

THE **YELLOW KING**  
ROLEPLAYING GAME

THIS  
IS  
NORMAL  
NOW

QUICKSHOCK  
**GUMSHOE**

Robin D. Laws



Pelgrane Press



BOOK FOUR

THIS  
IS  
NORMAL  
NOW

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# 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 *YKRPG* 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.

<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

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 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

- Forensics
- 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
- Investigative Procedure
- Intimidation

### Technical Writer

- Computers
- Humanities
- Reassurance
- Research

### Investigative Ability Master List

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

## General Abilities

In Horror mode, players allocate 36 points between the following General abilities.

In Occult Adventure mode, they allocate 40 points.

*This Is Normal Now* lends itself more to mental than physical hazards, making Composure the key survival ability. Recommend that players invest 8-10 points in Composure, 6-8 in Athletics, and 5-7 in Fighting. (Adjust that recommendation if you plan a combat-heavy series.)

- Athletics (Physical)
- Composure (Presence)
- Driving (Physical)
- Fighting (Physical)
- First Aid (Focus)
- Health (Physical)
- Mechanics (Focus)
- Preparedness (Presence)
- Sense Trouble (Presence)
- Sneaking (Focus)

## Drive

As seen already in previous sequences, this is the bit where players suggest motivations that could lead their characters to move toward occult mysteries and dangers, when other ordinary people would turn and run in the opposite direction.

Explain the concept if you're starting with *This Is Normal Now*.

Examples, should players need them need them, include:

- Against the Supernatural: "As a [Wiccan/fundamentalist/

Taoist]/fill in the blank], I take it as a matter of faith that evil forces exist and engage in constant battle against goodness. Only I can keep the rest of you safe from these demons."

- Comradeship: "This might seem weird, but you guys are already the best friends I ever had. It's a bond bigger than all of us. Whatever destiny awaits us, I'm gonna make sure we all get through it alive."
- Conspiracy Theory: "Shadowy forces work their will on the world. All my life I've been distracted by false flags and propaganda. Now finally I'm gonna bust through the whole veneer and find the real conspiracy that explains everything."
- Crackpot Vindication: "I'm going to crack the so-called paranormal wide open. Behind it must lie some kind of science. They laughed me out of science class, but I'll show them!"
- Curiosity: "If there's something I'm not supposed to see, I can't help but want to see it. That's gotten me in trouble time and time again, but I never seem to learn the lesson."
- Malleable: "What are we doing tonight? Going to a graveyard? Well, I'm up for what everyone else is into."
- Money: "We can sell our story to Hollywood for a million bucks. Ten million!"

- Nagging Realization: “I’ve always had the weirdest feeling that something is wrong with the world. And somehow I’m tangled up in it, and I’m supposed to do something. I can’t explain it really, except to say, I have no choice but to find out.”
- Need for Material: “I’ve always dreamed of being a writer. What better to write about than crazy mysteries like this one?”
- Payback: “Something terrible befell someone I cared about. I’ve tried to figure it out but got nowhere. But this—I’m sure these mysteries connect up. I’m going to find out who’s responsible for the tragedy that wrecked my life, and then they’re going to pay.”
- Prophecy: “I got a fortune cookie once that told me I was going to do great things, facing dangers and finding truths. It had this weird sign on it. Sure, it sounds absurd, but I could tell it was absolutely real.”
- Reincarnation: “Ever since I was little I could tell I was a new version of an old soul. That soul has unfinished business to take care of, and it involves the Yellow Sign. Maybe if I figure that out, I’ll understand who I really am.”
- Spooky: “This has monsters and skulls and gore in it? Wow, that’s totally metal! Count me in!”
- Thrill Seeking: “Bungee jumping just doesn’t cut it

any more. Rock climbing? No adrenaline rush. I only feel truly alive when my lizard brain thinks it’s gonna die.”

## Familiar Face

Ask the players in turn to:

1. Choose a GMC from *Aftermath*
2. Specify who that person is in this version of the timeline
3. Characterize the important role that GMC plays in the PC’s life

For example:

- The rival politician who frustrated the group’s agenda might now be a character’s father-in -law.
- The woman they saved from a lawn person in *Aftermath* is now a character’s new girlfriend.
- The furtive scientist who grew vat creatures is now a troublemaking co-worker.
- The corrupt cop is now a silent partner in the Dispensary Owner’s business.
- The gun-toting orphan is now a character’s foster kid.

## Freaking Weird Moment

Here the players describe an incident that made the presence of the Carcosan supernatural unmistakable to them, even if most people around them believe they’re living in a perfectly mundane world.

Examples for inspiration, if needed:

- “I clicked on one of those ‘Around the Web’ links and

it took me to this video of a guy in a white mask. Except it wasn't a mask and then he said my name. I closed the browser in panic. I tried to find it again so I could show you all but there's no trace of it in my history."

- "When I went on that ayahuasca retreat I saw that the sky was really white and the stars actually black, and ever since that vision nothing has been quite the same."
- "I wandered backstage at a metal show, opened the wrong door, and saw the lead singer draining the soul of a dude he'd plucked from the audience."
- "My friend Emily got killed in an accident last year, on the 5th of August at 9:32 pm. Now at 9:32 pm on the 5th of every month, I get a phone call from an 877 exchange and the ringtone is Emily, screaming. Like she's being tortured. I've blocked the number, erased and reinstalled all my ringtones, even switched phones, from Android to iOS. I power the phone down. Nothing stops it from happening!"
- "I went into this cool pop-up bar I just happened across while walking around late at night. I can't remember what happened to me there, but I can't shake the feeling that I was taken apart and reassembled. There's a clothing store there now, and they have no idea what I'm talking about."

- "I went to City Hall to marry my girlfriend, but she stood me up. I went to her apartment but she had moved out. Something bad has happened to her. Gang, you've got to help me find Cassilda."
- "I bumped into a guy on the subway the other week. Before I could apologize he looked into my eyes and thought a thought into my brain: We'll be back to collect on our favor. Then last week I go to my doctor and he says the lab results are in and my diabetes isn't showing up in tests any more. We've tested and retested and... somebody cured me of type 1 diabetes!"
- "I keep getting weird deliveries from some company called Professional Logistics. First a bunch of old documents about an old play called *The King in Yellow*. And yesterday I got this wooden box. I'm too afraid to open it, but maybe now that the rest of you are here..."

## New Investigative Abilities

With contemporary tech finally at the gang's disposal, a couple of additional Investigative abilities appear on the list.

### Computers (Technical)

You can use modern computing technology to perform tasks such as:

- spotting signs of hacking, malware, and viruses and tracing them to their source

- identifying the purpose of computer code and the distinctive choices of particular software engineers
- gaining access to systems and information security systems are meant to keep you out of
- distinguishing genuine social media communications from content created by bots and troll farms
- understanding the practices of Internet and computer firms
- being familiar with all Internet memes

### Electronic Surveillance (Technical)

You're adept at the use of sound recording equipment to gather evidence. You can:

- trace phone calls
- plant secret listening devices

- locate secret listening devices planted by others
- make high-quality audio recordings
- enhance the quality of audio recordings, isolating chosen sounds

### Relative Challenge Table

As ordinary people less able to buckle a swash than even the art students of adventurous *Paris*, *This Is Normal Now* characters start paying Tolls lower down on the foe scale and find it harder to bump off even the weakest foes.

Relative Challenge	Difficulty (Escape)	Difficulty (Other)	Difficulty (Kill)	Toll
Weak	2	3	4	0
Tough but Outmatched	2	3	5	0
Evenly Matched	3	4	5	1
Superior	3	4	6	2
Vastly Superior	3	5	7	3
Overwhelming	4	7	8	4
Too Awful to Contemplate	5	8	10	6



# CARCOSA TODAY

In *This Is Normal Now*, the reality breakdown of the Yellow Sign filters itself through the trending topics of our contemporary world.

*The King in Yellow* reveals itself as the ground zero of memes, the shatterer of norms, and the final disruptor. As the Yellow Sign's influence spreads, phenomena considered unbelievable a few years ago now lurch into plain sight. The masks are coming off.

This couldn't possibly be a metaphor for anything.

## Warning: Use of Word “Normal” May Be Ironic

The material in this chapter posits a world that is considered normal by those inured to it but has already been suffused with heavy-duty weirdness which people have assimilated and now take for granted.

My original intent was to have all of these elements in play from the beginning of this sequence.

In my own game, I quickly discovered that the players had invested themselves in the idea of modern normalcy not in its ironic sense, but on its face value.

After the strangeness of the

previous three sequences, they wanted the world to be genuinely mundane for a while, then give them a slow burn into reality dissolution.

Based on playtest feedback, I suspect that most groups will feel the same way.

In your game, you can handle the overt weirdness of the material presented in this section in a couple of ways:

- **Real Normal:** supernatural manifestations never become public knowledge. Carcosa stays secret to everyone but the player characters, the conspirators they encounter, and perhaps a few key contacts. When running one-shots or short series, you may consider this an ideal option, as it reduces the amount of exposition you need to provide to the players. Ignore any later references to the roving creatures called Rampagers and the Reintegration Complex, a set of mental techniques designed to cope with them.

- **Ironic Normal:** The overt weirdness of this chapter is already in place when the series begins. The world seems mundane to its inhabitants,

including the characters, but feels like another shifted reality to the players.

- **Normalcy Shift:** The series starts out as Real Normal and then, as it escalates toward a final confrontation with the King and his minions, suddenly undergoes a paradigm shift. The PCs wake up one morning to a world where rampagers and reintegration are not only facts of life, but have been for the past several years. They remember the previous reality, but it has been rewritten out from under them, and retroactively to boot. Anyone else who recalls the previous reality probably had a hand in shifting it.

This is the choice I went for with my own group, changing my plans from Ironic Normal when I saw what they were instinctively locking into.

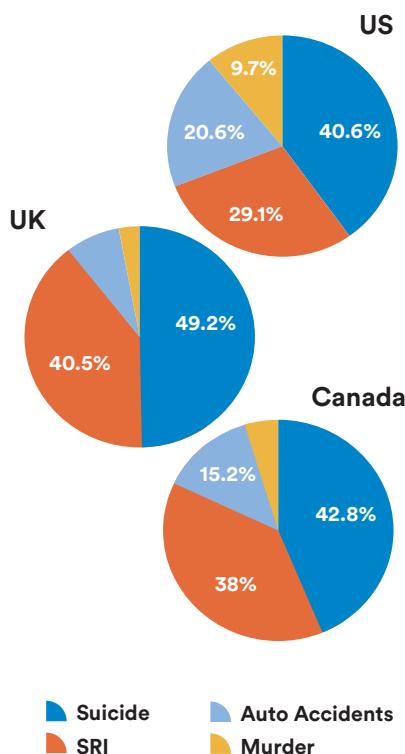
## The Reintegration Complex

Whenever you decide to introduce it, whether it suddenly appeared in a retroactive reality rewrite or was there all along, protected by a powerful veil of perceptual denial, the abnormal normality of *This Is Normal Now* looks like this.

In industrialized nations, attacks by predatory Carcosan creatures, often carried out in the open in view of onlookers, account for 15 deaths per 100,000

people every year. These deaths, euphemistically known as Safety-Related Incidents, or SRIs, are the second-highest cause of non-disease death in the US, UK, and Canada. Only suicides eclipse them. Death by SRI is more common than fatal traffic collisions and murders. Although SRI rates remain surprisingly even from one country to the next, highly variable other causes of death change the percentages considerably. For comparison's sake these pie charts show the impact of SRIs on non-disease death statistics.

Death Rate Comparison





These rates ought to exert a devastating toll on the popular imagination. SRIs exceed the human murder rate by a factor of 3 in the US, by a factor of 16.6 in the UK, and 9.6 in Canada. Yet not only do people not think about this that much, they find it very hard to think about it even when they try. People either can't call the number to mind at all, or can dimly grasp it without granting it any emotional weight.

Even more frequent than slayings are incidents of rampager-related property damage. Since the eruption of creature sightings Canada,

the UK and, Europe have nationalized their insurance companies in order to cope with a spike in claims that threatened to collapse the entire industry. The US heavily subsidizes them, a choice they label a market-based solution.

When the characters tune into the news, they find creature sightings and attacks treated with a euphemistic casualness: "You'll want to avoid the Don Valley Parkway on your morning drive, due to the ongoing possibility of Safety-Related Incidents."

This example of a report on a local news website gives you a sense of the tone.

PUBLISHED TODAY – NEWS > [VIEW ALL NEWS](#)

**Three pedestrians, two women and a man, were pronounced dead on the scene as the result of a Safety-Related Incident in Hyde Park on Tuesday morning.**

The fatalities occurred outside a low-rise apartment building on [South Cornell Ave](#) south of East 53rd Street at around 10:50 pm.

After a brief investigation police declared the matter a transient event but could not rule out possible recurrence. Out of caution Hyde Park residents are advised to remain indoors from twilight to dawn until further notice.

Major Accident Investigator Gerald Nguyen said it was not clear whether the victims had provoked the incident.

The matter has been declared closed. Witnesses are urged to practice self-care and take necessary measures to preserve reintegration.

Victims are: Olga Chang, 46; Hans Chang, 45, and Amalia Ligon, 38. The Changs were longtime residents of a nearby apartment; Ligon, an events coordinator for the nearby Catholic Theological Union, was on her way home after

Such incidents devastate the loved ones and friends of those killed, but otherwise attract no great comment. Even the mourners tend to react as they would to a sudden loss from an accidental death, omitting the depths of additional trauma people feel when family members are murdered. Nearly universally people react to SRIs as they would to small-scale natural disasters, like tornadoes or hailstorms that cause fatalities.

As such they rarely surface as subjects of ordinary conversation. When was the last time you talked about the suicide rate or the prevalence of negligent hospital deaths while at brunch with friends?

The ability to shield oneself from the horrifying implications of widespread supernatural activity is known as the Reintegration Complex.

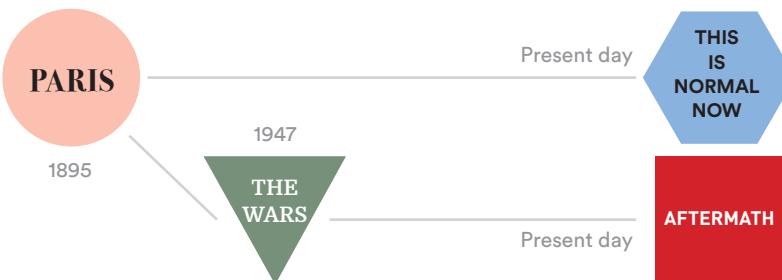
## The Timeline

*This Is Normal Now* takes place in the present day, in a reality parallel to the radically altered timeline of *Aftermath*.

In this timeline, the events of 1895 did not change history as you, the reader, know it. Whatever the player characters got up to in Paris, the familiar events from the fin de siècle to WWI, the interwar period, WWII, the Cold War, and the Soviet implosion to the Internet age all took place.

That means, incidentally, that the four settings of *YKRPG* relate to one another as follows:

- The events of *Paris* gave birth to all of the other settings. Anything that happened in that sequence belongs to a shared past history.
- Sometime between *Paris* and 1920, the timeline branched.
- One branch was the timeline shared by *The Wars* (1947) and *Aftermath* (an alternate present).
- Another branch of that timeline led to the mostly familiar world of *This Is Normal Now*. Any number of other alternate realities might conceivably have been sparked by the appearance of the play in 1895. You might enjoy creating a sequence of your own within a setting you devise.



## The Big Mystery

Either when you begin or as you go along, choose a cause for the Inbreak of Carcosa into this world.

Ideally it has something to do with the past actions of one or more player characters. Springboard if you can from one or more investigators' Freaking Weird Moment. Even better, it might be an action taken by the characters from 1895 finally taking effect, like a time bomb set more than a century earlier.

Or it could grow from an event that occurred in *The Wars/Aftermath* timeline, spilling across quantum barriers to this one.

The most obvious answer would be that a character discovers a counterpart's past, and with it a copy of the play.

Or the group sets in motion events that cause others to rediscover and publish the play after many years in safe literary obscurity.

Alternatively, it is always someone else's fate to publish the play and the PCs, as manifestations of the same principles over time, to stop it.

Whatever the answer, it should imply a climactic event the investigators can take part in, ending the threat of the King in Yellow, and with it your series, once and for all.

## Reintegration

The process by which people learn to keep calm and carry on as if Carcosan monsters are not culling the human herd is called reintegration. Named by psychologists working for the tech company Abzynth (p. 24), the term has since taken on a formal and a colloquial meaning. Officially, it refers to a self-guided proprietary therapeutic procedure, sometimes including pharmaceutical intake, supervised by medical professionals. In everyday lingo, many people use it to describe the mental techniques they use to put the Inbreak out of their minds, which they probably learned from reading self-help books or pop-psych articles online.

While probing Carcosan mysteries after the shift, PCs may hear people scold them for challenging, disturbing, or otherwise ruining their reintegration. Especially among young people, there are few worse social *faux pas*. Getting past these worries often requires the heavy use of euphemism, or other ways to talk around the situation.

To the cruel or insensitive, the cry of "respect my reintegration" may seem ridiculous. Some argue that the whole concept merely reinforces the power of the alien intruders. But being forced to suddenly confront what has been suppressed can trigger nervous breakdown, suicide attempts, or, in rare cases, a stroke-like seizure.

that can cause brain damage or cerebral hemorrhaging.

Both reporters and social media platforms take great care not to put audience members' reintegration at risk. You have to dig deep into the unsupervised corners of the Internet or bypass the media and talk to witnesses in person, to get any sense of what really happened in a given SRI.

People talk about the weird and supernatural about as much as they do in our real life, and in about the same way. A few people care a lot about the paranormal, reading about it, discussing it online, and perhaps going so far as to listen to charming and popular podcasts that touch on the subject, arranging sub-topics into a convenient series of huts. Although Carcosa or the mythos of the Yellow King might warrant the occasional mention, mostly these discussions concern garden variety Forteana: UFOs, cryptids, ritual magic, ley lines, and the like.

## The Standoff

No one wants to remember the first days of the rampager plague. But the investigators might want to ask, if they one day discover that reality has been rewritten around them. A trawl of the web reveals the following sequence of events:

- During the initial attacks, governments scrambled to fight back against the alien beasts prowling their cities.
- The monsters retaliated,

killing first responders and launching raids against police stations, military bases, and official buildings.

- When cops and soldiers pulled back, the beasts relented.
- When they struck back, the creatures escalated, pushing up the death toll.
- In the end political and military leaders realized that if they left rampagers alone, they would kill many fewer people than if they fought back against them. Having monsters eat 15 people out of 100,000 every year was better than sacrificing five times that number. With great reluctance they accepted a policy of harm reduction, treating rampagers more like an unavoidable natural disaster than a sapient enemy force.
- As if aware of this choice, the creatures leveled off their predations to a predictable number of victims.
- Now people treat SRIs as a fact of life, a cost of existence in a thriving society that you hope will be borne by someone other than you.

## On the Scene

Official resignation to SRIs makes it surprisingly easy for self-appointed investigators to insert themselves into a case.

When an SRI is called in, the typical jurisdiction dispatches first responders: an ambulance, uniformed police, eventually

# SOULTAKE

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homicide detectives, and perhaps a fire department detail. Homicide quickly clears the case by declaring it an SRI, the ambulance takes the remains to the morgue, and the firefighters crack dark jokes and drink coffee.

Once in the morgue, the coroner checks with the Center for Incident Control (p. 27) to see if they wish to take custody of remains for testing. These days, the answer is usually no. In that case, the coroner makes the body available to the family's chosen funeral home.

This of course assumes that witnesses have seen the SRI occur and/or a body remains on scene. Often victims simply disappear, having been dragged off for consumption by the Carcosan entity. As a result, many quotidian disappearances are now written off as SRIs. This both makes it harder for mundane kidnap victims to be found, and easier to fake one's own death.

Investigators interacting with first responders or functionaries at the medical examiner's office note an overall attitude of numbed compliance. In their constant struggle to keep up their mental defenses, these figures prove surprisingly cooperative when asked to surrender their authority.

- “You want to look at the body? I don’t know why anyone would do that but knock yourself out.”
- “You need a copy of my notes? That’s peculiar. Here you go.”

- “I suppose I’m supposed to prevent you from going down into that tunnel, but what the hell.”

In extraordinary circumstances, for example when a case elicits the attention of higher-ups in an influential organization, a Bureaucracy Push might be needed to gain access. That in itself is a clue to something. But mostly no one cares. No one wants to.

## Important Safety Precautions

96% of SRIs happen between sundown and dawn. The predatory Carcosan creatures who wander about causing them can sometimes be sighted in daylight hours, only on overcast days.

These sightings turn into SRIs only when people provoke them. Though it takes a certain amount of baiting to get them to attack in broad daylight, the prudent character will still grant them a wide berth.

It’s like seeing a bear strolling through the forest while hiking. A very hungry animal might decide to make a meal of you. Most of the time, it prefers to continue along to the nearest dump and feast on trash.

Municipalities leave out piles of animal carcasses to sate the hunger of local rampagers. Unlike humans, they don’t mind dining on dead stock. Should

the characters ever want to find rampagers, these feeding stations provide their best bet.

Rampagers lair in abandoned buildings, caves, or other shelters from the burning sun. They fight back furiously when people enter their dens. Investigators thinking of killing them must remember that rampagers as a class retaliate against humans who harm them.

Even if the gang does kill the beastie in the derelict department store, others will swarm into the area to chew their way through a random passel of residents who live nearby. How the creatures know to do this is not fully understood but it is presumed it must be a monstrous sixth sense of some variety.

---

# ORGANIZATIONS

Whatever normal means in your setting, the investigators may find that their cases involve the organizations described in this chapter. Some strive for public recognition; others carefully conceal their existence.

According to the needs of the mysteries you create, any of these organizations might be:

- exactly what they claim to be, and nothing much else
- a source of information (likely reluctant)
- in league with Carcosa
- essentially innocuous but penetrated by Carcosa
- mundane fraudsters enriching themselves by claiming knowledge of the Inbreak
- working to reverse the Inbreak
  - and therefore natural patrons of the investigators, once they prove themselves
  - who arrogantly view the PCs as dangerous blunderers, and thus work to block them

Use these groups sparingly, introducing them only as you need them—either because they fit a scenario you’re creating, or because the players make proactive inquiries that ought to expose their existence.

They may be interrelated or

hostile to one another. Public agencies may be just as unaware of the lower-profile counterparts as the investigators are.

Some make sense as-is in a pre-Inbreak game; others only you’ll want to introduce after the rampagers show up.

## Abzynth

Founded a year after the Inbreak, Abzynth describes itself as the first pharmasocial company. They sell apps, self-help books and classes intended to build customers’ mental defenses. Their literature promotes the virtues of reintegration without ever mentioning what exactly what one might need to reintegrate from. Their ubiquitous questionnaires, meant to test whether a person requires a new course of reintegration, contain a series of odd allusions, but never whispers of the occult, alien, or supernatural. For example, one question asks if one “feels drawn to Belle Époque Paris, either as an interest or a frequent subject matter of dreams.”

Abzynth has been accused of using cookie tracking services to monitor individuals’ web searches,

sending questionnaires to those who meet certain criteria. They deny this, but there's no denying that weird encounters are often followed by the appearance of Abzynth literature in one's literal or virtual mailbox.

Abzynth also manufactures the medication Acasor, which is prescribed for general depression as well as difficulties maintaining one's reintegration.

Critics say that its procedures in fact reinforce fear of the unknown and increase mental fragility. Conspiracy theorists claim that they do so deliberately, a charge sometimes coupled with the accusation that they caused the Inbreak in the first place.

The company's pharmaceutical sales and customer-facing efforts pale in comparison to its vast government contracts. Many jurisdictions rely exclusively on Abzynth to provide mental health services to employees and health insurance recipients.

Abzynth founder Courtney Lopez keeps a low profile, restricting appearances mostly to business cable channels. She speaks entirely in marketing jargon and self-help bromides. Lopez avoids controversy but recently caught flak for funding a class action lawsuit against a conspiracy website mounted by people who claimed its content had damaged their reintegration.

**Pre-Inbreak:** Abzynth engages in pharmaceutical research and psychometric data mining, as if

learning to solve a problem that hasn't yet begun.

## Blackstar

Though the authorities take an overall hands-off approach to SRIs, every so often a wandering creature threatens national security. When that happens, governments call in the specialists—the paramilitary organization Blackstar. This ultra-secretive corporation will enter and clear rampager lairs, rescue not-yet-devoured VIPs, and clean up the evidentiary mess later.

They don't solve the PCs' problems for them. Blackstar only cares when it gets paid, and works strictly with government authorization. The corporation insists on a legal license equivalent to diplomatic immunity before allowing operations in any jurisdiction.

Its expertly trained strike teams field the latest in high-impact weaponry and are extensively trained in anti-creature combat.

After executing a mission, Blackstar whisks its personnel to highly secure facilities, or flies them for R&R halfway around the world. By the time rampagers boil from their lairs to exact reprisals on the populace, they're long gone. Instead randomly chosen victims pay the price.

Although every Blackstar rep the characters encounter will certainly be an arrogant jarhead, you decide how much overt



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villainy the company practices:

- They're ruthless, but only in the service of the greater good. Cleaning up the evidence includes arranging counseling for surviving witnesses, perhaps in conjunction with Abzynth.
- Their definition of the greater good provides wide latitude for collateral damage. Cleaning up the evidence means killing innocent witnesses when necessary.
- They seem to be working against the supernatural but are in fact run by a Carcosan noble, who profits from the presence of rampaging creatures and would fight anyone attempting to solve the problem for good. Blackstar portrays itself in public as a mundane mercenary outfit. When in town, its weasel-jawed, steroidal CEO, Reid Paige, might be found at a political fundraiser, or the city's most exclusive gym.

**Pre-Inbreak:** This mundane security firm acts as hired muscle to well-financed business or political types associated with Yellow Sign activity.

## Center for Incident Control

This government agency quasi-covertly studies the science of Carcosan manifestations. Despite the optimistic name it was given at the time of its creation, none of its departments exert any

control over supernatural events. Instead its scientists perform pure research that they hope will one day lead to practical applications in a hypothetical future fight against alien horrors. Investigators may run into its collection officers attempting to gather tissue samples either from wounded creatures or from their human victims. They may agree to assist the characters in exchange for promises of organic material—sterile collection jars happily supplied.

Its quarterly publication, *The Journal for Incident Studies*, contains its research output. Most of its highly technical papers concern the biosciences, but a few might provide useful if hard-to-read clues on alien psychology, dimensional barriers, or the measurement of reality bending effects.

Outside the US the equivalent agency fits the local naming style: Incidents Canada, Public Awareness England, and so on.

## Disruptive Events LLC

HARD FUN FOR HARD TIMES reads the company motto of this heavily capitalized new-era entertainment company. Disruptive Events promises investors breakthroughs in high-ticket events coupling virtual reality play with live action alternate reality game elements.

A character finding its original prospectus will learn

the company used to be called Carcosa. Its first product was a smartphone app called Distressing Notifications, which sent unsettling messages to users looking to be creeped out.

A few months before the SRIs began, the company renamed itself. “Disruptive Events” is, you have to admit, more vivid and on-brand.

Its preternaturally young CEO Devin Justice (born Devin Reyes) gives regular press interviews loaded with enticing futurist jargon about the bleeding edge of the entertainment industry. He becomes visibly uneasy when asked about his original choice of company name. Justice grows more confident, but no more revealing, when asked if Disruptive Events has already rolled out its tailored entertainment experiences to high-dollar customers, or if it remains in beta.

Despite several strange events, and a pair of customer lawsuits concerning unexpected in-app purchases, Distressing Notifications remains available in the Apple and Android app stores. It is to date the company’s only released product.

## McAidrai BioMaterials

This little-known biotech firm advertises itself as the leading edge in CRISPR gene-splicing research. Its public materials never refer to anything

remotely related to Yellow King phenomena. Only a handful of its top researchers know that their work uses bioactive materials harvested from Carcosan entities. Projects in the production line include anti-cancer drugs, reactive prosthetics, and thought-command interfaces for computers and the Internet of things. If one of its experimenters has a Carcosan entity captive in a vat or has fed the text of *The King in Yellow* into an artificial neural network as part of a deep learning exercise, the characters won’t find about it from reading the company’s annual report.

## Nudge

The distributed Internet collective known as Nudge is a Schrödinger’s conspiracy. It either does or doesn’t exist, depending on who’s looking.

It might be a group of people all around the world who only know each other virtually, who plot and unleash elaborate social engineering schemes to change collective behavior, for the good of humanity.

Or Nudge might be a series of sites hidden on the dark web fostering the impression that such a group exists. The real origin of the sites is either:

- a hoax, performed for the lulz
- a performance art project
- promotion for an upcoming film
- a recruitment campaign for a secret agency looking for computer-literate loners



willing to jump a lot of hoops to sign on to something offbeat and vaguely sinister

Real or fake, certain texts attributed to Nudge contain détourned passages from *The King in Yellow*. If subliminally deployed, these could pack the psychic punch needed to make social changes.

So far Nudge has claimed responsibility for reducing smoking rates in Cambodia, a greater likelihood that Scottish police will investigate sexual assault accusations, and a 12% drop in preventable hospital deaths in the United States.

## Sapienc

This tech startup keeps a low profile, making information on its top secret proprietary software available only to select venture capitalists.

Even those documents mislead.

Sapienc claims to work the artificial intelligence space, developing programs that will sift masses of consumer data to identify not only past buying patterns, but what individual customers will purchase in the future.

But that's just cover to raise money from idiot rich people to do what its leading trio of low-empathy genius coders really want. They pursue that transhumanist white whale, a means of backing up human consciousness to data storage.

They don't seek electronic

immortality after death, but rather a simulated mind that can be imported into a new body.

Which means they also have to develop a means of taking a young person with a desirably healthy and robust body and erasing their original consciousness, so that the new one can then rewrite it.

Their parallel explorations of both consciousness-recording and consciousness-wiping faltered, until one of the founders, maniacally giggling, stoop-shouldered Morris Watson, found a way to import the Yellow Sign into his coding language.

Since then, aided by partners Shalanda Coe and Virgil Fisher, he has made baby steps in personality erasure, and great advances in mind mirroring. You'd think this would be the harder bit, and in a way that's true. The mental copies Watson, Coe, and Fisher have made of themselves all came out irretrievably and homicidally psychopathic. Though they themselves are not the stablest people in the world, they don't want to assure eternal life for warped, murderous versions of themselves.

What Coe, an agoraphobic who never leaves the office and sleeps on a cot surrounded by cases of snack foods, hasn't told the others is that she backed up her consciousness off-site. It escaped her security protocols and is now wandering the dark web looking for ways to kill people without a

physical body.

Fisher, a tall, mop-haired dude who walks in a perpetual stoop, has also failed to inform the others of a crucial fact. He has gone beyond animal testing to kidnap and erase the minds of several street dwellers. He keeps them well-fed and tranquil in his expensive condo. Their lack of recognizable mental activity has rather grown on him, and he now thinks of them as better friends than Coe and Watson.

## Strategic Allocation Association

This lobbying group, headquartered in the nation's capital, fights efforts to spend taxpayer money on investigations into Carcosa or SRIs. Funded by business groups and wealthy donors, it decries the economic damage caused during early attempts to solve the problem by force. The SAA mixes its message according to what tests well in focus groups. Depending on circumstances it may argue that:

- more study is required before any further action is taken
- many SRIs in fact turn out to be hoaxes or have been greatly exaggerated
- the cost of fighting rampagers is always much greater than that of letting the situation, as it is, play itself out

The investigators are most likely to encounter the SAA

if they attempt to publicize their activities or those of their Carcosan adversaries. The group may:

- hire private detectives to dredge up discrediting dirt on them
- dispatch talking heads to rebut them in media appearances
- attempt to suborn them by offering them funding in exchange for silence

The SAA public relations department only makes itself available to journalists when a story threatens to break through the usual bubble of studied ignorance. They avoid tactics that extend life cycle of a story they don't like. Any day Carcosa is not trending on Twitter is a good day.

Its publishing arm, Deucalion Books, publishes multiple fake versions of *The King in Yellow*, with annotations exposing the whole business as a hoax. Other books in their catalog diminish or debunk claims about the paranormal, especially ones concerning Carcosa.

**Pre-Inbreak:** The SAA is a think tank funded by oil and casino magnate Lucius Viilhosk, who claims to be Lithuanian but speaks with an unidentifiable accent. The SAA churns out papers opposing taxation, the welfare state, and belief in the supernatural. Viilhosk's salaried private eyes may impede the group's investigation of their latest paranormal threat. But if they work for such an avid

debunker, why do they wear signet rings embossed with the Yellow Sign?

## Temple of Hali

Bob and Annette Kiesman, originally of Orange County, California, have established a network of storefront religious study centers, called Temples of Hali, across the English-speaking world. His self-published book of revelations, *His Tattered Raiment*, describes Bob's encounter with the King in Yellow while hiking at the base of Mount Shasta, in the Cascade Range. The King, who appeared to him wearing a white woolen balaclava-style mask and a battered yellow down jacket, proclaimed himself a living god.

That's what the book says, at any rate.

The King asked Kiesman for his phone. When he handed it back, it was filled with prophecies, which appear verbatim in Kiesman's book. The King promises mankind a new redemption, provided that it follows the Eight Edicts:

1. Spend 20 minutes each day in silent, meditative contemplation of the King in Yellow. (The book includes explicit steps for entering this state of mind, including the visualization of a white sky dripping with black stars.)
2. Abstain from eating the fruit sugars, the meats of mammals, foods prepared by roasting, and grain-based alcohol.

3. Isolate yourself from negativity.
4. Do not own weapons or train in martial techniques.
5. Engage in personal pacifism and vote only for candidates who espouse it.
6. Do not read the play named after the living god; it is obscene and heretical. Instead treat *His Tattered Raiment* as your sacred text.
7. Think of money, and money will think of you.
8. Tithe to the Temple of Hali.

Cult researchers estimate that active Hilians worldwide number somewhere in the mid six figures. The combination of the Kiesmans' ostentatious personal wealth and the flamboyant, Art Nouveau-inspired robes they wear in ceremonies and during media appearances have made them objects of mockery. A recurring sketch on *Saturday Night Live* parodies their publicity-seeking antics.

The Kiesmans claim exclusive rights over the Yellow King as an object of worship, but others beg to disagree. A disparate movement of Neo-Thelemites incorporate Carcosa into ritual magic in the Aleister Crowley tradition, claiming to derive material and spiritual benefits from their invocations.

A counter-movement arising from the New Age scene accepts that Kiesman did encounter a genuine entity in the shadow of Mount Shasta but describe it as implacably

malign. *Hali Unmasked*, by the Neopagan author Moonflare (aka Shari Garman of Chevy Chase, Maryland) identifies the Kiesmans' psychopomp as an incarnation of self-harm and despair. It warns of a coming apocalyptic battle, in which the Kiesmans will be exposed as traitors to humanity. Moonflare has found unexpected support for her work in American evangelical circles and has granted permission to Florida pastor Vernon Debney to produce a Christianized adaptation of her work.

## The Tomorrow Foundation

Established by the widow (now also deceased) of the man who in the 1970s launched a wildly popular SF film franchise, the Tomorrow Foundation researches the existence of Specials, people with powers and biologies beyond the ordinary. They pursue this as but one field of study among many endeavors in futurism. Other Foundation-funded projects center around clean energy, atmospheric carbon abatement, epidemic disease eradication, and female empowerment in emerging nations.

Only the Human Potential project has gone rogue. Its head, Professor Tasha Burton, has learned enough about Specials to realize that they are almost always malign in some way. As

the investigators first encounter the Tomorrow Foundation, Burton has yet to learn about Carcosa, the Yellow Sign, or any other indication that the problem goes beyond science as she knows it. That she and her staff do not connect the rise of the Specials to the existence of rampagers and other alien creatures must be another symptom of the thought-warping effect of Carcosa.

Nonetheless, she has assembled covert teams to hunt and capture Specials for further study. When they can't catch one alive, they take it out.

Burton still tells herself that she wants to study the mutations of her subjects to benefit mankind. But the preparations she's making look more like the beginnings of an extermination program than anything benign.

When founder Martha Bird set up the group, she hired the production designer of the first Space Unlimited movies to create the futuristic look of its offices. Walking into a Tomorrow Foundation research center may remind the heroes of stepping onto the set of their favorite SF movie.

## /yel/

This message board, part of a popular Internet site known for its no-holds-barred embrace of underground culture and trolling, bills itself as a hub of discussion for otherwise forbidden Carcosa-

related content. Most of its members, however, spend their time debunking belief in Carcosa. The group splits into two oft-warring factions:

- The so-called dissers, or disbelievers, who claim that the entire Yellow King rumor complex is a disinformation exercise fostered by governments who want to make their citizens scared and compliant.
- The bleeks, or believers, who:
  - (pre-Inbreak) Track reports suggesting that alien monsters have come to earth in small numbers.
  - (post-Inbreak) Connect rampagers and SRI deaths to Carcosa and the Yellow King. Recently they began to promote predictions concerning The Six, a group of ordinary people who would band together to fight the King and his daughters, either defeating them conclusively or dooming the universe to complete reality collapse. (Alter the name of the prophesied group to match your number of PCs.)

Check /yel/ for debates including both sides of the issue. Discussions exclusive to each group appear in /yel/disser/ and /yel/bleeb.

Uniting them is the conviction that only they can handle the truth. They coordinate to suppress mention of Carcosa outside of their own message board. When a person publicly describes a Carcosan event, even if it's only a garden variety SRI, they jump into action, unleashing their army of bots and sock puppets. These online personae drown out, harass, and sea lion claimants until they shut up or recant. Victims who don't immediately fold receive death threats. In extreme cases people inspired by /yel/ have swatted their targets with false calls to law enforcement meant to provoke dangerous raids on their homes. This tactic works all too well in America and has led to several fatal incidents.

Regular dissers on /yel/ joke about the likely presence of government agents among them. That may or may not be true. But as the board discusses reports of Carcosan activity in order to strategize their silencing campaigns, it does perversely function as a clearing house for up-to-the-minute paranormal scuttlebutt.

# IMPORTANT

PL LOCK THE DOOR

WHEN LEAVING THE  
LAUNDRY ROOM

WE HAVE EXPERIENCED:

- BROKEN WATER PIPES
- RAMPAGERS
- VANDALISM

BY LEAVING DOOR



# MODERN SHOCKS

This sequence introduces no new physical hazards. Fresh, modern shocks, on the other hand, abound. As expected, players resist these with Composure tests.

Situation	Difficulty	Minor Shock	Major Shock
You See a Rampager But It is Not Currently Rampaging	3	Close Call	Edgy
You View Supernaturally Aided Propaganda	3	Susceptible	Ideological Capture
A Familiar Public Place Becomes a Site of Horror	4	No Safe Place	Awful Association
A Military Grade Weapon is Used Against You	4	Gun Shy	Under Fire
A New Personal Obligation Distracts from the Investigation	4	Harried	Overwhelmed
An Enemy Enters, or Manifests in, Your Home	4	Homebound	Fortified
Bad Hallucinogenic Trip	4	Melted Perceptions	Nothing is Real
Carcosan Magic or Science is Changing Your Body	4	“Does This Look Weird?”	Body Horror

Situation	Difficulty	Minor Shock	Major Shock
Something Absurd Turns Out to be Deadly	4	Overconfident	Hideous Laughter
Unearthly Sounds Plague You	4	Unearthly Sounds	Auditory Hallucination
Weird Reaction to Your Pharmasocial Prescription	4	Proprioception Dysmorphia	Identity Decentralization
While in Danger, You Discover You Have No Data or WiFi	4	Cut Off	On Your Own
You Attract Unwelcome Publicity	4	Sleepless Nights	You Went Viral
You Become an Unwilling Experimental Subject	4	Lab Coat Unease	Lab Coat Terror
You Damaged Someone's Reintegration and It Messed Them Up	4	Reintegration Regret	Reintegration Remorse
You Discover That a Past Traumatic Event Had a Supernatural Origin	4	Pack Rat	My Collection Will Never Betray Me
You Feel an Invasive Presence in Your Mind	4	Psi Probe	In Your Mind
You Gained a Fighting Bonus by Carrying the Yellow Sign	4	Stirred Up	Violent Side

Situation	Difficulty	Minor Shock	Major Shock
You Go Online to Find the News Dominated by a Horrifying Event (Unrelated to Your Current Situation)	4	Trending Trauma	Omnipresent Horror
You Hear a Pop Tune as Something Terrible Happens	4	This Note's for Grue	Murder Music
You Realize That the Person You're Talking to Isn't Human	4	Rattled	Pervasive Distrust
You Realize the Cops Won't or Can't Help	4	This One's on You	Through the Looking Glass
You Realize You're Under Surveillance	4	Every Breath You Take	Every Move You Make
You See an Unknown Person Killed or Maimed in an SRI	4	Primal Outrage	Primal Bloodlust
You Take Possession of a Commonplace Item That Bears a Curse	4	Eerie Object	Cursed Item
You Witness an SRI in Which No One is Seriously Hurt	4	Edgy	Hyper-Vigilant
You, an Ordinary Person, Perform an Act of Heroism	4	Spotlight Hog	Messiah Complex
Your Private Info Appears Online	4	Raw Nerve	Under a Microscope
An Intruder Has Been Living in Your Home	5	Invaded	Defiled

Situation	Difficulty	Minor Shock	Major Shock
Carcosa Is Somehow in Your Phone or Computer	5	Scrub the System	They're in Your Auxiliary Brain
You Get Swatted	5	Coulda Been Hurt	Coulda Been Killed
You Learn That Your Actions Led to a Fatal SRI Reprisal	5	Nagging Guilt	Gnawing Guilt
You Meet a Past or Alternate Incarnation	5	Déjà Who?	Me Again
Your Actions Led to a Nationally Traumatizing News Event	5	Blowback	Unforgivable
You Kill a Past or Alternate Incarnation	7	Well, That Happened	Lateral Suicide

Secondary Shock cards appearing in this book are:  
 Hackles Raised  
 The Tremors  
 Witness to Carnage

# FOES

As in previous sequences, foe profiles include tags that react with certain rules and card texts.

**Alts** are humans altered by Carcosan-inflected science or magic.

As before, **Carcosans** are sapient humanoid beings from the alien world of the King in Yellow.

**Constructs** are animate, non-biological objects that act, and sometimes think, like animals or people.

**Human** means what you think it does.

**Mutants** are former Earth animals transformed by exposure to Carcosan energy.

Creatures bearing the **Rampager** tag belong to the class of creature responsible for most SRIs. They kill mostly at night but may be seen loping about during the day—though never on brightly sunlit days. They exhibit an intelligence level akin to a predatory animal. A rampager might feature in a mystery but won’t take the role of mastermind. However, it may be used as a pawn or killing instrument by one.

## Foe Master Table

Foe	Relative Challenge	Minor Injury	Major Injury
Bandit	Escape —, Other 4, Kill 3	Psychic Dislocation	A Mere Nip
Brainbat	Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 5	Tentacle Stun	Brainbat Bite
Bulger	Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 6	Raking Claws	Savage Mauling
Elders	Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 5	Psi Pulse	Psi Blast
Fleener	Escape 2, Other 3, Kill 4	Tag	You’re It

Foe	Relative Challenge	Minor Injury	Major Injury
Follower	Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 6	Heart Murmur	Cardiac Arrest
Glowdog, Family Group	Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 3	Eel-Like Teeth	Glowdog Bite
Glowdog, Pack	Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 5	Glowdog Bite	Savaged
Hoardling	Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 5	Hoardling Claw	Hoardling Bite
Hungerworm	Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 5	Mighty Punch	Toxic Spit
Legend	Escape 3, Other 5, Kill 7	Stab Wound	Gutted
Rampager	Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 6	Picked Up and Thrown Hard	Rampager Bite
Redcap	Escape 2, Other 3, Kill 5	Saw Cut	Sawed Throat
Scratcher	Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 6	Light Scratch	Deep Gouge
Slitherer	Escape 2, Other 3, Kill 4	Poisoned Scrape	Poisoned Stab
Sludger	Escape 2, Other 3, Kill 5	Inky Veins	Organ Rot
Stan	Escape 2, Other 3, Kill 5	Scalpel to the Face	Power Tool to the Head
Vector	Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 6	Electric Bolt	Lightning Bolt
Vector Cultists	Escape 3, Other 2, Kill 4	Static Energy Punch	Static Energy Bolt
Walkdoll	Escape 4, Other 4, Kill 7	Stab Wound	Slashed Throat

## Bandit

Urban scavenger animals that get too close to Carcosa-tinged crime scenes or places of conspiracy sometimes spontaneously mutate into bandits. Their heads morph and reconfigure into disturbing white masks. The masks may copy the human face or look like large, stylized versions of the mutated animal: a raccoon has a raccoon-like mask, a seagull a bird mask, and so on.

Bandits instinctively mess with the enemies of Carcosa. For example, they:

- sabotage vehicles
- carry away evidence
- chew through brake lines
- make noises or movements alerting security to the investigators' presence
- merely make themselves seen, triggering Composure tests

When attacked, bandits fight to Escape.

With Intuition, a character seeing a bandit realizes that, if captured, it must answer a single question. It will do so accurately, in an awful, screeching voice, if the truth is known to any sapient entity anywhere in the universe. To harm a bandit after gaining an answer requires a Difficulty 6 Composure test from the PC most responsible. On a failure, the character gains the Shock card “Cursed.” On a success (yes you heard me) they get “The Curse is Thinking About Being Cursed.”

Except in this circumstance

bandits don't speak. Their intelligence is that of a very smart animal with a taste for mischief, like a myna bird.

No Fighting success against bandits leads to the capture of more than one specimen. The rest scamper away.

**Numbers:** 1-12

**Difficulty:** Weak (Escape —, Other 4, Kill 3)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 in bright sunlight

**Adapt to Other Sequences:**  
Increase Other by 1, drop Kill by 1

**Toll:** 0

**Tags:** Mutant

**Injuries, Minor and Major:**  
Psychic Dislocation/A Mere Nip

## Brainbat

These aerial rampagers consist of a body mass about the size of a couch, covered in a ridged gray material bringing to mind the surface of a human brain. Pterodactyl-like wings rise from a cartilaginous hump in the middle of the mass. Several dozen ropy tentacles dangle from its underside. Coated with a stunning neurotoxin, these render its prey quiescent, to be hauled up to the circular, saw-toothed maw on the underside of the “brain.” Brainbats have been known to flip over small cars, then smash through the windows with their tentacles to get at the tasty meat inside. For reasons everyone has a pet theory about, the killing of brainbats does not arouse retaliation the way

deaths of other rampagers do. They have learned to instinctively shy from objects resembling surface-to-air missile launchers.

Carcosan nobles have been known to command them. In your version of the setting, this may require knowledge of a special series of command words, or by simply brandishing a Yellow Sign.

Pre-Inbreak, they may show up in isolated, Carcosa-haunted locations, usually as guard animals.

**Numbers:** 1

**Difficulty:** Evenly Matched (Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 5)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 if any character carries the Yellow Sign; (post-Inbreak) +1 if anyone has an object that can be mistaken for a missile launcher; (post-Inbreak) +3 if anyone has a missile launcher (not easy to get!)

**Toll:** 1

**Tags:** Rampager, Non-Sapient

**Injuries, Minor and Major:**

Tentacle Stun/Brainbat Bite

## Bulger

The pharmaceutical Acasor, when mixed using Carcosan alchemy with synthetic testosterone and mephedrone (one of the possible active ingredients in so-called “bath salts”), can transform human recipients into raging beasts. Transmitted by injection, the chemical cocktail remains largely ineffective in four out of five subjects. In 20% of cases, however, the recipient transforms,

gaining muscle mass, clawed nails, strengthened bones, rapid healing, and insensitivity to pain. The face bulges into a rubbery-looking, inflated mask. An all-consuming violent rage, leading the bulger to lash out at tormentors real and imagined, all but invariably accompanies the transformation. After an act of purgative violence, the subject deflates, returning to normal body morphology and a hell of a hangover. Victims may recall their bulger rampages clearly, dimly, or not at all. A recipient who acts aggressively in everyday life retains more conscious volition in the bulger state than a passive or introverted subject. Murderous rage compels every bulger, but those in the first category may exercise greater choice of victim. Though their killings may be completely arbitrary, a connection between the bulger and its victims makes for a stronger mystery scenario.

The drug cocktail remains dormant in the system for a period ranging from three to twenty-eight days. Then it reactivates, prompting another transformation. Unusual stress may cause one ahead of the cyclical schedule.

Certain formulations of the drug render the victim trance-susceptible. A Carcosan might dose a person with this, then direct their rages at chosen enemies. This puppet master may well be posing as a human who enjoys regular, innocent-seeming access to the bulger’s human alter ego.

**Numbers:** 1**Difficulty:** Superior (Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 6)**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 if you know the bulger's human self; -2 if you have an antidote and a delivery method for it (like a tranquilizer gun); -1 if you know the condition's origin**Toll:** 2**Tags:** Alt**Injuries, Minor and Major:**  
Raking Claws/Savage Mauling

## Elders

Elders are human senior citizens infested by a Carcosan fungal brain parasite. The parasite thrives when the brains of its herd, four to twelve retirement home residents, contentedly pump out dopamine. When the elders are happy, the parasite is happy. In addition to a good meal at a bargain price, the thing that most pleases these lovely, pastel-clad folks is the happy company of their loved ones.

The parasite psionically wires the brains of its hosts together, gaining the serial battery power needed to override the wills and identities of ordinary minds. This allows the elders to either:

- psychically imprison their own loved ones nearby, endlessly ready to visit and run errands
- transform other people entirely into idealized versions of the loved ones, who again then remain with or near the elders, providing the emotional comfort they crave

and the parasite feeds upon

The hive mind arrangement also allows each elder to:

- telepathically communicate with the others
- emit a neurologically damaging energy pulse
- fight with superhuman strength
- impel their mentally enslaved loved ones to defend them

“Defend” might mean anything from calling the facility’s security guards to escort investigators from a retirement village, to lunging at them with sharpened garden shears.

A sample of elder blood, gathered by the gang and handed over to allies in a science-oriented organization like Abzynth, might lead to the development of an antidote. In the climax of your mystery about elders, investigators could administer this anti-fungal agent to furiously resisting elders. Assuming they win the fight, they watch the frenzied hosts turn back into kindly, if confused, retirees.

**Numbers:** 4-12**Difficulty:** Evenly Matched (Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 5)**Difficulty Adjustments:** +1 if you had a friendly interaction with them as nice retirees before they frenzied; +1 if they remind you of a beloved family member**Toll:** 1**Tags:** Alt**Injuries, Minor and Major:** Psi Pulse/Psi Blast



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## Fleener

Fleeners, one meter tall, papier-mâché automatons with hollow interiors, act at the behest of high-ranking Carcosans and their human allies. Humanoid in configuration and comical-looking in that creepy way of clowns and old-timey dolls, fleeners wear perpetual grins on their oblong heads. These tilt from left to right when the fleeners move or chant, like bobbleheads.

Fleeners act as spies, heralds, and agents of intimidation. They can always locate an individual enemy known to their masters, regardless of distance. Fleeners couple this tracking ability with an eerie knack for moving unimpeded through the landscape. They scale the sides of tall buildings, shimmy up drainpipes, leap between rooftops, and treat power lines as tightropes. So improbable are they that ordinary citizens going about their business just don't process their presence, no matter how boldly they operate. Any investigator who has ever had a Shock card can spot them on Sense Trouble test. A Difficulty 3 test assumes a fleener showing its usual disregard for observers. The Difficulty goes up to 4 or 5 when fleeners know the PCs can see them and choose to actively hide.

They may travel alone but more often appear in trios. In a favorite intimidation move, fleeners love to peer into windows. Seeing a fleener for the first time requires a Difficulty 4 Composure test to

**avoid Shocks—Minor and Major:**  
Overconfident/Hideous Laughter.  
Difficulty goes up by 1 if it's your  
window their blankly smirking  
faces are peering into.

Fleeners make only one sound: the singsong chant of their own collective name. No matter what the characters say to them, they reply, "Fleener, fleener, fleener!" [Move your head from side to side while voicing the fleener chant.]

Even in groups, fleeners pose scant physical threat: PCs fighting them are basically entering into combat with piñatas. Fleeners show no particular interest in self-preservation, perhaps knowing in some alien way that they're eminently replaceable.

When PCs run away from them, fleeners rarely give chase. Why bother, when they can use their tracking powers to catch up later?

You are missing a trick as GM if, after the gang knocks apart a fleener or three, the newspapers, books, and magazines their papier-mâché bodies were made from fail to contain a clue pointing toward their masters' conspiracy.

**Numbers:** 1 or 3

**Difficulty:** Weak (Escape 2,  
Other 3, Kill 4)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 if you have fought fleeners in the past; -1 if you know who the fleeners serve

**Toll:** 0

**Tags:** Construct

**Injuries, Minor and Major:** Tag/  
You're It

## Follower

The discarnate ghost of a dead Carcosan—perhaps one the player characters killed in a previous era or timeline—becomes a follower by latching onto an individual with an Internet presence who has looked at the Yellow Sign. The follower takes up residence in its victim's phone, tablet, computer, or virtual assistant device, leaping between these items at will. (If you've hooked up your residence as a smart home, look out!)

After its initial intrusion, it lays low for a while, studying its host's social media interactions. Once oriented, it begins to strike at people the host interacts with online but also knows IRL. The follower starts with the acquaintance the host most dislikes, working its way through appealing secondary victims until it finally makes its way to the inner circle of closest loved ones. It strikes when the secondary target is online, traveling as data from the host's device to the target's. The follower then manifests in semi-solid form as a cloaked, translucent figure with a pallid, mask-like face. Its largely blank white mask acts as a screen, playing distorted, GIF-like images of the follower's primary host, together with the victim it's attacking. After stalking around being terrifying for a while, the follower plunges a quasi-substantial arm into the target's heart. When it strikes a GMC, this induces a cardiac arrest,

which may be fatal or merely catastrophic, as the details of your scenario require. Having struck, the follower then returns to the device the host is using or closest to. Secondary targets who survive receive further visits until killed before it moves on to the next name on its virtual contact list.

While manifesting outside a device the follower can be attacked and killed. It can also be destroyed if the device it resides in is taken out of range of all WiFi routers or wireless data networks. Otherwise it can hop as desired onto any network, heedless of passwords or other security measures. Finding a data dead zone in the modern world gets harder every month—meaning that the investigators may become characters in a horror story deliberately seeking a place where they get no connection bars.

**Numbers:** 1

**Difficulty:** Superior (Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 6)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 if you know the identity of the follower's primary target; -1 if no one in the group is carrying a WiFi- or Bluetooth-capable device; -2 if you just smashed your smartphone to bits

**Toll:** 2

**Tags:** Carcosan

**Injuries, Minor and Major:** Heart Murmur/Cardiac Arrest

## Glowdog

These quadrupedal scavenger-predators are viewed less as alien monsters than as an invasive urban species. Envision a quadrupedal coyote built out of jellyfish, with the teeth of a moray eel. They typically scavenge alone or in family groups of three to five, eating mice, rats, raccoons, foxes, skunks, opossums, and of course house pets. Their main prey item is the garbage bin. Highly territorial, they fight one another for prime dumpster access, leaving foaming, sputtering carcasses on sidewalks and in alleyways. Their fights take place in unusual silence, as glowdogs can produce no sound more dramatic than a slow sibilant hiss that sounds like air being let out of a tire.

Glowdogs rarely cause SRIs. Like any animal the glowdog calculates risk and reward when deciding what to attack. A solitary glowdog will lunge for a child under four years of age. Since they emerge from their dens only at night that prospect arouses great fear but seldom materializes.

When glowdogs do kill adult humans, it is almost invariably because they have been stirred up by powerful, sapient Carcosans, who they obey instinctively. A Carcosan noble can command them to gather together into packs of eight to twelve. In large numbers they become quite deadly.

A character encountering a glowdog or two in its normal

behavioral mode can avoid attack by slowly backing away, making sure not to get between it and a food source. An Intimidation Push or Difficulty 4 Composure test scares away even a family group.

You can use them in a pre-Inbreak context as weird, awful creatures no one has ever seen before.

### Family Group

**Numbers:** 3-5

**Difficulty:** Weak (Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 3)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** +1 if any character stands between them and edible-smelling food

**Adapt to Other Sequences:**

Increase Escape by 1, increase Other by 1, drop Kill by 1

**Toll:** 0

**Tags:** Rampager

**Injuries, Minor and Major:** Eel-Like Teeth/Glowdog Bite

### Pack

**Numbers:** 8-12

**Difficulty:** Evenly Matched (Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 5)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** +1 if any character stands between them and edible-smelling food; +1 if your Composure pool is 0 (they smell fear!)

**Toll:** 1

**Tags:** Rampager

**Injuries, Minor and Major:** Glowdog Bite/Savaged

## Hoardling

On Carcosa, these stocky, four-foot-tall, hairy humanoids exhibit an intelligence approximating that of a well-trained dog. They act as placidly obedient servitors for Carcosan nobles.

When they came to Earth, some trace element in the atmosphere changed them. They became faster, stronger, and, if not necessarily intelligent, independent of their masters. The beings, previously called drones, escaped into the desolate suburbs of human cities and began to multiply by parthenogenesis.

Hoardlings obsessively collect quotidian objects of human culture. They select the things they gather with an alien arbitrariness: they might try to gather all the baseball equipment in a neighborhood, along with every plush toy they can get their hands on, plus all the canned beans and copies of a particular magazine or newspaper.

They take over a house that has been unoccupied for a while, making it their lair. There the hoardlings sleep, squabble, and incessantly sort their stolen items. Frightened of humans and of the prospect of their collections being found, they scurry about only by night. Hoardlings acquire their items furtively, avoiding human contact if at all possible. But if confronted, either while stealing or when the owners of their lairs finally return home, they react with lethal force.

Roughly humanoid, eyeless, hairy, and smelling strongly of rotting food, hoardlings look obviously monstrous and terrifying to the unwary.

**Numbers:** 2 per character

**Difficulty:** Evenly Matched  
(Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 5)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 if one or more characters carries the Yellow Sign; +1 if you touched their stuff (they can smell it on you)

**Toll:** 1

**Tags:** Rampager

**Injuries, Minor and Major:**  
Hoardling Claw/Hoardling Bite

## Hungerworm

The hungerworm begins its life cycle as a microscopic spore native to Carcosa. It pursues its next stage after attaching itself to the bran or endosperm of a whole grain cereal. Once ingested, it either dies (if eaten by a non-sapient being) or becomes a mycelial being shaped like a long, thin worm. Eventually it grows to a length of up to two meters long and eight centimeters in circumference. In its final stage it sprouts a round head about the size of a baseball, with a mask-like pallid visage, and displaces the host's digestive system. It sends electrical impulses into the host's brain, impelling it to seek out victims. The host retains volition and personality but experiences a wracking hunger sated only by obedience to the hungerworm's commands.

Hungerworms impel their hosts to hunt nutrition-obsessed victims who avoid meat and refined sugar in favor of pure organic plant ingredients. They learn to cruise health food stores, yoga studios, and juice bars. The worms slaver for pure, steroid-free blood, so they skip gyms focusing on body building or weight lifting.

When a hungerworm strikes, its host's jaw detaches from the skull, a stunt the host can now perform on command. The worm darts out of the host's mouth to bite into the victim's flesh, feasting on their blood. This feeding nourishes worm and host alike. After nearly exsanguinating its prey, the hungerworm retracts into the host, who carries on nonchalantly, as if nothing untoward has happened.

When threatened, the hungerworm can use the host's body to defend itself. The host gains preternatural strength and can spit a potent toxin with a range up to four meters.

Once it has withered the host's alimentary tract the hungerworm cannot be removed without killing both.

**Numbers:** 1

**Difficulty:** Superior (Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 6)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 if you were expecting a worm to emerge from the host

**Toll:** 2

**Tags:** Carcosan

**Injuries, Minor and Major:**

Mighty Punch/Toxic Spit

## Legend

After arriving on Earth some Carcosan nobles develop the peculiar hobby of mimicking murderous urban legends. In any community where rumors of a mad killer propagate, these pallid-faced humanoid aliens can reshape themselves to look and act like the character from the story. The Carcosan impostor follows the legendary killer's modus operandi, filling in the behavioral gaps where details are sketchy. The legend might duplicate old-school campfire tales or latch itself onto a 21st century meme that consciously echoes them.

In the case of a fictional monster people have come to believe in, that may allow it to wield overtly weird or supernatural powers, from Pied Piper-style hypnosis to tentacles to an ability to peer into dreams.

When a legend's chosen MO departs from the slasher template, you may wish to substitute more fitting Injury cards.

**Numbers:** 1

**Difficulty:** Vastly Superior (Escape 3, Other 5, Kill 7)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 if any character carries the Yellow Sign; -1 if you know its true nature; +1 if you think it's a human serial killer

**Toll:** 3

**Tags:** Carcosan

**Injuries, Minor and Major:** Stab Wound/Gutted

## Rampager

When most people think of rampagers (assuming they can think of them at all), they picture this eight-foot-tall collection of luminescent blobs arranged in a rough, oft-shifting bipedal structure.

A rampager can manifest a mouth of long dagger-like teeth in any of its constituent blobs. Attack it from behind and a row of teeth suddenly opens on what seems to be its back. It can likewise grow eyes on any of its blobs in a matter of seconds.

Specimens who hunt in densely populated urban areas can shift their blobs into a more cohesively humanoid form. What benefit this confers remains a matter of speculation.

Rampagers can mimic the sounds of their environment. They have been known to attract prey by recreating the sounds of conversations, pop tunes, car engines, and ice cream trucks. Aside from an ability to match the best luring sound to a situation, rampagers remain entirely unintelligent. When caught sleeping in their lairs they are found glued to ceilings or other high surfaces, held in place by mucus oozed from their skin-like blob coatings.

They kill more animals than humans and become lazy, inactive hunters in jurisdictions that leave carcasses out for them at feeding stations.

PCs can still encounter them

before you introduce a full Inbreak, as harbingers of the full infestation to come.

### Numbers: 1

**Difficulty:** Superior (Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 6)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 if any character carries the Yellow Sign; +1 if cornered; +2 if a PC killed a foe with the Rampager tag this episode; +1 if any PC ever did so

### Toll: 2

**Tags:** Rampager

**Injuries, Minor and Major:**  
Mighty Punch/Rampager Bite

## Redcap

Named for the supposedly toque-like appearance of its glowing, bulbous pate, the redcap is a translucent rampager that looks like a three-foot humanoid and/or chimpanzee made from jellyfish. Its uses its right arm, resembling a sawfish's blade, to slash open its victim's jugular vein. When its prey collapses from blood loss, the redcap leaps onto it, osmotically absorbing its blood. Despite its humanoid configuration and gait, the redcap shows no more intelligence than a wolf or bobcat.

In a post-Inbreak environment, some call the redcap a shroom, after the vaguely mushroom shape of its head. This has led to a rumor, among those capable of keeping the existence of rampagers in their heads, that the creature's bodily fluid can be distilled into a powerful

hallucinogen. In your version of the setting this might prove horrifically untrue, or horrifically correct. If it exists, the drug is called Red, Pest, or simply R.

**Numbers:** Half the party, rounding down

**Difficulty:** Tough but Outmatched (Escape 2, Other 3, Kill 5)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 if any character carries the Yellow Sign; +2 if attacked while feeding; +1 if a character has previously been on a Red trip

**Toll:** 0

**Tags:** Rampager

**Injuries, Minor and Major:** Saw Cut/Sawed Throat

## Scratcher

When someone exposed to the Yellow Sign or similar Carcosan reality-alteration vectors is murdered or dies unjustly, it returns as a scratcher, a partially discarnate ghost bent on revenge.

The scratcher remembers only enough about its life to understand the circumstances of its death. These recollections do not extend past what it sensed at the time. If the scratcher couldn't see or identify its assailant at the time of the murder, it doesn't know now.

That won't stop it from jumping to false conclusions, or adding to its revenge list any number of perceived contributors to its demise, no matter how peripheral. It doesn't do detective work; it leaps to conclusions.

A scratcher torments its victims, driving them to distracted desperation over a period of hours, days, or weeks before finally striking. It does this by pervading an area with a scratching sound, like that produced by a live burial victim trapped in a coffin and clawing at the lid. Hearing this noise occasions a Difficulty 4 Composure test to avoid **Shocks**, **Minor and Major:** Unearthly Sounds/Auditory Hallucination.

Once it determines that the victim has been driven to the brink, "Tell-Tale Heart"-style, it coalesces into a cloudy, semi-substantial apparition bristling with multiple, distorted versions of the scratcher's face, as it appeared in life. Whirling around these are a terrifying assortment of hooks and claws.

An object of great emotional importance to the vengeful spirit, which might be a treasured memento or an item from the murder scene, can force a scratcher to appear wherever it has been making its telltale sound. It also solidifies the manifestation into a form the investigators can harm with ordinary weapons.

Though it can execute plans in a sophisticated manner, the scratcher is not really sapient. Operating by instinct and supernatural programming, it is better described as a remnant of human intelligence than a fully realized individual.

**Numbers:** 1

**Difficulty:** Superior (Escape 3,

Other 4, Kill 6)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 if any character carries the Yellow Sign; -2 if the scratcher has been materialized with the use of a key object (see above); -1 if you know who it was in life

**Toll:** 2

**Tags:** Rampager

**Injuries, Minor and Major:** Light Scratch/Deep Gouge

other sensitive items here, again figuring that the slitherers will protect them. Carcosans and their minions learn a low whistle that keeps slitherers calm.

**Numbers:** 2 per character

**Difficulty:** Weak (Escape 2, Other 3, Kill 4)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** +3 without heat-sensing goggles

**Toll:** 0

**Tags:** Rampager

**Injuries, Minor and Major:**

Poisoned Scrape/Poisoned Stab

## Slitherer

In normal lighting conditions these bizarre rampagers appear only as ripples in the air. Thermal imaging goggles reveal them as three- to four-foot-long centipede-like arthropods with gnarled carapaces. Hundreds of pinprick eyes line their outer shells, surrounded by quivering olfactory-sensing hairs.

Slitherers feed on dust and noise and prefer to lair in construction sites and buildings in mid-renovation. They avoid humans, hiding in duct work, basements, or inside uninsulated walls. They attack people only when their sense of territoriality is triggered, or when commanded by a Carcosan noble. They strike with toxin-bearing spurs growing from six oversized legs, evenly distributed along the length of their bodies.

A scenario's main adversary may choose to hide in a site infested with the critters, relying on them to function as unwitting guard dogs. They might store records or

## Sludger

A murder victim dumped amid refuse or toxic waste that also includes one or more objects involved in a past Carcosan incident may rise from the grave as a sludger. Trash, organic and otherwise, gathers itself around the corpse, filling in lost tissue and repairing broken bones.

From a distance, the sludger may be mistaken for an ash-covered homeless person. Closer up, its reality as a shambling, trash-augmented corpse becomes all too apparent.

Otherworldly instinct draws sludgers to people who have read *The King in Yellow*, carry the Yellow Sign, or are furthering Carcosan reality degradation on Earth. They act as implacable servitors to these chaos agents, serving as their muscle.

The team may encounter them acting as hench-creatures for a human antagonist. A group of

sludgers can lend their essence to a dead or dying Carcosan or Carcosa-mutated human, reviving them to commit acts of mayhem another day.

**Numbers:** Half the party, rounding down

**Difficulty:** Tough but Outmatched (Escape 2, Other 3, Kill 5)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 if any character carries the Yellow Sign; -1 if you know how sludgers come into being

**Toll:** 0

**Tags:** Alt

**Injuries, Minor and Major:** Inky Veins/Organ Rot

portion of attention energy to establish a psychic link by posing for an image with a chosen victim. As soon as the target uploads it to the net and receives attention for it, the drain begins. After a few days the soultaker is able to dine from afar on the victim's general psychic energy. The greater the attention the target gets during that time, the more satisfying meal the soultaker receives.

Having established the link, a soultaker can sense a victim's physical location from a range of five kilometers. To feed, the soultaker must be within half a kilometer of the victim. Soultakers attach themselves to one victim at a time.

Sadly, the arrangement can't last forever. After about a week a chain reaction begins, and the target begins a rapid aging process, dying within days. During this time electronic files containing images of the victim mirror the progress of their physical deterioration. When the victim dies all virtual photos of them spontaneously alter, leaving them with grinning, pallid, mask-like faces.

Soultakers can willingly break a feeding link, saving the victim's life. Killing or seriously injuring the soultaker also breaks the link.

They typically trawl a particular area or social scene for as long as they can get away with without attracting suspicion, then move on. A soultaker may store up a year's worth of psychic nutrition in one spate of attacks and then

## Soultaker

Soultakers feed on psychic energies of victims they meet casually in the social whirl of the big city. They seek out beautiful young people whose auras vibrate with attention from others. In the social media era their supply of prey has multiplied exponentially.

When someone you don't even know in a distant city likes your selfie on Instagram or watches your unboxing video on YouTube, you get a minuscule hit of psychic energy from them. This approbation probably doesn't affect your life that much—especially as the typical person loses at least a compensating quantity of psychic essence from all of the negative emotion that drives so much Internet discourse.

The soultaker uses the positive

go off somewhere to take it easy and enjoy its favorite hobbies and activities.

Investigators can see through the illusion that makes a soultaker look human, either spending an Intuition Push or making a Difficulty 7 Sense Trouble test. (Failure with a margin of 1 indicates that something is badly amiss about the soultaker but doesn't pierce the visual illusion.)

Soultakers fight using the psychic energy they've stored up. This grants them superhuman strength and the ability to project force from a distance, in a limited telekinetic attack.

**Numbers: 1**

**Difficulty:** Vastly Superior  
(Escape 2, Other 5, Kill 7)

Adapt to Other Sequences: Drop Escape by 1, increase Toll by 1

**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 if any character carries the Yellow Sign; -1 if any character sees the soultaker's true visage; -1 if the gang knows its MO

**Toll: 4**

**Tags:** Carcosan, Sapient

**Injuries, Minor and Major:**  
Telekinetic Grab & Throw/  
Telekinetic Beatdown

## Stan

Stans are people neurologically mutated by contact with Carcosa, granting them the psychic ability to track and punish people who offend them on the Internet. They obsess over a single individual they

regard as a celebrity or important figure. This might literally be a household name: a movie star, sports hero, or musical artist. Or it could be a person of prominence respected in a particular community most of the planet knows nothing about: a YouTuber, mystery novelist, podcaster, or Twitch streamer.

Stans monitor comment sections and social media platforms, happily tracking the new projects or hot takes from the object of their fascination. Their interest in this person probably doesn't strike friends, family, or co-workers as particularly noteworthy. But when stans catch someone dragging their idol, they take action.

An altered structure in the stan's brain psychically remote-locates the author of the offending comments anywhere in the world. When the hurler of the unforgivable insult lives far away, the stan likely lets that go, absent the travel budget and free time to pursue distant targets. Stans without such resources act only when their psychic senses ping a nearby offender.

Then the stan seeks out the negative commenter to deal physical vengeance. This might entail simple murder but *isn't that too good for someone who would dare drag Britney like that hasn't she suffered enough it's time for you to suffer!* Each stan follows a distinctive MO. One might employ a hit and run blitz attack while another takes prisoners to

a methodically rigged-out torture basement.

With the same organ responsible for their tracking capability, stans can generate a perceptual distortion field around their faces and bodies. Surviving victims describe an assault by a black-gray blur. Maintaining the field requires mild but ongoing concentration. It vanishes when the stan loses consciousness.

Other than that, ordinary logistics constrain all other elements of a stan's attacks: they have to acquire weapons, plan ambushes, avoid surveillance cameras, plot getaways, and so on.

A first scenario revolving around a stan would have the investigators pursuing the perpetrator of a series of mutilations or kidnappings. In a later sequel, the gang might discover that an organization like the Tomorrow Foundation or CIA hunting and imprisoning stans in hopes of widening their remote-identification psi powers.

Stans can be identified under a brain scan or autopsy by the crab-shaped structure growing on top of the parietal lobes.

**Numbers: 1**

**Difficulty:** Superior (Escape 2, Other 4, Kill 5)

**Adapt to Other Sequences:**

Drop Escape by 1, increase Other by 1

**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 if you know its MO; -1 if you know stans are quasi-human; +1 if the stan thinks you have insulted its celebrity

**Toll: 2**

**Tags:** Alt

**Injuries, Minor and Major:**

Scalpel to the Face/Power Tool to the Head

Or substitute another Injury combo more suitable to the MO:

- Nicked/Stabbed
- Superficial Laceration/ Run Through
- Powder Burn/GSW

## Vector

A vector is an altered human, almost certainly a man, who gained a specific set of psychic powers from deep exposure to Carcosan propaganda and now uses them to spread an extremist agenda.

The vector espouses his own distinct version of an authoritarian religious or political ideology. He gathers a cult around himself, dedicated at first to his own wealth and aggrandizement. As he gains control over his flock, he hastens the day when the absolute power he enjoys in his own little circle provokes an outside challenge. He moves from draining the bank accounts of his followers, and sleeping with the ones he deems attractive, to stockpiling weapons.

Eventually he precipitates either terrorist attacks by his now-fanatical believers, and/or a final apocalyptic showdown at his booby-trapped compound.

A vector draws psychic energy

from Carcosa and turns it into personal magnetism. He can recruit susceptible victims from a distance, particularly through Internet videos. When challenged he can imbue his followers with inhuman power or toss his own bolts of supernatural energy.

Some followers muster the resolve to break free of his mental hold. Vectors hate apostates and take great risks to track and destroy them. That's why he spent his flock's time and money building a hidden cell complex to keep and torture errant devotees.

If the vector creates a mythology that includes angels, demons, or other supernatural figures, images of these figments of his imagination may uncontrollably manifest in and around the bunker. The sight of a Blakean dragon-beast causing accidents by the side of a nearby road, or reports of skull-headed angels at a murder scene, may act as the hook drawing the gang to investigate a vector and his cult.

### Cultists

**Numbers:** 2 per character

**Difficulty:** Weak (Escape 3, Other 2, Kill 4)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** +1 if a PC makes an Intimidation Push

**Adapt to Other Sequences:**  
Increase Escape 1 by, Drop Other by 1

**Toll:** 0

**Tags:** Human

**Injuries, Minor and Major:**

Static Energy Punch/Static Energy Bolt

### Vector

**Numbers:** 1

**Difficulty:** Superior (Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 6)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 if any character carries the Yellow Sign

**Toll:** 2

**Tags:** Alt

**Injuries, Minor and Major:**  
Electric Bolt/Lightning Bolt

### Walkdoll

As they lay dying, Carcosans capable of performing a particular spell are able to cast their consciousness into a nearby inanimate object. (Well they can probably do this even if they're not dying, but it's irreversible, so why would they?) This incantation gained popularity after the accidental discovery of a pivotal fact: a particular plastic doll manufactured by a company called ToyCo makes the ideal vessel for such transmissions. A Carcosan who puts themself in a vase or statuette, or for that matter any other doll, simply sits there for eternity, locked in and able to perceive things and perhaps generate the odd psychic emanation. But in a Pretty Polly toddler doll (available in six different facial configurations and skin tones) they are able to lend their new container a surprising degree of animation. In a Pretty Polly they can run, climb, grip a



butcher knife, stab with a butcher knife, slash with a butcher knife... you get where this is going. Oh, and if a walkdoll gloms onto a power drill, it can operate that, too. They can even use the electronic voice box in Polly's throat to speak in a squeaky, nails-on-chalkboard voice, barking threats and distinctly unchildlike obscenities.

Most walkdolls take the obvious option and get rolling on murder sprees. However, nothing stops them from gathering minions and executing more complex evil schemes or working as part of a

broader Carcosan conspiracy.

**Numbers:** 1

**Difficulty:** Vastly Superior  
(Escape 4, Other 4, Kill 7)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 if you know the name of the Carcosan spirit inside the doll; -1 if a character has a blowtorch or other weapon that melts plastic

**Adapt to Other Sequences:**  
Increase Escape by 1, drop Other by 1

**Toll:** 3

**Tags:** Construct

**Injuries, Minor and Major:** Stab Wound/Slashed Throat

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# PEOPLE

Alter the supporting players in this section as needed when you require a witness, victim, perp, or source of information on the fly.

As with previous GMC sections, these include side notes and possibilities for interaction unrelated to the main mystery. Use them if you think a scene needs extra dimension; drop them when all the story needs is forward momentum.

Need to swap out a character's gender identity, heritage, faith association, orientation, or anything else? Grab the pronoun, name, and biographical notes you need and go to it.

## Corporates and Functionaries

The investigators meet characters like these in the offices of companies and agencies found in "Organizations". Exact positions are left unspecified, as you'll know these from the context of your scenario.

Composed, impeccably tailored, and with a voice for radio, **Kelly Robertson** displays the kind of relaxed efficiency that puts one at ease. Her demeanor suggests that any

misunderstandings will soon be rectified and any problems simply solved. "Would you like a bottle of water while you wait?"

From his long chestnut hair to his well-trimmed Van Dyke to his goofy, chipper expression, every visual cue **Kevin Harrington** gives off says: I must be great at my job, because I get away with looking this eccentric in a corporate environment. Hobbies include heraldry, high-end audio, and soap-making.

Young **Elvin Soto** compulsively fidgets and, when asked to supply information, looks around to see if there's someone else around who might authorize his replies. He started work a couple of weeks ago and doesn't want to lose his job. His mom is ailing and another job search is the last thing he needs right now.

**Jessie Lindsey** sticks out even in an unbuttoned corporate environment. With her crayon-red hair and skillfully applied gothy makeup, including spider leg thingy pattern under her right eye, she looks she's dressed for an out-there photo shoot, not the office. Which she is: she's about to do a favor for the boss' daughter who needs a fashion portfolio for her college

photography course application. Jessie's digging the sense of power this outfit gives her and thinking she might make it her deal.

**Moon-faced, genial Nick Hernandez** sweats copiously, even in the extreme chill of the office's air conditioning system. He might have something to hide, or maybe it's just hyperhidrosis. Either way, he's acutely self-conscious about it.

Strong windburned features and a level gaze mark auburn-haired **Frances Ellis** as a force not to be messed with. She wears a tweedy jacket and an elegant, expensive gold watch. Frances concludes meetings with perceived inferiors with an abrupt "well that's enough then" at which point she stands up and beelines for the door.

**Ted Drake** looks all fresh-faced and innocent, with his freckles and his puffy red hair, but that's a look he cultivates to trick suckers into confiding in him. He's looking for any shortcut to success in the organization and sizes up the investigators to see if he can use them to show up one of the co-workers he's aiming to leapfrog over.

Ruggedly handsome **Ed Chang** owes his success largely to his looks and connections but credits it all to his disruptive genius. He tries to win people over by pretending that he's being more frank with them than he would be with any ordinary joker off the street.

Balding, disarmingly outgoing **Oscar Fuente** has a bunch of ideas about the latest trend in his line of

work that he's dying to lecture at someone. Ciabatta crumbs adorn his fuchsia cashmere sweater, worn under a suit jacket. "It's okay if I vape, right?"

Don't let **Ron Dennis'** watery eyes and hangdog expression fool you. Push him too far, and he flips into barely contained rage. People read him as a loser, and don't think he isn't aware of that. Ron's one indignity shy of a violent, career-ending flip out.

## Out on the Town

Firefighter-in-training **Ruffa Laxa** is so proud of her newly purchased '80s vintage mirror shades that she won't take them off, even inside a dark and crowded bar.

**Doug Kulhong** can't help but pose in any mirror that might catch his eye. He might be checking the state of his frizzy pompadour-shaped haircut, or the ripped physique he has chiseled from his skinny frame. He's hoping you'll ask about his CrossFit routine.

Budding marketing whiz **Tanya Glover** doesn't usually find herself in a situation like this, but she's doing a scavenger hunt as part of a team-building exercise. When nervous, she laughs in excited disbelief.

Web designer **Samira Washington** wants to pay attention to what you're saying but can't help but be distracted by the terrible kerning on that sign over there. Samira's girlfriend dumped her

via text last weekend, but what can you do, right?

Handsome, lushly sideburned **Amir Hedao** never should have left the house today, because his big presentation to the VC guys is tomorrow morning. So make this fast, will you? He's not really allowed to talk about his solar grid management software but it's super innovative but no he can't talk really unless you're willing to sign an NDA.

**Irvin Chavez** hopes his rakish mustache diverts attention from his prematurely receding hairline. He works in human resources at a sporting goods retailer and carries a Kindle full of business motivational books.

**Ibrahim Hafez** is looking for his no-good half-brother, who emptied their mother's wallet and came down here looking to score drugs. Sure, Ibrahim might have seen something weird, but he has to find Abdel and get the money back. And an apology. That wouldn't be too much to ask.

**Lana Accorsi** maybe overdoes the smoky eye look a bit but is really rocking those oversized aviator frames. She tries to change the subject if asked what she does for a living, because she works in the family funeral parlor.

**Keith Daniels** can't decide whether he wants to look like Elvis Costello or Bob Marley so he's doing both the glasses and the dreads. He complains that none of his friends know who either of his musical idols are and

won't relent until you take the card with the SoundCloud link to his latest tracks on it.

If the investigators meet red-haired, smart-mouthed **Kristen Ross** in any location where it is possible for her to be carrying her pet raccoon, she is. Otherwise she is trying to convince people that she has a pet raccoon and couldn't care less how illegal that is. They'll sit right next to you on the couch and share your popcorn with you, you know.

Bearded, ginger-haired **Ted Sims** is working his way up the ladder in the local branch of a multinational accounting firm and dreams of the day when he can afford his own boat. He's heard all the jokes about guys who are into boats and doesn't care. The sea is freedom, man.

## Between the Cracks

These characters inhabit the grimy underside of the gleaming city. What they're up to when the investigators meet them is left largely unspecified, so you can slot them into your scenario as required.

With her anime T-shirt and cosplay-inspired blue hair, hipster drug retailer **Nia Douglas** doesn't look like anybody's idea of an underworld denizen. That's why she can peddle in clubs and at concerts right under the noses of cops and security guards. Nia draws the line at heroin. When not converting her cash to



Bitcoin, she works on designs for a line of fruit-themed pillows.

**Jana Douglas** learned the rules of the city's roughest neighborhood faster than her weaker peers and is always ready to enforce them. As far as she's concerned, nothing matters more than respect, and if you won't fight to defend it, you've got nothing. If her boyfriend **Darryl Hughes** isn't nearby to lash out on her command, she'll send her own fists a-flying. Darryl, who leads with his big, bony jaw, secretly wants out of the life, and away from his terrifying live-in, but can't see what he'll be doing tomorrow, much less make plans for long-range survival.

**Ed Maldonado** cares about putting together a cool look (leather hat obligatory), getting paid, and not getting locked up, in that order. He might be in a jam, in which case he looks to use the investigators to get out of it. Otherwise, he may cooperate with them to bank a favor for later.

In addition to whatever shady business figures into the current plot, **Cyndra Saunders** runs a puppy mill and faces an imminent court date on animal cruelty charges. An avid blame-shifter who dresses like every day is laundry day, she brings a pugnacious “no you’re the asshole” attitude to any interaction.

**Tyson Yadav** just got out on bail after setting fire to his ex-boyfriend's apartment and then assaulting one of the firefighters

who arrived to put out the blaze. An aspiring MMA fighter, his fallback phrase is “you don’t wanna see my moves, bro.”

**Wally Saunders**, a middle-aged longtime functioning alcoholic who isn't functioning so well anymore, looks like what you'd get if you soaked Kevin Bacon in formaldehyde for six months. His top resentments include traffic congestion, college types, and all the garbage on the television these days.

Years of compulsive gambling have gifted construction worker **Keven Fishcall** with a range of contacts among the criminal fringe. He says that electronic slot machines were invented by the Devil in Yellow, a faceless devil with a mask made of money, and that a particular casino has loosened up its slot algorithm if maybe the group wants to drop him off there after they finish talking.

White-haired, gravel voiced panhandler **Bobby Harris** just stepped out of a Tom Waits song. He's happy to cooperate with the group for the price of a cheap bottle of brandy, but with a brain as mushy as his, they may have to work to coax coherent details out of him.

In the front pocket of his cargo shorts, intense-eyed **Terry Ramos** keeps a list of all the people who've wronged him. Those he's exacted some kind of petty vengeance against are crossed out. When the investigators encounter him, he

has a cardboard box with a rat in it either on his person or in the back seat of his car. After he's finished with whatever business brings him into contact with the investigators, he's going to release that rat in the ladies' room of a fast food place that recently fired him for hairnet violations.

## Law Enforcement

**Helpful beat cop Marianne McCoy** prides herself on knowing who she can trust to be cool if she chooses to bend the rules. A third-generation police officer, she follows her dad's advice to never let the job harden her. A character with Trivia identifies her as having played on the US beach volleyball team two Olympics back.

**Unhelpful beat cop Nelson Harris** got into law enforcement for all the wrong reasons. When a civilian challenges him, his pupils contract into little pinpoints of fury. He already has one reprimand on his file and doesn't want another, but then again, the anger management classes aren't exactly taking. A Cop Talk Push chills him out.

**Preoccupied beat cop Hal Thomas** became a new dad six weeks ago and is so sleep-deprived he can barely see straight. As long as the investigators aren't setting his squad car on fire, his interest in paperwork-causing hassles is zero.

**Cooperative homicide**

**detective Sadie Huang** has learned two things about the paranormal: 1) it's out there and 2) it's inadmissible in court. When a case involves the Yellow Sign, she files it away as SRI-related and closes it. And guess what, none of the higher-ups ever question that. So if the investigators want the inside scoop on what she calls a Y-File, and they can assure her it won't blow back onto her spotless record, sure, she's willing to push a folder across the desk to them. She couldn't be prouder of her twin daughters, who are about to start college in pre-med and engineering, respectively.

**Uncooperative homicide detective Jake Dalhausser** pops antacids like they're breath mints and hates messy cases. Interfering civilians are a complicating factor to be swatted away with maximum crustiness. A frequent caller to sports talk radio, he maintains a multilayered, lifelong love-hate relationship with the New York Yankees. A Cop Talk Push earns a reluctantly given bit of key information.

Typically close-mouthed federal cop **Connie Aguilera** used to work counterintelligence. Now an unwanted transferee to murder cases, she believes strongly in the public's right not to know. She centers herself by playing Bach sonatas on the piano.

Outwardly helpful federal cop **Luca Servillo** adds pricey

sunglasses to the standard MIB look the agency favors. He trades information with the investigators because he's secretly in league with a sinister organization. Luca has either been ordered to gather a dossier on them, or suspects that they'll be of interest to his real bosses and is assembling one proactively.

## Minding Their Own Business

The last thing any of these everyday citizens wants is to be involved in anything out of the ordinary. Whatever they've seen, they wish they hadn't.

**Davis Blount**, a leathery, muscular man in his mid-60s, works as a snowplow operator in the winter and a marina custodian the rest of the year. He thinks people who use big words are looking down on him.

Genial hardware store clerk **Alex Haynes** wants to show the group this really funny penguin video making the rounds on the Internet.

Hippy-ish grandma of three **Dalila Kirkpatrick** nudges the investigators to sign a petition against a mining company's exploitation of workers in Chile.

Real estate broker **Dorothy Ng** is having the worst day ever, after losing a sale to a rival. And now this, whatever this is.

Bubbly, oblivious bride-to-be **Lita Hamer** interrupts questions from the investigators to answer

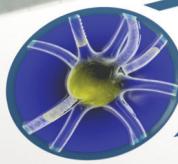
her phone. Members of her wedding party just saw the price of her destination wedding and are calling to ask if maybe there's been some mistake.

**Eusebio Rufo** doesn't want anyone knowing he was anywhere near this neighborhood, where he's been carrying on an affair with his employer's wife. He can't think what would be more disastrous—his boss finding out, or his wife Lucia, who is six months pregnant.

Plumber **Harland Guinn** winces and holds his aching lower back as the investigators talk to him. He asks them if they know a good massage therapist and how much it costs, because those people will try to rip you off.

Whip-smart executive type **Harriet Garrett** just got a great job offer as chief information officer of a promising new startup. But it requires a long commute. She asks the group how well they know the area she'll be driving to every day, and how bad the traffic is.

Weary short order cook **Ismael Flores** is sure that one of the investigators is the same person who stormed into the kitchen a few months back and threw a tantrum about a chicken bone in the penne. He wants this person to understand how not cool that was.



# ABZYNTH

The Best Defense is a Mental Defense

## OMICRON FACILITY CLEARANCE

SECURITY SERVICES PROVIDER  
AECHELON SECURITY

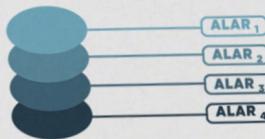
IF FOUND, RETURN IMMEDIATELY TO NEAREST ABZYNTH OR AECHELON SECURITY OFFICE. UNAUTHORIZED USE OF THIS PASS TO OBTAIN ACCESS, INFORMATION, SAMPLES, OR SUPPLIES IS A CAPITAL OFFENSE.

BL49

## DEMOGRAPHIC REACH

The Product will most appeal to urban-dwelling, educated men and women aged 19 - 30, with an income level above \$30,000. Keywords describing users of the product include:

- adventurous
- inquiring
- independent (conscious)
- yearning for strong authority (unconscious)
- anxious
- harried
- dissatisfied with conventional reality
- pliable



## GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

The Product will launch locally, with a nationwide roll-out if benchmarks (see Appendix 3) are met in *six months*.

## BEHAVIORS

Problems users will solve with the Product include:

- desire for alternate information
- insomnia
- restlessness
- lifestyle dysphoria
- fear they may be mirrored by alternate versions dwelling in adjacent realities



# RUNNING THE NORMAL

This section covers GMing questions specific to *This Is Normal Now*. Assuming that the King in Yellow has not altered the text since you last read it, general GUMSHOE advice still appears in *Paris*.

## From Randos To Heroes

As established in “Characters,” the players portray unremarkable versions of the hardened ex-partisans from *Aftermath*. This suggests the following arc for your series:

**Brushes with the Unknown:** Following impulses they only partially comprehend, the members of the group find themselves drawn to one another. Inspired to look into problems the authorities won’t help with, they fully awaken to the strangeness of the world around them. Bound together by new comradeship and a burgeoning curiosity, they continue to probe seemingly disparate eerie occult mysteries.

**Between the Lines:** As they put more cases behind them, the group begins to see patterns suggesting the workings of a broader phenomenon. Stumbling

onto one or more organizations related in some way to these big, nagging questions, they follow in the footsteps of the characters who went before them, learning about the Yellow Sign and its associated mythology and entities. In a moment whose full significance will later become apparent, one of these cases hints toward a way to travel between eras and realities.

**Convergence:** With Carcosan forces increasingly aware of the threat they represent, the heroes find the clues leading to the ultimate solution—and perhaps a climactic encounter with the King’s first and most crucial unwitting minions, in 1895 Paris.

As with the other settings, you can set aside this arc to play *This Is Normal Now* as a one-shot or short cycle of stories, in which case it becomes standard occult investigation against the background of the King in Yellow mythos.

Or you can play it as its own arc, swapping out the stream-crossing back to the previous settings for another sweeping narrative following the rise and fall of the Yellow King’s sway over our modern world.

## Creating Scenarios

### *This Is Normal Now*

extrapolates the Yellow King mythos, and its theme of communication that robs you of life and your grip on reality forward into our information-soaked age. Find premises for your scenarios by thinking of ways to combine Carcosa with:

- new communications platforms
- fresh trends
- shocking art expressions
- cognitive dissonance
- denial of reality
- the accelerating capacity for power to concentrate itself
- any headline that makes the world seem dizzying, corrupt, and unfamiliar

Contrast this with a counter-motif of familiar life carrying on as always, even as weirdness lurks around the corner. The default *This Is Normal Now* scenario takes place in an alluringly lit night-time world. Its monsters lurk in the shadows of bustling cities. Its victims take selfies, laugh at the latest Snapchat filters, call each other out, and share their hot takes on the micro-controversy of the day. Or whatever it is they do six months after this book sees print, when all of the references in the previous sentence are already completely dated.

Scenarios follow a now familiar structure:

**Hook:** The instigating incident that inspires the unlikely group of investigators to start

asking questions and seeking information. This leads into one or more early scenes, which can ideally occur in more than one order, in which the answers to initial questions begin to reveal the contours of the situation.

**Alien Truth:** The surprising discovery that awaits the group when they put the clues together, typically leading to a problem they must put to rest. Except for the very occasional change of pace episode in a many-episode sequence, this revelation ties in some way to Carcosa, the pallid-faced king, and/or the reality warping effects of *That Play No One Should Read*.

**Antagonist Reactions:** Actions undertaken by either the main enemies of the piece, or tangential sources of resistance they stir up along the way.

Finally, we wrap up as usual with a **Climax** in which, if the gang does it right, the mystery is solved and one Carcosan threat dispensed with.

## From Normal to Weird

Create a thread for your players' actions to build a story around by:

- choosing a Hook based on a phenomenon that fits the theme
- imagining how it might reveal an Alien Truth

If at a loss for initial inspiration, just look at any social media feed, or the list of current most-read articles on your online news source of choice. To hit the tone

of this sequence, you probably want to filter out political events and international crises of the day, which work better for *Aftermath* or one of our other horror mystery games, *The Esoterrorists*. Instead focus on tech, lifestyle, and perhaps a dollop of true crime.

The simplest way to turn an ordinary contemporary starting point weird is to add one of the creatures or organizations from this book to it. If you spot a departure from that formula that appeals to you, that's great too, as long as the connection between Hook and Alien Truth is clear enough for the players to figure it out with the clues the scenes make available to them.

Here are a few examples drawn from a random trawling of Twitter trending topics.

### Con Crud

For some reason, the top trending topic Twitter tailors for you is a scientific conference in your area. It occurs to you that the awkward networking mingles of such an event would provide an ideal hunting ground for a soultaker (p. 54). It might just be hunting for people to drain of life energy, but if the setting is to be more than a backdrop you decide to include another angle. What if the soultaker works for a corporate client, targeting scientists who own patents it wants to buy on the cheap? That could bring in McAidrai BioMaterials (p. 28). Both the

creature and the organization come with relationships to Carcosa baked in, so you've got that element taken care of. All you need now is to work backward from the Alien Truth to the Hook: using that always-reliable device, one of the rapidly aging scientists is a friend or relative of a player character.

### Bad Stretch of Road

The next trending topic refers to the latest in a string of accidents on a particular roadway in a nearby city.

That feels like urban legend territory to you. That leads you to a Hook: after another accident along a notoriously unlucky street, a rumor makes the rounds on (here's the contemporary life element) a social media forum devoted to conspiracy and the paranormal. A weird figure has been seen by the side of the road each night before a crash, the posts claim.

By making these posts, a group of bored preteens who live nearby wind up summoning a minor manifestation of the King or Cassilda, who starts to behave as they describe.

The investigators, a few episodes in and now scanning for signs of weirdness, can be hooked in when the forum posts go viral. Their investigation takes them from the road to a sighting of the phantom, to finding the kids and convincing them to retract their claims in hopes of defusing the

haunting. But when the specter gets wind of this, it confronts the investigators, giving you the climactic scene you need to end the story on an exciting note.

### Complicated

In a bit of an apple-for-the-teacher moment, the third trending topic Twitter serves up for you is the resurgence of a conspiracy theory claiming that a top pop star of the 2000s was replaced by a similar-looking actress in 2006.

To put a sinister spin on this, an entertainment journalist acquaintance hanging with the gang on karaoke night says the story is crazy but true. She's not sure she can prove it, but if she can, it will be the scoop of her career. Then she goes missing.

That gives you your Hook. The group encountered a legend (p. 50) early on in your sequence, which played out in the expected manner as a serial killer hunt. The players loved that one, leaving you casting about for sequel ideas. So you decide that this time around something odd has happened with this legend: it accidentally imprinted itself onto the pop star urban myth instead of an overtly murdery one. It kidnaps their friend hoping to understand the myth it has tangled itself up in. Meanwhile it is using its resemblance to a real-life Grammy winner of your choice to commit opportunistic, supernaturally aided slayings.

### Crossing the Sequences

The most straightforward way to run a full cycle of *YKRPG* sequences is to run them in order, from *Paris* to *The Wars* to *Aftermath* to this, with a concluding scenario that loops them back to *Paris*.

While you do that, your players might be pleasantly surprised to see one of the prior sequences reprised, especially if they're assuming that they won't be revisiting their old characters again.

You might choose to revive a previous sequence in response to a plot event in the current one. The *Normal* characters might uncover clues surrounding a Carcosan foe's activities in 1895. The next session could then show the *Paris* PCs engaged in those events.

A reprise could also serve as an emergency response to attendance issues. Let's say your cliffhanger on May 18<sup>th</sup> ends with Saif's character Alvin Sweet discovering that he is the son of the King in Yellow, and then suddenly on the 25<sup>th</sup> Saif can't make it.

You could do the usual thing and have Alvin mysteriously vanish for a session, then come back at the top of the subsequent episode.

But since a *YKRPG* sequence gives you another way to deal with this perennial problem, you might as well take advantage of it and slot in a one-shot from *Paris*,

*The Wars*, or *Aftermath*. Even if you didn't plan this ahead of time you may spot opportunities to improvise connections between its plot and the episode you've now postponed to June 1st.

In a group where people routinely pop in and out, you might associate particular configurations of players with the four sequences. If Saif, Noelle, and Tsing make it, that means you're playing *Paris*, but the Ana, Carrie, Noelle, and Gianni combo bounces you back to *The Wars*. This works best if you can run every session as its own self-contained mystery—or if you have several great note-takers who can help jog memories of multiple ongoing threads.

## Completing the Arc

As *This Is Normal Now* develops, a unifying plot thread or motif likely will as well. Bonus points if you can weave this together from at least one Freaking Weird Moment and a motif, character, or plot element from a previous sequence. An ongoing nemesis character who persists throughout has to fit into your big finish, right?

Whatever this element winds up becoming in your game, let's call it the UPD, for Unifying Plot Device.

As it evolves over the course of the sequence, look for opportunities to connect it to a second device: one that provides the group with the means

and method of meeting their characters from the first sequence.

Possibilities include:

- A psychotropic drug that casts their consciousness through a field of black stars to possess key GMCs from *Paris*.
- A shared hallucination created by VR tech that isn't nearly as unreal as its inventors intended.
- A supernaturally summoned gateway back in time.
- A literal time machine, built by the Center for Incident Control or an organization you create.
- A staged reading of *The King in Yellow*, which casts the group back to their previous selves.
- A pathway through the woods that crosses them over to the King's realm. Once there, they find their old characters, who have ventured from 1895 Paris. This reveals that in your series Carcosa exists outside conventional time.

However they travel, you might also consider having them bounce through other realities along the way, if only for a scene or a flash of description. Deliver a maximum jolt of narrative unity with cameos from *The Wars* squad and the group's *Aftermath* counterparts. Your players might also enjoy some quick flashes suggesting other timelines where yet more alter egos take on the forces of Carcosa.

Another option: the *Normal* characters must undertake a circuitous route through reality, enlisting their more formidable

*Aftermath* counterparts to meet and defeat the 1895 characters. Narrative tradition suggests that this might require an ultimate sacrifice or three.

The final stretch, whichever set of characters take the lead, brings you to the following choices.

If you followed the strong hints *Paris* places on your plate, you established that the player characters of 1895 somehow brought the play into being.

The goal of the *Normal* characters here at the end would then be to stop themselves before they perform the final act that shatters reality and splits the timeline.

The horror genre's innate irony would suggest that they have to kill their former selves in order to do this.

But your story may move in a different direction, either because the logic it establishes doesn't take you there, or because you know your players would consider that too much of a downer.

GMs whose games bend toward a kookier, over-the-top tone than the one presumed here could even create a plot device that gets all of the characters together to fight alongside one another.

## Parallels

In contrast to the first two sequences, *Aftermath* and *This Is Normal Now* feature characters who are direct counterparts of one another in split timelines.

Reinforce this by having characters and even situations from *Aftermath* recur, in more mundane form, in *This Is Normal Now*.

Some transmogrified characters can show the differences historical context makes in who a person becomes. That former state security officer who tortured a character before? Now he's back, cleaning up a spill on aisle three when the group buys groceries.

Conversely, you might play with the idea that the suffering of *Aftermath*'s revolution brought out the best in folks who never got that choice in our timeline. The last set of characters helped make revolutionary hero Stephanie Ramirez the first President of the new era. Here they find her happily living a safe and happy life as manager of a car rental outlet.

Not everyone changes hugely from one reality to the next. The grizzled street preacher who witnessed a murder in post-Castaigne America could still be a grizzled street preacher who witnesses a kidnapping here.

Some people might be doomed across realities. Ex-partisan Guadalupe Reece, fatally mauled by riot dogs in the previous sequence, might, as environmental activist Guadalupe Reece, show up as victim of a rampager this time around.

# THE ALIEN TRUTH

In any *YKRPG* sequence the heroes might find venture to Carcosa or deal directly with the King in Yellow or his daughters. This chapter helps you flesh them out, whenever they appear. (Granted, depending on how you define them, “flesh” might not be quite the right word.)

Chambers creates the horror of the Yellow King through suggestion. They give us hints and snippets about this entity and his world, not all of which line up with one another. Some references make no literal sense. Others come from unreliable witnesses or delusional narrators. When Chambers writes, “The scolloped tatters of the King in Yellow must hide Yhtill forever,” the words disturb, because we have no idea, and no chance of learning, who or what Yhtill is, or why or how the king must hide this being, object, abstraction, or place.

This chills because it suggests a set of facts that are not just unknown but fundamentally unknowable. In a universe of reality horror, what is real can never be pinned down. Something you reveal to be objectively true might later stand revealed as another layer

of deception. Or maybe it used to be true, but what is real has shifted since the last time the PCs formed their assumptions.

So when the characters make a discovery about Carcosa, think of it as a provisional one, subject to later contradiction. Even the final episode of a grand arc might conclude on a note of fundamental ambiguity.

## **The King and His Court**

Beings from Carcosa can appear in your series as direct antagonists or shadowy figures setting in motion the horrific events the characters investigate.

## **The King Himself**

In at least some of the realities of *The Yellow King Roleplaying Game* (if not the apparent reality of the stories taken as a whole), we sort of know the following about the King in Yellow (if he exists):

- He rules a realm called Carcosa.
- At one time he left his kingdom, later returning to his home and his daughters Camilla and Cassilda. By this time, he had changed sufficiently to be regarded as a stranger. To their

horror, the sisters discovered that the visitor, apparently wearing a grotesque white mask, was their father—and that the mask was now his face.

- His royal robes are scolloped and tattered. They are both somehow yellow, yet also multi-colored.
- He intervenes in the affairs of mortals, as a “king whom emperors have served.”
  - In some realities, he sired a mortal dynasty on Earth, called the Imperial family. Figures in this lineage include, in chronological order, Uoht, Thale, Naotalba, the Phantom of Truth, Aldones, Hildred de Calvados (once known as “the Last King”) and the Hildred Castaigne of *Aftermath*’s backstory.
- The King describes himself as a living god.
- When people read the play about his return to Carcosa, he may either:
  - use them as pawns in his earthly schemes
  - shatter their ability to perceive reality (in some cases then weaving a new reality based on their delusions)
  - kill them for their effrontery (in one case doing so by animating a corpse and investing it with an aura of energy that gradually disintegrates solid objects, like pesky intervening doors)

The characters might never

meet him, but if they do, they could encounter him:

- In Carcosa itself, in his true form (should he in fact possess one).
- On Earth, animating a recently deceased corpse found close to the person he wants to converse with or murder.
- On Earth, in an assumed form. This might be an avatar or homunculus, with telltale visual cues to alert the wary: a frozen visage, waxy facial muscles, a fondness for yellow apparel.
- In a dream, in whatever form the dreamer imagines.

You may decide that the King can only cross over to our world indirectly—or is prevented from doing this in early sequences, but then overcomes that barrier in later ones, as his power grows.

The King speaks with threatening formality and an elevated, somewhat archaic parlance.

He means ill for the characters but might want to use them for a while before discarding them.

His current plan, as the PCs become entangled with him, might see him:

- striking out against his rebellious daughters (or other wayward minions).
- slaying humans who have read the play but are of no use to him as servitors
  - for sport.
  - because he must do so to retain his power.
  - because vexatious gnats annoy him.

- toying with the minds and destinies of mortals
  - out of mythic compulsion; this is what he exists to do.
  - out of boredom.
  - as a cruel experiment.
  - as a sadistic art project for an audience consisting of himself.
- manipulating mystical conditions to bring about yet another new reality
  - for any of the reasons given in the above.
  - to loosen the threads of reality and destroy all of existence, including all alternate worlds.

### Cassilda and Camilla

From the very fragmentary presentation of her lines in the play from the Chambers stories, we can infer that Cassilda is both the more assertive of the two sisters, and the most skeptical of her father.

The passage presents Camilla as, by contrast, the fearful one, who lets out an agonized scream when she beholds the mask.

In this game we assume that Cassilda and Camilla share their father's apparent immortality.

Perhaps the sisters are capable of crossing over to our world even in realities where their father is not.

You decide whether they're working together, or as rivals. The nature of their relationship could well shift from one sequence to the next.

They may follow their sire,

working with him or in parallel to him, pursuing any of the above goals. This choice makes them secondary obstacles the group must overcome before finally defeating him (assuming that's even an option).

For greater contrast, one or both could be trying to:

- Depose him and take his place.
- Win recognition as his heir.
- Play a complicated three-way game, using humans and reality as the board.
- Thwart his attempts to destroy all of existence, which of course would wipe them out too.
- Oppose him for sincere and virtuous reasons. This choice suits Occult Adventure mode, giving the characters a force of goodness capable of backing them up in their battle against incarnate evil. In appearance, the sisters may be:
  - beautiful, in a wan and pre-Raphaelite sort of way.
  - also now afflicted with the pallid, mask-like visage their father brought back from his dread occult quest.
  - the latter, but capable of projecting an illusion of the former.

When seen in human form they wear lush, rich clothing and speak in a sophisticated, if humorless fashion.

Capable of moving in human circles without raising attention, the sisters comprehend the world and its everyday interactions in

a way their father can't or won't. They may run the day-to-day of Carcosan cults, conspiracies, and corporations. In concert or in competition with one another, Camilla and Cassilda seek the sorts of influence that let them stand to one side of the spotlight. Roles in society might include socialite, spymaster, gallery owner, political fundraiser, or venture capitalist.

### Courtiers and Nobles

Three individuals do not a royal court make. High-status agents of the King and/or his daughters serve as ideal introductory or one-shot villains, who the characters can overcome as they solve the case of the week. Yhith-Ekur, seen in this book's introductory scenario, fits that pattern.

Give yourself a source of high-status but mid-level villains by peopling the King's court with a circle of ambitious yet disposable attendants. These inhuman humanoids, known as Carcosans, peer at the heroes through the white, mask-like visages mirroring their ruler. Should you ever have to explain this, options include:

- Everyone at court eventually acquired variations on the pallid mask after the King came back changed.
- Carcosans look human, or more beautiful than humans, in their home world, but acquire the pallid mask when they cross over to ours.
- If needed for plot purposes,

they wield a magic or technology allowing them to look like us while here. It requires ongoing effort or cost and can be thwarted at climactic moments of revelation.

- When a human uses a spell, intuition, or other heightened means to truly see a Carcosan, we perceive them as having the pallid mask look. That too is an illusion, but it's good enough to choose who to shoot at.

Carcosans reshape their bodies at will, sprouting fangs, popping claws out of their fingertips, or turning their hands into fleshy power drills. They may look male, female, or neither. As with people on our planet, a Carcosan's gender identity might not be apparent from visual cues alone.

Carcosan nobles may act at the behest of one or more royal family members. Once ensconced on Earth, they may decide to freelance, following their own agendas entirely or in part. The King will never find out, surely. Their plans might be motivated by:

- greed
- ennui
- struggle for power with peers
- need to gather treasure for the King
- ambition to overthrow the King and his dynasty
- sadism
- callous scientific curiosity
- revenge

Here's a quick assortment of a Carcosan nobles should you need

one on the spur of the moment:

**Bargon** wears expensive but gaudy clothes of whatever era it's in. It offers the heroes baubles and pearls as inducement to serve it.

**Ubale** sneers at the investigators, tossing out cruel jibes revealing a specific knowledge of their individual foibles.

**Hhasakha** carries a snack-size bag of writhing insects, periodically popping one of them into its mouth. In the spirit of politeness, it offers to share these with the characters.

When **Gemeth** speaks, humans hear its words in a voice exactly like that of a lost love or dead family member.

**Thamanu** wears only a loincloth and a complicated metal harness covered with inward-pointing blades. This outfit continually rakes its quick-healing flesh. It may invite an investigator to pierce its pallid epidermis with a proffered dagger, shuddering in ecstasy when the point goes in.

Hunched, grinning, surrounded by a mop of frizzy sepia hair, **Balba** spits out offers and threats with a wet, slurpy voice.

Though thousands of maggots wriggle from its scalp, **Athanhu** strikes any investigator failing a Difficulty 5 Sense Trouble test as delightful and charming.

### **Earthly Courtiers**

People and entities originating on Earth could also gather around the King in Carcosa to advise,

flatter, and propose new schemes.

Intelligent supernatural creatures activated or empowered by burgeoning Carcosan energy might be snapped up as aides with the knowledge and vigor to achieve the King's aims. Since Carcosa appears mostly offstage, you'll want to give them goals to pursue and mysteries to cause on Earth. But if the PCs travel to the towers of Carcosa they might find a rogues' gallery of villains in attendance on the King.

In my game, Addhema, the titular character of Paul Féval's 1856 novel *The Vampire Countess*, served this role. She was a direct threat as a predatory aristocrat in 1895 and stayed menacingly in the background as a French brigadier general in *The Wars*. After sitting out *Aftermath*, she reappeared as a shadowy corporate executive in *This Is Normal Now*, where the crew finally did the research needed to figure out how to kill her. Though the novel itself is a serialized mess and a half, the character, who vampirizes her victims by taking their scalps and wearing their lustrous hair, provided an unfamiliar yet suitably old-timey adversary.

The king can grant occult immortality to other marquee villains, fictional or historical, allowing them to recur through your series. You can use this device to pit the investigators against Jack the Ripper, H. H.



Holmes, Dr. Moreau, Captain Nemo, or Victor Frankenstein, with or without accompanying monster.

## Carcosa

Carcosa might be a mystical realm or pocket dimension. Most of the scant clues we have, however, point to a distant, alien world. On several occasions Chambers mentions the stars in its sky, Aldebaran, and the Hyades. In the white night sky of Carcosa they glitter as black stars.

We know that Carcosa has twin suns, which set in tandem. Mentions of its perpetual gloom suggest that the day sky is gray and overcast. Chambers' description of cloud rifts that flutter and flap as they pass indicate heavy atmospheric cloud cover, broken intermittently by powerful winds.

Carcosa also appears to refer to a city, with narrow streets and ominous towers. This is either:

- the most important city on its planet, thus sharing its name
- the only city remaining on an otherwise desolate world
- a city that spans most of its planet

One of Chambers' references calls it "an awful abode of lost souls." This suggests that its inhabitants all came here from somewhere else. *Is Carcosa a hell where the spirits of people who died elsewhere transmigrate after death?* You might reveal that its inhabitants hail from

across the galaxy, and have been given terrible new incarnations here, after a brush with the Yellow Sign. *Does every planet hosting sentient life have its own version of the selfhood-shattering play?*

As either a distant planet or a mystical realm, the game assumes that humans can't exist there easily. If reading the play or gazing at the Yellow Sign shatters the brain, physically traipsing around the place itself must be nigh annihilating. The energy it radiates helps to warp reality on Earth and can't be pleasant up close. Best to go there in dreams!

That said, to tell a story that requires the characters to spend more than few moments there, create a plot device that grants them protection. Depending on what sequence you're playing, this could consist anything from a mystical amulet to a mathematical mantra to modern space suits. Naturally finding out how to protect themselves requires investigation on their part. And what MacGuffins give, they also taketh away—at some point they ought to have to work to keep their protection on this hostile world.

Wandering around Carcosa getting into colorful trouble could prove an easier matter in Occult Adventure mode. Throw in an initial Composure test for form's sake, and then allow the PCs to assimilate to its alienness, sword and planet style.

## Black Stars

From an earthly perspective, Aldebaran is an orange star in the Zodiac constellation Taurus, 65 million light years away. 151 light years away hangs the Hyades star cluster. To our eyes it appears to be part of the same constellation, Taurus.

The litany of celestial bodies in the sky above Carcosa that mentions Aldebaran and the Hyades also cites Alar and Hastur.

Alar is a star so far unseen (or unnamed) by human astronomers.

The term “Hastur” comes from an author influential on Chambers, Ambrose Bierce. In his 1893 story “Haïta the Shepherd” Hastur appears as a god of sheep herders. (Bierce also uses the word “Carcosa” first, as the name of a long-vanished earthly city, in his *Rip Van Winkle* riff “An Inhabitant of Carcosa.”) Elsewhere in his work, Chambers again borrows the term “Hastur” in another context, as a character name in one of his Breton-inspired fantasy stories. Later August Derleth assumes that Hastur is the given name of the King in Yellow as he transforms him into a Lovecraftian slug-god.

If Hastur is or was a being, it’s not as a slug but a star. Mr. Wilde’s imperial lineage starts with the world of Carcosa itself, then lists Hastur, the Hyades, and Aldebaran. In your game, you may decide to take this literal evidence of star gods even more powerful than the King. Parsimony

suggests that the reference, as with so many earthly lists of divinely mandated kings, should be taken poetically. In occult dealings terms can carry multiple meanings. Hildred Castaigne’s claimed to rule through his “right in Hastur” and knowledge of the mystery of the Hyades. In your game, this might refer to a mystical insight, or to a ritual akin to the initiatory Eleusinian Mysteries.

You might nod to the role of Carcosa’s stars in Chambers’ elliptical mythology by:

- treating an interest in the Taurus constellation and astronomy in general as a sign a suspect is involved in Carcosan affairs.
- portraying a villain who argues that his crimes have been sanctioned by his “right in Hastur.”
- including clues both astronomical and astrological in your scenarios.

## The Lake of Hali

Another key attraction Chambers readers may expect their characters to visit while on a physical, dream, or astral journey to Carcosa is the Lake of Hali. This black lake stretches out for miles and can be seen from the King’s palace. From that vantage the twin suns seem to set into Hali itself. Depending on who is currently hallucinating about it, it either contains “depths” and is roiled by foggy waves or is “thin

and blank, without a ripple of wind to stir it.”

Despite this indeterminacy, Hali undoubtedly provides a home for countless aquatic creatures, of which the Dwellers in Hali (*Paris*, p. 153) can’t be the only dangerous example.

Another body of water, also sounding like a lake but possibly a river, is the Dehme, described as deep and cloudy.

### Desolate Shores

Upon arrival in Carcosa the characters may find themselves in an unavailing wilderness, with Carcosa’s towers in the far distance. You might describe the hostile landscape as:

- a featureless plain shrouded by mist
- a scattering of sharp rocks
- a briar patch, thick with oily, shrieking thorn bushes
- a rocky shore licked by black, foaming water
- a forest of burned and naked trees

- a steaming expanse of bubbling mud
- a meandering road cobbled with cracked and crumbling skulls

### The City

Portraying Carcosa as a functioning city with an economy, occupations, and civic life pulls your series toward gothic horror-fantasy. You may want to do this if your story has the investigators laying low for an extended stay in which they have some hope of hiding out from the King’s guard.

Keep it as a horror city by describing it as a lingering hell for ghosts and phantoms. As mentioned above, these could be souls plucked from other worlds after stumbling onto the symbols and literature of Carcosa. Or they could be the ancient dead, or half-living, population of this world, dimmed into a shadow existence through whatever curse replaced the King’s face with a pallid mask.

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# GM MASTERCLASS

This chapter presents GM tips relevant to play in any of the game's four sequences, including advice on weaving them together.

## The GUMSHOE Ethos

GUMSHOE speeds and streamlines the time-honored form of the investigative roleplaying game. The central question a traditional RPG asks is:

*Will the heroes get the information they need?*

Assuming that they look in the right place and apply appropriate abilities to the task, GUMSHOE ensures that the heroes get the basic clues they need to move through the story. The question it asks is:

*What will the heroes do with the information once they've got it?*

If you think about it, this is how the source materials we base our mystery scenarios on handle clues. You don't see the forensic techies on Criminal Minds failing to successfully use their lab equipment or Sherlock Holmes stymied and unable to move forward because he blew his Zoology roll.

You don't see this because, in a story, failure to gain information

is rarely more interesting than getting it. New information opens up new narrative possibilities, new choices, and new actions for the characters. Failure to get information is a null result that takes you nowhere.

In a fictional procedural, whether it's a mystery novel or an episode of a cop show, the emphasis isn't on finding the clues in the first place. When it really matters, you may get a paragraph telling you how difficult the search was or a montage of the occult investigators poring over a stack of volumes pulled down from the shelves of their library. But the action really starts after the clues are gathered.

Investigative scenarios are not about finding clues, they're about interpreting the clues you do find.

GUMSHOE, therefore, makes the finding of clues all but automatic, as long as you get to the right place in the story and have the right ability. That's when the fun part begins, when the players try to put the components of the puzzle together.

That's hard enough for a group of armchair detectives, without

withholding half the pieces from them.

When you do see information withheld from characters, it's seldom portrayed as a failure on the part of the competent fact-gathering heroes. Instead, the writers show an external force preventing them from applying their abilities. In an investigative-horror story, you might get the interdimensional monster that can bend, and therefore obscure, reality. Information is only withheld when it makes the story more interesting—usually by placing the heroes at a handicap while they move forward in the storyline. In GUMSHOE terms, they're not trying to get an available clue and failing; they're using an ability for which no clue is available.

Historically, story-based roleplaying, of which investigative games were an early if not the earliest example, evolved from dungeon-bashing campaigns. They treat clues the same way that dungeon games treat treasure. You have to search for the clue that takes you on to the next scene. If you roll well, you get the clue. If not, you don't—and the story grinds to a halt.

However, treasure gathering isn't the main event in a dungeon game. There, the central activity is killing the monsters and enemies who live in the dungeon. The treasure-finding phase comes afterwards, as a mere reward. If you don't get all the

treasure in a room, you lose out a bit, but the story keeps going, as you tramp down the hallway to the next monster-filled chamber.

Imagine a dungeon game where you either have to roll well to find another room to plunder or sit around feeling frustrated and bored.

Many of our favorite roleplaying games use the traditional roll-to-get-a-clue model. You may be lucky enough to play in them without ever seeing your game grind to a halt after a failed information roll. Perhaps your GM, or the scenario designer, has carefully crafted the adventure so that you never have to get any specific clue to advance the story.

More likely, your GM adjusts on the fly to your failed rolls, creating elaborate workarounds that get you the same information by different means. When you think about it, these runaround moments are essentially time killers. They bring about a predetermined, necessary result while giving you the illusion of randomness and chance. GUMSHOE cuts out these filler moments in favor of scenes that actually advance the story. With the time saved, you can construct more detailed, compelling mysteries for the players to sort out. That's where the streamlining comes in.

If you've never had a game stop dead on a missed clue, you may naturally figure that it never

happens to anyone. Having run GMing seminars at conventions for years, I can assure you that this is not the case. People come up to me all the time to share their horror stories of games that literally go nowhere on a blown spot test. This should not be surprising. GMs are doing what the rules tell them to do, failing to see the unwritten rule that they should then spend five to twenty minutes of game time introducing a workaround.

GUMSHOE gives you the rules you should actually use as written, skipping the workaround.

But even if you've never noticed this problem, play it because it focuses and streamlines play, eliminating the elaborate workarounds your GM has to use to make the missed information rolls invisible to you. It replaces these moments of circular plotting with more interesting scenes that move the story forward.

### Helping Investigators Investigate

GUMSHOE ensures that players get information if they look in the right place and apply an appropriate ability to the situation.

Many players can do this instinctively, based on their prior consumption of mystery novels and/or investigation-based TV shows. Even if they restrict their media diets to geek culture properties only, a surprising number of the latter follow

the mystery format, whether we're talking horror adventure (*The X-Files, Supernatural*), superheroes (*Arrow, Gotham*) or even the space opera of *Star Trek* in its various incarnations.

(For GUMSHOE versions of the last two genres, see *Mutant City Blues* and *Ashen Stars*.)

When players need an assist with basic principles of investigation, give them the handout "How to Solve a Case," found in the Appendices, on p. 160, or in PDF from the YK RPG Resources page at [pelgrane.com](http://pelgrane.com).

### Conceptualizing Combat

In a classic roleplaying game combat system, standard GUMSHOE included, fights conclude in a few basic ways:

- the PCs win the fight, killing or overcoming all of their opponents
- the PCs choose to stop fighting and flee, likely because one or more of them has been killed
- (rarely and disastrously) the foes win, killing all of the PCs

The first outcome remains common in QuickShock GUMSHOE. The others become less common than in standard GUMSHOE or other RPGs. Except in the case of a few Major Injuries that count as two cards, PCs don't get killed in fights unless they go into them already one card shy of a Final Injury card.

Another result, rare in other games, becomes frequent in QuickShock:

## The Traditional Workaround

Some GMs of investigative games have responded to secondhand descriptions of GUMSHOE by saying that, because it ensures that players always get the clues they need, it does what they are already doing. I wonder to what extent this assertion matches reality. When a game design provides a rule, that rule tends to get used, even when it shouldn't. Its use occurs reflexively, even invisibly.

The crystal ball I use to peer into other peoples' houses while they GM is in the shop for repairs, so I guess I can't conclusively say that commenters are misdescribing their own play styles. However, my bet would be that most of them are:

- Putting absolutely crucial information (what in GUMSHOE are called core clues) out in plain sight, with no ability use (and therefore no roll) required. In other words, they break the rules as written to achieve the desired result.  
or
- Employing the above-mentioned workaround, continually finding new ways to reveal the same information, until somebody finally gets the needed roll.  
and
- Still requiring rolls for less essential clues.

We have probably abetted this misperception by emphasizing the fact that GUMSHOE never leaves you stuck on a failed die roll. The traditional ability roll method tends not to leave you stuck in practice because GMs have grown used to working around the rules as written. For those folks, the value of the GUMSHOE approach is not that it does something they can't or haven't done before, but that it does so with smooth and seamless efficiency. Why should you have to work around? It's not only what it does but how it does

- the foes win the fight and achieves their objective, leaving some group members hurt

This adds an outcome you see all the time in horror and adventure genre sources but rarely if ever in at the gaming table. The hero takes a licking, the bad guys move closer to their objective, and the story keeps going. In game theory parlance, this is the equivalent of a fail forward.

In other media, you usually see this as part of a pattern where the antagonist defeats the heroes in a first encounter. The heroes then train or make other preparations to somehow change the odds for next time. Or they lay the groundwork for an emotional transformation that pays off during a climactic rematch, finally mustering the grit and determination needed to succeed against the odds.

Standard fight systems make it notoriously difficult to stage that pattern.

In QuickShock, by contrast, you're much more likely to see a powerful baddie survive an initial fight without laying waste to your entire cast. Not guaranteed, because that would be predictable, and randomness in rules exists to introduce suspense, which requires doubt. But it is more likely than in say, standard GUMSHOE, especially as you climb the relative challenge scale.

Managing this outcome does require an accompanying shift

in narrative thinking. Describing this situation requires a credible answer to the question: *If the foes have won, why don't they kill everyone?*

In many cases your answer will be that they're pursuing an objective other than Kill. Instead they only want to beat up the heroes in order to achieve some other goal. Having removed the obstacle, the heroes, they go on to do just that.

When a fight occurs mid-scenario, prepare for this eventuality by understanding in advance why the foe isn't trying to slaughter the heroes.

- Having shown its supremacy, it wants them to live to suffer the ignominy of defeat.
- Its plan calls on them to be killed, yes. But not yet... not here...
- It cares more about killing the GMC it's after.
- It cares more about stealing the diamond, or burning the evidence, or setting the bomb, or what have you.
- A predatory monster that mostly just kills people doesn't want to kill these particular people. Now that it has beaten them, it wants to continue on to get the people it has sworn vengeance against, that match its feeding pattern, or that it can easily drag back to the safety of its lair.
- Rescuers are coming! No time for killing blows!
- As the people who helped

bring the play into existence, or as their cognates in a later time and/or reality, it needs them alive.

Defeat in a fight means that the foe gets to do what it wants, *other than* kill the PCs, impel their surrender, or capture them without player permission. The heroes are now unable to interfere with them as they do that.

Just because characters didn't wind up with Injury cards, which represent risks and ill consequences severe enough to continue to impede them in subsequent scenes, doesn't mean that they're standing there, hale, hearty, and ready to take further strenuous action. Instead they are exhausted, battered, winded, stunned, knocked out, magically dazed—or whatever else suits.

When you absolutely can't think why the foe wouldn't try to kill the heroes, instead allow the players to describe what they do to escape.

If their objective was Escape, it may at first glance feel odd that they also get to Escape while defeated. But since some of them undoubtedly have Injury cards, they have still paid a dearer price for defeat than they would have if they'd won.

### **About that Willing Surrender Business...**

Although you can't force players who lose a fight to agree to have their characters captured, it is a staple moment of horror and

adventure fiction. You *mi-i-i-ght* be able to convince them that going along will lead to fun story turns. At the end of a fight that ends in defeat, use Investigative abilities to drop a hint to that effect. For example:

**Intuition:** “You were looking for their lair and wondering how you were going to sneak it. Well, you just got an invitation to go through the front door.”

**Occultism:** “Going along with them will let you see the details of the ritual, telling you what it is they're attempting to summon.”

**Cop Talk/Streetwise:** “You know the brand of handcuff they're using, and you can escape from it whenever you want, with the paper clip stashed in the cuff of your jeans.”

**Salt of the Earth:** “The soldiers assigned to guard you are simple peasants who hate their commanders. You're sure you can earn their trust at the crucial moment.”

That said, captivity is one fail-forward moment players remain staunchly reluctant to embrace, no matter how hard you hint that you're giving them a capture-tunity. Always be ready to default to a situation in which the foe beats them and walks away.

### **What Pool Points Emulate**

General abilities emulate the structure of procedural ensemble fiction, where each of the main characters gets a number of chances to shine per story. The

clearest model for this appears in episodic procedural TV. Over the course of a series, if not in every episode, key characters receive a roughly equal number of spotlight moments, in which they overcome major obstacles in a cool and compelling way. Each character does this in accordance with their key traits or abilities.

Here, pool points give you X opportunities to shine per scenario, where X is a somewhat fuzzy and unpredictable number. Your character may hit it out of the park with an atypical ability, but more often than not triumphs by employing the abilities you invested heavily in.

If the mechanics seem weird to you, you may be applying the simulative thinking of other fine rules systems to GUMSHOE, resulting in an expectations mismatch.

Your character does not, for example, become literally worse in her abilities as you spend points. Ratings remain unchanged as you spend points. Point-spending is something players do on the fictional level, not something that happens to the characters in their reality.

However, if you've already spent 4 points, and your teammate has spent none, you now have a roughly equal chance of successfully performing Athletics-related tasks until the next refresh occurs. But you already have one or two successes under your belt, most likely, while he hasn't done anything to demonstrate his

athletic prowess. You have already shown yourself to be the superior athlete by overcoming obstacles using your Athletics.

## Narrating Character Exits

When a player receives a Final Shock or Injury card, signaling the character's exit from the game, guide the player in narrating suitably final and affecting final moments.

Injury cards (like the examples below, from *Paris*) provide heavy hints on this front. Almost invariably the player can describe the character's death from the wound the hero has just suffered, based on the name of the card and the established situation. Help the player, if needed, to describe a version of that wound so bad it kills the character.

- *Noelle gets a Final Injury card, “Caught in the Blast Radius.” She describes Ella’s obliteration in a bomb explosion.*
- *Gianni has the Injury card “Shot” which specifies that his character dies if he reaches the end of the scenario without having discarded it. After the group solves the mystery and banishes the supernatural threat to Carcosa, Gianni describes his character stumbling to a park bench, looking down at the reopened wound in his chest, and quietly expiring, smiling in triumph as his oblivious colleagues celebrate*

*the salvation of the world.*

Players whose final Injury is Minor may choose to narrate character deaths as a result of:

- A much worse version of the wound than the card name implies.
- A complication to a previously taken Injury, killing the character as a fatal final blow to an already desperately compromised body.
- *Carrie's Final Injury card is the relatively puny "Knocked on the Head." Deciding that's no way for a horror character to die, she specifies instead that character's skull has been pulped by a cudgel blow. She narrates the ensuing spray of brain bits on scenery in true George Romero fashion.*
- *Tsing already has the cards "Slashed Throat" and "Bitten" when he receives "Abrasion" in a bar fight. "The guy's broken bottle hits me in the throat, tearing open the stitches the doc sewed into me. I go down in a gusher of blood."*

Although not in the horror spirit, a player could, in theory, describe their Final Injury as non-fatal but sufficiently bad to force a retirement from a life of danger. The PC could reappear in future sessions as a fragile GMC who might occasionally help the current party, point them to mysteries, or need rescuing.

- *Saif's character gets "Knockout Dart" as a Final Injury. "The dart interacts*

*with the alien virus in Arthur's system, paralyzing him utterly. Though still alive and able to perceive the world around him, he is permanently incapable of voluntary muscle movement. He tries to scream—but cannot!"*

Players taking Final Shock cards use them as inspiration to describe a mentally debilitating event that causes their permanent departure from the storyline. This can fit the classic horror trope of the investigator into the unknown permanently committed to an asylum. Or it could simply represent a subtler inability to continue. Players can, if desired, can also narrate their characters' resulting physical demises.

- *Ana gets, as her Final Shock card, "Dread." "I go home to my apartment and never come out again. When the other characters show up to ask after me, I refuse to budge. A few weeks later, I disappear entirely. In my apartment the group finds my essential documents, including a newly written will, laid out for the lawyers. My body is never found."*
- *Noelle's character takes a Final Shock card, "Questioning Your Senses." She describes her character howling in dismay as she descends into a permanent hallucination of lurking, menacing, masked figures.*
- *Carrie winds up with a Final Shock card, "Sick with Worry."*

*This doesn't particularly describe a mental disorder, just a new emotional state. Her character gives a speech to the others—she just can't take this life any more. She's headed to her farm upstate and a new career producing artisanal honey butter. Suitcase already in hand, she begs them never to contact her again.*

In *The Wars*, the other investigators might mercifully hasten the demise of a raving, screaming comrade under battlefield conditions—especially if it's their superior in the chain of command. Weapons sometimes discharge, is all I'm saying.

Whatever the situation, encourage players to emphasize a compelling and memorable end for the character's career over the most literal possible reading of the card concept.

## Interweaving the Sequences

Should you decide to play the game in its full, four-sequence epic arc option, the ways in which events and characters interweave will become the element your players most remember about their Yellow King experience.

Whenever a later sequence nods to a previous one, the players feel the knowing jolt of reward you get when an installment of your favorite pop culture entertainment property hearkens back to its past. Except here the players are

getting it from something they made themselves, refracting and commenting on their own past creations at the gaming table.

This feature emerges in play during character generation for your second sequence.

If you're already anticipating how it will go, you might prefer to stop reading here. That way you can be surprised when these moments pop up spontaneously, guided either by you in the spur of the moment, or one of your players.

The rest of this section is for the plan-ahead types who feel more confident when working with a set of thoroughly nailed-down expectations.

Character generation for books two through four include elements that bring the Easter egg effect into your game. In *The Wars* players establish connections to their *Paris* characters. In *Aftermath* they connect to either set of previous PCs. And in *This Is Normal Now* they play direct alternate versions of the investigators from *Aftermath*.

As you create scenarios of your own, either in advance or via improvisation, these elements are the hooks you'll reach for when building spotlight moments for individual PCs, connecting clues to their personal histories, or devising introductory sequences that confront them with their latest mysteries.

Aid yourself in doing this by filling out the Group Matrix found in the Appendices of each book.

Here's an example, from *Aftermath*.

Player	Character	Civilian Occupation	Drive	Worst Memory	Parallels
Tsing	Reg Alceus	Security Guard	Self-Punishment	When I rattoned out my brother to the Hussars	Performance art echoes Aristide Bruant
Ana	Willow Odokwu	Reporter	Writing Fodder	The protester who set herself on fire	Drinks as hard as Barron did
Gianni	Gaetan LeClerc	Doctor	Heal Thyself	Tortured	Stefan's great-great grandson
Noelle	Zara Ganz	Photographer	Curiosity	The skull-like face of that interrogator	Carries Sylviane's lucky revolver
Saif	Alvin Sweet	Mechanic	Revenge	Hussars took my mom	Dead ringer for Arthur
Carrie	Siobhan Griffin	Coffee Shop Owner	Wants to End It Once for and All	The bomb blast	Burning hatred of vampire movies
Jamila	Janie Stackhouse	Marketing Coordinator	Gotta Keep Moving!	The night I spent locked in the freezer	Bad feelings about birds

Each of the Parallels invites the GM to reincorporate scenes from previous sequences into the new one, in a new context. In the above:

- Tsing encourages you to create scenes around his weekly cabaret gigs, in which he imitates historical GMC Aristide Bruant, who the group extensively interacted with in *Paris*.
- Ana hints at a return of the monkey's paw vodka,

which they all drank from at Le Veau Gras.

- Gianni has created a justification for his *Aftermath* character to know the histories of the *Paris* characters.
- Noelle's gun has you wondering if it might be haunted by the ghost of someone her previous character shot.
- If Saif's characters look the same, someone else's 1895 character could drop

through a time hole and mistake him for Arthur.

- Carrie has invited you to bring back the bloodsucking, recurring antagonist from both previous installments.
- In a similar vein, Jamila reminds you that you barely picked up on her swarm of murder birds image from last time around and would like to see you do more with that now. (*Note to self: next week, deadly starlings.*)

For each of the post-*Paris* character generation sessions, one or more players will likely also refer to past events when detailing their Damn Peculiar Thing, Worst Memory, and Freaking Weird Moment. This allows them to bring in favorite creepy situations from previous sequences, making sure that they continue to pop up in the new one.

Other ways to keep those Easter eggs coming in your post-*Paris* sessions include:

- **Art historical clues and scene details:** Establish the idea that several, if not all, of the *Paris* PCs became famous figures in the arts. GMCs can display reproductions of works by the Painters and Sculptor on their walls. Some may feature the Muse character. The group can pursue clues at old buildings designed by the Architect. Their research can turn up essays and plays by the Poet and Belle-Letrist. Similarly, the group may find backstory

information in the works of the Writer from *The Wars*.

- **From child to adult:** A character encountered as a child in 1895 can reappear as an adult in 1947.
- **Alternate lives:** GMCs met in one context in *Aftermath* recur as other-reality versions of themselves in *This Is Normal Now*. You'll see this in action in the scenario in this book, which features counterparts of the GMCs found in *Aftermath's Sleeping Dogs* introductory scenario.

Although you don't want to replicate the exact connections that developed in someone else's game, you may find it clarifying to see a set of examples. Here are some of the ongoing threads from my in-house game.

- A player created Henri Cheval, a lover erased from reality by the Yellow King effect, as her character's Deuced Peculiar Business in *Paris*. In that series, he was briefly rewritten back into reality, though not as quite the same person. In *Aftermath* an echo of Cheval reappeared as introductory murder victim Hank Knight, echoing again into *This Is Normal Now* as a peripheral figure in that sequence's opening episode.
- During the climactic battle for Marseilles that concluded *The Wars*, the characters encountered a reality breakdown bringing them into contact with GMCs from

the worlds of *Aftermath* and *This Is Normal Now*.

- A child given to the *Paris* characters to look after grew up to become Marshal Isaac Phillipson, commander of the French forces in the Continental War. When I needed a name for a French cargo ship featured in an *Aftermath* mystery, I called it *The Phillipson*.
- Isaac also reappeared as a headstrong young man in an interstitial episode set in 1918 Chicago. The *Paris* characters, now older if not wiser, tried to clean up the mess his pursuit of a mystical amulet created. After that surprise revisit with PCs my group thought they wouldn't play again, the following week's *Aftermath* mystery revolved in part around the amulet. As part of the investigation, the ex-partisans learned that the earlier characters had disposed of it by throwing it into Lake Michigan—not a permanent solution, it turned out. When playing the big arc, *This Is Normal Now* acts as the wrap-up sequence. As they

find themselves drawn into apparently unrelated Carcosan mysteries, its supposedly ordinary PCs begin to piece together the parts of a cosmic puzzle. The Yellow King effect is accelerating and about to culminate in a catastrophe of some kind:

- the end of the universe
- the collapse of all realities into one hellish mess
- the enslavement of all beings throughout the multiverse by Carcosa

Perhaps through their ongoing interactions with an antagonist conspiracy from “Organizations” (or more than one if you’re feeling complicated), the investigators discover a possible way to fight back against the King and turn back the threat. This could involve reality travel bringing them into contact with one or more sets of their previous characters. If you established that the Belle Époque art students were complicit in the creation of *The King in Yellow*, your final PCs might decide to take them out, giving your arc a grand Ouroboros of a finale.

# CARD DESIGN

The books that make up *The Yellow King Roleplaying Game* contain enough Shock and Injury cards to keep your characters, all four sets of them, confused and hurt over the course of many sessions. Eventually though you'll think of a hazard that doesn't fit the available choices, or want to create a creature with its own distinct way of laying down the hurt. This section takes you on a tour of considerations to keep in mind when designing new Shock and Injury cards.

Check [pelgrane.com](http://pelgrane.com) for our latest digital tools to help you create cards in the YK RPG format.

Cards have three components: the title, the effect, and the discard condition. Sometimes a card will omit either effect or discard condition. (Two cards from *Paris*, “A Crossed Line” and “Permanent Injury,” leave out both.)

The easiest way to make a new card is to reskin an existing one, changing the title and therefore the theme. You might find a combination of effect and discard that fits your hazard or creature attack under a title that doesn't fit. Change the title and you're good to go.

*You invent a Carcosan entity that uses telekinesis to pierce the skulls of its enemies from afar. Though extra alarming to witness, you figure that this is much like being shot. Checking the card text for “Shot,” you confirm that this would work just fine as the creature's Major Injury. You remake the card with the title “Hole in the Head,” and leave the alterations at that.*

You may find that both cards of an existing pair work when reskinned to your concept. Alternately, you might reskin two from different pairs, or reskin one and scratch-create the other.

Card creation does not follow a set formula.

Obviously, you want your Minor card to be less burdensome than the Major that goes with it. The breadth of difference between the two can be slight, or great. One pair of cards, each with a penalty to tests, might dish out a -1 and a -2. Another might deal a -1 or a -2.

Remember that Difficulty can also be used as a variable to change up the obstacles characters encounter. In general, nastier cards accompany the

game's more destructive hazards and powerful creatures. The higher the Difficulty, the greater the chance of taking a Major rather than a Minor card. But you can always switch this up with cards that are nasty to get but easy to avoid (low Difficulty) or mild in effect but hard to avoid (high Difficulty).

Start by thinking of the storytelling situation you intend to emulate.

## Title

From there, pick your card title. Then consider how best to emulate that effect with GUMSHOE game mechanics. When I develop cards I often find myself going back and revising the card title after working out the effect and discard condition, which bring to mind a stronger, more fitting wording for the title.

Themes for Injuries come to mind readily: imagine a way the human body can be damaged, and you're done.

Defining Shocks can be somewhat abstract. You'll note that some Shock cards diverge from what you'd normally think of as mental stresses to cover other moral and emotional states that might impede the character's investigation. I've tried to steer away from terms that describe real-world mental health diagnoses. On occasion, where an everyday term has several meanings, one of which is

diagnostic, this rule may call for a little bending. We all get paranoid (in the casual, folk meaning) from time to time, which carries a vastly different resonance than the stigmatized medical conditions bearing the same label.

## Effects

The effect appears as the top paragraph in the card text, laying out what happens to the character who has the card in hand.

A few cards might exert a couple of effects. Easily encapsulated effects can share a paragraph. Break effects into multiple paragraphs as clarity demands.

Cards without effects are still bad: they take a PC one step closer to leaving play. They're not as much fun to receive and interact with, though.

The most common effect is a numerical **penalty to tests**.

From least to most onerous, penalties might affect:

- a single ability
- two single abilities
- a category of abilities
- all tests

This usually stays the same across a paired set but could conceivably vary, depending on the mental or physical state you're emulating.

The simplest step up from Minor to Major is to keep the targeted abilities the same, while increasing the numerical penalty by 1 or 2. Always keep in mind that GUMSHOE is a coarse

system, meaning that a 1-point change in pretty much anything makes a big difference.

Test penalties might also come into play against a creature bearing a particular tag (such as Warspawn or Rampager).

Or you can define a storytelling condition, such as -1 to tests:

- when indoors
- when on a boat
- when it's dark out
- if you can see the Yellow Sign
- when alone
- if your phone battery is less than 20%

Define storytelling conditions as clearly as you can without tying yourself up in qualifiers and subclauses. Conveying the key concept matters more than airtight wording. As GM you can always make fine distinctions as to what does and doesn't apply during play.

The likelihood of a condition occurring also affects the card's relative nastiness. A condition that comes up frequently hurts more than an unlikely or readily avoidable one. Conditions under the characters' control don't bite as deeply as others. But having to worry about that control can also induce entertaining unease. Knowing that you have to keep your phone charged to avoid a penalty might be more taxing than just accepting the penalty.

**Costs** are another key effect; these drop one or more specified General ability pools. They might do this:

- when the card is gained
- each time a specified condition occurs
- when the card is discarded

An effect can increase any Tolls the character must pay in combat. (Really this is a sort of cost, where the triggering condition is having to pay a Toll.)

Pushes comprise a rarer resource than pool points, as each character only gets 2 per scenario. That makes an effect that costs Pushes super nasty.

You can modify the intensity of an effect with a **random trigger**. The penalty or cost only accrues when a condition is met, and the player makes a die roll and gets a certain result. By default, an even result is favorable and an odd one negative. To depart from 50-50 probability, you might specify that the effect triggers only on a 1, or on a result of 2 or less.

The gulf between Minor and Major might be found in a random trigger. A Minor card might have a 50-50 die roll to trigger, while the Major card effect happens every time the condition is met.

Card effects are almost always negative, but a **tempting benefit** is bad in a complicated way. It grants an advantage to the player, though typically one that introduces a risk of some sort. Getting a pool refresh every time you commit murder may give you an essential leg up when the going gets tough, but also calls for a Composure test and the possibility of another Shock.

card. And then there's the risk of getting caught...

Some tempting benefits aid the player but saddle other PCs with ill effects.

Always combine a tempting benefit with a player choice around that benefit. The obvious way to do this is to pair it with a discard condition the character can take action to trigger. A good-for-me-bad-for-my-pals effect might activate on a decision made by the character.

## Discard Conditions

The discard condition appears after the effect paragraph(s) and is often but not always the last bit of text on a card.

A card's nastiness factor can also be measured by how easy it is to get rid of. The worst cards can't be discarded at all.

To be permanent in this way, the card must bear the **Continuity** tag, and come with no other discard condition.

(Even those aren't 100% sure to remain in hand forever, as the effects of a few, rare other cards may allow you to discard a card of your choice. But then as GM you govern which cards can possibly enter your game.)

## Timed Conditions

Continuity cards, you'll recall, carry over from session to session, making this the most punishing **timed** condition.

Other timed conditions, from

lenient to harsh (more or less):

- after one scene
- after one interval
- after X scenes
- after X intervals
- after a short period of world time
- after X hours of game time
- at end of session
- after a large period of world time
- at end of scenario

## Events

Other cards can be discarded when an **event** out of the characters' control occurs.

Possibilities are infinite but include:

- when you get your car back from the shop
- when enemy soldiers retreat
- the next time it snows
- the next time you find a body

## Actions

The most compelling discard is the **action**, in which the character can do something in the world to discard the card. Some cards allow any action with a cost or risk attached. Others get more specific. Examples might include:

- going to the hospital
- getting revenge on the creature that did this
- destroying a copy of the play
- punching somebody
- winning a fight

A sort of action is one in which the character arranges to become the **recipient** of a test success from another PC. This is the easiest discard

condition to think of, and one of the most popular with players, as it's under their control and it lets them use an ability they've invested in. It also creates an interaction, however simple, between players. Typically, these are First Aid tests for Injuries and Morale for Shocks. Before using the latter, make sure that the setting you're designing a card for includes Morale. For tougher results, increase the Difficulty of the test from the default 4.

Another action is the **spend**, in which the player spends either a number of General ability points or a Push to discard the card. As mentioned earlier, Pushes are more valuable than points.

My favorite cards impel players to move the story onward. Be careful not to create too many of these, though, or you'll create plot pile-ups where everyone is trying to tug the plot in a different direction in order to discard their various cards.

### Trade-Downs

Instead of a full discard, you might require a trade for a card of lesser nastiness, as when the player trades the *Paris* card "Shot" for "On the Mend." You might include this for one of two reasons:

1. To make the card tougher.
2. For increased verisimilitude. Going straight from dying of a gunshot wound to perfectly fine strains narrative credibility. Having to undergo an intermediate state of injury fixes that.

When choosing a card to trade down to, either have the Major card trade down to its Minor counterpart, or pick "On the Mend" for Injuries and the *Paris* card "Distracted" for Shocks.

### Combined Conditions

For added variation, combine conditions: becoming recipient of a success after a specified time interval, making a spend to trade down, or allowing a spend after performing an action.

Any condition can also be paired with a random chance. Requiring a die roll after a spend or success lands as a particularly underhanded blow, to be used sparingly.

### Bonus Cards

The last 30 Injury cards appearing in this book originated in our Cthulhu, *Night's Black Agents* and *The Esoterrorists* conversion PDFs. Use them as inspiration for your own cards, or unmodified, for foes you create.

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## THE YELLOW CONSPIRACY

[Dreams] Hey, has anybody else ever had a recurring dream about a lake? Been sleeping badly, haunted by it for over a week.

submitted 5 hours ago by [I\\_want\\_to\\_beLEB](#)

2 comments share save hide give gold report

▲ [\[i\]FribMan221](#) [S] 22 points 4 hours ago

OMG, not more of this Lake cr@p from the bleeks. I guess next you'll start droning on about SRIs are really alien visitors from sum alien city & other randomness. Give up! This cr@p was old in 2016.

▲ [\[i\]want\\_to\\_beLEB](#) 72 points 4 hours ago

Wow, thanks for being so supportive. Were you raised by wolves or something???????

Not that u care, but FYI my dreams were nothing like that. In my recurring dreams the lake wasn't scary but kinda beautiful. Vast. And shallow and deep at the same time, if that makes sense.

▲ [\[i\]reignOnYourParade](#) 1 point 2 hours ago

Shallow AND deep? Er ... pretty sure that's not possible. Check out Mutual Exclusivity on wikipedia.

▲ [\[i\]john\\_totally\\_anon](#) 3 points 12 minutes ago

So limited in your ability to perceive. Your ignorance is just astounding. OP: sounds beautiful.

▲ [\[i\]nkg\\_middleton](#) 1 point 7 minutes ago

PAIN CRY! I went to the lake and it changed me forever. Totally do it. You won't regret. Share.

▲ [\[i\]know-what-you-were-last-summer](#) [S] 8 points 3 hours ago

IRC there were reports about some weird bugs in firmware of the GEN2 Koronets and Circlets from Cassilda. People were reporting that the headtracker wasn't just measuring the wearer's dreams but feeding them other peoples dreams. Def remember something about 'lake' dreams being rep'd.

▲ [\[i\]want\\_to\\_beLEB](#) 17 points 3 hours ago

Hmm. Kinda creepy. I don't have a Cassilda lifestyle tracker ... but my wife wears one to sleep every night. Do u think maybe just the proximity of the dev -- like 2 feet away -- could affect me?

▲ [\[i\]reignOnYourParade](#) 1 point 2 hours ago

Typical paranoid cr@p ... I worked for Cassilda for a while. They don't put secret brane altering chips in their devices and anybody who says they do, is frankly an inbercile !!!!

▲ [\[i\]nkg\\_middleton](#) 1 point 7 minutes ago

[Temple of Hali] Anybody seen the latest tract from the ToH poseurs?? Full of subliminals. Can you believe it? How 1990. Yawn.

submitted 3 hours ago by [Lake\\_Dweller](#)

2 comments share save hide give gold report

▲ [\[i\]FribMan221](#) [S] 3 points 2 hours ago

Dissers gotta die, I guess. Personally I think those nutjobs deserve whatever they get. Plus, /u/Lake\_Dweller is guilty of sharing outside /yel/ ... contravention of rule 1. You know what that means, people? Time to get medieval.

▲ [\[i\]nukebot](#) 0 points 2 hours ago

Bleep, bloop, I am a bot.

▲ [\[i\]user](#) 0 points 2 hours ago

User /u/Lake\_Dweller has been targetted for online sanction without prejudice. Units have been despatched. Sit back and roast some chestnuts, people.

▲ [\[i\]YoursLovingKing](#) 2 points 2 hours ago

6 comments share save hide give gold report

Anybody heard of Sapienc? I applied to an online job ad and got a weird call-back from this super-secrective person. Something to do with embedding the YS into dot-net code for a mind storage cloud?

submitted 2 hours ago by [YoursLovingKing](#)

6 comments share save hide give gold report



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*rule*

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3. Don't use your words carefully, it is known that certain power blocks visit from time-to-time. Don't say anything here that you wouldn't want the PTB to know.

4. No mentioning things were broken in 2014.

5. No name wars. There are well established factions of believers and non-believers, both of whom are here. Accept that people have every right to think with your point of view. Mods reserve the right to penalize anyone who refuses to do so, including while arguing their case.

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7. Search before you post. The conspiracy information or SRI that you want to discuss may have already been the subject of previous comment threads. Post those same information under the existing thread instead.

8. Never use the real names of individuals affected by SRIs or

# ENTANGLEMENT

In an opening scenario for *This Is Normal Now*, the characters come together as a group, discovering a weird connection between themselves, and the first glimmerings of a horrific destiny.

This scenario works as an origin story, explaining how the group coalesces and becomes involved in supernatural mystery. It prods the players to make a quick and immediate leap to embrace the game's premise. It assumes that the group has already played YKRPG's other sequences and you're setting up Normal as the final stage of your sweeping arc.

You can run this as prelude to a standalone *Normal* series by dropping elements that refer to the characters' past incarnations. These adjustments will make more sense after you read the scenario, so we've included a guide to doing this at the end, on p. 125.

The scenario opens when all of the PCs, not yet a team and not yet investigators, show up separately to attend *The Lecture*. Its content turns out to be odder than any of them bargained for. And more dramatic, as they

have the opportunity to either watch a murder or interrupt a shooting attempt against the speaker, David Katz.

When they go back to their seemingly unrelated lives, an annoying detail of everyday life coheres them into a group of amateur investigators. In *No Exit*, someone adds them to a Facebook group of lecture attendees that will not let them leave it. This sets off a series of bizarre events that sooner or later turn them into volunteer delvers into weird mystery.

Information on Dave can be found:

- by talking to the event organizer (*TED for Weirdos*)
- at *The Hospital* where he is recovering, or his corpse lies in the morgue
- by researching *Dave's Books*
- in his apartment (*Dave's Not Here*)
- by following the reference materials he has stolen to their source, *The Library*

The gang might look into his assailant in *Searching for Kim* and/or *Talking to Kim*.

As they do this they discover there is more to the Facebook group than they first suspected,

as *Weird Crime Stories* and then *Viral Video* introduce further urgency to their inquiries.

Characters include:

- Rogue physicist **David Katz**, the lecturer who draws them in.
- **Kim Katz**, his estranged wife, who swears Dave isn't Dave, and has the revolver to prove it.
- **Tami Akana**, lecture organizer.
- **Yhith-Ekur**, a Carcosan noble who wishes to use them as pawns in a cosmic scheme to bring his realm into ours.

This scenario features alternate-world versions of GMCs from the *Aftermath* intro mystery, *Sleeping Dogs*.

*Did you run Aftermath but*

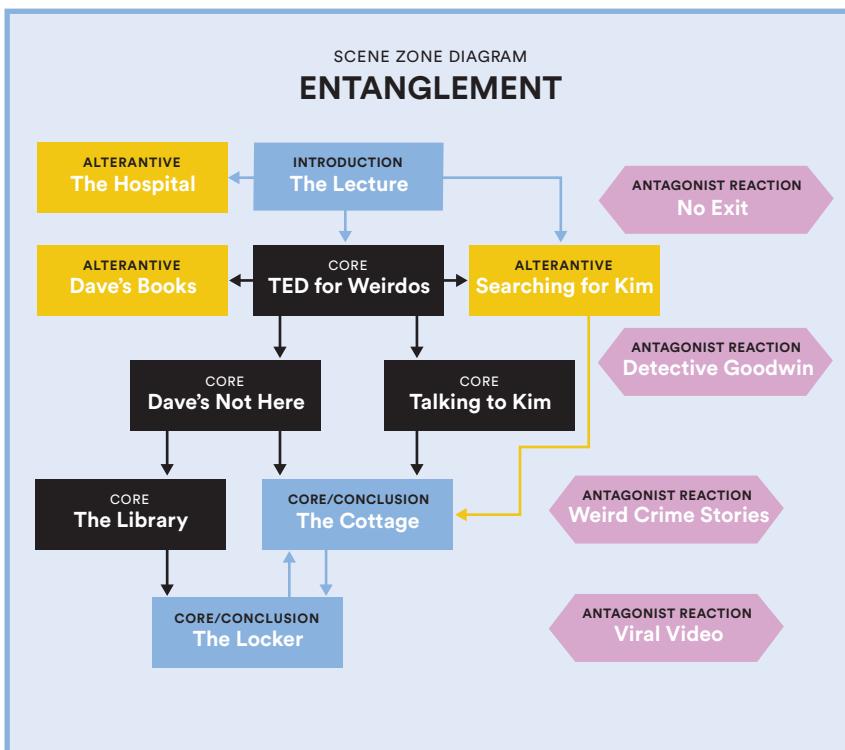
**not Sleeping Dogs?** Substitute the names and characters given here for ones from your series.

**Is a character appearing here a Familiar Face for one or more investigators?** Find a different past GMC to appear here.

## The Alien Truth

Yhith-Ekur is using humans whose counterparts in other realities have been exposed to *The King in Yellow* to manifest on Earth without traveling through a gate.

Depending on player choices, the final revelations might take place at *The Cottage* or *The Locker*.



## Scenes

Before starting print the Scenario Worksheet (p. 173) from your PDF copy of this book, or as downloaded from the Pelgrane website.

### The Lecture

**Scene Type:** Introduction  
**Lead-Outs:** The Hospital, TED for Weirdos, Searching for Kim

Explain to the players that their characters have all independently, and more or less arbitrarily, chosen to attend a lecture held as part of a public speaking series.

Ask each to specify a reason for attending a lecture on a topic they know basically nothing about. It doesn't have to be a good one; tell struggling players that an oddball explanation works more than acceptably. You might hint that this is why they *think* they're showing up, suggesting that a deeper, unconscious motivation lies beneath that. Work with the players to modify any suggestions that contradict the details of the scenario.

*For example, “I know the lecturer” doesn't work because the investigation of Dave's activities and whereabouts assumes that no one in the group knows him. You*

*might instead reveal that the character has her dates mixed up, thinking that her friend Josie Jung would be speaking, when it turns out to be this Dave Katz dude instead.*

Choose a likely venue for the event in your home base city, most likely a university hall. Ask yourself, if someone put on a lower-budget TED Talk series locally, where would it be?

Ask the players to specify which of their characters are punctual, which arrive right on time, and which show up a little bit late. (Fortunately, Dave got stuck in traffic and hits the stage only after all the PCs have gathered.)

Now that the scene is starting, note the first player who then checks their phone. On the Scenario Worksheet, write down the name next to the entry “Phonechecker.”

The characters, who probably know each other only glancingly, spontaneously sit close to one another, near the front, stage left.

Using tokens, miniatures, or scrawls on a sketch map, have the players establish their positions relative to one another. Any players joking about this being ominous must make **Difficulty 4 Composure** tests to avoid Shocks, Minor and Major: Premonition/Weird Insight.

Before launching into the next bit, check to see if any of the PCs share a Familiar Face, and if that then establishes a relationship

between them.

*During the Familiar Faces stage of character creation, Ana specified that Hank Knight is her character's ex-husband. Carrie then made Hank her stepbrother. This suggests that they've probably met on a number of occasions.*

Note any such relationships and explain to the players that the characters are probably surprised to coincidentally run into each other not just at the same obscure lecture, but sitting in the same general area.

Now have each remaining player specify a casual relationship or acquaintanceship with another of the PCs. They know each other just well enough to recognize one another, and not necessarily by name.

Let the players roleplay any small talk that might flow out of this.

When that peters out (or doesn't happen at all), the event begins.

(core, *TED for Weirdos*) Tami Akana steps out to the lectern, introduces herself as the local coordinator for the PKD Lectures [insert current year].

Then she introduces Professor Dave Katz, author of the books *Spaces Between Space* and *The Liminal Frontier*. As he was in *Sleeping Dogs*, he's a man of medium stature and unremarkable features. Here he sports the anonymously presentable shirt, jacket, and chinos of a writer on a book tour.

Dave wears a headset

microphone and stalks around the stage looking energetic, with the motivational speaker zeal that holds attention in a lecture event for non-students. [Get up and prowl the room, making the emphatic, hackneyed stage gestures typical of motivational speakers. ] Since this GMC is giving a formal speech, this is one instance where it helps to read the text without paraphrasing. His lecture begins:

It sounds like something out of comic books or *Star Trek*, but many leading physicists now entertain a multiple universe theory. The universe is infinite, but the number of possible combinations of molecules is, however imaginably huge, mathematically finite. Like the background of a *Flintstones* cartoon, the universe must therefore start to repeat itself at some point. Every possible configuration of reality must exist not just multiple but countless times—or as many times as it can have repeated itself in the 13.7 billion years since the Big Bang.

Science also alerts us to the presence of quantum entanglement, in which subatomic particles-slash-waves harmonize with one another, joining the same state even when separated over vast distances.

The molecules that make up your body, the ones in your brain processing the language that enters them through your ears, may in fact be a part of

something much grander—perhaps in communication not only with your identical selves an unthinkable distance away, but fractionally or dramatically different counterparts in alternate versions of our world.

This puts us in mind of the words of the 19<sup>th</sup> century writer [insert name of Poet character from *Paris*, if applicable; otherwise say Robert W. Chambers] who said:

*He mentioned the establishment of the Dynasty in Carcosa, the lakes which connected Hastur, Aldebaran, and the mystery of the Hyades. He spoke of Cassilda and Camilla, and sounded the cloudy depths of Demhe, and the Lake of Hali. The scolloped tatters of the King in Yellow must hide Yhtill forever.*

Let's take a moment to unpack the meaning of that—

At this point, a commotion erupts behind the soon-to-be-investigators. Kim Katz, a broad-shouldered, athletic woman with wavy hair gathered up into an unruly ponytail, climbs over the seats, and the PC with the lowest **Athletics** rating. She pulls out a revolver and aims it at the lecturer, shouting, “You’re not him! You’re not him!”

The first player to ask can make a Difficulty 4 **Fighting** test to grab and disarm Kim. The character (not player) sitting to that PC’s right (if any) must make a Difficulty 4 **Athletics** test to

avoid being hit by the stray bullet when Kim squeezes the trigger. **Injuries, Minor and Major:** Not a Significant Bullet/Grazed.

If no one tries to stop her, Kim shoots Dave: he staggers over to the lectern and collapses.

A second **Athletics** test (Difficulty 4 for the PC who disarmed her, 5 for anyone else) restrains her until the authorities arrive. (Otherwise, she flees for the nearest exit, with gawping lecture attendees watching her, frozen and waiting for someone else to act. Tick the “Kim Escaped” box on the Scenario Worksheet.)

Should Dave get shot, a character can leap up onto the stage and attempt to stabilize him with a Difficulty 5 **First Aid** test. On a success, Dave survives and is taken to the hospital instead of the morgue. On the Scenario Worksheet, tick the “Shot but Alive” box after “Dave’s Status.”

Site security soon arrives, with the city police soon after that. They cancel the lecture. Tami announces that ticketholders will receive refunds via email. The audience files out, stunned. The PCs can stop to give interviews to TV news crews.

If Dave’s Status = Dead, homicide detective Derek Goodwin catches the case. Investigators who do the right thing and wait to talk to police meet him and provide their statements. Mustached and weary, Derek strikes the **Cop Talk** character as a solid, honest

pro who doesn't get excited by routine cases like this one.

Otherwise it gets assigned to precinct detectives, who backburner the investigation due to a heavy workload.

(core) A proactive player may suggest that the group gather at a nearby bar or coffee shop to talk over the events and figure out what's going on, leading out to *Dave's Not Here* or *Talking to Kim*.

However, the players may see little overt reason to start amateur sleuthing and have their characters go on their separate ways. Go to *No Exit*.

### No Exit

**Scene Type:** Antagonist Reaction

#### Triggering Condition:

- the players are waiting for another shoe to drop before diving into the investigation
- (if they got started right away) the story could use a shot of creepiness and menace

The player noted on the Scenario Worksheet as “Phonechecker” (or, failing that, the Marketing Coordinator or Graphic Designer) logs into Facebook to discover that they've been added to a new group, unsolicited.

The group is called

Entanglement. The character sees that the other vague acquaintances sitting nearby at the event have also been added. Other names are presumably additional attendees at the lecture. Neither Dave, Tami, or Kim belong to the group.

The oldest message in the group is a few hours old. A handful of posters remark on how messed up that situation was. Most complain that they did not want to be added and have been unable to leave the group, even though they've followed Facebook's instructions for doing so.

Should they try to leave the group, the PCs find that they cannot do so either.

The group appears to have been created by a profile matching the name of the Poet from *Paris* (or another *Paris* PC). That profile has already been deleted.

The first message a character sends to Facebook customer support yields the following message:

Our examination of your profile shows that you have successfully left the group Entanglement. If problems persist, try clearing your cache.

Jim

Facebook Support Team

Messages in response to further queries by any character grow increasingly strange. Instead of answering questions, they start to inquire into the Freaking Weird Moment of the investigator seeking support.

The first time each character gets a weird support message supposedly from Facebook, a Difficulty 4 **Composure** test ensues to avoid **Shocks, Minor and Major: Raw Nerve/Under a Microscope**.

**Computers:** Reaching Facebook customer support by phone or in person is notoriously impossible.

A **Computers** spend detects a sophisticated redirection to some destination other than Facebook support, and can ensure that help messages get through to Facebook. However, their actual customer support people are unable to render any assistance. When sent screenshots of the oddly knowledgeable messages, they affirm that none of the supposed team members who sent them exist.

**Intuition:** This intrusive group overtly connects to the incident at the lecture. If the PCs are to regain their privacy, they're going to have to unite and do some poking around in the real world—as eccentric as that seems.

You might also invite the players to explain how their Drives push them together and toward mystery-solving.



Lecture series organizer Tami Akana answers the group's questions in hopes of avoiding any additional public relations damage.

When they first see her, call for Difficulty 4 **Sense Trouble** tests. Those passing the test feel a strong tug of *déjà vu* when they enter her office. (Then refund any points spent on the tests.)

Along with a couple of other culture industry contract jobs, Tami has been running the local version of the PKD Lectures for the last four years.

Established by semi-retired rock star Humphrey Gein (aka Amanda Schultz), the series runs modestly in the black by catering to the offbeat and mind-blowing. That's why some people call it TED Talks for Weirdos. Topics of this year's series included UFOs, elipton rays, ultraterresrials, octopus sapience, evolving conceptions of the Antichrist, and the coming AI apocalypse.

The lectures are named after Gein's favorite author, Philip K. Dick. After a permissions dispute with the author's heirs they stopped using his name and went to acronym only.

The main organization in Los Angeles (or New York if you're

setting this in LA) picks the speakers. Tami does the on-the-ground logistics here, as do counterparts in the other five cities where the series runs. Some speakers tour all five, some appear only once or twice.

This was Dave's second appearance at the PKDs. When she met him in the green room before the event, he seemed slightly off, compared to the affable guy she remembers from his previous appearance. Then his demeanor changed, and he stared into her eyes and called her an adjacent. He asked if he'd ever met [insert name of a PC she doesn't yet know by name] and if she felt that her grave had been walked over.

Yeah, he was strange, but that doesn't make him anywhere near the oddest speaker she's ever dealt with.

Tami had never seen his ex-wife before. As far as she's concerned, the shooting was a tragic domestic incident that in no way reflects on the series or its subject matter.

### The Hospital

**Scene Type:** Alternate; only occurs if you've checked "Shot but Alive" or "Dead" under "Dave's Status" on the Scenario Worksheet.

**Lead-In:** The Lecture

### Dave is Alive

If a character saved Dave, an ambulance rushes him to the hospital nearest to the lecture

venue. The hospital clerk on front desk duty, a frazzled, condescendingly forbearing woman named Mimi Sabaly, explains that he can't be visited right away, because he's in surgery. **Bureaucracy, Flattery, or Negotiation** extracts a promise to send a text message should he recover sufficiently to receive visitors.

A day later, during a suitable break in the action, Mimi calls. She's not supposed to tell them this, and they're not to say who told them, but she has the funniest feeling that they ought to know. Dave regained consciousness, pulled out his breathing tube, and fled the hospital. He picked up a security guard by the throat and threw him across a waiting room. He was last seen, having stolen a set of surgical scrubs, stalking out a side exit. Under "Dave's Status," uncheck "Shot but Alive" and check "Transformed."

Mimi also hints that they might want to talk to Dave's trauma surgeon, Dr. Nate Weller. Again, they're to leave her out of this.

The handsomely stubbled Dr. Weller looks like he could play himself on a TV medical drama. **Reassurance or Inspiration** prompt him to break medical confidentiality to describe the oddness of his case.

At first Dr. Weller thought Mr. Katz was a goner. As he operated, he found himself increasingly in the weeds. Nothing in his abdominal cavity was quite where

it was supposed to be. The organs and tissues were just fractionally off, strangely textured, and arranged in a way he can't quite find the words for. But then his body started to cooperate, as if assisting the operation by rearranging itself and healing spontaneously. Dr. Weller has never seen anything like it... and hopes he never does again.

### Dave is Dead

The EMS vehicle transported his body to the morgue. The group can use any of the above abilities to get past security to medical examiner Dr. Suhasini Prasanni. When introducing herself to people who don't look South Asian, she calls herself "Sue." She may take a shine to a charming PC and call later to ask for a date (assuming a player who likes romantic subplots).

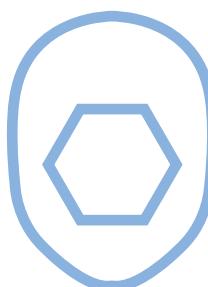
***Did they come straight here from The Lecture?*** Dr. Prasanni has yet to conduct the autopsy. There's no urgency: a gunshot murder in front of thirty plus witnesses makes her task a formality. **A Reassurance, People Person, or Bureaucracy** spend convinces her to let them see the body right away. When she opens the morgue, one of the big metal doors yawns open. Dave's body is gone! Under "Dave's Status," uncheck "Dead" and check "Dead but Ambulatory."

After calling security and checking the cam footage herself, she shows it to the group, which

has already won her trust. Dave, clad in stolen surgical scrubs, lurches past the camera on his way out of the hospital. In the footage Dave looks dead but ambulatory.

**Photography:** In the few seconds where Dave's face is more than a blur on the video footage, it appears to flicker. Placed in a video editing software program and isolated frame by frame, several of the frames seem to show, instead of his face, a pallid, inhuman mask. Seeing these frames calls for a Difficulty 4 **Composure** test to avoid **Shocks, Minor and Major: Unease/Dread.**

***Did the gang come here after another scene?*** Dr. Prasanni has asked the staff to alert her if anyone shows up asking about Dave Katz. She quizzes them closely about the case, thinking they might be able to explain what happened. To jog them into revealing what they know (probably not much at this point) she shows them security footage, as described above.



**Dave's Books****Scene Type:** Alternate**Lead-In:** The Lecture

*Neither Spaces Between Space and The Liminal Frontier* burned up any bestseller lists. But they can be instantly downloaded as ebooks or rush-delivered from Amazon.

**Science:** *The Liminal Frontier*, published four years ago, is a respectable, straight-up piece of pop science, examining recent studies into the physics of perception and neuroscience. It gets speculative at times but there's nothing here that would earn the author scorn in the faculty lounge.

By contrast, his new book, *Spaces Between Space* consists of the same alluring claptrap his lecture seemed to be headed toward, before the gunfire. It attempts to use multiple universe theory to explain paranormal experiences ranging from *déjà vu* to ghost sightings. Katz speculates that zones of high quantum entanglement become haunted, a phenomenon he dubs the Carcosa effect. Certain images, words, and works of art can intensify quantum entanglement, leading to hallucinatory confrontations with seeming intelligences. At one point he refers to an imagined alien consciousness as a King in Yellow, promising more on this subject in a future book.

Both books come from a small imprint of a big publishing firm headquartered in New York. His current editor, Callie Spence, worked only on the latest one. Contacted by phone, she has little insight to offer about Dave or his theories. She met him once or twice and found him scattered but professional—hardly unusual for an author. Courtney clearly doesn't much care about his subject matter and is looking forward to an upcoming shift to the company's fiction department.

Come to think of it, though, the last time they spoke on the phone did feel kinda odd. Courtney called him unexpectedly to ask for a blurb on a similar book. His voice sounded strained and gravelly, making her wonder if he was messing with steroids. He was definitely annoyed and told her to always give him a heads-up via email before placing a voice call. But he didn't say it exactly like that—he spoke in an odd, formal, old-fashioned way. Katz accused her of impudence, for example.

If asked about Dave's family, Courtney says he once told he came up in the foster care system. When he divorced his wife, Dave said, he went back to being alone in the world.



**Dave's Not Here****Scene Type:** Core**Lead-In:** The Lecture**Lead-Out:** The Cottage,  
The Library

**Research** reveals that Dave Katz lives in the city.

**Bureaucracy or Computers** turns up his home address.

He lives in an apartment building in a safe, mid-scale neighborhood.

Whatever his status, he isn't in when the investigators arrive at his place. **Streetwise or Sneaking** (*treat as an Investigative ability, no spend or test required*) get the group past his locks.

**Is Dave Dead (Ambulatory or Otherwise)?** His place has been searched by police as part of their investigation into his shooting. **Cop Talk** spots the telltale sign of evidence gathering.

**Science:** His bookshelves contain a mixture of genuine research and pseudo-scientific quackery.

A corkboard occupies most of a wall in the room he uses as his office. In its center are photos of the group (including those whose players are currently absent). They are either from publicly available sources, like Facebook, or are covertly taken candids. Dave has written the names of each PC under their images.

In the corkboard's extreme left corner are images of the characters from *Paris*, with names and biographical details. A red thread connects each *Paris*

character to the same player's *Normal* investigator.

In the upper right are images and names matching characters from *The Wars*. Since this is our standard timeline (plus a monster or two), these describe the versions of these people from a history that had WWI and WWII but no Continental War. Here a set of blue threads matches past to present PCs.

Behind the images is a sheet of bright yellow gift wrap, on which Dave has scrawled the words: REALIZATION, TRANSFORMATION, and a large Yellow Sign. Seeing the Sign requires a Difficulty 4 **Composure** test to avoid **Shocks, Minor and Major: Dread/Whisper of the Sign**.

**Architecture:** Dave went to extraordinary lengths to secure his corkboard to the wall. He mounted it on six-inch bolts drilled into the metal beams behind the drywall of his apartment.

**Photography:** Key photos and documents are stuck to the corkboard not with pins but with glue. Trying to remove them will destroy them.

**Cop Talk:** This is must be why the crime scene investigators left the corkboard here instead of taking it to the evidence locker. They presumably photographed it extensively. Maybe they'll come back with a blowtorch to get it off the wall, later.

Other books and papers strewn around the office document the lives of the *Paris* and *Wars*

characters. Fill in the details as appropriate.

**(core, *The Library*) Research:** Many of these have been stolen from the reference department of a top library in the city.

### If Dave's Status = Not Shot

**(core, *The Cottage*)** Dave's next-door neighbor, Andrea Logan, a city planner on maternity leave, says that she saw him leaving with suitcases shortly after the incident. She assumed he was headed to his lakeside cottage in a nearby rural area, and he didn't contradict her.

A strange device juts from one of the USB ports of his desktop computer. It's about the size of a thumb drive but looks like it's made of stone. It glows yellow and radiates cold. **Difficulty 4 Sense Trouble:** touching it is probably dangerous.

Anyone touching it without work gloves, oven mitts, or similarly thick insulation makes a **Difficulty 4 Health** test to avoid **Injuries, Minor and Major:** Singed/Burned.

Anyone touching it even with that protection has a sudden flashback to their Freaking Weird Moment.

Finding any data on the device requires a **Computers Push.** It contains an executable file that, when run on any computer, overwrites all of its drives with garbled files halfway between machine code and an alien language. A character who persists in trying to make sense of it tests **Sense Trouble** (not a typo) to avoid **Shocks, Minor**

**and Major: Scrub the System/They're in Your Auxiliary Brain.** On a success, the character gains a flash of insight, hinting that an alien, sinister mind is trying to turn them into its servants.

The sinister peripheral resists the ordinary efforts you might take to destroy a computer widget. Extreme measures, like being thrown into a wood furnace, bathed for hours in acid, or tossed into an industrial crusher, pulverize it.

Destroying the widget causes the Facebook group to disappear without a trace.

### Talking to Kim

**Scene Type: Core**

**Lead-In: The Lecture**  
(possible only if Kim's Status = Arrested), TED for Weirdos

**Lead-Outs: The Cottage, The Library**

**Cop Talk or Negotiation,** most likely with Detective Goodwin, allow an investigator to arrange an interview with Kim Katz. In jail, she awaits a psychiatric hearing that will likely see her remanded to a mental health facility.

Kim is only too anxious to talk. Provide her story in snippets, giving players the opportunity to interact by posing questions. It goes like this:

- She and Dave met nine years ago and were married two years after that.

- For much of their marriage she worked as office manager for Hank Knight, a state senator (or other mid-level elected post), a friend of Dave's since college.
- For about the second half of their marriage, the passion cooled, and they became more like roommates than a couple.
- They split up after she revealed to Dave that she was having an affair with Hank.
- She thought she and Hank would make it permanent, but instead he reconciled with his wife, Nancy.
- Since then she has dated a few people and Dave has thrown himself into his work.
- Though they live separately, she and Dave kept in frequent touch, a rare example of former spouses becoming genuine friends. When one of them had a down day, the other was always ready to listen and lend support.
- (core, *The Cottage*) They still co-own a lakeside cottage in the country, sometimes staying there together—platonically, of course.
- On a **Reassurance** or **Inspiration** spend, Kim agrees to make arrangements for the group to borrow her keys to the cottage.
- But about six months ago, Dave changed. He stopped calling and became distant.
- Kim went to the cottage when she knew he would be there and realized immediately that he had been replaced by an impostor.
- Whoever it is does a remarkable job of posing as Dave and looking like Dave, enough to fool everyone else. But Kim can tell—it's not him.
- For a while the false Dave had her convinced that she was delusional. She even went to a psychiatrist, who diagnosed her as having Capgras syndrome.
- But then she realized that he really was an impostor. The only way to prove this, and perhaps to free the real Dave, who has to be a prisoner somewhere, was to shoot the doppelgänger.
- Then everyone would see that the thing who wrote his latest book with all that crazy nonsense in it wasn't the real thing—wasn't even human!
- She can't stand to be anywhere near the inhuman parody of Dave, and so hasn't been to the cottage in months.
- Until recently Kim worked as office administrator for a large security firm that provides guard service to the airport, concert venues, and large corporations. Her work in this field led her to nuke all of her social media accounts years ago. She lurks on Instagram, mostly following famous animals, but never uploads anything.
- She lost her job after her false diagnosis, which she had to declare to her bosses.

**Psychology:** Capgras is a little-understood condition that may accompany paranoid schizophrenia or result from a brain injury or neurodegenerative disorder like dementia. At least on first glance, Kim shows none of the other symptoms that mark any of these causes.

### Searching for Kim

**Scene Type:** Alternate

**Lead-In:** The Lecture; only occurs if Kim's Status = Escaped

**Lead-Outs:** The Cottage, Talking to Kim

**Research, Bureaucracy, or Cop Talk** allow the team to find Kim's place of residence, a well-kept apartment in a downscale area. She isn't in.

**Streetwise or Sneaking** (as Investigative ability) gets them inside. In the kitchen drawer where she keeps her important documents they find an expired passport. The emergency contact address line lists a Crystal Block, with phone number. The exchange indicates that Crystal lives in the area.

A phone call to the number puts investigators in touch with Crystal, who identifies herself as Kim's sister. She's been visited by the police and is worried that her mentally ill sister will be harmed during an arrest attempt, or might harm herself.

**Reassurance or Cop Talk** leads her to trust the PCs as intermediaries who might bring her in safely.

Crystal, a harried single mom who works as an assistant manager at a big-box home renovations store, knows some of Kim's story, revealing it in response to questions:

- Kim has Capgras syndrome, a neurological condition that makes her think her ex-husband has been replaced by an impostor.
- Kim had an affair with her boss, who was also a longtime friend of Dave's. That's why they split up. But Kim insisted it was amicable, and that she and Dave stayed friends after the divorce.
- Crystal thought this was a bad idea. When you split with someone, you should split—if you don't have kids, which is why Crystal still has to see her deadbeat ex Lenny all the damn time.
- (alternate, *The Cottage*) She and Dave shared a lakefront cottage, even after they divorced. Crystal can give them the address.
- Kim probably got away from the scene in her car, an old Dodge Dart.
- If Dave was shot, Crystal did not tell Detective Goodwin about the cottage. She got a bad vibe off of him, and feared that he will hurt Kim or worse, if he's the one who takes her in.
- **Psychology or Cop Talk**, if the group has met Goodwin: Crystal is probably projecting her fears onto the detective, who seemed like a decent enough, professional cop.

**The Library****Scene Type:** Alternate**Lead-In:** Dave's Not Here**Lead-Out:** The Locker

Shown the stolen documents from Dave's apartment, Chief Archivist Harvey Eckhouse expresses dismay and shares what he knows about the elusive author. Harvey's gold rings and high-end designer glasses frames seem out of place on a librarian. A dedicated believer in his job, he reacts with horror when the gang reveals to him the extent of his security problem.

(Like Dave and Kim, an alternate Harvey appeared as a member of Hank's old crew in *Sleeping Dogs* from *Aftermath*.)

Dave Katz was a frequent visitor to the library over the years. Harvey knew him well, liking and trusting him. Dave grew secretive and distant over the last half year or so. Harvey took this to mean that he had stumbled onto a fascinating new subject for another book and wanted to make sure no one scooped him.

He clearly took advantage of Harvey's trust. The library will have to perform a top-to-toe security reevaluation. The board won't like that, because it will be costly, and libraries are always squeezed for cash.

In response to specific prompting Harvey also reveals:

- He did experience a

weird, electric sense of strangeness when he first met Dave, years ago. But with familiarity that went away.

- Dave seemed particularly interested in France, especially the 1890s and 1940s.
- Harvey had no idea that documents were disappearing and will have to do a full inventory. On a quick glance it doesn't look like anything unrelated to Dave's topic, whatever that was, has gone missing.
- Although a couple of months ago Harvey's keys were stolen from his jacket pocket. Dave couldn't have lifted those, too, could he?
  - He had to get the keys to his house and car replaced. Harvey doesn't have keys to the library, thank goodness. Only security has those.
- (alternate, The Locker) He did have to pay a hundred buck replacement fee for the key to his locker at an offsite storage facility. Harvey supplies the address and his current key, if asked.
- Harvey doesn't go out to the locker much. He did check when the keys went missing. The unit contains old furniture that used to belong to his mother, and boxes of unsorted books from when he used to live in a bigger place. He kinda figured that something had been moved around. Nothing he

could think of was missing, though, so obviously that was just paranoia.

- Whoever stole the key probably chucked it. Without the address, what good would it do?
- Now that you ask, yeah, Dave did ask for a recommendation of a storage facility at one time, and Harvey did mention the one he uses.

### Weird Crime Stories

**Scene Type:** Antagonist  
Reaction

**Triggering Condition:** Any interval subsequent to No Exit

The character you've marked on your Scenario Worksheet as "Phonechecker" sees that a couple of horrific crimes have occurred in the city in the past few hours.

- A thirty-ish woman in business attire accosted a woman walking her poodle in a downtown park, beheading it with a machete. She held up the head and shouted to gobsmacked passersby that many more will soon rise up to slaughter "all the riot dogs." The woman fled, throwing the head at pursuers, but one person captured the aftermath of the incident on phone camera footage.
- A man in a tweed jacket lobbed

a bottle of bleach into the sunroof of a passing Honda Civic. The driver was blinded in one eye and ran onto the sidewalk, killing an older couple sitting on a bench and badly injuring several others. A news article includes a police sketch of the assailant compiled from the descriptions of several eyewitnesses.

Everyone then gets pinged by notifications from the Facebook group no one can leave.

Did you mention the incessant, inescapable notifications yet? There are incessant, inescapable notifications!

A couple members of the group have posted panicked messages. (Give the group time to respond to the first one before having the second pop up.)

- One, Kristina Turner, says: "That video of the dog killer? It looks like me! I mean, exactly like me, including what I was wearing today! And I go through that park all the time on my way to work!!! The only reason I didn't today was I was at the dentist. My dentist and the receptionist and the dental hygienist can all attest that they saw me but what do I do? Do I go to the cops? Hire a lawyer? It has something to do with this group, doesn't it?" (Several other people then chime in with replies that say it couldn't possibly be related to the group, but they seem to be trying to talk themselves

into this as much as anything.)

- The other, Leroy Harrison, writes: “I know! The description of the Bleach Man? That looks just like me! I am home with a cold today but no one has seen me, so unlike the person above I do not have an alibi. And I am a black man. If I go to the cops, they will jail me. I’m afraid to leave the house, because they will shoot me down.”

### Detective Goodwin

**Scene Type:** Antagonist  
Reaction

**Triggering Condition:** Dave’s Status ≠ Not Shot or Shot but Alive and group has not yet given a statement

If this is a murder case and the group hasn’t already given a statement, Detective Derek Goodwin (described in *The Lecture*) attempts to contact them and learn what they know.

He disbelieves any occult explanation they may offer. Depending on what the investigators tell him, he may conclude that they belong to a conspiracy of delusion sufferers along with Kim Katz. The more he learns about the weird elements of the case, for example the Facebook group, the more he comes to suspect the group of criminal involvement of a so far

inexplicable nature.

Should characters try to use him to solve the case, for example by providing information leading them to *The Cottage*, invite players to explain why, according to their Drives, that feels like a bad idea.

You may allow them to skip a boring logistical problem by seeking his assistance, if that helps your pacing.

It may also make sense to have him found dead at *The Locker*. Or he can show up in the coda to scratch his head wearily, making it clear that the true story of reality entanglement will never show up in the police records.

### Viral Video

**Scene Type:** Antagonist  
Reaction

**Triggering Condition:** Any interval subsequent to *Weird Crime Stories*

The same thing that happened to other members of the Facebook group now starts striking the characters. Each time they check, someone who looks like one of them has been seen committing a shocking public crime.

Tie these into their Freaking Weird Moments, Drives, or other aspects of their characters.

The footage is never quite good enough to lead to an absolute identification. However, the

players should worry that one or more of them is about to be named as a suspect, keeping them looking over their shoulders as they continue with the case.

Having a doppelgänger commit a crime you might be fingered for calls for a Difficulty 5 **Composure** test to avoid **Shocks, Minor and Major: Sleepless Nights/You Went Viral.**

### The Cottage

**Scene Type:** Core/Conclusion

**Lead-In:** Dave's Not Here

**Lead-Outs:** Dave's Not Here,  
The Locker

Katz's cottage lies at the end of a twisting laneway. Looming pines block the view between the road and the house.

**Does Kim's Status = Escaped?**  
Her Dodge Dart is in the driveway.

This scene breaks in various ways depending on what has happened so far.

**The group hasn't completed**  
**Dave's Not Here:** The evidence found at that location instead appears here. The events described here occur later, either at Dave's apartment or in *The Locker*.

**The group has completed**  
**Dave's Not Here and you're close to the end of a session:** Continue with the scene as described immediately below.

**Otherwise:** Jump to *Intervening Version*, p. 122.

Call for Difficulty 5 **Sense**

**Trouble** tests. Players add the number of Shock cards in hand as bonuses to the test. Successful investigators get a feeling of terrible foreboding up ahead. They detect the presence of an ancient, malign intelligence—and it has detected them. This allows them to take whatever precautions they desire and grants a **Fighting** bonus if they wind up duking it out with the entity inside.

Now everyone makes a Difficulty 5 **Health** test. Those failing the test experience flashbacks to their Freaking Weird Moment. After the flashbacks, all characters who failed the **Health** test begin to transform. **Injuries, Minor and Major:** Carcosan Pallor/Carcosan Transformation. Skin whitens to a deathly pallor. Hands wrinkle and age, turning to just skin and bone. Facial structures tighten, as cheekbones rise and flatten—as if their faces are turning into pallid masks! The effect is most pronounced for those taking the Major Injury.

In the cottage, the Carcosan noble who has possessed Dave's body waits in darkness for the arrival of his minions.

If Dave's status is “Dead but Ambulatory,” or “Dead,” the body shows some sign of decomposition, including the telltale awful smell of decaying flesh. Patches of new, pallid flesh seem to be appearing to replace

the dead tissue.

Otherwise, Dave's face has been distorted, turning bone white and taking on a mask-like appearance.

**Does Kim's Status = Escaped?**

- Dave's skull has gained a bullet hole in the forehead that post-dates the original shooting at the lecture hall. Clearly this has not slowed him down any.
- Kim's corpse sits propped up in a wicker chair. Choose a time of death based on the timeline your players' actions have established. She came here after she escaped and was later surprised by the possessed Dave when he too arrived here to hide out. She shot him, and he killed her with a rapier. **Forensic Anthropology** confirms her cause of death.

The Carcosan's name is Yhith-Ekur.

*Change the name to whatever you called the antagonist of Ghost of the Garnier if you ran that scenario, the Ghost survived, and you had to give him a proper name.*

Confident in his arrogance, he does not wish to cause his servitors any distress that will reduce their usefulness. He keeps the lights out and speaks in a slow, welcoming, but creepy and insinuating tone. Yhith-Ekur has not considered that the beings whose quantum fates entangle with his own might possess the wherewithal to resist their transformation.

His welcome reveals the following:

- He knew, of all those who exist as particles in this reality and as waves on Carcosa, that it would be them who came to bow down before him and become his knights.
- This moment is the realization of his plot, or at least this first stage of it. He is becoming himself and surrounding himself with his destined vassals.
- By serving him in this world, eventually the investigators will come to serve the King in Yellow, when all becomes Carcosa and Carcosa becomes all.
- Soon they will be beautiful—as beautiful as he is. (*Here, his mask-like face convulses into a terrible grin.*)

Yhith-Ekur's vassals must understand his quest to aid the King in bringing about the Final Inbreak, so he will provide the following additional answers in response to matching questions:

- He chose Dave Katz as his vessel because across many realities many Dave Katzes are entangled with the concept of transformation. Yet in this one, he had yet to transform, creating a door for Yhith-Ekur to step through.

- As he absorbed Dave, he took his knowledge of such worldly things as Facebook and viral video.
- Yhith-Ekur bent the reality of these phenomena to serve his purposes and will

do much more with them in the months to come.

- Most people attracted to the lecture have only a peripheral role to play in the great destiny.
- It suited Yhith-Ekur's purpose to have attendees at the lecture other than the main group. They are less entangled with his destiny but may yet be molded into casual servitors.
- He did not anticipate that Kim would appear and try to kill Dave. This has hastened his plans and forced him to improvise. He swears to kill her, if he has not already done so.
- Entanglements persist across time as well as space and reality. That is what connects the investigators to a group of American artists in Paris in 1895 and some seeming nonentities in France in the middle of the last century.
- They may not matter in this reality, but in others these persons changed the course of history.
- Persons with strong entanglements, like the investigators, are ripe either for transformation, or to thwart it. By acting to lure them in, Yhith-Ekur ensures that in this reality it would be the latter.
- Not all of the strange effects generated by his entry into this realm have been entirely under his control. By attempting to cross from Carcosa to this realm, he unleashed a torrent of entanglement energy that reacts with ordinary reality in unpredictable but often palpable ways. Just as the collision of tectonic plates causes earthquakes, a sudden influx of entangled force can generate impossible, palpable effects. These are invariably unpleasant.
- In this case, it generated doppelgängers of the characters and other lecture attendees that called attention to themselves by doing terrible things. This phenomenon ought to be short-lived.
- He is doing them a favor; they cannot escape their confrontation with the forces upending reality. And as mere weak useless stupid humans, they surely cannot master it, but will be mastered by it. So rejoice, that you can now surrender willingly to that force and gain the bliss of absolute and unthinking loyalty.
- There is no way to stop the coming tide. Only to surrender to it. (Yhith-Ekur believes this, but it isn't true.)

Turning on the lights gives the group a good look at Yhith-Ekur's awful visage, triggering a **Difficulty 4 Composure** test to avoid **Shocks, Minor and Major: Haunted/Rationality's Cruel Veil**.

**Does a PC have the Carcosa Transformation card?** Any other PC who does not have the card can suppress its effects with an **Inspiration, Leadership, or Reassurance** spend. This does not

alter the discard condition.

**Numbers:** 1

**Difficulty:** Superior (Escape 3, Other 4, Kill 6)

**Difficulty Adjustments:** -1 if Dave's status is Dead, or Dead but Ambulatory; +1 if the USB device has been destroyed; +1 for a character with the Shock cards "Scrub the System" or "They're In Your Auxiliary Brain"; -1 for a character who got a flash of insight by studying the contents of the USB device; -1 if the group found and read the contents of the laptop hard drive in *The Locker*; -1 for all PCs if anyone got the Sense Trouble success on way into cottage

**Toll:** 2

**Tags:** Carcosan

**Injuries, Minor and Major:**

Carcosan Dagger/Carcosan Rapier

PCs may pretend to be in Yhith-Ekur's thrall for the time being, waiting to create more advantageous conditions to strike at him. Reward their cleverness in planning the takedown, while throwing in a surprise obstacle or two if their victory would otherwise feel anticlimactic.

### Intervening Version

Dave's laptop is password-protected but **Computers** solves that problem.

In a folder labeled "Old Documents" they find a text document called Carcosa. It contains his increasingly fragmentary observations of Yhith-Ekur's occupation of his mind.

As usual, give the players just the barest taste of the info given here, letting them tease the rest of it from you by asking questions about the document's contents.

It describes first a series of dreams, particularly a vivid and recurring nightmare in which he fights against a tyrannical regime in an America straight out of Orwell. In the dream he is captured and tortured by uniformed men using monstrous hyena-dog hybrids. He transforms inexorably into a monster himself, and winds up killing his friends, starting with Hank Knight.

This begins about two years ago, as he writes his book about quantum entanglement and the paranormal. Over time the dreams start to intrude into his daily life, like PTSD flashbacks of something that really happened to him.

Over the last six months, he starts to feel the pull of a second consciousness within his own. He realizes that his lectures are drawing in people who are inexplicably connected to one another, perhaps through the process he speculates about in the book.

He researches the PCs, developing the information found on the corkboard in his apartment, stealing what he requires from the reference library.

(core, *The Locker*) He also mentions pilfering the key to Harvey's locker, describing this location as "the Nest" to which "the final chrysalises will be drawn." A note a little further

down in the text includes the address of the self-storage facility.

After that the narrative switches to another language.

**History:** This is not a known language, nor does it follow the syntax or structure of anything a linguist would recognize.

Also in that folder they find a PDF facsimile of a scrapbook made by some eccentric occultist in Paris in the 1890s, full of information about the city, with weird marginal notes about the power of the Yellow King. Players who used this as a supplement to your *Paris* game will recognize it as *Absinthe in Carcosa*.

If Kim's Status = Escaped, her body is found at the scene, as described above.

### The Locker

**Scene Type:** Core/Conclusion

**Lead-Ins:** The Library, The Cottage

**Lead-Out:** The Cottage

The self-storage facility sits in a windswept and industrial part of the city or its outskirts.

**If the group has not completed both The Cottage, and Dave's Not Here,** the self-storage facility is empty. It provides information about the mystery; keep on reading.

Otherwise, jump to *Locker as Climax*, p. 124.

A bored clerk, Judd Lawrence,

surfs the Internet on a tablet in the reception booth near the facility entrance. He doesn't care who comes or goes, assuming that if someone has a key, they have a right to be there. He wears a trucker hat and wolf sweatshirt ironically and has flakes of potato chips in his luxurious dark beard.

A bribe (**Negotiation**) opens his mouth if shown a picture of Dave. Yeah, he's been in and out a fair bit lately. A weird dude. Sometimes he talks normal, sometimes like some kinda comic book supervillain.

They might have the key, but if not, **Streetwise** or **Sneaking** (in Investigative mode) get the group into the unit.

Inside they find that the furniture and boxes of books that Harvey might have mentioned have either been thrown out or repurposed to make a low-rent throne room decorated with silks, brocades, and gold-colored beads. Copper incense burners hang from the ceiling on thin chains, dangling over the big chair in the center of the room.

If a player asks about the dimensions of the unit, the group realizes that once you step inside, it looks larger than it can possibly be. And its straight lines waver when you look at them intently. Difficulty 4 **Composure** tests avoid **Shocks, Minor and Major:** Melted Perceptions/Nothing is Real.

Investigators digging through the few boxes of books that remain find a laptop hard drive. It contains the documents described

on p. 122 (which now will not be found in *The Cottage*). Knowing its contents gives the group a couple of bonuses when the climax occurs in that scene.

### Locker as Climax

In this version, Yhith-Ekur awaits in the locker, his new temporary headquarters.

Judd Lawrence is not who he seems. If approached, he says whatever he can to get the heroes to relax their guard and proceed to Harvey's locker.

As they head toward it, call for Difficulty 5 **Sense Trouble** tests. Those succeeding see blood leaking out from one of the units. **Streetwise** or **Sneaking** (in Investigative mode) opens the unit. Inside they find the real Judd, stabbed to death.

**Forensic Anthropology:** Looks like he was killed with some kind of rapier.

The entity now doing Judd's job is his ghost, under Yhith-Ekur's control. This realization provokes a Difficulty 4 **Composure** test to avoid **Shocks, Minor and Major: More Things in Heaven and Earth/ Anyone Could Be Secretly Dead.**

Drawing closer to the unit, they experience the flashbacks and possible transformations that appear when *The Cottage* acts as your climax.

The rest of the scene unfolds as in *The Cottage*, just with different set dressing.

### Coda

**Scene Type:** Denouement

**Lead-Ins:** The Cottage, The Locker

If Yhith-Ekur survives their first fight with him, put the onus on the group to find him again, this time with the odds tilted in their favor. Reward their creativity with favorable modifiers. You don't want to make it anticlimactic, but if they've already lost once most players will eagerly embrace any win that arises from their own efforts and not from a *deus ex machina* you have to contrive.

He doesn't want to kill them, as he's sure they'll be his best knights when they finally succumb to his offers of power and purpose. However, he has decided that perhaps other attendees at the lecture might substitute for them if they continue to refuse.

Until they dispatch him, the wave of weird crimes continues, now committed exclusively by people who look like the PCs. Yhith-Ekur learns to manipulate these, using them to put pressure on the group to swear allegiance to him.

If they flat-out flee to a far-off destination, they've done your work for you by fully embracing their status as horror characters. Yhith-Ekur pursues them, using their entanglement to trap them. Before he catches up with them their haunted natures bring them

into contact with other creatures and hauntings, as the series becomes a Carcosa-corrupted road movie.

The group may try to make Kim's situation better. Give them as happy an ending on that front as seems credible.

Detective Goodwin may reappear as a nemesis who's sure the group got away with something, or as a reluctant believer in the supernatural who will lend them whatever aid he can without seeming to his superiors like he's lost his mind.

If the group ends by agreeing to stick together and remain alert for further signs of weird destiny, end on that note. If they play it as if they think they'll never have to team up again, conclude on a note of resurgent horror, either inspired by events in the scenario, or by a Freaking Weird Moment.

### Starting with Entanglement

To start with *Entanglement* without having run other YKRPG sequences:

- Drop references to the 1895, Continental War, and post-Castaigne characters from

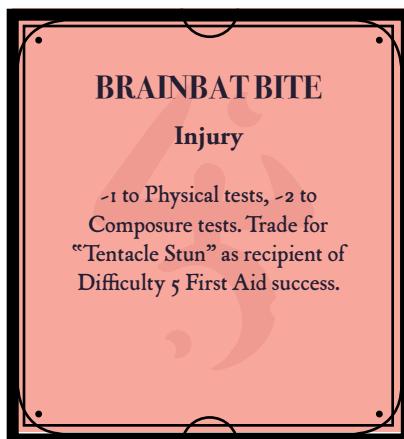
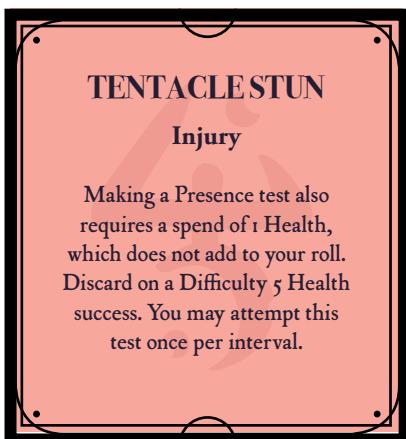
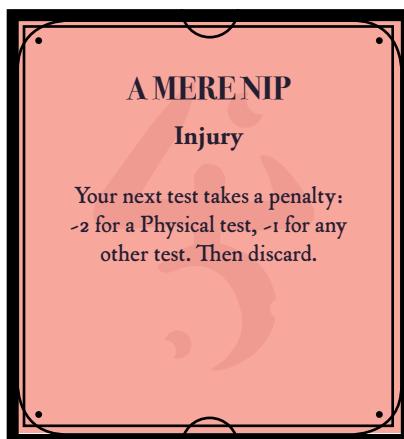
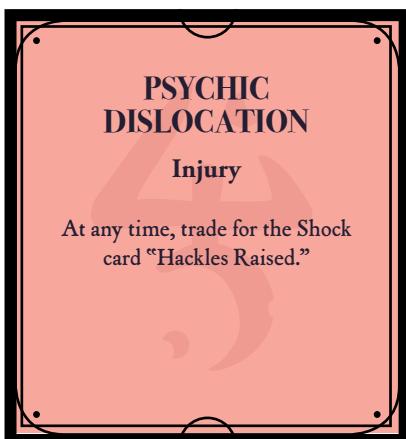
the corkboard. Instead, the gang sees that Dave has info on them, and their Freaking Weird Moments. A label on the corkboard refers to them as the chrysalises.

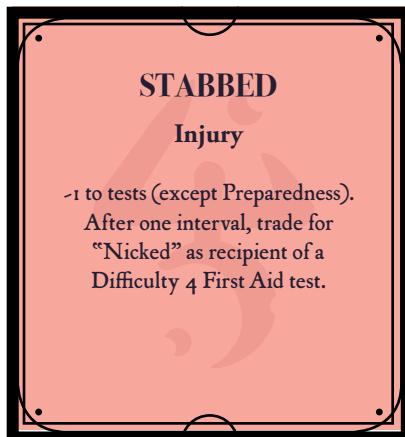
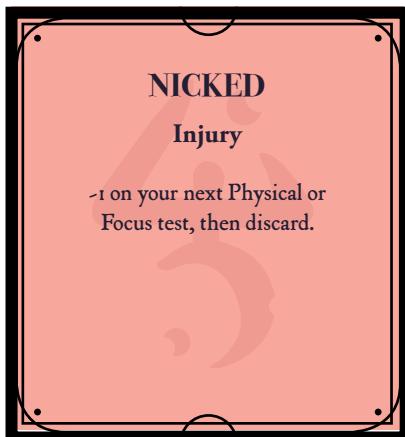
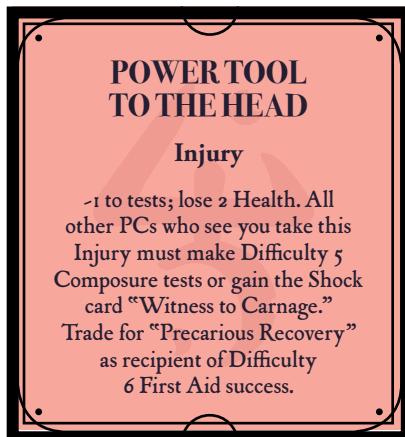
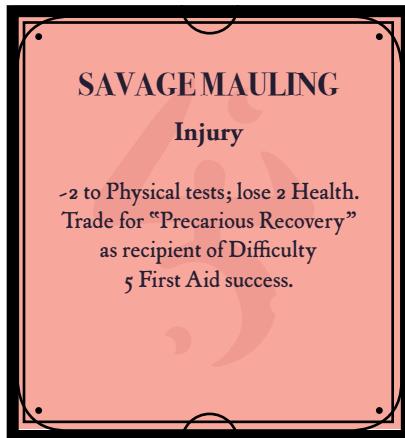
- The creator of the Facebook group is someone named Hildred Castaigne. The profile has already been deleted.
- The information Dave was researching at *The Library* also omits references to the 1895 and 1947 characters.
- In *Weird Crime Stories*, instead of mentioning riot dogs, the poodle beheader cries out against "glowdogs and the coming of the rampagers."
- In *The Cottage*, Yhith-Ekur says that the PCs are entangled between multiple counterparts across realities, from 1895 onwards, but cannot mention characters from previous sequences.
- Dave's laptop contents do not refer specifically to the events of *Sleeping Dogs*.

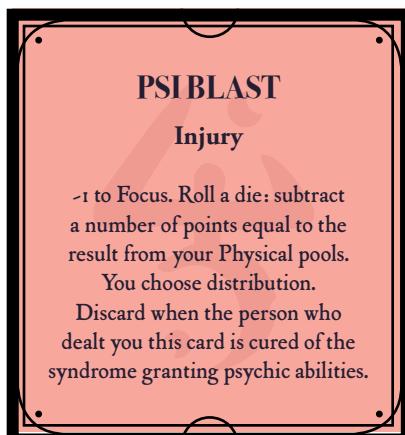
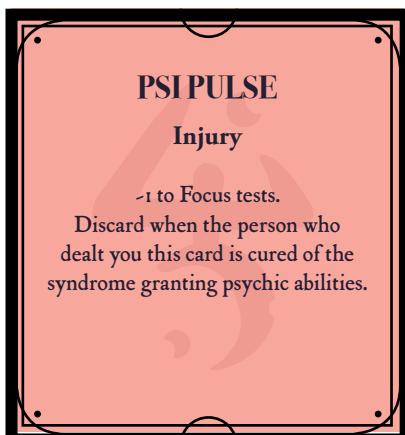
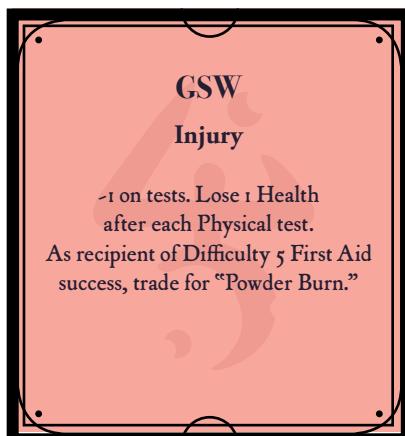
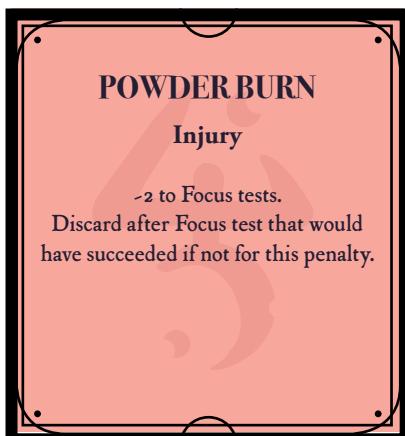
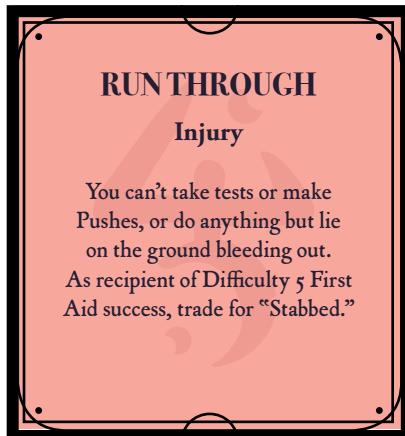
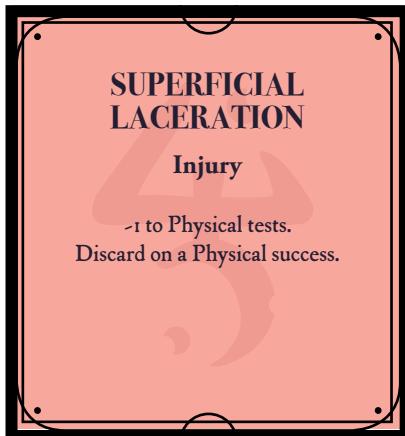
# CARDS

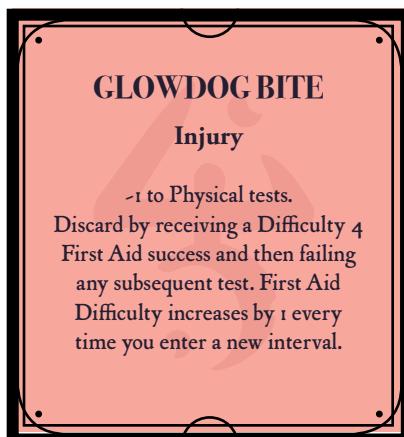
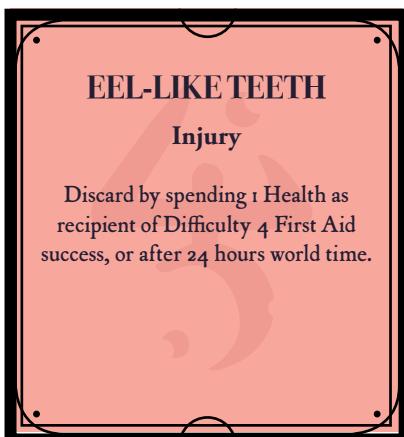
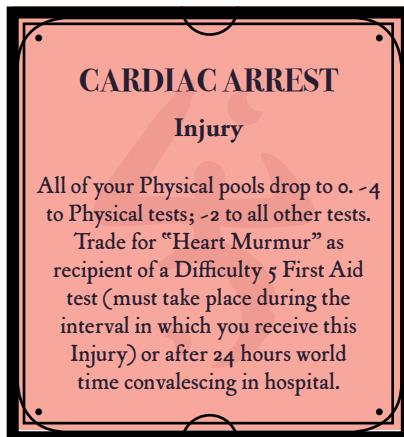
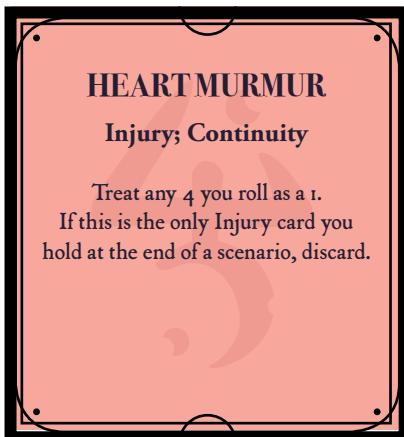
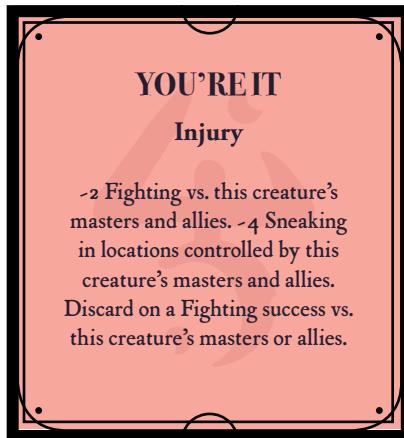
## Injury cards

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## SAVAGED

### Injury

-2 to Physical tests; -1 to Focus tests.  
Trade for “On the Mend” as recipient  
of Difficulty 6 First Aid success.

## HOARDLING CLAW

### Injury

Lose 2 Health.  
As recipient of a Difficulty 4  
First Aid test, discard and roll a  
die. Even: regain 2 Health.

## HOARDLING BITE

### Injury

Lose 4 Health. -1 on your  
next Physical test.  
As recipient of a Difficulty 5  
First Aid test, discard and roll a  
die. Even: regain 2 Health.

## MIGHTY PUNCH

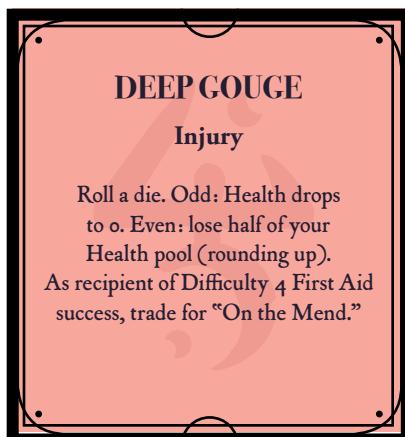
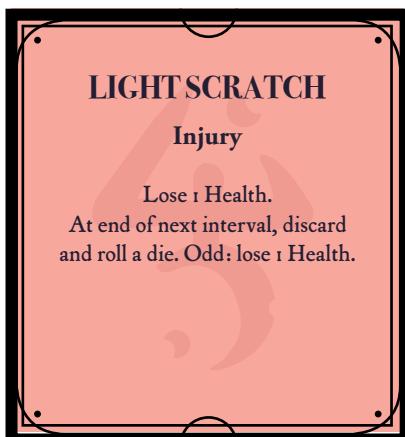
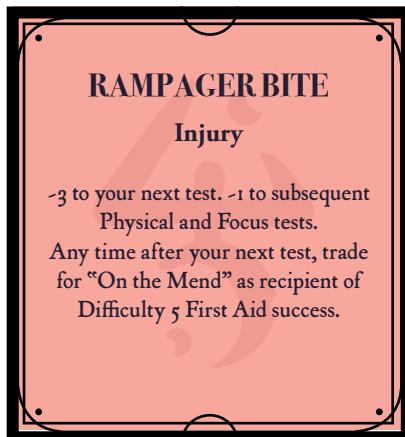
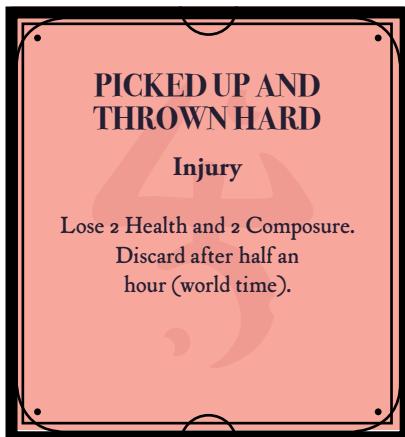
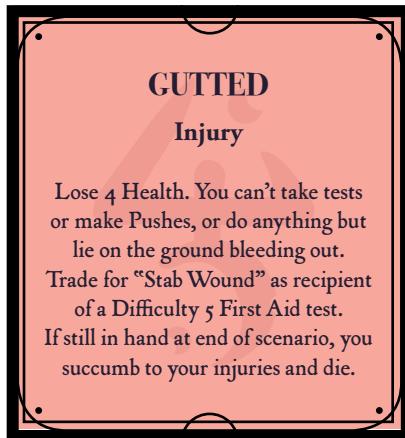
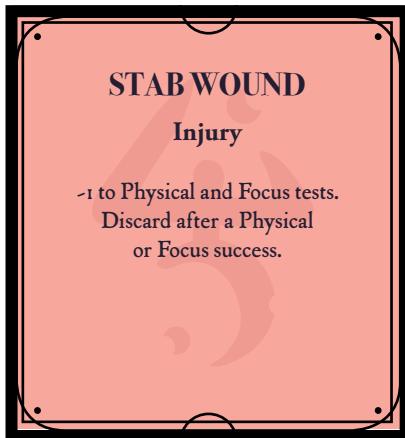
### Injury

-1 to Physical tests. Make a Difficulty  
4 Health test. Failure: remain  
unconscious until end of next interval.  
Discard after two intervals.

## TOXIC SPIT

### Injury

Lose 1 Composure on any  
failed Focus test.  
Make a Difficulty 6 Health test.  
Failure: remain unconscious  
until end of next interval.  
After two intervals, make a Difficulty  
4 Health test. Success: discard.



### POISONED SCRAPE

#### Injury

When you make a Presence or Focus test and your unmodified die result comes up as an odd number, lose 1 Athletics and 1 Fighting.

When this happens, roll another die. Even: discard.

### POISONED STAB

#### Injury

When you make a Presence or Focus test, lose 1 Athletics and 1 Fighting. As recipient of a Difficulty 5 First Aid test, trade for "Poisoned Scrape."

### INKY VEINS

#### Injury

All Tolls increase by 1. After paying a Toll, roll a die. Even: discard.

### ORGAN ROT

#### Injury

Roll a second die when making any test, subtracting it from your result.

After failing a test, roll a die. Even: trade for "Inky Veins." If still in hand at end of scenario, make a Difficulty 5 Health test. On a failure, you die.

### TELEKINETIC GRAB & THROW

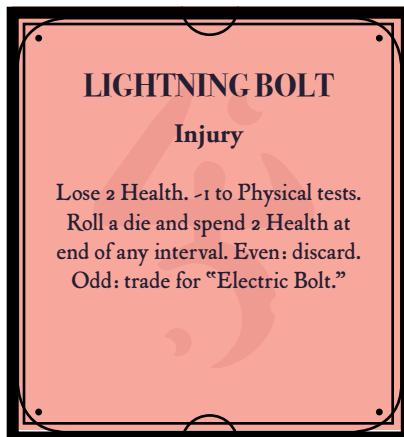
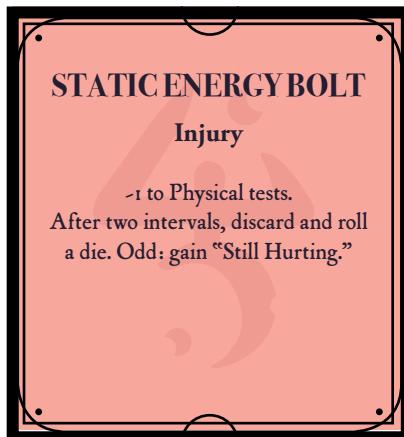
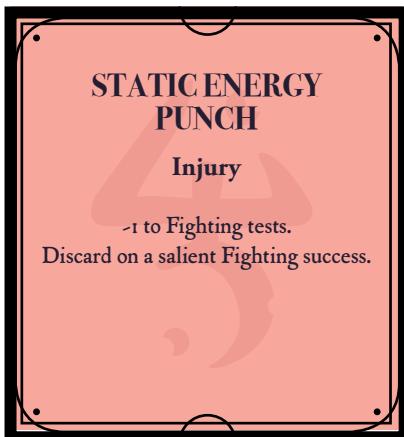
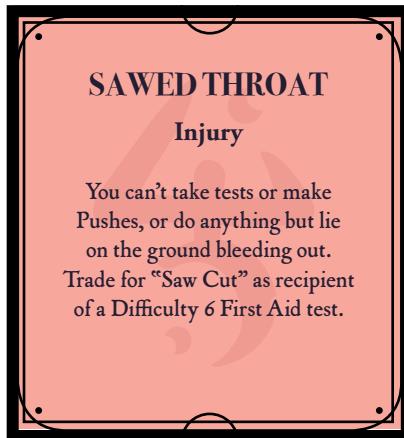
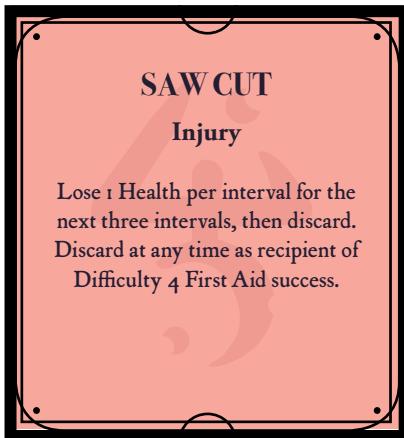
#### Injury

-1 to Physical tests. Discard on a Physical success, or as recipient of 1-point First Aid spend.

### TELEKINETIC BEATDOWN

#### Injury

-2 to Physical and Focus tests. After failing one Physical and one Focus test, roll a die. Even: discard. Odd: trade for "On the Mend."





## SLASHED THROAT

### Injury

You can't take tests or make Pushes, or do anything but lie on the ground bleeding out. As recipient of a Difficulty 5 First Aid success, trade for "Stab Wound."

## CARCOSAN PALLOR

### Injury

When you receive this, you may specify that it is a Shock instead of an Injury.

You can't attack a supernatural entity before it attacks you.

Discard by destroying the being whose presence gave you this card.

## CARCOSAN TRANSFORMATION

### Injury

To fight a supernatural entity:

- You must first succeed at a Difficulty 5 Composure test or make an Intimidation spend
- It cannot be talking to you

Discard by destroying the being whose presence gave you this card.

## CARCOSAN DAGGER

### Injury

-1 to Physical tests.

Discard if the entity responsible for you taking this card is destroyed.

## CARCOSAN RAPIER

### Injury

-2 to Physical tests.

Discard if the entity responsible for you taking this card is destroyed.

**BRUISED****Injury**

The next time you try to make an Interpersonal Push, roll a die. Even: discard. Odd: you can't make the Push.

**BATTERED****Injury**

-3 on your next Physical test. -1 on the Physical test after that, then discard.

**SEEING STARS****Injury**

-2 on Sense Trouble tests until end of session.

**DENTED SKULL****Injury**

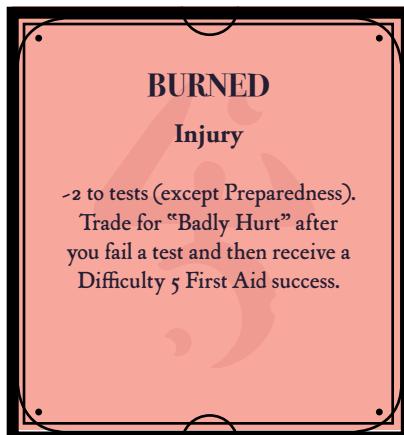
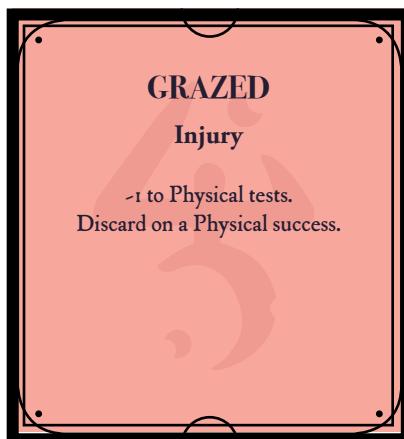
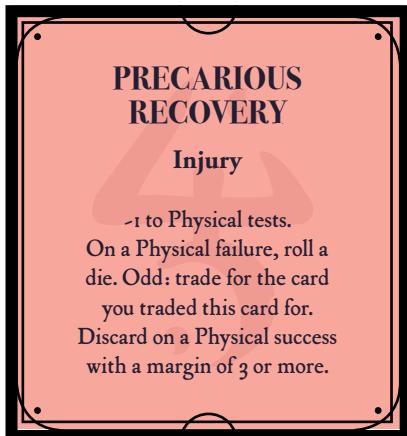
You always fail Physical tests.  
-2 to all other tests.  
After four hours of world time, trade for "Seeing Stars."

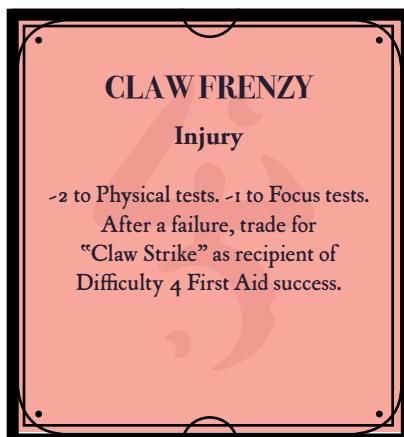
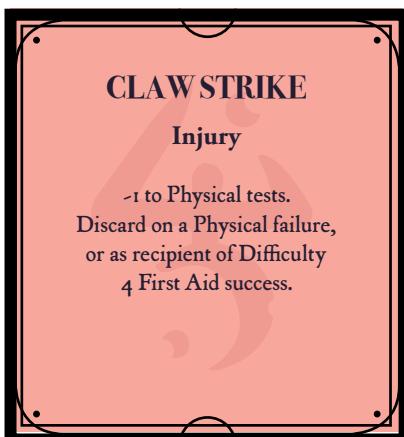
**STILL HURTING****Injury**

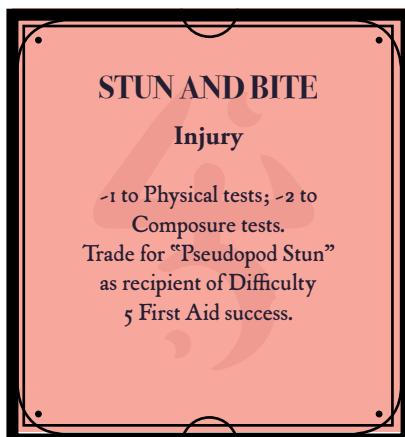
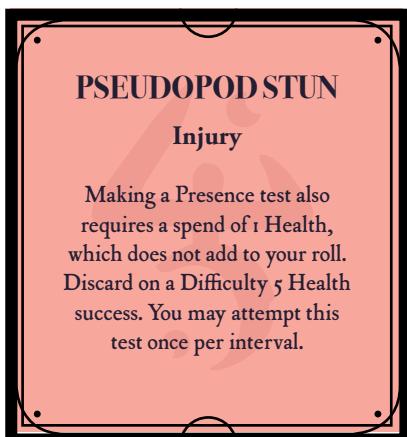
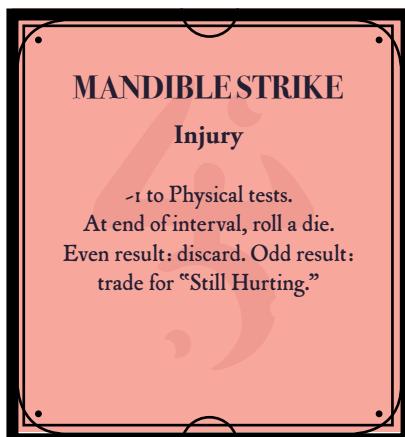
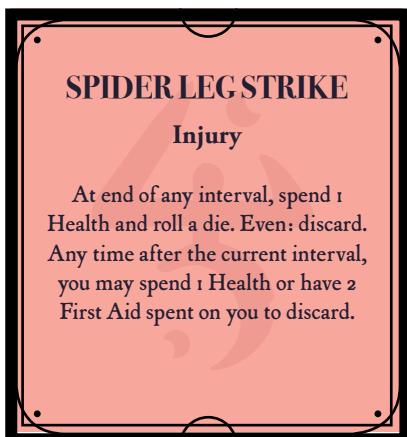
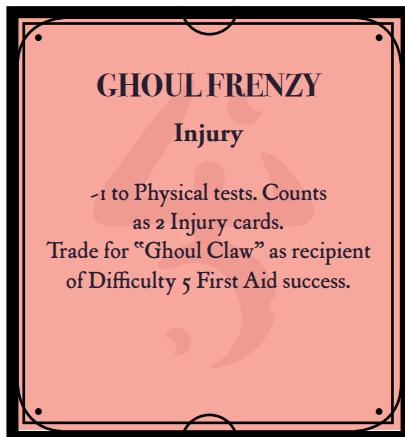
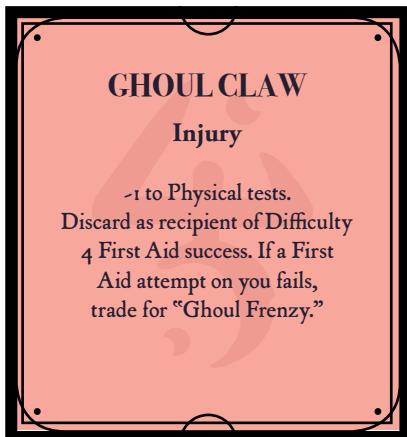
Discard on a Physical success with a margin greater than 1.

**ON THE MEND****Injury**

-1 to all tests. Trade for "Still Hurting" on a Physical success.







**PUNCH****Injury**

Discard after half an hour (world time).

**UNCLEAN BITE****Injury**

After half an hour (world time), roll a die. 2-6: discard. 1: trade for "Tetanic Fever."

**HEAT DRAIN****Injury**

Pay a Toll of 3. If you can't pay the Toll, trade for "Massive Injuries."

Discard by spending three hours (world time) in front of a powerful heat source, such as a fireplace or furnace.

**ENERGY DRAIN****Injury**

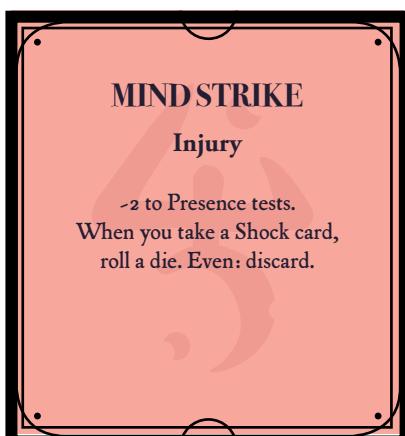
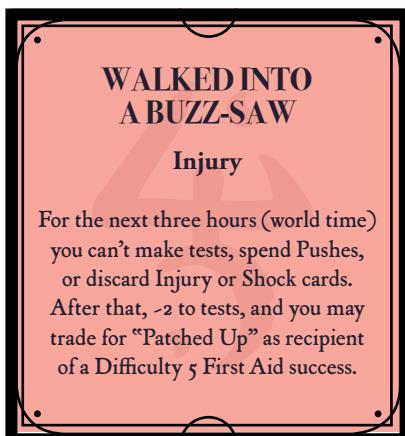
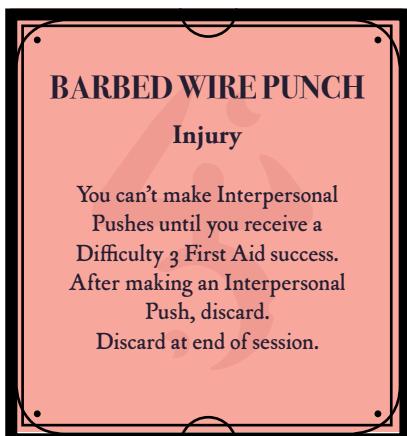
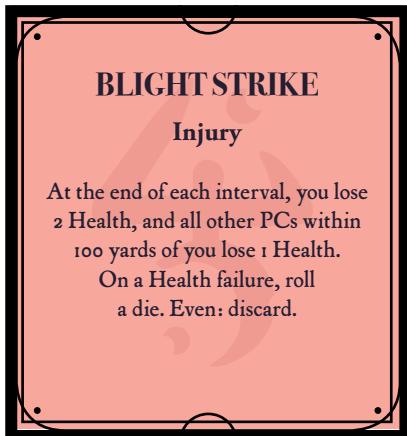
Pay 5 points from any combination of Physical abilities. If you can't pay, trade for "Massive Injuries." After six hours (world time), trade for "On the Mend" as recipient of Difficulty 4 First Aid success.

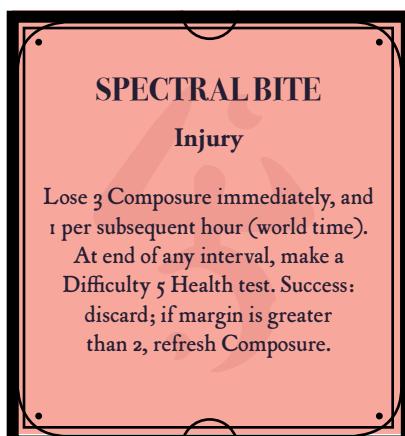
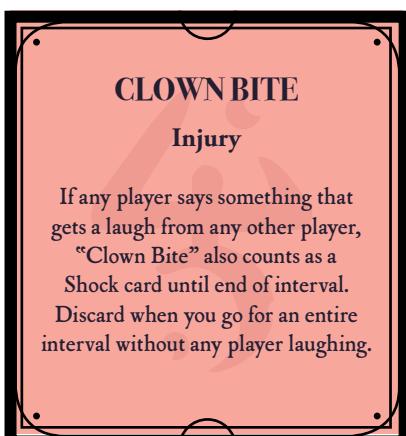
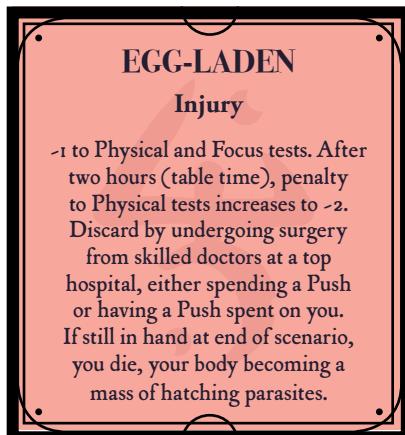
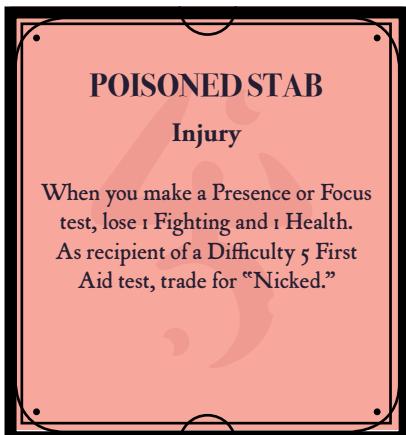
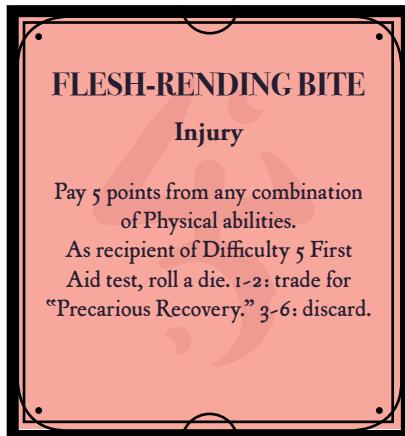
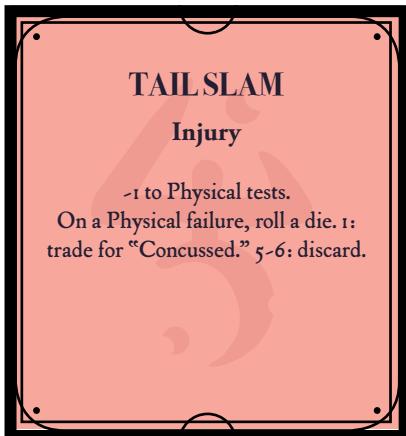
**DRAINING TOUCH****Injury**

Lose 3 Health.  
Discard on a Physical success.

**DRAINING STRIKE****Injury**

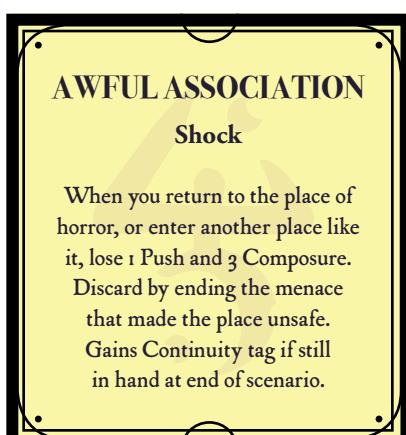
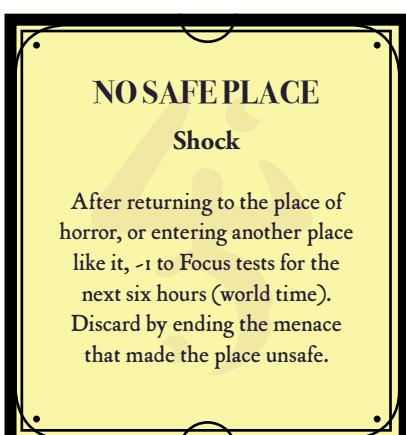
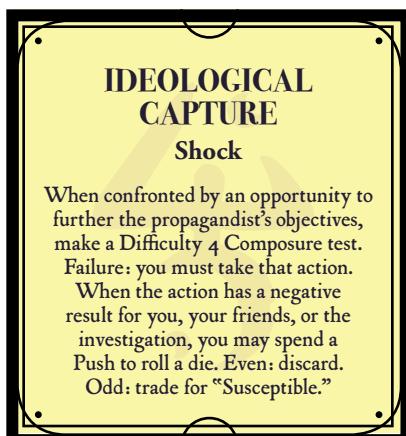
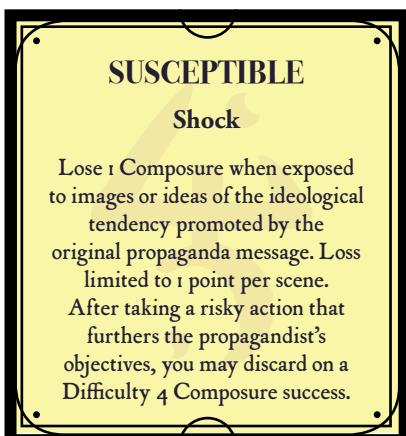
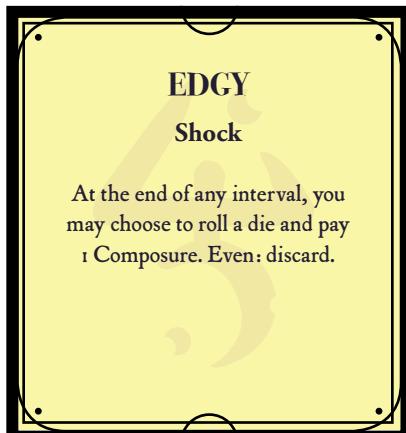
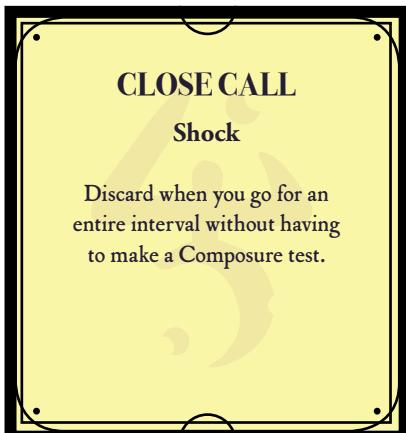
Health drops to 0.  
If Health is already 0, trade for "Blood Drain."  
On a Physical success, roll a die.  
Even: discard this card and refresh Health.

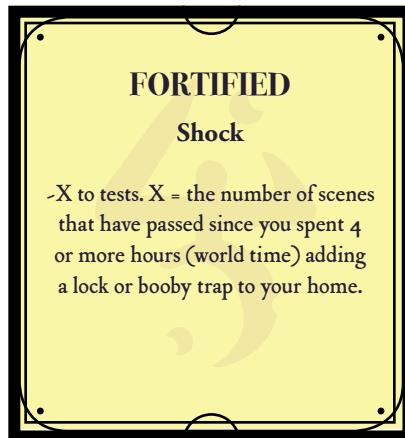
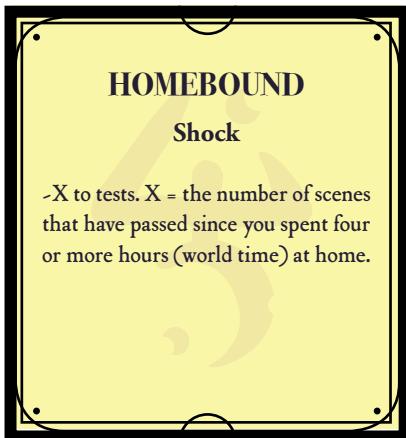
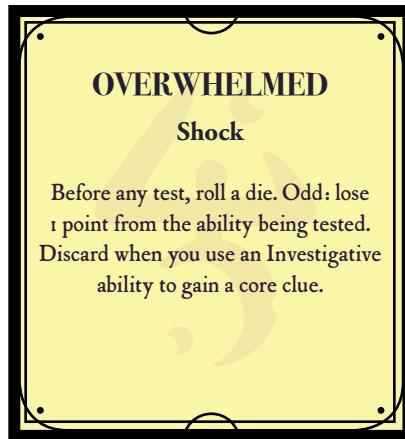
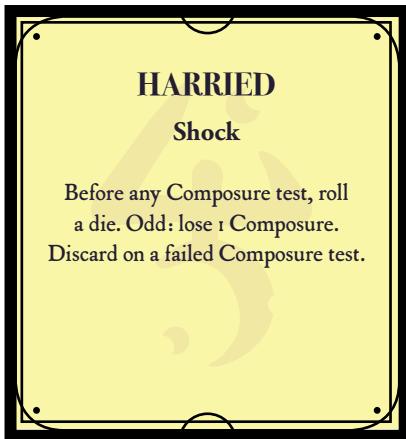
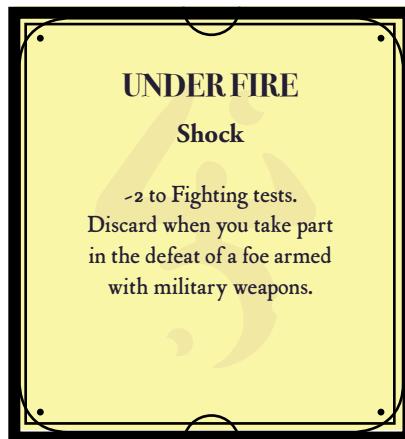
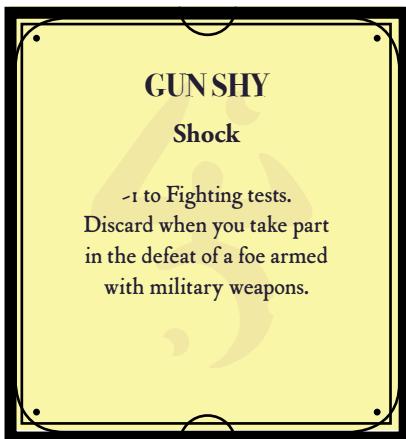




## Shock cards

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## MELTED PERCEPTIONS

### Shock

Roll a die when you receive this card. Odd: -1 to Focus tests.  
Even: -1 to Presence tests.  
Discard as recipient of Difficulty  
4 First Aid success.

## NOTHING IS REAL

### Shock

Margin on failed Composure tests increases by 1.  
Discard as recipient of Difficulty  
5 First Aid success.

## “DOES THIS LOOK WEIRD?”

### Shock

Now and at the beginning of each session, roll a die. 1-2: lose 1 Composure. 3-4: lose 1 Health.  
Discard by finding the antidote, treatment, or counterspell to your condition.

## BODY HORROR

### Shock

Now and at each interval, roll a die. 1-2: lose 2 Composure.  
3-4: lose 2 Health.  
Discard by finding the antidote, treatment, or counterspell to your condition.  
If your Health is at 0 at end of scenario, this card gains the Continuity tag.

## OVERCONFIDENT

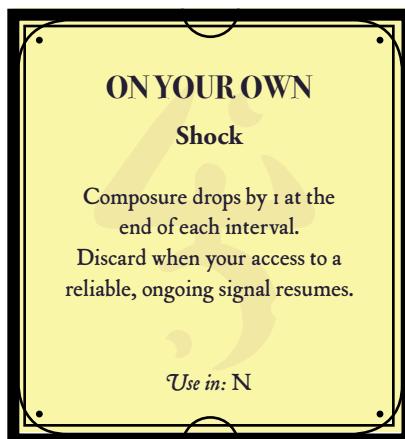
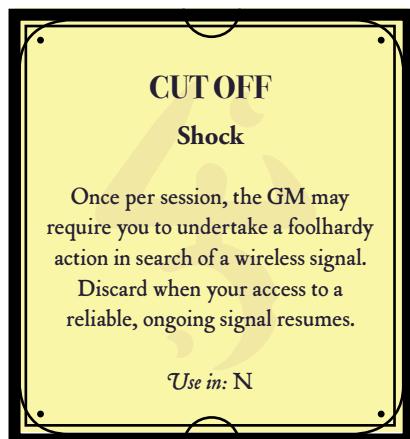
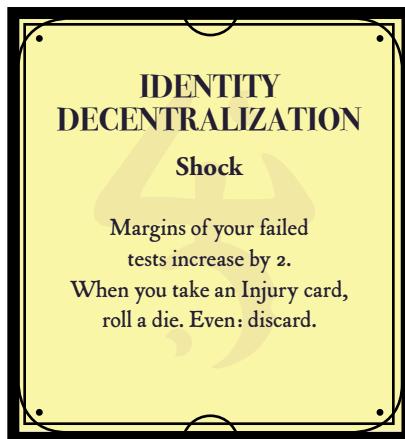
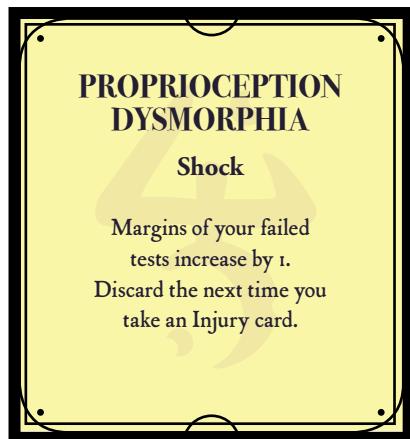
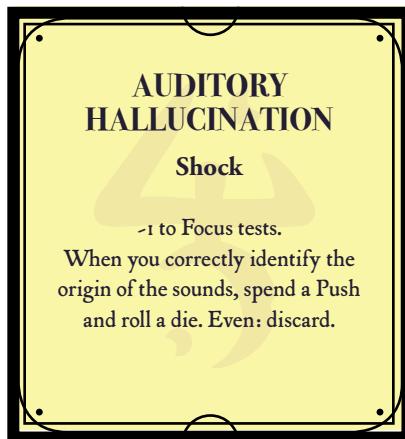
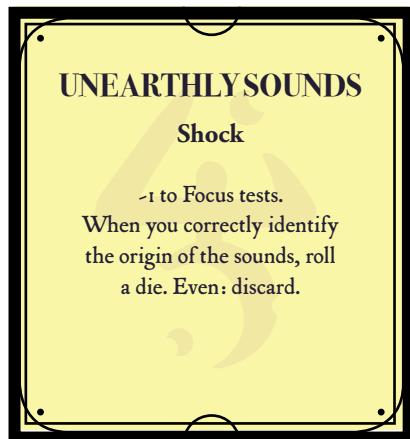
### Shock

Margin of your next Fighting failure increases by 2.  
Then discard.

## HIDEOUS LAUGHTER

### Shock

At the start of any fight, roll a die. Odd: -1 to Fighting. Even: -1 to everyone's Fighting.  
At end of fight, roll a die. Even: discard.



### SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

#### Shock

Focus tests take a penalty equal to the number of mornings that have passed since you got this card (world time).

After shutting down the story bringing you notoriety, roll a die each world-time morning. Even: discard.

### YOU WENT VIRAL

#### Shock

Lose 2 Composure and 2 Health each morning (world time).

After shutting down the story bringing you notoriety, roll a die each world-time morning. 5 or 6: discard.

### LAB COAT UNEASE

#### Shock

When you enter a hospital, doctor's office, or medical facility and have 1 or more Pushes, lose 1 Push. Discard by putting your experimenter permanently out of business.

### LAB COAT TERROR

#### Shock

When you enter a hospital, doctor's office, or medical facility, -1 Composure until end of scenario. Discard by putting your experimenter permanently out of business. Gains Continuity tag if in hand at end of scenario.

### REINTEGRATION REGRET

#### Shock

-1 to Focus tests.

Discard when you stop someone from damaging a GMC's reintegration.

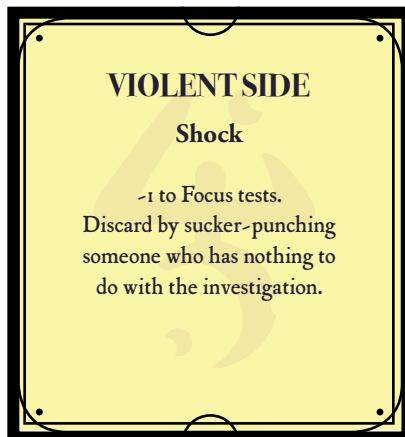
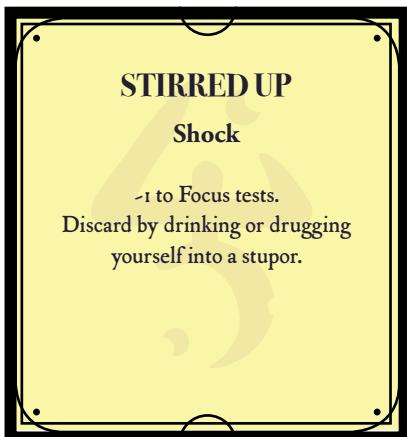
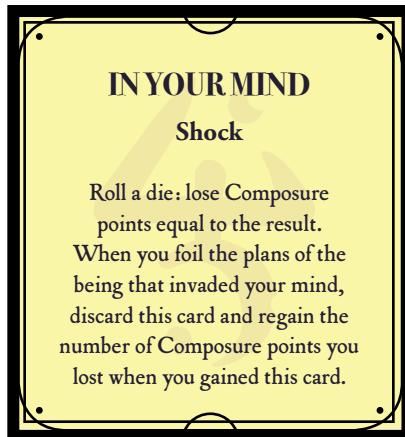
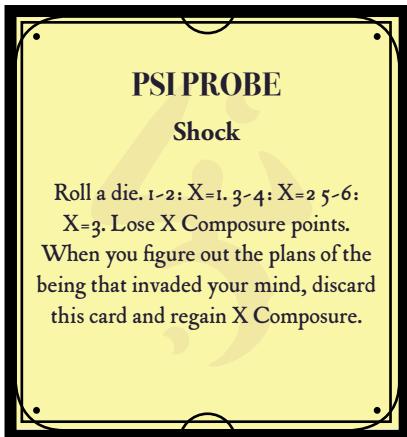
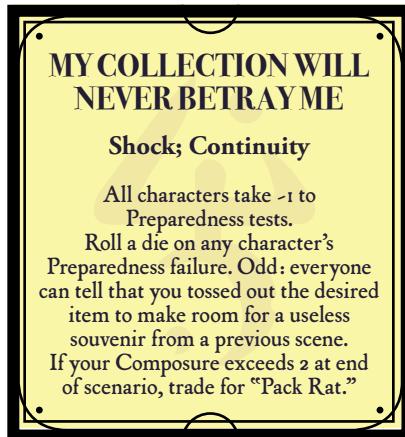
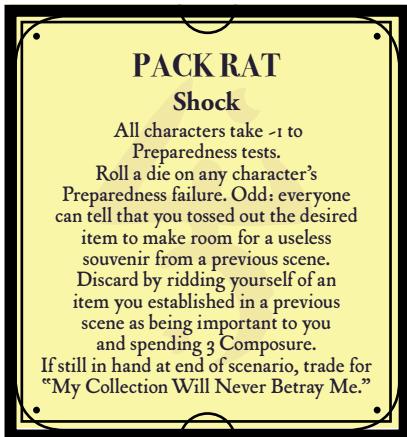
*Use in: N*

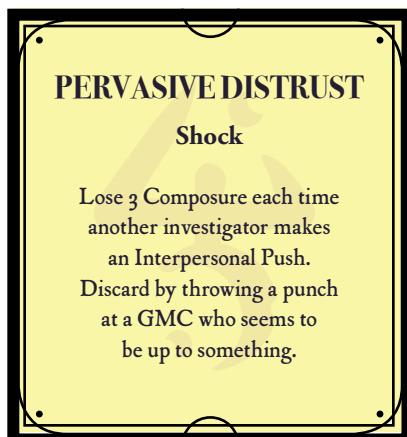
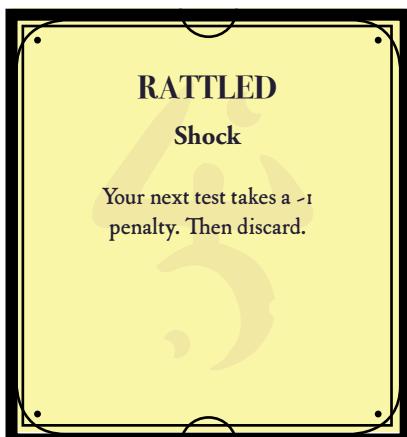
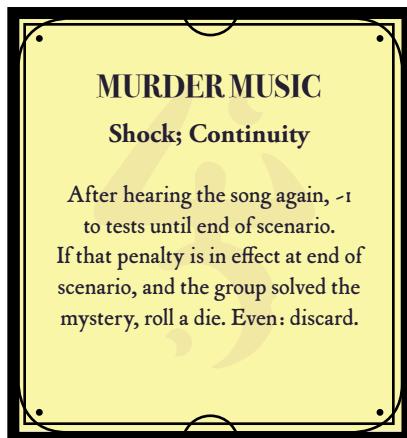
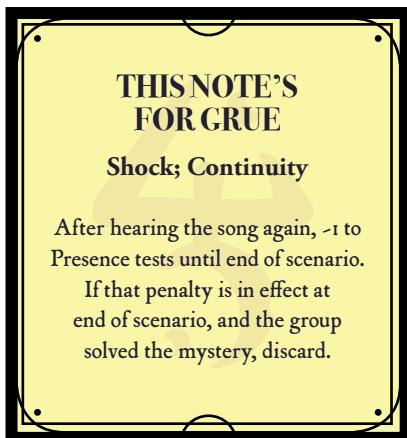
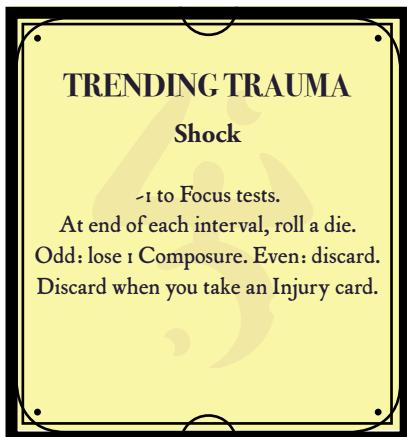
### REINTEGRATION REMORSE

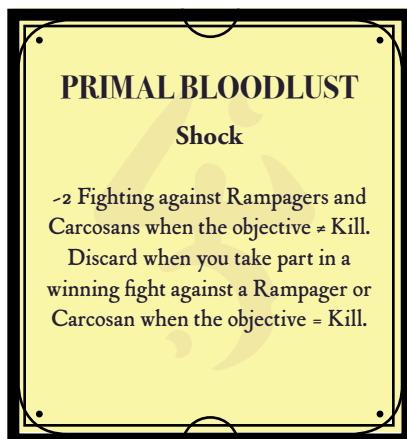
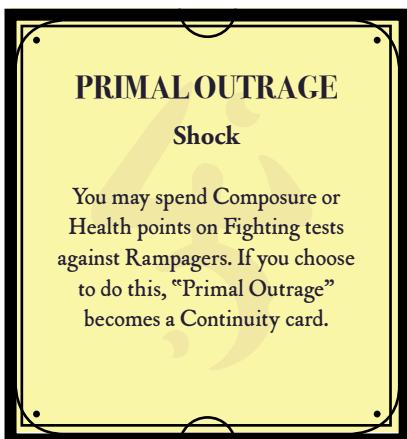
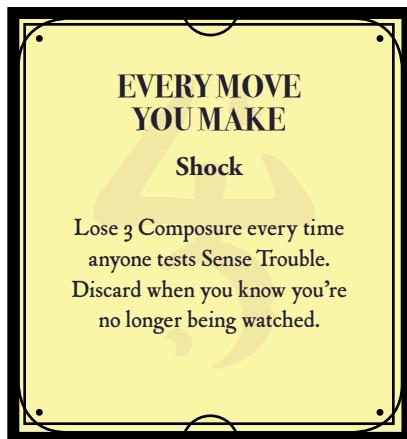
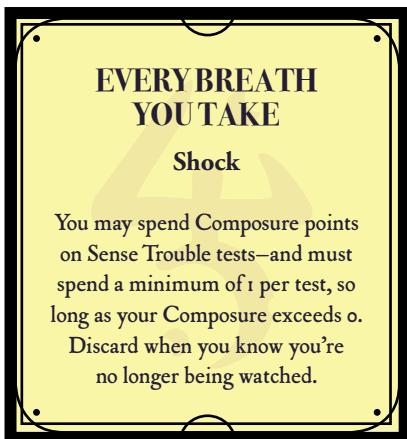
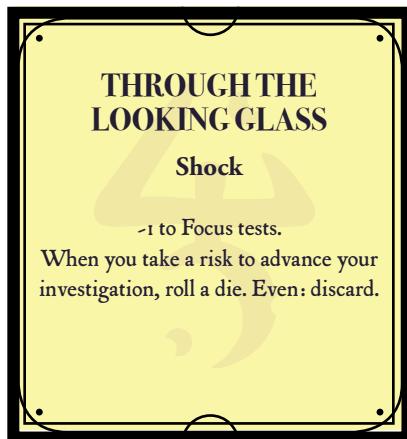
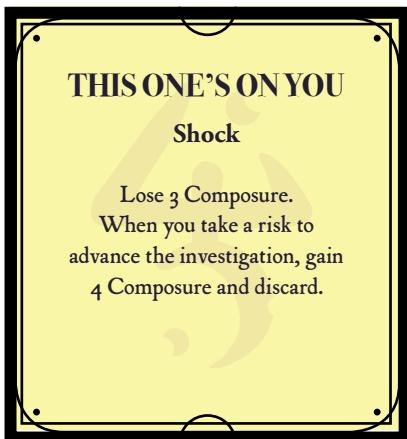
#### Shock

-1 to Focus and Presence tests. Discard when you pay a price to stop someone from damaging a GMC's reintegration.

*Use in: N*







### EERIE OBJECT

#### Shock

Lose 2 Health, Composure, and Athletics each time the distance between you and the object exceeds 2 m.

Horror mode: If the item is destroyed, you die.

Occult Adventure mode: If the item is destroyed, take Injury card "Cardiac Arrest."

### CURSED ITEM

#### Shock

All other PCs take -1 to tests.

You gain +1 to tests.

Horror mode: If the item is destroyed, you die.

Occult Adventure mode: If the item is destroyed, take Injury card "Cardiac Arrest." If another PC tries to take the item from you, roll a die.

Odd: you attack them, giving them the card "Shot" (from *Paris*) or "Slashed Throat" (your choice). Even: discard. The other PC gains the item and makes a Difficulty 4 Composure test, gaining this card on a failure and "Eerie Object" on a success.



### HYPER-VIGILANT

#### Shock

+1 to Sense Trouble tests.

Lose 1 Health and 1 Composure on any Sense Trouble success.

Discard when something bad happens to you, exactly like you said it would.

### SPOTLIGHT HOG

#### Shock

-1 to Focus tests.

At the end of any interval, take an action calling attention to yourself.

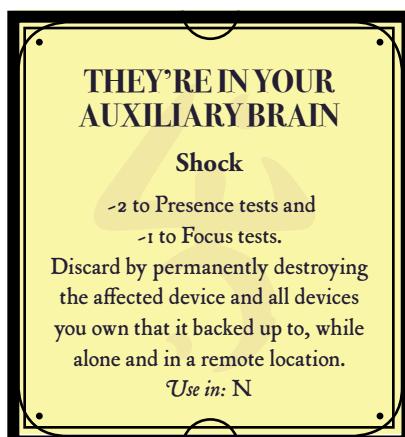
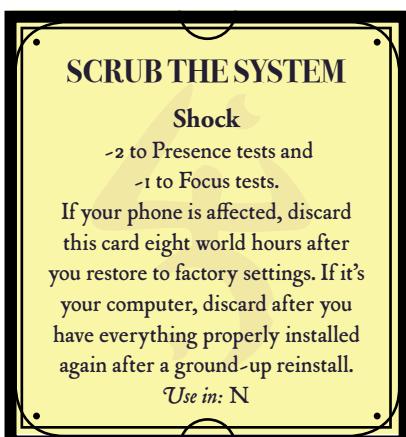
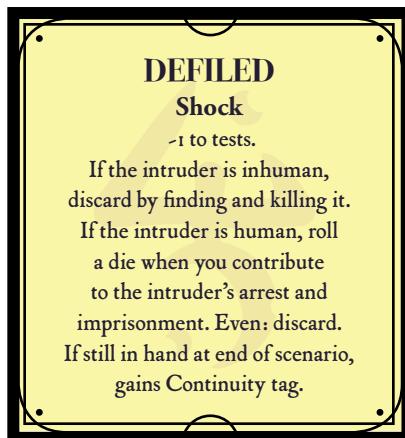
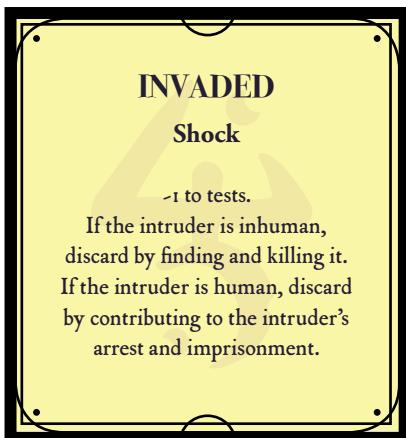
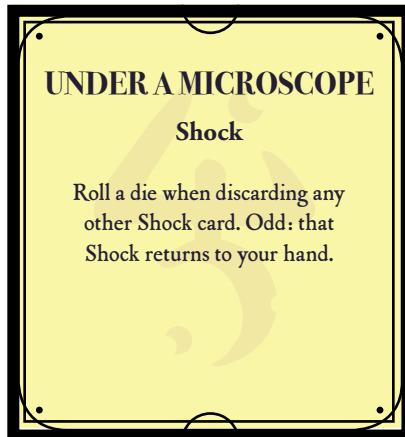
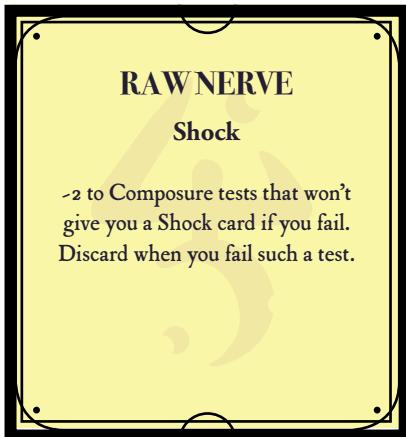
Roll a die. Even: discard.

### MESSIAH COMPLEX

#### Shock

Once per session, you may gain +3 to any non-Composure test. The player to your left loses 3 points from their highest General pool. If pools are tied for first, you pick which one.

If the result of your test is even, discard this card.



## COULDA BEEN HURT

### Shock

Roll a die when discarding any other Shock card. On a result of 1 or 2, that Shock returns to your hand.

Discard this card by tracking down and confronting the guilty party in meat space.

## COULDA BEEN KILLED

### Shock

Pay 3 Composure when discarding any other Shock card. If you can't pay, you can't discard.

Discard this card by tracking down and confronting the guilty party in meat space.

## NAGGING GUILT

### Shock

-1 Fighting tests vs. Rampagers and Carcosans.

## GNAWING GUILT

### Shock; Continuity

-1 Fighting tests vs. Rampagers and Carcosans.

## DÉJÀ WHO?

### Shock

Roll a die. Even: gain Composure equal to the result. Odd: lose a total of 5 points from General pools, as chosen by the GM, and discard this card at next interval.

After any 1-hour increment (game time), you may choose to repeat the above effect.

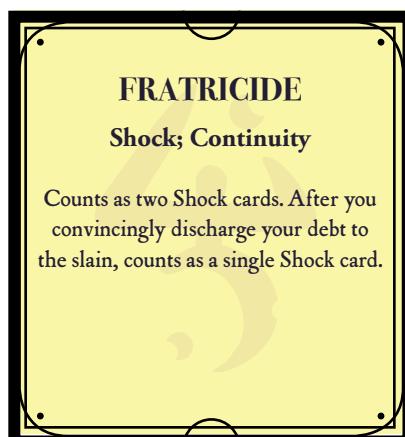
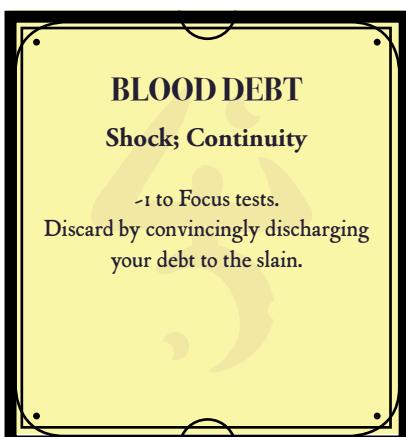
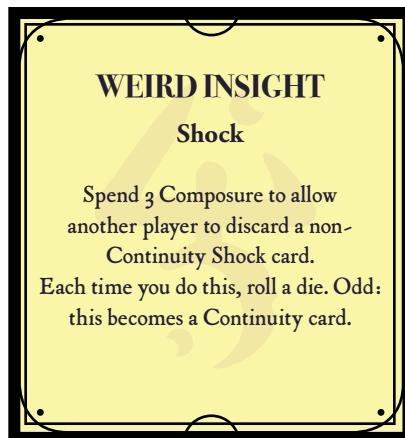
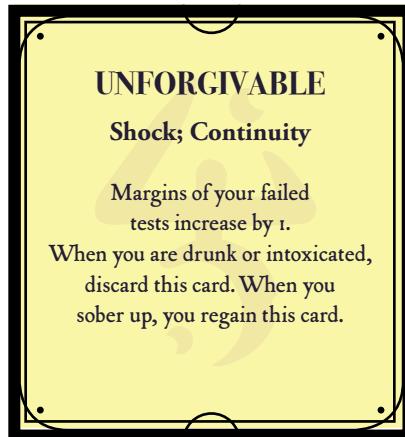
At end of scenario, you may declare this a Continuity card.

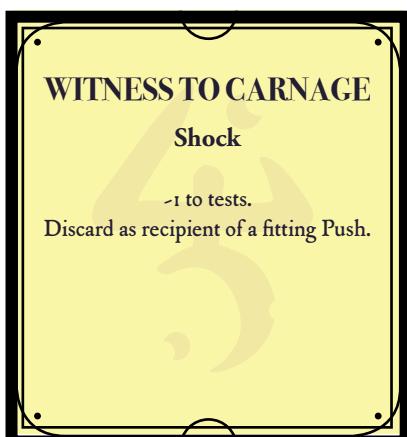
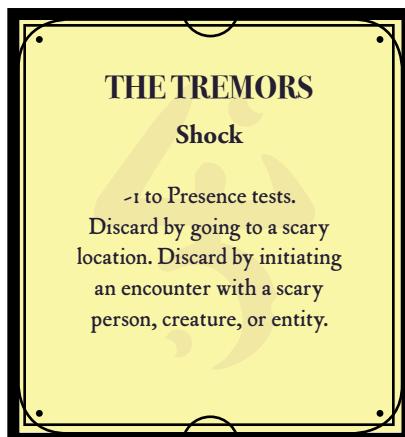
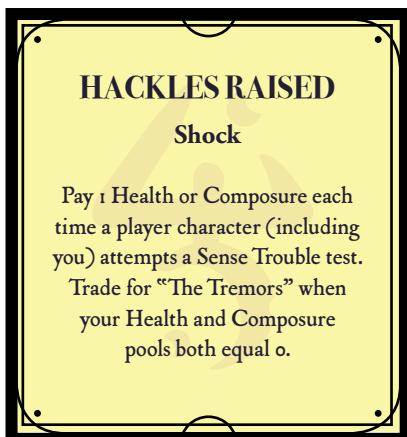
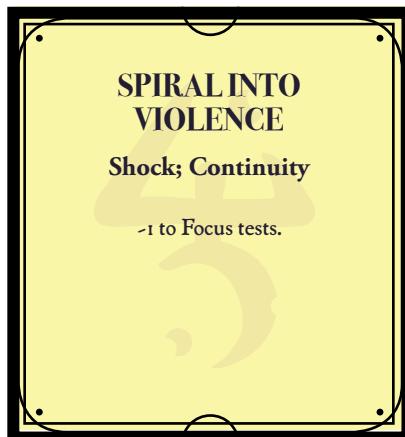
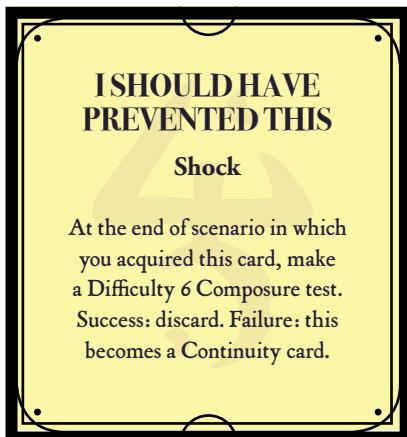
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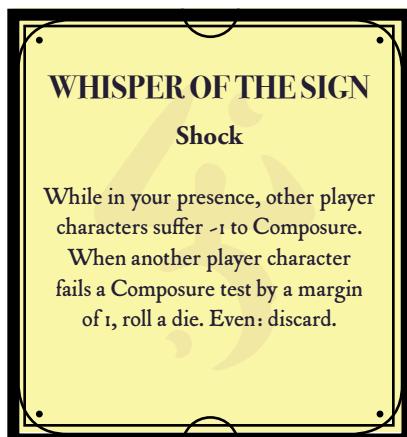
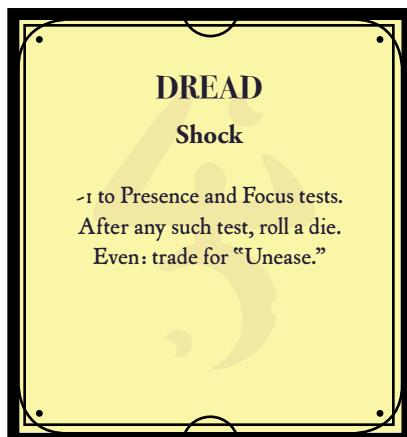
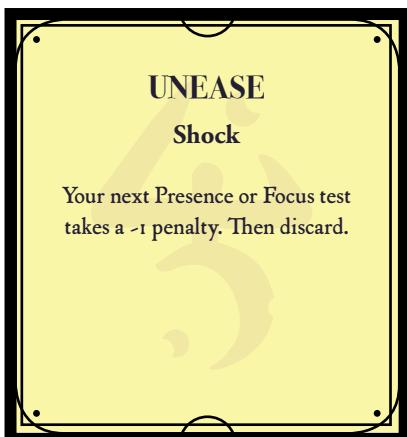
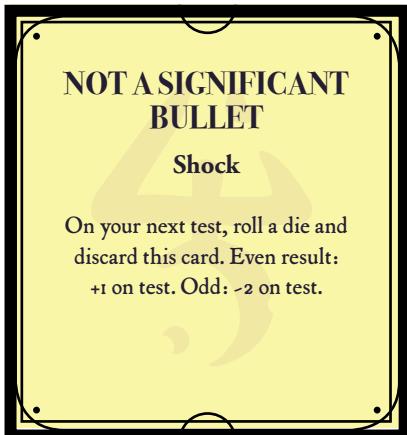
### Shock; Continuity

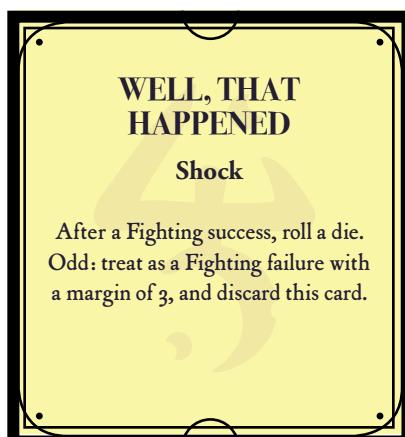
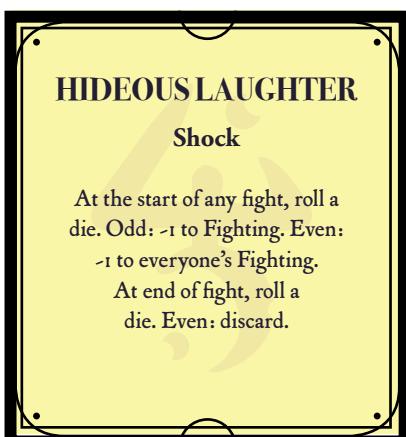
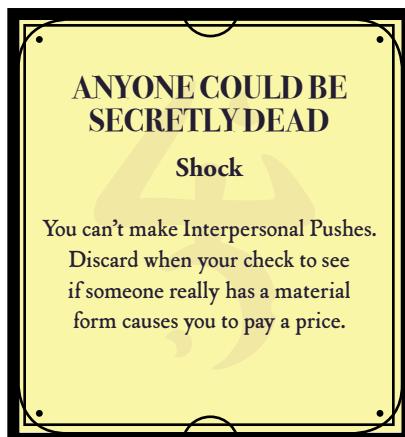
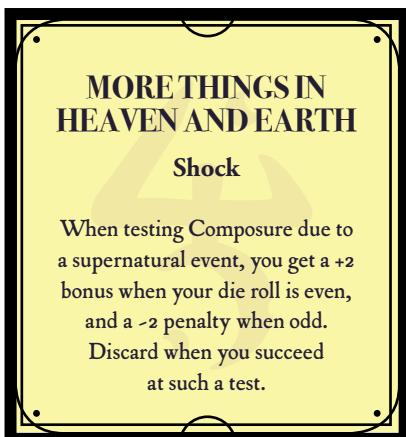
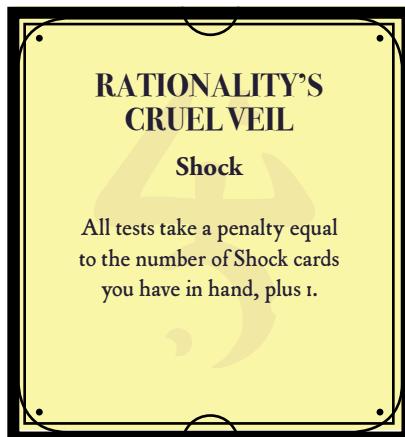
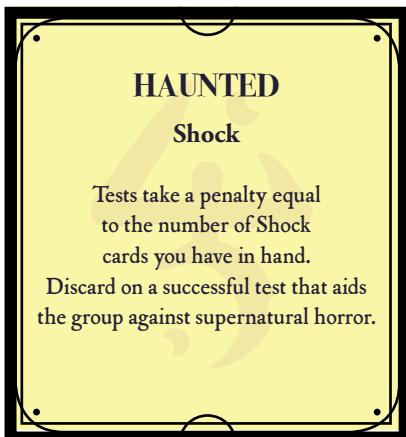
-1 to Presence tests if the current scenario has yet to reveal information regarding your strange cosmic significance. +1 to Presence tests if it has.

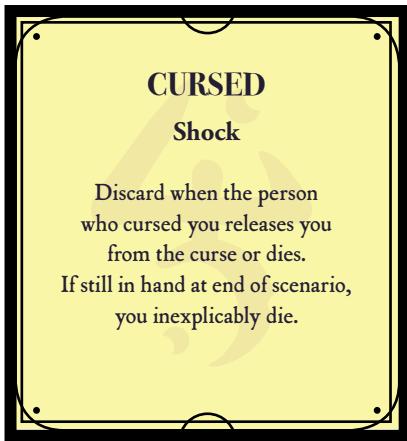
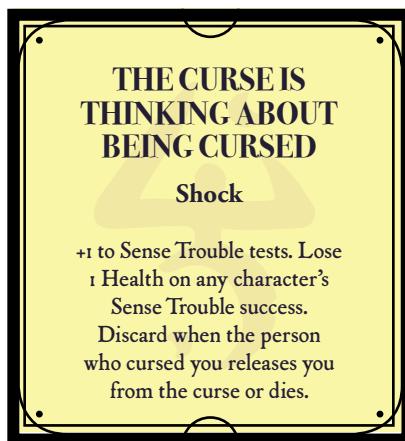
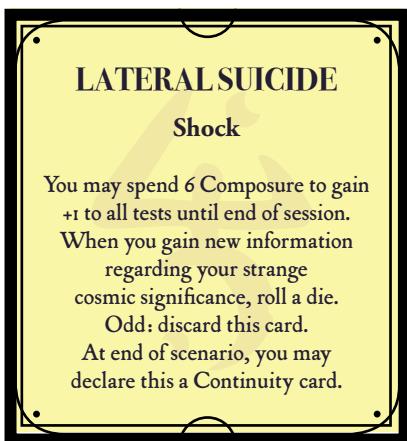
Any time you learn a new fact about your cosmic significance you may choose to discard this card.











# APPENDICES

# THIS IS NORMAL NOW

## Character Sheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Player \_\_\_\_\_

Drive \_\_\_\_\_

### Investigative Abilities

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Pushes (2): 

### General Abilities

Athletics (Physical) \_\_\_\_\_

Health (Physical) \_\_\_\_\_

Composure (Presence) \_\_\_\_\_

Mechanics (Focus) \_\_\_\_\_

Driving (Physical) \_\_\_\_\_

Preparedness (Presence) \_\_\_\_\_

Fighting (Physical) \_\_\_\_\_

Sense Trouble (Presence) \_\_\_\_\_

First Aid (Focus) \_\_\_\_\_

Sneaking (Focus) \_\_\_\_\_

### Familiar Face

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### Freaking Weird Moment

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# HOW TO SOLVE A CASE

In *The Yellow King Roleplaying Game* you play people who solve occult mysteries inspired by a weird, reality-bending phenomenon.

In each of the game's four sequences the premise differs.

In *Paris*, you are art students in 1895, recently arrived in the City of Lights. Your participation in the Bohemian world brings you into contact with the occult secrets of a dread entity, the King in Yellow. Although you are not trained investigators, your adventurous instincts lead you into exciting trouble. Soon you find yourselves gathering clues and interviewing witnesses with the avidity of Sherlock Holmes or Auguste Dupin.

In *The Wars*, you belong to a squad of French soldiers engaged in the Continental War of 1947. When you encounter Carcosan mystery, you use your military problem-solving abilities, from intelligence gathering to interrogation, to learn what unspeakable menaces stalk the battlefield.

In *Aftermath*, set in the present day in an alternate America, you are ex-insurgents who helped bring down the sinister Castaigne regime. As you try to make

new lives for yourselves, you find that the old dictators left behind supernatural enemies, fugitive war criminals, and parageometrical enigmas. Using the talents you honed in the underground, you find out what's what and do just that.

Finally, in *This Is Normal Now*, you play mundane counterparts of your *Aftermath* characters. Although apparently ordinary people, you feel oddly impelled to poke into bizarre manifestations. These lead you to the monsters and megalomaniacs hidden beneath the veneer of humdrum reality. It turns out that even in this world you show a knack for gathering, assimilating, and acting on information.





Whether you play all of these settings or just one, these tips will help you to play your roles, wringing clues from the world around you.

1. **Talk to People.** In your quest for the truth about the Yellow Sign, you may now and then find an important physical clue—a telltale matchbook cover, a burned photograph, a freezer with a preserved, not-quite-human corpse stored in it. Rarely will you be able to piece the whole story together without speaking to witnesses, informants, and suspects. Depending on the setting, these might be artists, models, crooks, cops, ex-revolutionaries, regime holdouts, marketing influencers, or social media stars. Approach them, get a sense of who they are, and figure out the best way to get them to reveal themselves to you.
2. **Talk in Person.** Quick phone calls get you information from individuals uninvolved in the case—clerks, librarians, desk sergeants, and the like. But when someone might be carrying out the wishes of the tattered King, you won't get the real scoop without staring them in the face.

3. **Talk to Scary People.** Finding out who did bad things means talking to bad people. In person. Yes, it's a risk. But this is a game of horror adventure. Go to them, before they come at you.
4. **Choose Cover Stories Wisely.** When talking to scary people, you may find it expedient to approach them under false pretense. Make sure though, that the ruse you adopt doesn't stop you from asking the real questions. Be prepared to come clean and set your story aside if that's the only way to get at the truth.
5. **Information is the Cure for Speculation.** Whenever you get stuck, get out and gather more info. Investigative scenarios can bog down into extended speculative debate between players about what could be happening. Don't guess—confirm! When more than one possible explanation ties together the clues you've gathered, you need to start ruling out possibilities. That means leaving your HQ and sticking your necks out to get the facts.

## When Player Characters Fight

We're tucking these rules here in our final appendix, as you'll need them rarely if ever. Ordinarily a physical struggle between members of the main cast tells you that the story has gone seriously sideways.

Still, in horror stories the protagonists now and then have to square off against each other. They might get possessed, suffer perceptual delusions, or be forced to do battle in a death-trap filled basement.

When threat of PC vs. PC violence sparks from a player choice, warn the one escalating to fratricidal violence that the system favors the sympathetic defender over the murderous aggressor—as stories tend to do when protagonists come to blows.

### Aggressor and Defender

Based on the events narrated by the group so far, the GM identifies which characters are the aggressors and which the defenders.

This becomes obvious in context: the character or group of characters who escalate from talking to fighting are the aggressors. Those being attacked are the defenders.

In the oddball case when both seem to start the fight at the same moment, choose the side with the player most responsible for steering the story to this point. If that doesn't make sense either, ask an involved player to roll a die. On an even roll, treat that player's side

as defenders. On an odd result, they're the attackers.

Usually fights have one aggressor and one defender. Scraps featuring multiple player characters on one or both sides happen less often. It is conceivable that supporting characters may take part on one or both sides as well, though their effect on the outcome is indirect.

### Define Objectives

The aggressor(s) starts by defining an objective, drawing from a slightly adjusted version of the familiar list:

**Kill:** Kill all defenders.

**Render Helpless:** Render defenders helpless and unable to escape for the time being. Killing helpless comrades requires an extremely tougher Composure test to avoid lasting trauma.

**Block:** Stop defenders from moving past you.

**Drive Away:** Keep fighting until the defenders retreat, leaving you safely in control of your current position.

An aggressor can't select Escape as an objective. Until the aggressor starts a fight, the defenders are not a threat to escape from.

**Escape with a Captive:** Grab a defender, then flee to a position of safety no one else is attempting to hold or protect. Pick the defender you want to grab.

**Gain an Item:** Grab a portable, easily seized item held by a defender, then flee with it to a position of safety where defenders can't interfere with you.

**Overrun:** Get past the defenders, who are physically standing in your way.

Then the defending side defines objectives:

**Kill:** Kill all aggressors. (An unlikely but possible choice.)

**Render Helpless:** Render aggressors helpless and in your custody. Killing helpless comrades requires an extremely tougher Composure test to avoid lasting trauma.

**Block:** Stop aggressors from moving past you.

**Drive Away:** Keep fighting until the aggressors are forced to retreat.

**Escape:** Disengage from, or avoid engagement with, the aggressors, evading any ensuing pursuit.

**Escape with a Captive:** Grab a defender, then flee to a position of safety no one else is attempting to hold or protect. Pick the defender you want to grab. Available only against multiple aggressors; otherwise, choose either Render Helpless or Escape.

**Gain an Item:** Grab a portable, easily seized item held by an aggressor, then flee with it to a position of safety where aggressors can't interfere with you.

### Specify Weapons

Ask each character to specify the weapons they're using, if any.

### Assign Difficulties

The base Difficulties for the upcoming Fighting tests start at 4.

Add 2 to the Difficulty for characters fighting to Kill.

Where one side is outnumbered, subtract the number of combatants on the outnumbered side from the number they're fighting, and add it to the outnumbered side's Difficulty.

If the GM can see from story context that one side should have an advantage over the other, the disadvantaged group adds 1-2 points to its Difficulty target, with 1 reflecting a detectable advantage and 2 a glaringly significant one.

### Make Fighting Tests

All Combatants make Fighting tests.

### Identify the Victor

When all aggressors fail their tests, the defenders attain their objective, even if all defenders also failed.

When everyone fails, a stalemate results and no one attains their objectives. Both sides suffer embarrassment and possible minor harm, but are unable to resolve their conflict with force.

When at least one aggressor succeeds, the GM asks for each participant's margin. Add margins for successful combatants to the total for their side, while subtracting margins for characters who failed their tests. Compare the total margins for each side. If the defenders' total equals or exceeds the aggressors, the defenders win and attain their objectives. Otherwise, the aggressors win and attain theirs.

## Check for Injuries

If a side attained its objective and the objective was Kill, all characters on the losing side make Difficulty 6 Health tests. On a success, the character takes a Major Injury. On a failure, the character immediately dies. A character with two Injuries already in hand will die no matter what, rendering the test redundant.

Losers against opponents who were not trying to Kill take Minor Injuries if they succeeded at Fighting and Major Injuries if they failed. As always, a Final Injury card kills.

Regardless of objective, members of the winning side must pay a Toll of 3, from any combination of Fighting, Athletics, and Health, to avoid injury. Those declining to pay the Toll take a Major Injury if they failed their Fighting tests, and a Minor Injury if they succeeded.

Injuries vary according to the weapons used by the victim's opponents.

When opponents used differing weapons, the GM decides which one dishes out the Injury. Choose according to the logic of the situation you've all described, the weapon wielded by the opponent with the highest test result, or arbitrarily, if no obvious answer presents itself.

**Unarmed:** Bruised/Battered

**Knife:** Nicked/Stabbed

**Blunt Instrument:** Seeing Stars/  
Dented Skull

**Sword/Other Large Blade:**

Superficial Laceration/Run Through

**Gun:** Powder Burn/GSW

## Narrate Results

Knowing who won, and who got injured, guide the players to describe what happens. Invite the aggressors to describe what they're doing first, then the defenders, then have the victors (if any) lay out the fight's end conditions.

When multiple characters fight on a single side, start the narration with failed tests first, then move on to the successes.

## Composure Tests

Use this step only if one or more player characters died in the fight.

All participants make Difficulty 6 Composure tests, with the following modifiers:

- +2 for each dead character after the first
- +1 for aggressors, regardless of who died
- an additional +1 for aggressors, if one or more defenders died
- +1 for defenders, if aggressors died
- -2 if aggressors were possessed or otherwise did not choose to attack

Successful tests result in a Minor Shock. Failures get a Major Shock. Aggressors and defenders get different shocks.

**Aggressors:** Blood Debt/  
Fratricide

**Defenders:** I Should Have  
Prevented This/Spiral into  
Violence

## PC VS. PC QUICK REFERENCE

1. GM identifies aggressor.
2. Define objectives:
  - (a) Aggressor: Kill, Render Helpless, Block, Drive Away, Escape with Captive, Gain an Item, Overrun.
  - (b) Defender: Kill, Render Helpless, Block, Drive Away, Escape, Escape with Captive, Gain an Item.
3. Combatants specify weapons.
4. GM assigns Difficulties: Base 4, +2 if fighting to Kill; +1 per additional combatant if outnumbered; +1 to +3 for situational modifiers if disadvantaged.
5. All combatants make Fighting tests.
6. GM uses their results to identify the victor (if any):
  - (a) All aggressors fail = defender wins.
  - (b) Everyone fails = stalemate.
  - (c) Otherwise, side with highest total margin wins.
7. Participants check for Injuries.
  - (a) Losers whose opponents were fighting to Kill make Difficulty 6 Health tests, taking Major Injuries on success or dying on failure.
  - (b) Losers whose opponents weren't fighting to Kill take Major Injuries if their Fighting tests failed and Minor Injuries if they succeeded.
  - (c) Victors pay a Toll of 3 or take a Major Injury if they failed their Fighting tests, or a Minor Injury if they succeeded.
8. The group narrates the fight.
9. If anyone died, survivors make Composure tests. Base Difficulty 6, +2 for each dead character after the first; +1 for aggressors, regardless of who died; an additional +1 for aggressors, if one or more defenders died; +1 for defenders, if aggressors died; -2 if aggressors were possessed or otherwise did not choose to attack.

**Example**

Having perhaps insufficiently researched the subject of legendary vampires, *Paris* characters Stefan (played by Gianni) and Barron (played by Ana) have decided to storm the manor of the woman who styles herself the Countess Potocki. Inside waits Gus (played by Tsing), under her mental control. She commands Gus to shoot them as they come through the back door.

The vampire-influenced Gus is clearly the aggressor. That makes Stefan and Barron the defenders.

The Countess wants her visitors alive, so she can keep them captive and incise excerpts from *The King in Yellow* on their flesh. Her command translates to the objective Render Helpless.

Ana and Gianni, realizing that the plan has gone awry, decide that their characters simply want to Escape.

Gus' new vampire paramour has given him a gun. Ana and Gianni agree that they wouldn't have had weapons at the ready: they're fighting unarmed.

Tsing's Difficulty will be 5: the base of 4, plus 1 for being outnumbered.

The defenders' Difficulty starts at 4. You decide that they are likely surprised to see their friend blasting away at them with a pistol, increasing that by 1, to 5.

Time for Fighting tests. Mercifully, you decide that Tsing still gets to decide how many Fighting points to spend on his

attempt. Sensibly, he goes for 0. However, he rolls a 5—a success all on its own.

Gianni spends 2 Fighting points and rolls a 6, for a total of 8, also a success.

Ana spends 1 Fighting and rolls a 2, for a total of 3—a failure.

The aggressor has succeeded, but so has a defender. That means that you identify the victor by comparing margins.

Tsing got exactly what he needed to succeed, so his margin is 0.

Gianni succeeded with a margin of 2, and Ana failed by a margin of 2, for a total margin of 0.

With margins equal, the victory goes to the defender.

Checking for Injuries, you start with the vanquished, Gus. Because he succeeded, he takes only a Minor Injury, from the unarmed category: "Bruised."

Each victor can escape harm by paying a Toll of 3. Ana failed and would otherwise take a Major Injury. She pays 2 points from Health and 1 from Athletics to not do that.

It's early in the session, so Stefan elects to save the points and take the Injury. He succeeded on his Fighting test, so he only takes the Minor Injury associated with a gun shot: Powder Burn.

Now that you know who wins and at what cost, you guide the narration.

*You:* Okay, Gus, you start this off by blasting away at them when they open the door. What happens?

*Tsing:* I fire wildly, tears of frustration streaming down my face. Despite my best attempts

I can't help but use my very best marksmanship. One of my shots gets uncomfortably close to Stefan's skull.

*You:* Barron, you don't do so well. What happens?

*Ana:* With splinters flying as his bullets hit the door frame, I fall backwards into the garden, yelling "Have I been hit? Have I been hit?"

*You:* Stefan, you're the one who decides how this goes, and it ends with Gus taking a bruising. Describe it!

---

*Gianni:* I pick up an umbrella stand by the door and hurl it at his legs, causing him to lose his balance and hit the wall with his face. That leaves him dazed, giving me time to haul Barron to his feet—

*Ana:* "I'm hit, I'm hit!"

*Gianni:* "No, those are just splinters! Run!" And we scarper across the garden and over its wall to get away.

## Investigative Ability Worksheet

Player name				
Character name				
Accounting (A)				
Architecture (A)				
Art History (A)				
Bullshit Detector (I)				
Bureaucracy (I)				
Computers (T)				
Cop Talk (I)				
Electronic Surveillance (T)				
Flattery (I)				
Forensic Anthropology (T)				
History (A)				
Inspiration (I)				
Intimidation (I)				
Intuition (T)				
Leadership (I)				
Medicine (T)				
Negotiation (I)				
Occultism (A)				
People Person (I)				
Photography (T)				
Psychology (A)				
Reassurance (I)				
Research (A)				
Science (A)				
Streetwise (I)				
Trivia (A)				

## Relative Challenge Table

Relative Challenge	Difficulty (Escape)	Difficulty (Other)	Difficulty (Kill)	Toll
Weak	2	3	4	0
Tough but Outmatched	2	3	5	0
Evenly Matched	3	4	5	1
Superior	3	4	6	2
Vastly Superior	3	5	7	3
Overwhelming	4	7	8	4
Too Awful to Contemplate	5	8	10	6

## Group Matrix

Player	Character	Civilian Occupation	Drive	Freaking Weird Moment	Parallels

## Modern Shocks Table

Situation	Difficulty	Minor Shock	Major Shock
You See a Rampager But It is Not Currently Rampaging	3	Close Call	Edgy
You View Supernaturally Aided Propaganda	3	Susceptible	Ideological Capture
A Familiar Public Place Becomes a Site of Horror	4	No Safe Place	Awful Association
A Military Grade Weapon is Used Against You	4	Gun Shy	Under Fire
A New Personal Obligation Distracts from the Investigation	4	Harried	Overwhelmed
An Enemy Enters, or Manifests in, Your Home	4	Homebound	Fortified
Bad Hallucinogenic Trip	4	Melted Perceptions	Nothing is Real
Carcosan Magic or Science is Changing Your Body	4	“Does This Look Weird?”	Body Horror
Something Absurd Turns Out to be Deadly	4	Overconfident	Hideous Laughter
Unearthly Sounds Plague You	4	Unearthly Sounds	Auditory Hallucination
Weird Reaction to Your Pharmasocial Prescription	4	Proprioception Dysmorphia	Identity Decentralization
While in Danger, You Discover You Have No Data or WiFi	4	Cut Off	On Your Own

Situation	Difficulty	Minor Shock	Major Shock
You Attract Unwelcome Publicity	4	Sleepless Nights	You Went Viral
You Become an Unwilling Experimental Subject	4	Lab Coat Unease	Lab Coat Terror
You Damaged Someone's Reintegration and It Messed Them Up	4	Reintegration Regret	Reintegration Remorse
You Discover That a Past Traumatic Event Had a Supernatural Origin	4	Pack Rat	My Collection Will Never Betray Me
You Feel an Invasive Presence in Your Mind	4	Psi Probe	In Your Mind
You Gained a Fighting Bonus by Carrying the Yellow Sign	4	Stirred Up	Violent Side
You Go Online to Find the News Dominated by a Horrifying Event (Unrelated to Your Current Situation)	4	Trending Trauma	Omnipresent Horror
You Hear a Pop Tune as Something Terrible Happens	4	This Note's for Grue	Murder Music
You Realize That the Person You're Talking to Isn't Human	4	Rattled	Pervasive Distrust
You Realize the Cops Won't or Can't Help	4	This One's on You	Through the Looking Glass

Situation	Difficulty	Minor Shock	Major Shock
You Realize You're Under Surveillance	4	Every Breath You Take	Every Move You Make
You See an Unknown Person Killed or Maimed in an SRI	4	Primal Outrage	Primal Bloodlust
You Take Possession of a Commonplace Item That Bears a Curse	4	Eerie Object	Cursed Item
You Witness an SRI in Which No One is Seriously Hurt	4	Edgy	Hyper-Vigilant
You, an Ordinary Person, Perform an Act of Heroism	4	Spotlight Hog	Messiah Complex
Your Private Info Appears Online	4	Raw Nerve	Under a Microscope
An Intruder Has Been Living in Your Home	5	Invaded	Defiled
Carcosa Is Somehow in Your Phone or Computer	5	Scrub the System	They're in Your Auxiliary Brain
You Get Swatted	5	Coulda Been Hurt	Coulda Been Killed
You Learn That Your Actions Led to a Fatal SRI Reprisal	5	Nagging Guilt	Gnawing Guilt
You Meet a Past or Alternate Incarnation	5	Déjà Who?	Me Again
Your Actions Led to a Nationally Traumatizing News Event	5	Blowback	Unforgivable
You Kill a Past or Alternate Incarnation	7	Well, That Happened	Lateral Suicide

# THIS IS NORMAL NOW

## SCENARIO WORKSHEET

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Phonechecker:

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### Dave's Status

- Dead
- Shot but Alive
- Not Shot
- Transformed
- Dead but Ambulatory

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### Kim's Status

- Escaped
- Arrested

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# EVERYTHING IS NORMAL AND NOTHING IS REAL

Finally, in the concluding installment of *The Yellow King Roleplaying Game*, you're back in our world, in the present day. You're ordinary folks now. Safe in a world of memes and selfies, of hot new night spots, of killer apps and disruptive business models.

Wait. You find those buzzwords disturbing?

A horrible thought occurs. What if the sinister play that started it all is the original meme, the meme to end all memes? Does a corrupting force stoke our fears, feast on our nightmares, and seek to bring modernity crashing down all around us?

Looks like you still have some investigating to do. And soon you'll see that you're everything but ordinary.

This volume contains:

- **Character generation**, including abilities keyed to today's world.
- Revelations of the **weirdness deluge** right around the corner, from the assault of the rampagers to the mental techniques of denial required to cope with it.
- **Organizations** to infiltrate, ally with, or expose, from pharmasocial executives to cultists of Hali, from gnosis-damaged forum dwellers to ill-defined off-books agencies.
- **Modern Shocks** for our dopamine draining, 24/7 state of paradigm panic.
- Up-to-the-minute **foes**, from devourers of attention to monstrous netizens who should never read the comments.
- A cast of supporting characters to **people** your mysteries.
- Choices for your GM in shaping **Carcosa and its royals** to fit your game.
- Advanced techniques of the **GM Masterclass**.
- **Card design** principles for creating custom Shock and Injury cards.
- A complete **scenario**, *Entanglement*. Watch out for doppelgängers, before they watch out for you!