, lying down, to the Yellow Sign.

### *Gameplay*

#### GENERAL EFFECTS

Any effect that targets cultists may instead target a thug. Effects that target all cultists also target all thugs.

#### THEATRES AND THUGS

When a district containing a theatre is completed, any player who may recruit cultists may also recruit a single thug from the Yellow Sign. If multiple players are entitled to recruit a thug, the active player may select first, then the player to their left, etc.

#### PLACING THUGS

Thugs may be placed instead of a cultist during the Place a Cultist step or using the We are Legion ritual following the rules for cultist placement.

#### THUG EFFECTS

Thugs control tile features and prevent unstable tiles from being replaced in the same way as cultists but they have no owner once placed. Therefore no power is gained from them if a ley line, district, or ritual site they occupy is completed regardless of who placed the thug.

If Feaster is revealed and consumes thugs, the player who controls the ritualist gains 4 power per thug consumed, regardless of who placed the thugs.

## CARCOSA: THE STRANGER

*You, sir, should unmask.*

*Indeed?*

*Indeed it's time. We all have laid  
aside disguise but you.*

*I wear no mask.*

*No mask? No mask!*

*- Robert W. Chambers, The King in Yellow*

The Stranger is come. He may bring Tidings of the King, he may be an Avatar - here to do the King's Bidding, he may be the King - terrible and wonderful, come at last! His motivations are unknown, but he brings chaos in his wake.

CARCOSA: THE STRANGER is a mini-expansion for Carcosa.

### *Setup*

Place the yellow Stranger meeple on the Yellow Sign. Do not dwell on his presence.

### *Gameplay*

#### HE COMES

If the Stranger is on the Yellow Sign and a player places a tile such that a single tile "gap" in the landscape is formed - surrounded on all 4 sides with legally placed tiles, place the Stranger in the gap.

#### HE MOVES

At the beginning of each player's turn, the Stranger will move one tile towards the nearest placed cultist in the North, South, East or West directions (not diagonally). If there is a tie or there is no cultist currently deployed, the active player may choose. After his initial appearance, he will only move on tiles.

If the tile onto which he moves is unstable, it stabilizes immediately without any other effects. I.e. No-one will gain power or be consumed because of this tile stabilising. If it is occupied by a cultist, the Stranger speaks and then is returned to the Yellow Sign.

#### HE SPEAKS

When the Stranger speaks, any cultist on that tile is driven mad and sent to their Asylum. At that point, their controlling player learns a Terrible Secret.

That player may fully examine all tiles in the largest stack of remaining tiles (if tied, they may choose the stack to examine) and select two tiles. One tile must be removed from the game and the other placed next to their Chapter House. This tile may be played during this or a later turn as an extra tile.

# CREDITS

Carcosa - A tabletop game by One Free Elephant

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*Look what we did!*



