



THE **YELLOW**
④ **KING**
ROLEPLAYING GAME

PARIS

QUICKSHOCK
GUMSHOE

Robin D. Laws



Pelgrane Press



BOOK ONE

PARIS

Publishers: Simon Rogers and Cathriona Tobin
Designed, Written, and Produced by: Robin D. Laws
Cover Art: Shel Kahn
Interior Illustrations: Shel Kahn
Collages: Dean Engelhardt
Graphic Design: Christian Knutsson
Copyediting: Colleen Riley, Cathriona Tobin
Eagle-eyes: S. Ben Melhuish
Indexing: Cathriona Tobin
Special Thanks: Kevin Kenan, Côme Martin, Erik Otterberg, Galen Pejeau

Playtesters:

Ralf Achenbach, Jack Anderson, Bradley Barger, Jeff Bernstein, Julien Berton, Alizée Bleue, Yosefka Bill, Jeff Borders, Mark W. Bruce, Shaun Burton, Kelli Butler, Brian Carter, Brendan Clougherty, Chris Cooke, Lizzy Cooke, Maudie Pepper Croal, Ashley Cyr, Jarrod Davila, Susan Davis, Mike de Jong, Dimes, Toorte Dot, Axel Eble, Jonathan Elcock, Davina Ellis, Anne Freitas, Jeromy French, Meg Gallagher, Nicole Gardella, Davy Gerard, Lloyd Graney, Jacob Haley, Justin Haley, Morgan Hua, Chris Huth, Bert Isla, Susan Isla, Paul Jackson, Bertram Jänsch, Sydney Jones, Zachary Joyner, Shel Kahn, David Kennedy, Joe Kimbrough, Zack Kline, James Kohl, Julaïe Koï, Rainer Koreasalo, Chris Lambertus, Nicole Long, Nyssa Mackinnon, Mark Manlapas, Côme Martin, John W.S. Martin, Damon Matthews, Dan McSorley, Dustyn Mincey, Chandreyee Mitra, Justin Mohareb, Arka Neirda, Thomas Nowell, Janne Nuutinen, Travis Offenberger, Tyler Omichinski, Erik Otterberg, Cameron Parkinson, Andrew Pfeiffer, Michael Pfeiffer, Florian Poisson, Luke Powell, Jack Reidy, Tim Reiter, Christian "CJ" Jensen Romer, Aubrey Rush, Nat Sanderson, Tomi Sarkkinen, Liam Scanlon, Martin Schramm, Steve Seminerio, Eric L.M. Shuman, Scott Slonaker, Jebadiah Smalls, Becky Smith, Robert J. Smith, Simon Strietholm, Aser Tolentino, Megan Tolentino, Ben Wachtell, Scott Wachter, Brett Wagner, Markus Wagner, Paul Ward, Michael Warnick, Brian Watson, Mike Weber, Cory Welch, Calliope Westbrook, Dan Wiley, Joseph Williams, Charles Wright, Kim Wright.

Copyright © 2019 Pelgrane Press Ltd.

The Yellow King RPG and GUMSHOE Quickshock are trademarks of Pelgrane Press Ltd.

Pelgrane Press is co-owned by Simon Rogers and Cathriona Tobin.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SHATTERED REALITIES, EXPLODED SELVES	6	Combat Special Cases, Exceptions, and Explanations	59
Roleplaying Basics	6	Hazards	63
Mysteries of Paris	7	Regaining Pushes and Pool Points	69
This Game	8	Improving Abilities	69
Modes	11	Character Replacement	70
Characters	11		
A HOWLING FROM CARCOSA	11	RUNNING THE GAME	71
Kits	12	To Arc or Not to Arc?	71
Gender and Background	16	Scenarios	73
Name	17	Self-Motivated or On Call?	73
Drive	17	First Episode	74
That Deuced Peculiar Business	18	Taking the Premise as Read	77
		Further Mysteries	77
DESCRIPTIONS	18	Antagonist Reactions	82
Relationships	20	Subplots and Side Notes	83
Investigative Abilities	21	Maintaining Genre	83
Investigative Ability Descriptions	22	Tone	84
General Abilities	28		
General Ability Descriptions	29	BELLE ÉPOQUE PARIS	86
GAME RULES	33	City of Lights	86
Getting Clues	33	Americans in Paris	87
Tests	38	How You Act is Who You Are	88
Time Increments	43	The Century So Far	89
Refreshing Points and Pushes	44	Politics	92
Fighting	45	The Press	96
Shocks and Injuries	55	Evocative Details	97
		Locations	98
		Haunted Paris	111
		Horror in the Countryside	112
		Shadows of Brittany	112
		Artists and Bohemians	115

PEOPLE	115
Artists and Bohemians	115
Scientists and Inventors	125
Occultists	126
Police and Thieves	133

THE KING, HIS PLAN, AND HIS MINIONS	138
The Unreliable Narrations of Robert Chambers	138
Your Unreliable Universe	142

FOES	146
Foe Format	146
Foe Master Table	147

GHOST OF THE GARNIER	168
The Alien Truth	168
Inspiration	169
Scenes	170
Antagonist Reactions	186

CARDS	188
Injury Cards	188
Shock Cards	209

APPENDICES	227
Upper-Crust American Names	229
French Names	230

TABLES AND REFERENCES	232
Relative Challenge Table	232
Physical Hazard Table	234
Mental Hazard Table	235
Investigative Ability Worksheet	238
Spotlight Tracker Table	239
Relationship Table	240
Group Matrix	240
Fight Trackers	241

INDEX	242
--------------	------------

SHATTERED REALITIES, EXPLODED SELVES

In *The Yellow King Roleplaying Game*, players take on the roles of young artists studying abroad in Paris in 1895. When the publication of a play called *The King in Yellow* begins to overwrite the city with the supernatural reality of an alien world called Carcosa, they plunge into weird mystery.

And they play European soldiers fighting in the murky Continental War of 1947. They come to realize that their endless, inexplicable struggle occurs at the behest of Carcosa's Yellow King, and plunge into weird mystery.

And they play former resistance fighters in the present day, after the overthrow of the tyrannical Castaigne regime, which has held America in its icy grip since the 1920s. They want to rebuild their nation, but that requires—you're seeing a pattern now—a plunge into weird mystery.

And finally they also play contemporary people in the world as we mostly know it—but what is that strange masked creature lurking behind that dumpster over there? Could it be a harbinger of... weird mystery?

Something links these characters across time and alternate realities—a grim destiny that may enable them to unravel the king's ultimate scheme.

The Yellow King Roleplaying Game (or *YKRPG* when only an acronym will do) can be played using this overarching,

interwoven structure, or in a simpler, episodic mode featuring shorter incidents of subjective reality horror in any one of its four settings.

To play the game, you need this book, which includes both the rules and the central Belle Époque Paris setting.

Each of the other settings appears in its own volume: *The Wars*, featuring Europe's 1947 War of Reclamation; *Aftermath*, the contemporary post-Castaigne world; and *This Is Normal Now*, our world with supernatural corruption seeping in from the corners.

Roleplaying Basics

This is a tabletop roleplaying game, or RPG.

When playing an RPG, a group of participants gather to talk their way through a story they spontaneously create together, adjudicated by a set of game rules.

Unlike other types of games with multiple participants, you don't win or lose a roleplaying game. Often you play many times, building a story featuring the same characters and situations. You come to follow them as you would the episodes of your favorite serialized television adventure show.

All but one of the participants takes on the role of a particular fictional character. These participants are called

the **players**. The characters are **player characters**, or PCs for short. Your rules set may give you other synonyms for the PCs, for example, investigators, heroes, conspirators, or the team.

As a player, you prepare for the first session of play by inventing details about your character, following a character creation process laid out by the rules set.

Typically one participant serves as the **Game Moderator**—GM for short.

The GM guides you through the events of the game:

- populating an imagined world with compelling places, people, and things for the main characters to interact with
- portraying those secondary figures, called GMCs (Game Moderator Characters)
- describing the setting's places and things when your characters encounter them
- deciding how the rules apply, should confusion about them arise
- refocusing your attention when the group gets distracted or bored

The action in a roleplaying session happens in each participant's imagination. Just as your experience reading a compelling book doesn't provide an observer with rich visual cues, playing a roleplaying game remains a low-key affair.

It used to be hard for absolute newcomers to initially figure out what the heck goes on in a roleplaying game. These days, lots of folks point video cameras at their tables, playing online in real time for others to watch. Roleplaying streamers, as they are called, then archive the results on sites like YouTube. If RPGs still seem

mysterious to you, check out an example game and you'll soon see how it all comes together.

Mysteries of Paris

Mysteries the group investigates go something like this:

- Grit and rock dust found in the strange wounds of victims murdered near the morgue suggest that the gargoyles of the nearby Notre Dame Cathedral have come to life.
- Added by reading *The King in Yellow*, a beloved art instructor changes by night into a murderous brute—and the trail of victims grows ever closer to the heroes.
- The delightful but overbearing mother of an investigator arrives in town to visit—and then seems to have shed thirty years. She's determined to spread the miracle cure to aging to America, but when the group goes to find the man who treated her, they find only a murder scene—and clues pointing to a conspiracy of Rosicrucian occultists about to transform themselves into Nietzschean übermenschen.
- Once word gets out that the group knows its way around the occult, a foreign agent tries to use them to contact the King in Yellow, to enlist his aid in a colonial war.
- A mysterious but munificent client pays the group's portrait specialist to create a weird, full-body painting depicting him suffering from all manner of wounds, from stab to gunshot. The client then goes on a murder spree, proving immune to all of the harms shown

in the painting. To stop him, the group must locate and destroy the painting, which by the addition of the Yellow Sign has become a protective charm of unholy power.

- In a sequel to Chambers' story "The Mask," residents and household staff in the wealthy Faubourg Saint-Germain district are found in fancy homes, transformed into marble statues. Their jewelry cabinets gape open, robbed by thieves. Though at first presumed dead, the victims recover—temporarily altered by a serum first developed by a sculptor named Boris Yvain. It works because the appearance of *The King in Yellow* has bent the rules of physics in Paris. To find the thieves, the investigators must learn who knew Yvain, now dead from suicide, well enough to gain access to the formula.

This Game

TKRPG uses Pelgrane Press' GUMSHOE system, a set of roleplaying rules focused on gathering information and solving mysteries. GUMSHOE says that failing to get information is never interesting. When your character uses a relevant ability in a situation where the scenario says there are clues to be found, you always get them. This simple premise allows us to present rich, layered mysteries in which the object is not to randomly stumble across a few key bits of information, but to piece together the truth hidden within a larger web of clues.

As with all of our GUMSHOE games, the rules have been specifically tuned to a particular setting and style of play—in

this case, the subjective reality horror of Robert W. Chambers' *King in Yellow* mythos.

Rules Basics

When characters seek information where it might be available, they always gain it, provided they have an **Investigative ability** that fits the situation.

In situations when interesting story possibilities arise from either success or failure, characters make a **test**. They spend a number of points associated with a relevant **General ability**, roll a single six-sided die, and add both numbers to get a result.

This is then compared with a **Difficulty number**. If the result meets or beats the Difficulty, the character succeeds. Sometimes the **margin** between result and Difficulty matters.

Each General ability has a numerical **rating**. This number tells you how many points you can spend on that ability over the course of a scenario.

The number of points you currently have available to spend is called your **pool**. If you've spent all your points, your pool equals 0.

At the start of a new scenario, your pool returns to its maximum value, the rating.

In special circumstances you may be able to return your pool to its rating during a scenario. This is called a **refresh**.

Unless directed to refresh only a certain number of points, you refresh to your rating.

When you refresh or otherwise gain a particular number of points, you never receive more points than your rating allows.

When battling, chasing, or running away from adversaries, characters simultaneously test their Fighting abilities, combining their results to compare against a Difficulty number reflecting the toughness of the enemy and the challenge of their tactical goal.

When characters suffer physical harm, they take **Injury cards**. **Shock cards** represent various sorts of mental and emotional strain. Text on these cards describes their game effects and tells you how to discard (get rid of) them. Where not otherwise specified in the card text, you discard all Shock and Injury cards at the end of every mystery. When you accumulate a certain number of Injury cards, the character dies. The same number of Shock cards means that the recipient has suffered a mental breakdown so severe that they can no longer continue to investigate and battle the occult forces of Carcosa.

When they succeed against a foe in a fight, characters pay a **Toll**, a number of points drawn in any combination from their Athletics, Fighting, and Health pools, to avoid taking a Minor Injury card.

Rules Departures

This version of GUMSHOE departs from previous ones in a few key respects:

- Combat is faster, with each player making a single Fighting test.
- Combat is player-facing; the GM never makes tests for enemies. (In fact, the GM never rolls dice at all.)
- Combat is more heavily abstracted, emphasizing what the characters want to achieve in the story.
- Health is no longer a resource determining how

close you are to dying.

- Characters who are hurt in combat or when encountering physical obstacles take Injury cards, which exert various effects tuned to the type of harm they've suffered.
- Stability is no longer a resource measuring how close you are to leaving play due to emotional breakdown.
- Characters who fail Composure tests to resist enduring emotional harm take Shock cards, which exert various effects tuned to the situation.
- Characters die when they accumulate too many Injury cards, or leave play due to permanent mental strain when they accumulate too many Shock cards.

Together these changes make this a new iteration of the core rules, which we call QuickShock GUMSHOE.

To avoid confusion with standard GUMSHOE, we sometimes highlight an **unrule**, a reminder that a rule you may have grown accustomed to does not apply in the QuickShock version.



A HOWLING FROM CARCOSA

Four short stories by American author Robert W. Chambers (1895–1933) serve as central inspiration for this game. Published in the collection *The King in Yellow*, they are, in addition to the title story: “The Mask,” “In the Court of the Dragon”, and “The Repairer of Reputations.”

Ambrose Bierce also writes of a place called Carcosa, in his short story “An Inhabitant of Carcosa.” Chambers clearly mined it for references, but in that tale Carcosa is an ancient city, and Hali the name of a philosopher the narrator contemplates. It also mentions Aldebaran and the Hyades, as stars the narrator sees overhead after leaping forward in time to an era long after his city’s reduction to ruins. These too become touchstones, in a different context, in the *King in Yellow* mythos.

Modes

TRPG can be played in one of two modes. Choose which one you prefer before character generation:

- **Horror** mode is the tougher of the two, likely yielding a higher character death rate.
- **Occult Adventure** is a shade more forgiving, though still no Sunday promenade down to the café district.

Characters

In the *Paris* portion of your series, the players portray students of various arts learning their craft and soaking in the sights and delights of the City of Lights. They begin play blissfully unaware of the alien and supernatural dangers they are about to encounter. Inchoate in each of them is a personality trait

BEYOND THE CYCLE

Chambers wrote other horror stories and some pulpy supernatural adventures. Aside from a handful of ghost stories that turn on the same simple ironies as those of his contemporary and inspiration, Ambrose Bierce, his voluminous other works are corny and dated even before you reckon with their lurches into breezy period racism.

References to a few of Chambers’ other tales appear sprinkled throughout the game’s four sequences. These appear as Easter eggs as a belated reward to those who have made the mistake of spending their time reading those tedious stories. If you haven’t, don’t let this game trick you into it. They truly are terrible.

that will drive them further toward occult danger.

In the early episodes of your series, they become aware of the recent covert publication of a disturbing closet drama, *The King in Yellow*. Over time they realize that its reality-bending ripple effect lies beneath all the bizarre events they’ve been investigating.

The default version of the series assumes that the characters are all, or at least primarily, Americans from wealthy families now living the artificially and temporarily impoverished lives of students abroad. This follows the pattern established by Chambers in his story “The Mask.” It makes the characters outsiders who have acquired some familiarity with Paris and its ways—a convenient conceit allowing you to easily present information to the players.

Although it doesn’t evoke the Chambers stories as closely, you could equally well have the characters hail from elsewhere. The players might better relate to characters from England, Canada, Australia, or elsewhere on the Continent.

One or two players may ask to play Parisians. This choice works particularly well in the case of the Muse character (see below) who becomes an insider and their guide to the city.

If you or your players are all French, you may find it odd to play Americans and prefer to recast the art students as locals. Maybe they’re provincials living in the great city for the first time.

Kits

Characters are created by combining one item apiece from two sets of **kits**.

Investigative Kits

The first kit, the **Investigative kit**, determines the characters’ fields of study and their Investigative abilities, which they use to gather information.

The kits are:

Architecture Student

Architecture
Art History
Officialdom
Technology

Belle-Lettrist

Belle-Lettres
History
Reassurance
Research

Landscape Painter

Art History
Natural History
Negotiation
Painting

Muse

Bonhomie
Culture
Inspiration
Miscellany

Poet

Demimonde
Intuition
Occultism
Poetry

Portrait Painter

Assess Honesty

Fashion

Painting

Photography

Society

Sculptor

Art History

Military History

Sculpture

Steel

The fields of study are all more or less self-explanatory, except perhaps for Belle-Lettrist and Muse. Explain that the first term refers to a writer for journals, magazines, and newspapers specializing in essays, editorials, the occasional bit of fact-finding reporting, and perhaps the odd didactic fictional vignette. In today's terms, the Belle-Lettrist is a journalist who primarily writes think pieces.

A muse is a member of the arts scene who does not personally create anything, but rather provides inspiration, impetus, and maybe organizational work to either a single creator, or the members of an entire artistic scene. Though we most often think of a muse as a woman, either romantically linked to one or more artists, or their object of unrequited infatuation, that isn't the only way to play the character. A male muse could be a man who functions as an impresario or critical ringleader. A woman could do the same, maintaining an utterly chaste and entirely respectable relationship with the male characters. And a man could have, or be the object of, romantic feelings for another member of the

group—reciprocated or not.

Investigative abilities listed in *italics* are *Interpersonal abilities*. These allow characters to get information out of people. They are called out because some card effects trigger on the use of an Interpersonal Push—a Push using an Interpersonal Investigative ability.

Allow the players to agree between them who takes which kit. In the unlikely event of more than one player vying without relent for the same kit, have them roll dice, rerolling any ties. The player rolling the highest total gets the preferred kit.

Should you have more than seven players (an already unwieldy number for an investigative game), the additional players are gadabouts. The gadabout may pretend to be studying something, especially in letters back home cadging money from dear old dad. In reality he is frittering away the family money while pursuing a life of aimless adventure in Paris.

The gadabout takes 4 Investigative abilities also held by other characters. Except for Art History, he can't choose more than 1 ability from any one identity kit.

Does your group consist of fewer than seven players? Invite the players to fairly distribute the abilities from the unused kits between the group, using whatever method makes sense to them.

General Kits

Players then select a General kit. It reflects the most notable qualities allowing them to take actions in the game world aside from information gathering.

Athlete

A master of many sports and an impressive physical specimen.

Athletics	8
Composure	6
Fighting	6
First Aid	3
Health	4
Mechanics	0
Riding	2
Sense Trouble	1
Sneaking	3
Preparedness	0

Former Cadet

Recipient of military training, either informally, or as part of reserve officer education.

Athletics	6
Composure	6
Fighting	7
First Aid	2
Health	3
Mechanics	0
Riding	3
Sense Trouble	2
Sneaking	2
Preparedness	2

Cool Customer

A confident character, hard to shake.

Athletics	4
Composure	6
Fighting	6
First Aid	0
Health	3
Mechanics	2
Riding	2
Sense Trouble	4
Sneaking	2
Preparedness	4

Scrounger

Your knack for always having the item you and your friends need may occasionally require you to skirt traditional notions of property rights.

Athletics	3
Composure	7
Fighting	6
First Aid	0
Health	3
Mechanics	0
Riding	1
Sense Trouble	3
Sneaking	5
Preparedness	5

Former Med Student

Either formally or by watching and learning from a family member, you know how to bandage wounds and even sew up a puncture wound.

Athletics	3
Composure	7
Fighting	5
First Aid	6
Health	3
Mechanics	0
Riding	2
Sense Trouble	2
Sneaking	3
Preparedness	1



Tinkerer

You know a thing or two about devices, newfangled and otherwise.

Athletics	3
Composure	6
Fighting	5
First Aid	0
Health	3
Mechanics	6
Riding	1
Sense Trouble	2
Sneaking	2
Preparedness	5

Raised on a Farm

As owner or peasant, you grew up in the healthy air of a rural area.

Athletics	5
Composure	8
Fighting	6
First Aid	3
Health	5
Mechanics	0
Riding	4
Sense Trouble	0
Sneaking	0
Preparedness	1

Raised on the Streets

Through lowly birth or unfortunate circumstances that were later reversed, you spent your formative years fending for yourself in a big city.

Athletics	5
Composure	6
Fighting	7
First Aid	0
Health	4
Mechanics	0
Riding	0
Sense Trouble	3
Sneaking	3
Preparedness	4

Spent Time in a Factory

As owner or worker, you spent your youth amid the thundering engines of industry.

Athletics	5
Composure	6
Fighting	5
First Aid	1
Health	2
Mechanics	6
Riding	0
Sense Trouble	2
Sneaking	3
Preparedness	2

Any player preferring to build a General ability list from scratch may do so, allocating 32 points between the 10 General abilities. A group of experienced GUMSHOE hands almost undoubtedly prefers to skip the kits entirely and move right on to scratch building.

Players may also modify their kits, moving around any number of points, so long as the total remains 32. Warn them that they might regret it if the whole group lacks a crucial ability, like First Aid or Preparedness.

Survival can depend on Composure and Fighting. Going below 6 in either can shorten a character's lifespan.

Point out to players of previous GUMSHOE games that Health isn't as vital to survival, and doesn't come up as often as they might be used to.

Gadabouts can either custom build their ability lists from 32 points, unless another player decides to go that route, leaving a general kit left over for the gadabout to pick up.

The above numbers apply to **Horror** mode.

MUSÉE DES HORREURS



BELLE ÉPOQUE PARIS

“None will ever be a true Parisian who has not learned to wear a mask of gaiety over his sorrows and one of sadness, boredom, or indifference over his inward joy.”

—Gaston Leroux, *The Phantom of the Opera*

The first section of a full *YKRP* series unfolds in 1895 Paris. Its art student heroes from rich American families have been established here for a year or so. They have somewhat familiarized themselves with their temporary home and know the basics of the setting, as conveyed in this chapter. If you are using another approach—using an all-French main cast, for example—you’ll want to adjust the perspective given here.

City of Lights

In 1895 Paris beckons as Europe’s foremost center of arts, learning, technology, and luxury. The world’s biggest star, the actress Sarah Bernhardt, treads its stages. The architectural wonder called the Eiffel Tower went up just six years ago.

The Impressionists, still controversial here but increasingly embraced in America, work and exhibit in Paris. Though opposed to their new way of painting, the École des Beaux-Arts remains the world’s most prestigious school of art and architecture.

The novelist Émile Zola stands atop the city’s literary heap, despite the

scandalous realism of his works. A fresh generation rebels against his focus on the social and the tangible by dealing with fantastic, dark, and outré subject matter. Some consider themselves Symbolists; others, Decadents.

Their influence extends past literature to infuse painting and music with an interest in the weird and mythic.

The monumental operas of Jules Massenet elicit gasps with their spectacular staging, as young composers Debussy and Ravel pursue subtler, stranger harmonies.

While the intelligentsia may fuss and argue over the progress of the arts, most visitors crave its brilliant and seductive amenities. In Paris, the pursuit of excitement is an around-the-clock affair. The moneyed treat themselves to the storied cuisine of pioneering chef Auguste Escoffier, wear the clothing of fashion titan Charles Frederick Worth, and meet out-of-towners at the Grand Hotel, managed by the felicitously named André Million.

When the sun shines, the cream of Paris dons its finery and flocks to its cafés. They strut and socialize down its main boulevards, flirting, gossiping, and, above all, being seen. When the

characters seek a witness or contact immersed in the social whirl, they need merely prowl its fashionable districts until they run into the person they seek, or a friend who knows where to point them.

At night attention shifts to clubs and cabarets, from the avant-garde Le Chat Noir to the circus-like, libertineish Moulin Rouge.

The Green Fairy

Absinthe, popularized at mid-century when a blight wreaked havoc on French vineyards, remains the totemic drink of Parisian excess. Of the herbs used in this anise-flavored spirit, the flowers and leaves of the wormwood plant take the blame for its fabled hallucinogenic properties. Parisians personify its mind-blurring effect as “the green fairy.” In fact, the real danger of absinthe comes from its devastatingly high alcohol content, paired with the tendency of drinkers to slug it back as quickly as they would wine. And they slug back their wine as they would their beer.

A beguiling ritual attends absinthe consumption. Bitter on its own, it is sweetened during presentation by a sugar cube placed on an ornate slotted spoon, which is then melted by water, dripping into the green spirit. The herbal elements in the drink interact with the water, turning the clear green liquid cloudy. Experienced and/or pretentious drinkers call this the *louche*. Disappointingly, we do not call creepy or disreputable people *louche* because of this phenomenon.

You will see no flaming sugar cubes in a Belle Époque café. They’re anachronistic in this time period.

Your characters may invite turn-of-the-century well-actuallying by calling absinthe a liqueur. At this point some impertinent pedant will surely interject that one properly classes it as a spirit, because its sugar is added after the fact.

Absinthe drinkers described in this book include Proust (p. 122), and Verlaine (p. 124), whose avid consumption will hasten his death a few months from now.

Already a hazard to mind and body, the green fairy must surely accelerate the mental dissolution caused by exposure to *The King in Yellow*.

Americans in Paris

Americans see the Continent in general as a place of dangerous sophistication. No place embodies that more than Paris.

As seen in the novels of Mark Twain and Henry James, Americans, including the rich ones, regard themselves as innocents and Europe and the French as wily debauchees and seducers. Naturally this conception both attracts and repels the wary, naïf American traveler.

The characters presumably feel the allure more than the fear. Their families likely regard their decision to come to Paris as either enhancing their social cachet or endangering their morality and good sense. Should this come up during a storyline, invite the player to specify which. A character’s family might be divided on the subject, of course.

A realistically drawn rich American family would never dream of sending a young adult daughter to live in Paris

alone. They may fear that she might become, like the American artist Mary Cassatt, who resides here, an embodiment of the “New Woman.” Address this only if the player of such a character wants to. One player might enjoy running around the city eluding her stuffy chaperone, while another would consider any strictures annoying in the extreme.

Used to living in a city that attracts the wealthy, ambitious, and creatively interesting from all around the world, Parisians see Americans as quaintly charming and refreshingly direct. Upper-class Parisians allow rich, intelligent, or charming Americans leeway in minor breaches of decorum or etiquette they’d never extend to their own young relatives. The bourgeoisie may fear the temptations handsome, fickle Americans might place in the path of their respectable daughters. Tradesmen find New World visitors agreeable if they pay their bills, resenting them otherwise. American students soon find that a round of drinks goes a long way with the poor, including artists and writers eking out their daily bread as they work on their yet-to-be-heralded masterpieces.

In other words, casting the player characters as outsiders to Paris lets them fraternize with all levels of society—sometimes in the same day. This provides them an investigative edge over locals—official ones most of all.

American expatriates the cast may gravitate to include Cassatt (p. 116), Loie Fuller (p. 118), and James McNeill Whistler (p. 124).

How You Act is Who You Are

Americans may think of all Parisians as wild and licentious, but that’s what happens down at the Moulin Rouge. In reality, inherited social class determines the bounds of acceptable behavior. How people may act without suffering ostracism depends on birth.

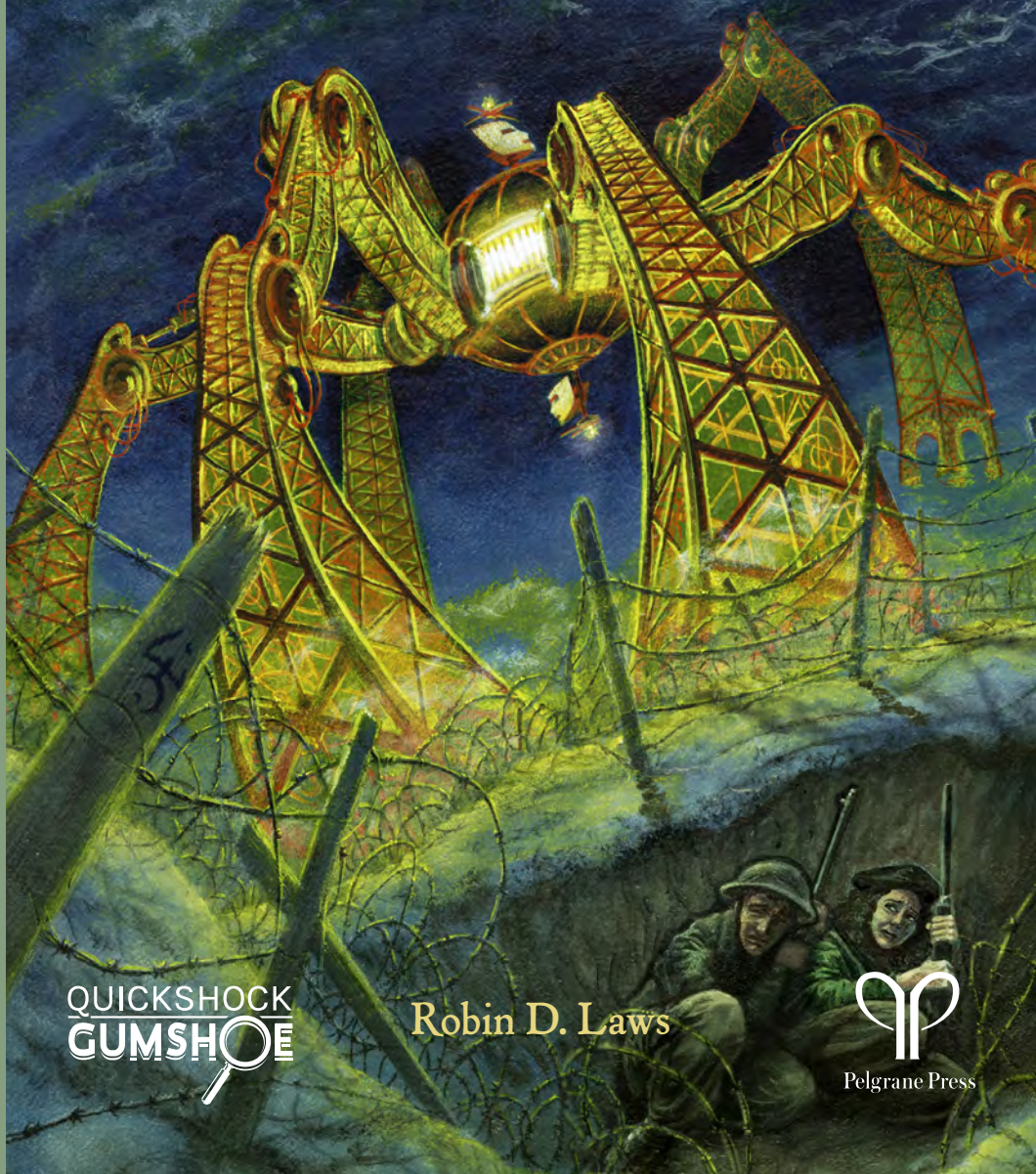
In a not unfamiliar pattern, aristocrats can do what they want, the bourgeoisie cleaves tightly to propriety, and the poor have nothing to lose and no further to fall.

Americans who think that the French Revolution wiped out the upper classes over a century ago may be surprised to find a thriving aristocracy still in place. Hereditary nobles got their titles back in 1852. These are, in descending order: duc, prince, marquis, comte, vicomte, and baron. Though an ultra-traditionalist faction seeks to return them to power, the monarchy is gone.

Title confers social prestige, which can be leveraged into political power. Many titled folk have fallen on hard times and have been reduced to incrementally pawning the family jewels. Hereditary rank can’t be lost, whatever the scandal. In general, the aristocracy hews to the conservative faction that seeks to revive the temporal power of the church. Members of this group avoid scandal not out of social pressure but from preference and conviction. That still leaves enough aristocratic men and women to pursue lives of pleasure—including affairs, if conducted with a modicum of discretion. Wives suffer greater opprobrium for indiscretions than husbands but still, love is love.

THE **YELLOW**
 **KING**
ROLEPLAYING GAME

THE WARS



QUICKSHOCK
GUMSHOE

Robin D. Laws



Pelgrane Press



BOOK TWO

THE WARS

Publishers: Simon Rogers and Cathriona Tobin

Designed, Written, and Produced by: Robin D. Laws

Cover Art: Melissa Gay

Illustrations, Schematics, and Battlefield Sketches: Melissa Gay

Graphic Design: Christian Knutsson

Copyediting: Colleen Riley, Cathriona Tobin

Eagle-eyes: S. Ben Melhuish

Indexing: Cathriona Tobin

Playtesters:

Jack Anderson, Julien Beaton, Chris Cooke, Mike de Jong, Susan Davis, John Delacruz, Dimes, Jonathan Elcock, Robustiano Fernandez, Davy Gerard, Lloyd Graney, Jurie Horneman, Blessing Huesmann, Joe Huesmann, Chris Huth, Paul Jackson, Shel Kahn, Shai Laric, Ben Loula, Michael Lovdahl, Côme Martin, Damon Matthews, Justin Mohaeb, Thomas Nowell, Erik Otterbeg, Laura Picraux, Rachel Picraux, Florian Poissonon, Jack Reidy Tim Reiter, Christian "CJ" Jensen Romer, Liam Scanlon, Robert J. Smith, Seth Taylor, Aser Tolentino, Megan Tolentino, Tracey Trower, Scott Wachter, Paul Ward, Calliope Westbrooke, Charles Wright, Kim Wright.

Copyright © 2019 Pelgrane Press Ltd.

The Yellow King RPG and GUMSHOE Quickshock are trademarks of Pelgrane Press Ltd.

Pelgrane Press is co-owned by Simon Rogers and Cathriona Tobin.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTO THE WARS	4	French Hero	85
What the Squadron Does	4	Foreign War Hero	86
Navigating This Book	5	Black Marketeers	87
CHARACTERS	6	Brothel Keeper	88
Pick Your Premise	6	Villagers	88
Who They Fight For	6	Peasants	91
Nationality	7	Not Everything Has	
When Women Fight	7	to Have Hitler In It	93
Orientation and Heritage	7	Scenarios	94
Kits	8	Shadow Squadron	94
General Kits	9	RUNNING THE WARS	94
Names	11	Report for Execution	96
Drives	11	Military Police	98
Connection	15	Hazard Scenes	98
That Damn Peculiar Thing	16	Chain of Command	99
Hey, Where's		Sequence Arc	101
the Relationships Step?	17	The Hook	103
New Abilities	17	The Development	103
RULES ADJUSTMENTS	24	The Alien Truth	103
Fighting	24	A FEAST FOR WOLVES	103
SHATTERED EUROPE	26	Possible Climaxes	104
Why Carcosa Fights	26	Scenes	105
The Loyalists	27	Origin Story	125
The Enemy	28	Shock cards	130
Warped Timeline	28	CARDS	130
Battlefronts	29	Injury cards	142
Behind the Lines	29	APPENDICES	163
The Fighting French	30	Character Creation	165
BATTLE WEARS		Embracing the Premise	165
NO MASK	33	YOU'RE IN	
Shell Shocks	33	THE WARS NOW	165
War Hazards	35	Weird War	166
Travel on Foot	38	French Infantry Ranks	167
The Machinery of War	38	Investigative Ability	
Terrifying Terrain	58	Worksheet	168
FOES	64	Group Matrix	169
Commanding Officer	79	Relative Challenge Table	169
PEOPLE	79	War Hazard Table	170
Comrades	81	Shell Shocks Table	173
The General	85	INDEX	174

INTO THE WARS

In this, the second sequence of *The Yellow King Roleplaying Game*, players portray a squadron of soldiers fighting on the European battlefield of 1947. There they unravel supernatural mysteries arising from the Carcosan phenomenon that generated this alternate reality. This struggle reflects not one specific war from our timeline, but all of them from 1914 on.

In a typical episode, the squad faces both a conventional military problem and a weird mystery stemming from the increased influence of the Yellow King over the world. The story never requires them to sacrifice the first in order to deal with the second.

What the Squadron Does

Weird mysteries of *The Wars* go something like this:

- Soldiers billeted in a remote village disappear. The locals are too frightened to tell the truth.
- Assigned to hold an old church as a sniper tower in anticipation of an enemy advance, the squad encounters a malign entity that intends to drive them to violent madness by altering their perceptions.
- The squad investigates reports that a brilliant but eccentric Loyalist commander has gone rogue. They find that he has carved out a swathe of crucial territory not for your side, but as his own domain, supported by enemy deserters who worship him as a living god. When they meet him, they find that his face has gone pallid and mask-like, and his discourse now runs to feverish monologues about Hastur and the Hyades.
- Desperate holdouts the group is dispatched to flush from their cavern turn out to be much less human, and considerably hungrier than their orders indicate.
- Dispatched on a deserter hunt, the squad finds the targets dead. But still running around the countryside shooting anything that moves.
- Sent to find out why a bridge can't be bombed, the squad sees the glowing sigils on its support pillars. Now they have to figure out how to deactivate this otherworldly protection, before enemy troops arrive and cross it, pushing further than ever into French territory.
- An enemy special forces

team penetrates the squad's base security at will. What power allowed them to assassinate the commanding officer and then seemingly dissolve into thin air?

- A walker (a tank on mechanical legs) acquires a murderous mind of its own and turns on its former masters. Can the squad figure out how to take it down?
- Behind enemy lines, the squad finds a dairy farm stocked with mutant cattle. A weird antennae juts from its central ban. What's going on here, and how do the investigators stop it?
- The squad discovers that a French brigadier general was also a powerful figure half a century ago. She looks the same today as she did back then. The *characters* suspect something sinister about her personal agenda. The *players* recall her as a terrifying villain their Belle Époque characters never managed to defeat.

Navigating This Book

"Characters" takes you through character generation, including the connections, mundane or eerie, between this new group of PCs and the ones from *Paris*. (If you're restricting play to *The Wars* alone, you'll skip that step, naturally.) The section ends with a few adjustments to the rules as provided in *Paris*.

"Shattered Europe" gives you the elements you need to build

out your version of the Continental War, from its contending alliances to the role the King in Yellow and his court play in driving the conflict. It also covers the culture and organization of the French army in this timeline.

"Battle Wears No Mask" covers the mental and physical dangers of the battlefield, as well as the setting's Cacosan-influenced retro-tech war machinery, from stalkers to dragonflies.

"Enemies" features foe profiles for both the mundane and eerie opponents the squad may wind up fighting.

"People" sketches out some supporting characters to pull into your scenarios as needed.

"Running the Game" ties these elements together with advice to assist you in GMing this sequence.

The sample scenario, *A Feast for Wolves*, pits the squad against a village of cannibal peasants in thrall to that legendary demon-wolf, the Beast of Gévaudan.

"Appendices" include the character sheet, tables used in this sequence, and an introductory handout for players, "You're in the Wars Now." Give this last item, available as a PDF from the *YKRP*G resource page at pelgranepress.com, to the players before your first session of *The Wars*.

CHARACTERS

Character generation proceeds as follows.

Pick Your Premise

Before starting your series, choose a premise. Here are three to start with; you might prefer to devise your own.

- **Shadow Squadron.** The squad forms the core of a unit specializing in reverse camouflage operations. It stages scenes meant to be picked up by enemy reconnaissance, using props and stagecraft to make it seem as if key positions are occupied by forces that are in fact nonexistent. As the only unit that does this, they get dispatched all over the place. This gets them moving and encountering a wide variety of situations from which to springboard into weird mystery.
- **Report for Execution.** Early in the sequence, the characters are released from their military duties to submit themselves for execution. Instead they choose to seek freedom and safety elsewhere. But as in a dream where you try to get somewhere but always wind

up in some other trouble, they can only continue to explore the battlefield, encountering supernatural mysteries all the while. This option suits groups who chafe at the mission structure otherwise implied by a military setting.

- **Military Police.** The team serves as a military police unit. Most of their cases occur offscreen, revolving around finding and hauling away drunk and disorderly soldiers. Scenarios feature their less-routine investigations, which lead them into confrontations with Cacosan mystery.

Who They Fight For

The players belong to a unit of the Loyalist infantry, one of the two international alliances mired in a conflict that grinds across the map of Europe. Some refer to it as the Continental War; others, as the War of Reclamation.

“Who’s trying to reclaim what?”, your players might ask. On that point, no two arguing soldiers quite agree. And thinking too hard on the matter hurts a poor grunt’s head: Difficulty 3 Composure

test to avoid **Shocks, Minor and Major**: Dulled Thinking/Throbbing Migraine.

Loyalists call the enemy by a variety of insulting nicknames, but mostly simply as the Enemy

The forces of Carcosa covertly manipulate both sides, in a manner you choose; see p. 26. The players may or may not discover the truth behind the war in the course of their investigations.

Nationality

This book assumes that the players portray French soldiers.

If played in isolation, without an arc tying together all of the *YK RPG* sequences, you might prefer to adapt this to another nationality the group finds more familiar. This is left as an exercise for custom-tailoring GMs.

When Women Fight

Players can choose to play women. If any do, that means that your version of this alternate history has women serving in full combat positions.

If none do, that means that your 1947 battleground hews closer to our timeline and does not yet allow women to serve in combat.

When including female PCs, ask the players if they want the series to:

1. Address their participation in combat in an idealized way where equality between the

sexes is assumed and goes without comment.

2. Treat the additional stresses they face as women on the battlefield in a way that allows them to fight and overcome misogyny and sexism.

Go with choice 1 unless the entire group expresses a preference for 2.

This preference does not override your X-card protocol, if you're using one. Whatever the initial agreement, players can still raise their cards to dial back or edit out situations they find distressing.

Orientation and Heritage

The setting imposes no restrictions on player characters of any sexual orientation. As with female characters, have the group decide whether they prefer to handle this in an idealized way or as a source of story conflict. Go with conflict only if everyone finds it acceptable. Making this choice implies that attitudes about orientation in this 1947 remain as far from ideal as in our 1947.

Members of the French Foreign Legion may have transferred into your squad—meaning that you can play people of any extraction, heritage, or national origin. You might be French citizens or not. If none of the players choose to play French citizens, clearly you're a Foreign Legion unit seconded to the European battlefield.

Kits

As seen in *Paris*, characters are created by combining one item apiece from two sets of **kits**.

Investigative Kits

As before, the first kit, the **Investigative kit**, lays out each character's Investigative abilities.

Lieutenant

- Blueblood
- Leadership
- Military Science
- Political Science

Terrain Private (Civilian Occupation: Medical Student)

- Intuition
- Medicine
- Reassurance
- Science

Private

(Civilian Occupation: Merchant)

- Accounting
- Assess Honesty
- Military Logistics
- Negotiation

Private

(Civilian Occupation: Peasant)

- Farming
- Salt of the Earth
- Hunting
- Terrain

Private (Civilian Occupation: Photographer)

- Flattery
- Intuition
- Photography
- Science

Sergeant

- Interrogation
- Intimidation
- Law
- Military Logistics

Private

(Civilian Occupation: Writer)

- Humanities
- Inspiration
- Lowlife
- Occultism

Distribute kits to players as follows.

When continuing on from the *Paris* sequence:

Start by selecting the player you think would best handle the role of leader. You're looking for a player who moves the story forward, contributes positively to decision-making, and will still collaborate well with the rest of the group when given a measure of imagined power. Look for a player who can comfortably occupy the spotlight without hogging it. Oddly, spotty attendance can be a plus. This means that sometimes the Lieutenant will be a hands-off GMC leader, and other times a PC.

In the bizarre case in which every single player would do equally well in the role, give the Lieutenant kit to the player who portrayed the Architect. If no one played the Architect, choose a player at random.

Now distribute the rest of the kits based on the types each player took on in *Paris*, as seen in this table. At the end, match up players without kits to kits without players.

<i>Paris Equivalent</i>		<i>The Wars Character</i>
<i>Pick player best suited to command role; if all equal, use →</i>		Lieutenant
Architect		
Poet	→	Medical Student
Portrait Painter	→	Merchant
Landscape Painter	→	Peasant
Muse	→	Photographer
Sculptor	→	Sergeant
Belle-Lettrist	→	Writer

When starting with The Wars:

Lay the kits out on the table and let the players negotiate who gets what.

Do you still have kits left over?

Invite the players to distribute the abilities from the unused kits between the group, using whatever method makes sense to them.

General Kits

Use General kits with a group unfamiliar with GUMSHOE, or in a one-shot game. Lay them out on a table and leave players to negotiate who gets what.

In Occult Adventure mode, modify each kit ahead of time, adding 2 points apiece to Composure, Battlefield, and Fighting.

As players paw through the

choices, they may notice that a couple of them pair naturally with particular Investigative kits: the Lieutenant with the Tactician, and the Medical Student with the Shepherd. You may wish to point out that the Shepherd is metaphorical, as in “shepherd of people” rather than a literal sheep herder.

Players may modify kits, moving around any number of points, provided the total remains 54 points for Horror mode, 60 for Occult Adventure.

For groups who know GUMSHOE, including those who have just played a Paris sequence, have them build from scratch. Remind players that Composure, Battlefield, and Fighting are survival abilities; they likely want to spend 6–8 points on each.

THE **YELLOW**
 **KING**
ROLEPLAYING GAME

AFTERMATH

QUICKSHOCK
GUMSHOE

Robin D. Laws



Pelgrane Press



BOOK THREE

AFTERMATH

Publishers: Simon Rogers and Cathriona Tobin
Designed, Written, and Produced by: Robin D. Laws
Cover Art: Jessica TC Lee
Interior Art: Jessica TC Lee
Document Art: Dean Engelhardt
Graphic Design: Christian Knutsson
Copyediting: Colleen Riley, Cathriona Tobin
Eagle-eyes: S. Ben Melhuish
Indexing: Cathriona Tobin

Playtesters:

Vincent Bill, Yosefka Bill, Alizée Bleue, Hugh Coates, Susan Davis, Toorte Dot, Jonathon Dyer, Holly Easter, Joshua Flora, Nicole Gardella, Jurie Horneman, Chris Huth, Paul Jackson, Shel Kahn, Brett Longworth, Tamsyn Michael, Justin Mohareb, Arka Neirda, Dean Newman, Charlie Nicholson, Sydney Jones, Zachary Joyner, Jake Prewitt, Scott Wachter.

Copyright © 2019 Pelgrane Press Ltd.

The Yellow King RPG and GUMSHOE Quickshock are trademarks of Pelgrane Press Ltd.

Pelgrane Press is co-owned by Simon Rogers and Cathriona Tobin.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FROM THE ASHES	4	PEOPLE	65
Weirdness Level	5	The Press	67
CHARACTERS	7	Peers	67
A Key Detail	7	Criminals	68
Investigative Kits	7	Cops	71
General Abilities	9	Business Interests	71
Heritage and Identity	9	Regular Folks	72
Drive	9	Tags	77
Parallels	10	FOES	77
Worst Memory	10	Foe Profiles	78
Goal	10	Crisis	95
New Investigative Ability		The Alien Truth	95
Descriptions	13	Opportunity	95
Absent Abilities	16	Risks	95
New General Abilities	17	Cast of Characters	95
RULES ADJUSTMENTS	19	SLEEPING DOGS	95
Relative Challenge Table	19	Timeline	96
Post-Revolutionary Shocks	20	Scenes	96
TWISTED HISTORY	21	Denouement	121
The Slip Before the Fall	22	Additional Antagonist	
The Castaigne Dynasty	25	Reactions	121
The Struggle and		CARDS	124
the Overthrow	28	Shock cards	124
Where Are They Now?	30	Injury cards	129
Much to Rebuild	30	Chit cards	140
Next Door to America	31	Hit cards	149
NOW WHAT?	33	APPENDICES	157
America in Recovery	33	Welcome to	
The New Cops	35	the Aftermath	159
Factions and Issues	39	REFERENCES	162
Interacting with Factions	41	Relative Challenge Table	162
Pursuing the Goal	43	Post-Revolutionary Shocks	163
Scenario Elements	48	Investigative Ability	
Sweet Victory	52	Worksheet	165
Government Lethal		INDEX	166
Chamber FAQ	54		
TECHNOLOGY	54		
Weapons of the Old Regime	58		
Political Leaders	65		

FROM THE ASHES

In the third sequence of *The Yellow King Roleplaying Game*, players portray former partisans who helped topple an authoritarian government backed by Carcosa.

In the present day, but in the same alternate timeline seen in *The Wars*, the totalitarian dynasty known as the Castaigne regime took over America in a 1920 coup. Aided by the King in Yellow, its kleptocratic Emperors suppressed dissent, spied on citizens and monopolized industry. Its protectionist cronyism enriched a small elite, slowing economic development and scientific innovation. As a result, post-Castaigne America looks like a brutalist 1950s with more or less 1980s technology.

After five years of accelerating protest and insurgency, culminating in outright civil war, the Castaignes were driven from power. The freedom fighters' final strikes shut down the gates allowing free traffic between worlds. The aliens who happened to be on this side when they blew are now trapped here, and anxious to return home. They may have lost their grip on covert power, but lingering occult energy and

a hidden population of unearthly creatures remain. Even as they fade from memory, their covert existence complicates the task of rebuilding America.

Though intent on taking part in this noble effort, the player characters soon discover they can't entirely set aside the skills they honed as anti-regime guerrillas. When the minions and monsters of the Yellow Sign stir, they investigate—often finding that what they learn aids them in their greater political objective.

Cases they encounter might include:

- murder at the People's Congress, committed by regime sorcerers intent on reopening the gates
- the disappearance of explosives from a rebel supply cache, pointing to a counter-revolutionary cell led by the ghost of a Carcosan noble
- someone knocking off munitions shipments headed for disposal facilities
- sabotage against damaged utilities
- an ally learns that a contract has been taken out on her life—and the assassin is the inhuman former interrogator who once tortured one of

- the PCs nearly to death
- people who knew the weird secrets of a genetic research facility start losing their memories
- people keep disappearing in a rubble-filled neighborhood and local kids swear that one of the condemned apartment structures has come to life, and grown hungry

Weirdness Level

When preparing your *Aftermath* game, choose the **Weirdness Level** that most appeals to you, and that you think will most appeal to your players. The Weirdness Level describes the extent to which the general population understands the existence of Carcosa and the supernatural, and its role in bringing about and sustaining the Castaigne regime.

Overt

Everyone knows about Carcosa, the Yellow King, and the existence of supernatural beings. People may want to forget, but they can't—in part because a population of monsters remains at large, still endangering the lives of ordinary folks. Sighting a shade or harbor master (see "Foes") is like running across an unexploded bomb: extremely distressing, but entirely within the bounds of accepted reality.

This choice lends your game an urban fantasy vibe in which abnormal powers and beings

become just another factor of ordinary life.

Fading

A mental fog surrounds the role of the supernatural in the world, especially in connection to the Castaigne regime. Only a few key insurgents, like the player characters, fully remember the presence of Carcosan entities in the world. Even they sometimes feel these events, which they directly experienced, fading from memory. Only when they confront the uncanny again do the full recollections come flooding back. External records of what happened are also vanishing: photos blur, electronic files corrupt themselves, paper documents go missing. Reality seems to be rewriting itself back to a normalcy free of Carcosan influence. Or is that effect itself a new trick on the part of the King and his court, an attempt to erase the evidence to let humanity lull itself once more into a vulnerable ignorance?

Covert

Only an unlucky few ever came to accept the existence of the supernatural. The Castaigne regime kept it its otherworldly secret weapons just that—secret. As key members of the resistance, the player characters learned about Carcosa and its creatures. Like the rest of the movement they took great pains to protect the general population from this mind-destroying knowledge. The

provisional government continues that policy today.

For the average person the sighting of a supernatural being profoundly shocks both the senses and one's assumptions about what can exist in the world. Once seen, a sphyx or shatterling can't be forgotten—but good luck convincing friends, family, or co-workers of what you saw. Most witnesses to such events keep it quiet, realizing that they'll

be treated as delusional if they come forward.

The difference between Fading and Covert lies in the expected response of the characters to knowledge of Carcosa. Here, both they and their enemies try to keep it concealed. In a game of Fading Weirdness, they're trying to preserve information before it vanishes, and may go so far as to attempt to awaken people to the truth of what happened.

CHARACTERS

As with each new setting, character creation for *Aftermath* adds a few wrinkles to the now-established pattern.

Start by introducing the premise to the players, paraphrasing the material from the introduction. Prior to your first game session, send them the “Welcome to the Aftermath” introductory handout (see “Appendices,” p. 159). Head to pelgranepress.com for our page of *YKRPC* resources: there you’ll find a PDF booklet version of the document including additional pages of art seen elsewhere in this book.

A Key Detail

A particular detail of this reality comes up during character creation: the Government Lethal Chambers. First installed in 1920 just before the Castaigne takeover, these suicide booths remain in service in city parks and other convenient locations throughout the USA.

One of the characters was a Government Lethal Chamber repair technician before the revolution and has (probably reluctantly) returned to the job in the months since the regime fell. When that fact comes up, your players will likely have many questions. This provides a device

that allows you to illuminate details of this horror-inflected reality in an interactive Q&A format.

When the questions break out, flip to p. 54, where a FAQ awaits.

Once they run out of questions about the world and their characters’ experiences, it’s time to start marking up those character sheets.

Investigative Kits

Investigative kits for this sequence are as follows, distinguished by each character’s civilian role or occupation.

When carrying on from *The Wars*, find the player whose previous character had the highest Mechanics ability. Resolve ties with a die roll if necessary. That player takes on the role of the Lethal Chamber Technician.

Assign the other roles according to the chart below.

Once those roles are assigned, give the remaining kit to the player who just played the Lieutenant. If more than one kit remains, have the player choose.

Start with the assumption that the characters held these occupations before the war and are now returning to them. Remain open to suggestions from players on what they might be doing now instead of their old jobs.

<i>The Wars</i>		<i>Aftermath</i>
Character with highest Mechanics ability (resolve ties with die roll)	→	Lethal Chamber Technician
Writer	→	Journalist
Merchant	→	Marketing Coordinator
Peasant	→	Waiter
Medical Student	→	Doctor
Photographer	→	Photographer
Sergeant	→	Security Guard

Lethal Chamber Technician

- Counterinsurgency
- Interrogation
- Leadership
- Technology

Doctor

- Forensic Anthropology
- Medicine
- Science
- Reassurance

Journalist

- Bullshit Detector
- History
- Inspiration
- Research

Photographer

- Architecture
- Art History
- Flattery
- Photography

Marketing Coordinator

- Accounting
- Bureaucracy
- Psychology
- Negotiation

Security Guard

- Cop Talk
- Intimidation
- Law
- Streetwise

Waiter

- People Person
- Intuition
- Occultism
- Trivia



THE **YELLOW**
4 KING

ROLEPLAYING GAME

THIS IS NORMAL NOW

QUICKSHOCK
GUMSHOE

Robin D. Laws



Pelgrane Press



BOOK FOUR

THIS IS NORMAL NOW

Publishers: Simon Rogers, Cathriona Tobin
Designed, Written, and Produced by: Robin D. Laws
Cover Art: Aaron Aurelio Acevedo
Interior Illustrations: Aaron Aurelio Acevedo
Document Art: Dean Engelhardt
i-Seddit Forum Written by: Dean Engelhardt
Graphic Design: Christian Knutsson
Copyediting: Colleen Riley, Cathriona Tobin
Eagle-eyes: S. Ben Melhuish
Indexing: Cathriona Tobin

Playtesters:

Scott Buchan, Urchin Colley, Susan Davis, John Dawson, Ely Fernandez-Collins, Salman Hamid, Chris Huth, Jurie Horneman, Paul Jackson, Jesse, Shel Kahn, Noah Kittleson, Justin Mohareb, Graham McCabe, Henry McCulloch, Illidasi, Jeremiah Monk, Benjamin O'Connor-Rose, Joshua O'Connor-Rose, Scott Paeth, Courtney "TrinitysEnd" Randleman, Christopher Riff, Jason Riley, Jake Sargent, Emlyn Thompson, Curtis Tom, Scott Wachter, Paul Whiteley.

Copyright © 2019 Pelgrane Press Ltd.

The Yellow King RPG and GUMSHOE Quickshock are trademarks of Pelgrane Press Ltd.

Pelgrane Press is co-owned by Simon Rogers and Cathriona Tobin.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTO THE NORMAL	4	Redcap	51
CHARACTERS AND RULES	6	Scratcher	52
Home Base	6	Slitherer	53
Names and Identities	6	Sludger	53
Kits	8	Soultaker	54
General Abilities	9	Stan	55
Drive	9	Vector	56
Familiar Face	10	Walkdoll	57
Freaking Weird Moment	10	PEOPLE	60
New Investigative Abilities	11	Corporates and Functionaries	60
Relative Challenge Table	12	Out on the Town	61
CARCOSA TODAY	14	Between the Cracks	62
Warning: Use of Word		Law Enforcement	65
“Normal” May Be Ironic	14	Minding Their Own Business	66
The Reintegration Complex	15	RUNNING THE NORMAL	68
The Timeline	18	From Randos To Heroes	68
The Big Mystery	19	Creating Scenarios	69
Reintegration	19	Crossing the Sequences	71
The Standoff	20	Completing the Arc	72
On the Scene	20	Parallels	73
Important Safety Precautions	22	THE ALIEN TRUTH	74
ORGANIZATIONS	24	The King and His Court	74
Abzynth	24	Carcosa	80
Blackstar	25	GM MASTERCLASS	84
Center for Incident Control	27	The GUMSHOE Ethos	84
Disruptive Events LLC	27	Narrating Character Exits	90
McAidrai BioMaterials	28	Interweaving the Sequences	92
Sapienc	30	CARD DESIGN	96
Strategic Allocation		Title	97
Association	31	Effects	97
Temple of Hali	32	Discard Conditions	99
The Tomorrow Foundation	33	ENTANGLEMENT	102
/yel/	33	The Alien Truth	103
MODERN SHOCKS	36	Scenes	104
FOES	40	CARDS	126
Foe Master Table	40	Injury cards	126
Bandit	42	Shock cards	142
Brainbat	42	APPENDICES	158
Bulger	43	How to Solve a Case	160
Elders	44	When Player Characters Fight	162
Fleener	46	Investigative Ability Worksheet	168
Follower	47	Relative Challenge Table	169
Glowdog	48	Group Matrix	169
Hoardling	49	Modern Shocks Table	170
Hungerworm	49	Scenario Worksheet	173
Legend	50	INDEX	174
Rampager	51		

INTO THE NORMAL

In *This Is Normal Now*, the players portray ordinary people in our contemporary world.

Or so it seems.

Then one day an occult presence concealed right out in the open, amid the din of buzzing smartphones, the incessant anxiety churn of social media, and the visual blare of video billboards, makes itself known to them. This revelation speaks to an intuition they can no longer ignore.

Something has gone deeply awry.

Others can't yet sense it, but for them, the mask of the everyday has been suddenly torn away.

To find out what is happening to the world around them, and who they really are, this group of until-now unremarkable individuals take on unlikely and unexpected roles.

They become... investigators.

Early on the group might be drawn into isolated cases such as:

- A van full of teenagers disappears in the parking lot of an isolated venue for an EDM show. Is this connected to the fire that killed sweatshop workers at this location a hundred years ago?
- Coders working on a hypnotic new virtual reality experience quit en masse to form a

commune together. They just want to be left alone to pursue a philosophy they call digital Zoroastrianism. But why does their belief system appear to be contagious, and who is that masked guru they follow?

- Despite the protestations of its reclusive author, the publication of a new horror novel leads to a rash of attempted suicides from young readers who hope to meet its monstrous main character.

Over an extended *This Is Normal Now* sequence, the group finds the pieces of a larger puzzle concerning the Yellow King mythology and the subtle yet blatant alterations it has wrought. Their fates intertwine with one or more conspiratorial organizations that either profit from or fight the Yellow Sign effect.

Perhaps they even take it all the way back to 1895, and the actions of their original set of characters at the outset of your epic arc.





CHARACTERS AND RULES

This section shows you how to create *This Is Normal Now* characters, and includes rules adjustments for this, the final sequence of *The Yellow King Roleplaying Game*.

Home Base

As the players flesh out their characters, tell them where this sequence takes place. This is either:

- **Modern-day New York City.** This choice maintains continuity with *Aftermath*. Groups outside North America may prefer this choice, avoiding a lot of work adapting the proper names and local assumptions found in this book.
- **The city you live in** (or the nearest big city if you live in a smaller community). This choice brings the horror closer to home and saves you time looking up geographical details of a faraway city. Don't worry about continuity: the different worlds of *YK RPG* are not alternate timelines that extrapolate from a single historical divergence point but instead magically spawned refractions of one another. The characters who

lived in NYC in *Aftermath* now appear as residents of a completely different city.

Names and Identities

Tell the players that the final sequence is set in something very similar to our reality and timeline.

When carrying on from *Aftermath*, the characters here are alternate-timeline versions of the investigators they were playing before.

They have the same names, appearances, and ages. The players they decide how much of their previous quirks and personal details they retain.

These people have been through much less than the ex-partisans of *Aftermath*. As the first session begins, none has directly witnessed a supernatural event, fired a gun in anger, been in a serious fight, or suffered a life-threatening injury. They've been drawn together by a bond none of them can quite explain or ever bothered to question. Together they enjoy the footloose life of urbanites in their late 20s and early 30s, going to clubs, checking out restaurants, and maybe even playing a round or

two of *Cards Against Humanity* at the local game cafe.

Here, the Lethal Chamber Technician is a small-time Hipster Drug Dealer. The character maintains a select client list, selling only small quantities of the soft stuff to fellow hipsters and well-off types old enough to be their parents. The Dealer steers clear of the gang violence that surrounds street buys, always pays distributors in advance, and knows which cops to pay off. Suggest that the character might have other ambitions to put into play once the nest egg reaches a certain level and it comes time to sell off the client list.

If you're setting this sequence in a jurisdiction with legal or quasi-legal pot, the player can instead elect to cast the character as the

owner of a weed dispensary.

Other characters have drifted only a little from their post-Castaigne selves, to reflect a contemporary vibe. In this reality, *Aftermath's* Journalist is a Technical Writer. The Waiter is a Barista; the Photographer, a Graphic Designer. The doctor has come down in the world and is now a CPR Instructor.

The security guard is still a security guard, perhaps with big dreams of becoming a private detective.

When playing *This Is Normal Now* as a standalone, ask players to assign names and quick backgrounds to the characters suggested by the kits.

To skip the kits and their character concepts, go around the room letting each player choose one Investigative ability from the

<i>Aftermath</i>		<i>This Is Normal Now</i>
Suicide Machine Technician	→	<i>Hipster Drug Dealer/Dispensary Owner</i>
Journalist	→	Technical Writer
Marketing Coordinator	→	Marketing Coordinator
Waiter	→	Barista
Doctor	→	CPR Instructor
Photographer	→	Graphic Designer
Security Guard	→	Security Guard

master list until all are spoken for. Make sure that each takes at least one Interpersonal ability.

Kits

As before, the first kit, the **Investigative kit**, lays out each character's Investigative abilities.

Kits for this final sequence are:

Barista

- Intuition
- Occultism
- People Person
- Trivia

CPR Instructor

- Forensic Anthropology
- Inspiration
- Medicine
- Science

Hipster Drug Dealer/Weed

Dispensary Owner

- Bullshit Detector
- Streetwise
- Law
- Technology

Marketing Coordinator

- Accounting
- Bureaucracy
- Psychology
- Negotiation

Photographer

- Architecture
- Art History
- Flattery
- Photography

Security Guard

- Cop Talk
- Electronic Surveillance
- Intimidation
- Terrain

Technical Writer

- Computers
- Humanities
- Reassurance
- Research

Investigative Ability Master List

- Accounting (Academic)
- Architecture (Academic)
- Art History (Academic)
- Bullshit Detector (Interpersonal)
- Bureaucracy (Interpersonal)
- Computers (Technical)
- Cop Talk (Interpersonal)
- Electronic Surveillance (Technical)
- Flattery (Interpersonal)
- Forensic Anthropology (Technical)
- Humanities (Academic)
- Inspiration (Interpersonal)
- Intimidation (Interpersonal)
- Intuition (Interpersonal)
- Law (Academic)
- Medicine (Technical)
- Negotiation (Interpersonal)
- Occultism (Academic)
- People Person (Interpersonal)
- Photography (Technical)
- Psychology (Academic)
- Reassurance (Interpersonal)
- Research (Academic)
- Science (Academic)
- Streetwise (Interpersonal)
- Technology (Technical)
- Terrain (Technical)
- Trivia (Academic)