

# The Premiere of the King

An Original Scenario For $7^{\rm th}$  Edition Call of Cthulhu by Jonathan Baxter

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# A KING'S PREMIERE

This scenario pits the Investigators against a sinister cultist's plot to produce "The King in Yellow" for the big screen, thereby introducing the madness-inducing story to America on a massive scale.

#### Prelude: The Dark Side of Tinseltown

Hollywood in the 1920s. The film industry is booming. Americans of all ages flock to "nickelodeons" to watch the latest film entertainment from their favorite stars. Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks are huge box office draws. Young women from around the country travel to Hollywood with stars in their eyes and dreams of making it big in Tinseltown. When most of these women fail to break into this ruthless industry, some go missing, and disappear into the underworld...

The scenario opens with the Investigators arriving in Hollywood to track down a missing young woman named Elle Flynn. They can be family, friends, private investigators, or reporters. Ideally, at least one will have some tie to the movie industry that would facilitate their first meeting with a big-shot Hollywood producer.

Elle Flynn: Young, beautiful, and naïve, Elle was the prettiest girl in her hometown of Ames, Iowa. The winner of the local "Mary Pickford" contest, she won a ticket to Hollywood and left home with stars in her eyes and visions of glory on the West Coast.

Unfortunately, she quickly learned the hard way that breaking into the movie industry wasn't as easy as she thought. Failing an audition for a major movie, she fell victim to the sinister forces that preyed on young, aspiring starlets.

Representatives from the local organized crime syndicate, involved in booze, drugs, and smut films, noticed Elle, groomed her, and got her hooked on heroin. Elle was looking ahead to a sad life in the 1920s porn industry when her path crossed with a famous movie star who had his own dark proclivities...

The Investigators are acting on a tip that Elle was last scene auditioning for the famous producer, Manny DeMarco, the head of Thule Studios. They have arranged a meeting with the famous producer. Arriving, they are shown into his office. The blinds to his windows are drawn, and slanted slats of light illuminate the murky room. A shroud of cigarette smoke hangs over the office. Manny, a short, squat man with a receding hairline and a pencil-thin mustache speaks rapidly with expressive movements of his hands.

A Spot Hidden roll reveals a copy of a script entitled, *The King in Yellow: An Adapted Screenplay*, lying in a stack of scripts on his desk.

Manny is short and brusque with the Investigators and says he doesn't remember Elle. Successful Charm of Fast-Talk rolls can prompt the following: "I can't remember this dame. I got thousands of dolls auditioning for me each year. I will tell you one thing though," he leans forward. "A lotta these girls who don't make the cut here, end up working in Chinatown. More than a few end up in *The Dragon's Court...* or in one of Frankie Faust's movies.

His tips should point the Investigators in a direction to start their inquiries. Should they strike out with de Marco, they could glean some clues from his secretary on the way out.

Behind the Scenes: The screenplay has been submitted to Thule Productions by a cult that worships Hastur. The cult is lead by film star Basil Torrance. By adapting the sinister play to a script, the cult hopes to have the story reach a mass audience through the medium of film. Torrance is directing the film and is using his status as a celebrity to help it reach the largest audience. The cult's end goal is to have the entire world fall under the spell of the screenplay and join them in their reverence of the Yellow King.

De Marco is sane when the Investigators meet him. He will shortly read the screenplay and become increasingly less sane as the adventure progresses.

# Chapter One: "It's Chinatown..."

#### The Dragon's Court

In Chinatown, the Investigators will discover that *The Dragon's Court* is an opium den run by the mob. Many of the women there were aspiring actresses. Now addicts, they "entertain" customers at the behest of the gangster owners.

To get in, the Investigators have to get past the intimidating doorman. They need a reference from a member to get into the club. Without that, it would be a hard Fast-Talk, Persuade, or extreme Intimidate roll to get past the doorman. Name-dropping Torrance or de Marco will help, but failed rolls will make the doorman suspicious, and he will pay closer attention to them as they explore the premises.

Inside, the first floor is lined with exotic Persian carpets, and the windows are covered with heavy drapes. The place is redolent of opium smoke, and the atmosphere is hazy and torpid. The rooms to the left are occupied by well dressed, but thoroughly stoned, men and women. The pool room to the right is where the "heavies" hang out. In addition to the doorman, there are two other goons responsible for maintaining security at *The Dragon's Court*.

Eliciting information about Elle from the guests will be difficult due to their collective narcotic stupor. If the Investigators are too overt with their questioning, they will attract the attention of the gangsters. The "madam" of the place, Madame Fang, will offer the Investigators opium. Taking the drug will help build rapport with the other patrons of the place and help maintain their cover, (bonus die for social skill rolls with the patrons and staff), but the drug's effects will greatly reduce any other skill checks the Investigators make (penalty die for physical skill checks).

The upstairs is off-limits, but if the Investigators find a way to sneak upstairs they will find one of the club's girls stretched out on a bed in the pink room. She can provide some more information about Elle before she passes out.

In the next room, there is a disturbing set up: studio lights and a camera set up around a bed. The screen behind the bed is emblazoned with the Yellow Sign. If the Investigators think to grab any of the reels of film from the camera, they can find clues on it later.

The last room contains a wardrobe filled with costumes for the "films" shot here. Among all the bodices and nightgowns, there is a satyr's mask and fur-lined breeches...A Spot Hidden roll will uncover a cigarette case (engraved with the initials "B.T.") in the pocket of the breeches. Another Spot Hidden roll will reveal a small sword tucked in the back of the wardrobe. One can only imagine what it is doing here.

There is a shelf of books in the final room. A perusal will reveal several tomes of eldritch lore, including a hardcover copy of the play *The King in Yellow*. [The idea here is to keep placing copies of the text in the path of the Investigators until one of them finally reads it, allowing madness to ensue.] A Spot Hidden roll will reveal a hidden lock. A successful Lock Pick roll will cause the bookcase to rotate aside, revealing a hidden alcove. The alcove contains several reels of film, stacks of cash, balls of opium, and a .38 revolver.

The Investigators should eventually be discovered by one of the "heavies" prompting a violent confrontation. The Investigators will either need to defeat the three mobsters or escape through the second floor window, resulting in a chase across the rooftops (see "Chase" map).

At the conclusion of the Dragon's Court episode, the Investigators should have the mob after them (prompting a sense of threat and urgency throughout the remaining adventure).

After their investigations in Chinatown, the Investigators should have learned:

- Elle used to work at *The Dragon's Court* and was addicted to opium and heroin.
- The film star, Basil Torrance, used to frequent *The Dragon's Court*, and Elle was involved with him.

- Viewing any of the film reels will reveal a bizarre erotic movie, featuring Elle and a man wearing a satyr costume (Torrance). The movie contains scenes of pagan rituals and bizarre fertility rites. It is more occult than pornographic and prompts Sanity checks, o/d4. The Yellow Sign features prominently in the movie.
- Torrance has frequent occult themed parties at his Hollywood mansion. These are pretty exclusive events.
- Lately, Torrance has become obsessed with a mysterious new movie he is set to direct.

#### **Other Chinatown Venues:**

These venues could take on increasingly surreal atmospheres if the Investigators are dealing with sanity issues or still riding the effects of any drugs they used in *The Dragon's Court*.

## Fortuneteller's Shop

More for atmosphere than anything else, this location features a wizened Asian woman who reads tea leaves and gives strange mutterings about "a King whom Emperors have served."

#### Hermann's Chinese Theater

A dilapidated Oriental-style theater, this place is eerily empty when the Investigators arrive. It contains a movie projector that the Investigators can use to play any film reels they might have taken from *The Dragon's Court*. They will be unnerved when organ music plays suddenly, and a strange, pale, ghastly organ player emerges from the back and exits the theater, scowling at them fiercely.

Additionally, the outside of the theater will feature movie posters of the upcoming movie Basil Torrance will direct (movie poster handout.) The back of the poster will have the address to the apartment of the poster artist, Leland LaPonte.

## Chapter Two: Dark Night, Black Stars

The Investigators should be getting the idea they need to find Torrance to find out what happened to Elle. Getting ahold of one of the biggest stars in Hollywood won't be an easy task.

They could call Manny de Marco and request a favor. However, the effects of the screenplay are starting to take hold, and Manny isn't his usual self over the phone. He rambles and talks incoherently about a King and a Lake and a night with black stars. He drops a hint about a "rehearsal" at Torrance's mansion that evening.

Breaking and entering Manny's office after hours will uncover Torrance's address in his files. However, failed Stealth rolls will bring security guards, followed by police, down upon the Investigators.

If the Investigators noticed Leland LaPonte's address on the back of the movie poster, this will lead them to the artist's studio, which in turn can lead them to Torrance.

#### The Mad Artist

Leland LaPonte is a young, talented artist who handles much of the promotional art for Thule Studios. He is part of Basil Torrance's circle, and the madness of the Yellow Sign is deep with him.

When the Investigators arrive at LaPonte's modest apartment, no one answers the door. The landlord will tell them that LaPonte is a very private person and keeps to himself mostly. Lately, he hasn't left his apartment at all. The landlord assumes he is busy at work at his studio inside.

A successful Lockpick roll will open the artist's door. Alternatively, the Investigators could Charm/Fast Talk the landlord into letting them in.

Inside, the artist studio is a reflection of his descent into madness. Canvases abound with images of a "King in Yellow." The walls are scribbled with lines and poems from the play. A giant canvas features a fantastic working of the Yellow Sign (painting handout). The image has a .45 caliber bullet hole in the center and is decorated with the blood and brains of Leland LaPonte who turned away from his terrifying painting in his final moments and shot himself in the mouth with a pistol.

The artist's body is lying beneath the canvas. He has been dead for a least a day, and everyone will have to do Sanity Checks upon discovering his corpse. 0/1d4.

Spot Hidden rolls will reveal his journal (journal handout) which will contain clues about his mental state, the horrifying power of the play, and the sinister plans Torrance and his group have for introducing the play to the world.

A copy of the screenplay, A King in Yellow, is in the apartment.

There is also a handwritten invitation from Torrance to attend an event at his mansion that evening. (Invitation handout.)

#### The Torrance Mansion

Between the clues at the artist's studio and the conversations with Manny, the Investigators should be led to Torrance's Hollywood Hills mansion.

The Investigators will find the premises dark with the doors and windows locked. They can enter via successful Lock pick rolls or by forcing their way with a more overt form of entry.

Their obstacle will be an alert guard dog who will attack any trespasser. Shooting the dog will attract the police on an unfavorable luck roll. Quick thinking investigators could drug the dog with "treats" laced with opium from *The Dragon's Court*.

Once inside, they will find the mansion eerily deserted.

- The foyer contains a fountain and a statue of Torrance.
- The ballroom is empty, but unsettling music plays from a Victrola.
- The kitchen contains nothing except for knives the Investigators can use in a pinch.
- The memorabilia room contains posters of Torrance's major movies as will as souvenirs and awards from his films. A variety of weapons from some of Torrance's films are on display, including large sabers. A Spot Hidden roll will reveal signed posters from artist Leland LaPonte, which can lead the Investigators to his studio if they have not visited it already. Another Spot Hidden roll will discover a box of shotgun shells in the bookcase.
- The home theater can provide the Investigators with an opportunity to view some of the reels from *The Dragon's Court*, if they have not viewed them already.
- The upstairs is an entire floor of opulent bedrooms and more portraits and posters of Torrance. A copy of the screenplay, *The King in Yellow*, can be found by Torrance's bedside.
- The garage contains Torrance's roadster, which the Investigators could use for a speedy getaway.
   Several cans of gasoline are in the garage. There is a double-barreled twelve-gauge shotgun in the trunk.

If they do not eventually explore the basement, they will be led down there by the sound of chanting.

The basement is a wine cellar, which Torrance has repurposed into a stage for rehearsals of the upcoming movie.

When the Investigators enter, Torrance is in the process of conducting a rehearsal on a makeshift stage in front of a backdrop painted with the Yellow Sign.

"No, no, no!" he is screaming at the other actors. "You call that acting! That is a performance unworthy of the King!" He is slapping and kicking the other performers. "Again! Act 1, Scene 2D, from the top!"

An actress (playing Camilla) begins: "You, sir, should unmask."

An actor (playing the Stranger), clad in yellow robes with a pallid mask, responds, "Indeed?"

 $2^{\mathrm{nd}}$  Actress (Cassilda): "Indeed it's time. We have all laid aside disguise but you."

Stranger: "I wear no mask."

Camilla (terrified, aside to Cassilda): "No mask? No mask!"

"No, no, no!" Torrance screams. "You cannot play the King! Production starts in a week, and you still can't do Him justice!"

He pulls out a small sword and runs through the actor playing the Stranger. The man soundlessly crumples. (Sanity checks for the Investigators.) Torrance rips off the man's bloody costume and pulls it over himself. "I'll play the King myself!"

He dons the mask. "From the top!" The actors and actresses dumbly move to their marks, ignoring the body at their feet.

The Investigators will have to sneak through the wine cellar to explore for clues. If they investigate the center room, they will find it to be completely walled in with bricks and mortar. Behind several larges casks of Amontillado red wine, they will find a small aperture, through which trays of food can be inserted.

Peering inside, they will find a small padded room that contains only a mattress and a small drainage hole. Elle Flynn is standing in the center of the room, surrounded by torn pages (from the play). She is completely and irrevocably deranged.

If the Investigators begin a whispered conversation with her, she will babble about being a "Bride awaiting the arrival of the King" in her "nuptial chamber."

Back Story: Elle joined Torrance's cult and became a firm believer in the Yellow King. She beheld an apparition of the King, and he removed his mask and gazed at her, completely obliterating whatever vestiges of sanity she had left. While the other cult members are deranged, they have enough "wherewithal" to blend into normal society in order to propagate the goals of the cult. Elle can no longer do this, and so the cult members have hidden her away in this secret cell. The Investigators can get ideas of this from Elle's fractured, rambling conversation. There is nothing more the Investigators can do for the poor girl. The compassionate thing would be to put her out of her miserable, deranged existence.

Between talking with Elle and listening to Torrance rant at the actors, the Investigators can figure out the cult wishes to produce a film version of the play and that the play induces madness in anyone who views it.

A failed Stealth roll or failed Luck roll will cause the Cultists to notice the Investigators. Also, depending on the direction the Investigators lead their conversation with Elle, she might start screaming. The cultists will attack the Investigators to prevent their plot from being exposed. The Investigators will have to fight their way out of the basement and escape from the mansion.

Back at their safe haven, the Investigators will need to recover from any physical or psychological injuries and plan their next course of action. At this point, they should understand that:

- Torrance is heading a plot to produce a movie version of *The King in Yellow* with the intent to expose it to as large an audience as possible.
- Anyone who reads or views this play is destined for madness.
- They must stop the production of this film if they wish to save America (and most of the developed world, as well).

# **Chapter Three: Bringing Down the House**

At this point, the Investigators should be focused on disrupting production of the film. It is being shot in a film lot at the Thule Productions studios. Finding the lot shouldn't be too difficult, but infiltrating the studios will be a little trickier, as everyone in the studio requires proper identification.

Once the Investigators access the compound and enter the film lot, they will find production of the movie in progress. The set is a construction of the Lake of Hali. (Investigators may recognize this from their dreams.) Dozens of cast and crew mill around an artificial lake surrounded by cameras and lights. Basil, dressed as the King in Yellow, is standing by the main camera, directing. An identically dressed actor (his stand-in) sits behind the intricately painted backdrop on a studio chair. The set is crowded and busy, but the atmosphere is marked by an urgent, fanatical energy. Everyone works with quiet, focused intensity. The Investigators can access the catwalk overlooking the set or try to blend in with the cast and crew around the artificial lake.

The scene being prepared will involve Basil rowing out to the center of the lake in a boat and delivering a monologue.

The Investigators can attempt to disrupt the scene in a variety of ways. A fire could be effective, as the set is built largely with plywood. However, the artificial lake in the center could be used to extinguish any blazes.

One of the studio lights could be knocked into the water and provide an electrocution hazard for anyone who touches the water.

If the scene is not interrupted, the stand-in will get in the boat and row to the center of the lake, while Basil frames the shot. (Investigators will notice how much taller the double is, as compared to Basil.) As Basil directs the framing of the shot, the stand-in will turn toward the camera and lift his mask, revealing himself to be the (actual) King in Yellow. Depending on the location of the Investigators, they do not necessarily behold his face and are thus spared the madness-inducing gaze. The camera operator, on the other hand, keels over and collapses to the floor. Basil leaps over the body and begins the cranking the camera himself.

If the Investigators attempt to interrupt the shooting of the scene, the deranged cast and crew will attempt to stop them by any means necessary. From the center of the lake, the King will attempt to affix the Investigators with his sanity-shattering gaze.

If the Investigators do not interrupt the shooting, the King will record his scene and then step from the boat into the water and disappear beneath the surface, leaving only a tattered, yellow robe floating on the artificial lake.

"Cut," murmurs Basil. He reverently removes the reel of film from the camera. The object of the scenario for the Investigators now must be to destroy the film reel before Basil takes it to post-production and debuts it for the world to see.

#### Conclusion

If the Investigators can successfully disrupt the production of the film (and survive the scenario), all are rewarded with 1d12 Sanity. For simply surviving the scenario, they are rewarded with 1d4 Sanity. If the film is released to America, the stage is set for future scenarios dealing with a country that had gone mad on a national level.

#### The King in Yellow, an Adapted Screenplay:

Sanity Loss: 1d10

Cthulhu Mythos: +1/+4 percentiles

Mythos Rating: 15 Study: 1 week

Until an Investigator reads this script, viewing the Yellow Sign imparts no more than a sense of curiosity. Upon reading the script, viewing the Sign causes o/6 Sanity loss. Sanity point loss from the script or the Yellow Sign will cause the Investigator's dreams to start becoming haunted. Insanity resulting from the script or the Yellow Sign will cause the Investigator to become obsessed with Carcosa and the King in Yellow.

**Dream #1 (induced by the Yellow Sign or by reading the script)**: If an Investigator has lost Sanity points from viewing the Yellow Sign or reading the screenplay, he or she must make a Sanity roll before going to bed. If the roll fails, the Investigator is haunted by the following dreams. The dreams continue until a Sanity roll is successfully made.

The Investigator is trapped inside a silent film, running vainly from a mysterious presence he cannot escape.

1d3 Sanity Loss

#### Dream #2:

All is black and white, as in a movie. The only sound is the rattling of a film projector and creepy organ music. The Investigator is in a movie theater, trapped in the audience. We can't see what's on the screen, but the audience is reacting with fear and horror. The Investigator turns to his left and right and sees the audience members are now wearing yellow robes. The robes are in bright color against the black and white background of the dream world.

Rushing outside, the Investigator finds chaos in the streets: cars on fire, bodies everywhere, people rioting. The Investigator starts being chased by a yellow-robed mob when the dream ends and he or she wakes up in a cold sweat.

1d4 Sanity Loss

**Dream #3:** Unlike the previous dreams, this one is in color; although, it is saturated with a yellow hue.

The Investigator is alone in an alien world. The Investigator stands on the shores of a vast lake. Above the Investigator, on a hill, is a grand city with exotic minarets, cupolas, and towers.

Small waves lap against the Investigator's feet. Looking across the lake, the Investigator sees ripples emanating from the center of the lake. Something is rising from the water.

1d6 Sanity Loss

As long as nightmares of the Yellow Sign persist for the Investigator, this dream recurs with more and more of the Entity in the lake becoming visible before the dream ends. If the Entity in the Lake becomes fully visible, the Investigator gets the chance to make a Power roll and attempt to force him or herself awake from the dream. Should that fail, the Investigator beholds the god Hastur for a d10/d100 Sanity point loss.

## **NPCs and Handouts**

#### Manny de Marco, Influential Movie Producer

STR 45 CON 60 SIZ 65 DEX 50 INT 70
APP 50 POW 40 EDU 70 SAN 65 HP 12
DB: 0 Build: 0 Move: 7 MP: 0 Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl 30% (15/5), damage 1D3

Armor: none. Skills: Appraise 40

#### Madame Fang, Madam of The Dragon's Court

STR 45 CON 75 SIZ 40 DEX 60 INT 65 APP 70 POW 45 EDU 40 SAN 70 HP 11 DB: 0 Build: 0 Move: 9 MP: 0 Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl 30% (15/5), damage 1D3

Ivory Hairpin damage 1d3

(Brawl or Throw) Armor: none.

Skills: Charm 70%, Intimidate 60%, Spot Hidden 55%

Persuade 65%, Psychology 60%, Throw 50%

#### Mobster, Underworld Goon

STR 75 CON 65 SIZ 75 DEX 70 INT 60 APP 55 POW 60 EDU 40 SAN 60 HP 14 DB: +1d4 Build: 1 Move: 8 MP: 0 Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl 60% (30/12), damage 1D3 + DB

Brass Knuckles 1d3+1+DB

(Brawl)

.38 Auto 40% (20/8), Damage 1d10

(Firearms, Pistol)

Thompson SMG 35% (17/7) 1d10+2

(Firearms, SMG)

Dodge 40%

Armor: none.

Skills: Climb 30%, Drive Auto 30%, Intimidate 70%, Listen 30%, Psychology 30%, Stealth 40%, Spot Hidden 40%

#### Cultist Minion, Fanatical Devotee

STR 60 CON 65 SIZ 60 DEX 60 INT 45
APP 55 POW 40 EDU 60 SAN 0 HP 12
DB: 0 Build: 0 Move: 8 MP: 0 Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl 30% (15/6), damage 1D3

Knife 1d4+2+DB

Dodge 35% (17/7) Armor: none.

Skills: Climb 20%, Drive Auto 25%, Listen 30%, Stealth 30%,

Spot Hidden 35%

## Basil Torrance, Villainous Film Star and Cult Leader

STR 70 CON 70 SIZ 70 DEX 75 INT 75 APP 90 POW 80 EDU 70 SAN 0 HP 14 DB: +1d4 Build: 1 Move: 8 MP: 0 Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl 40% (20/8), damage 1D3 + DB

Short Sword 30% (15/6), 1d6+1+DB

Pearl-handled Colt

Revolver 35% (17/7), 1d10+2

Armor: none.

Skills: Charm 75%, Drive Auto 50%, Spot Hidden 50%,

Persuade 50%, Psychology 50%

#### The King in Yellow, Avatar of Hastur

STR 125 CON 530 SIZ 70 DEX 135 INT 250

POW 175 HP 60 DB: +1d6 Build: 2

Move: 15 (can appear/disappear at will) MP: 35

Armor: none

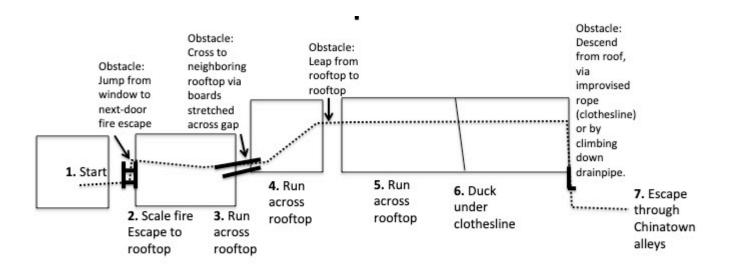
Spells: All Call/Contact Spells

Sanity Loss: When unmasked, 1d3/1d10

Gaze of the Yellow King (one attack/round): Induces paroxysms of fear by staring at the target, costing the unfortunate 1d6 Sanity points per round while the King in Yellow focuses upon them (costing the King 3 magic points per round). To avoid the gaze for a round, the target must

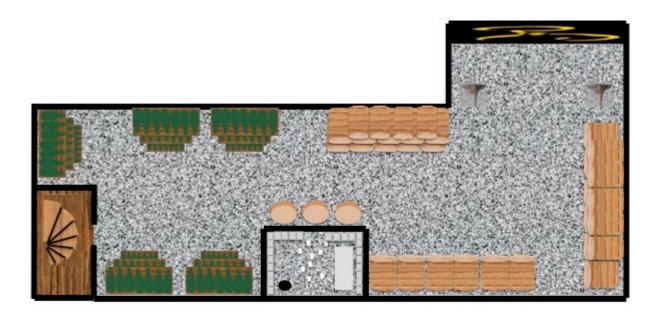
make an Extreme POW roll.

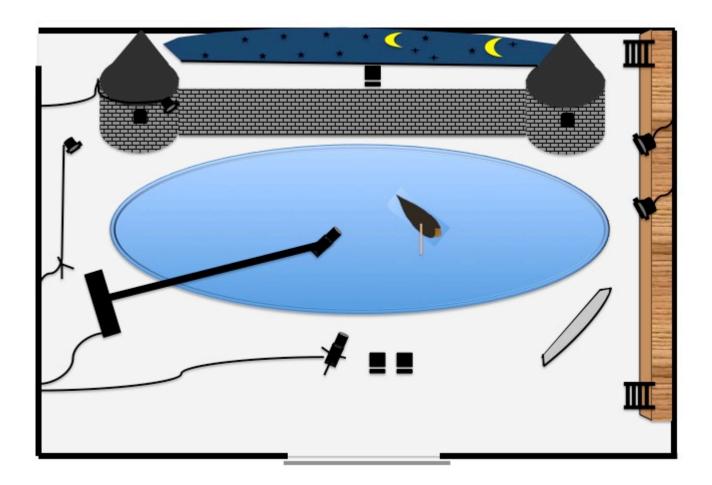


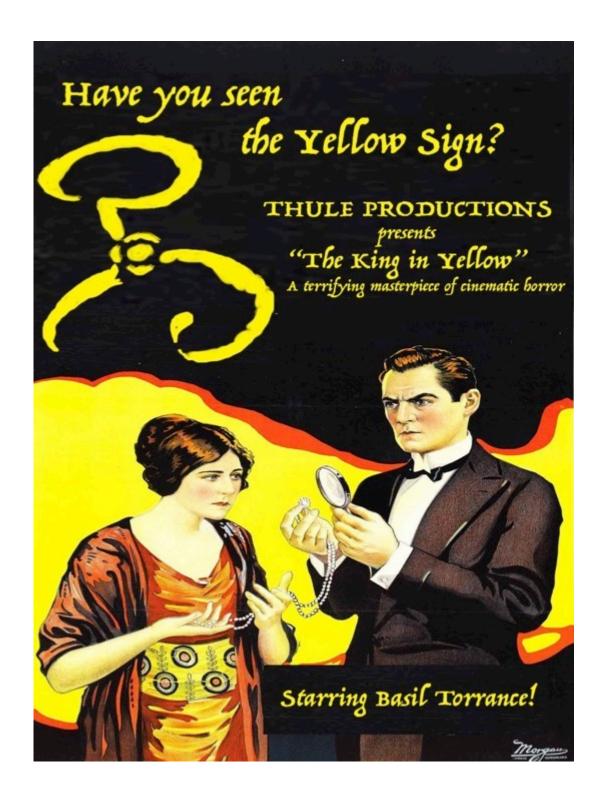




- Foyer Ballroom 1. 2.
- 3. Pool
- 4.
- 7. Memorabilia Room
- 8. Home Theater
- 9. Garage
- Stairs to Basement
- 5.
- 6. Dining Room









Jan. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1928

A new screen project with Basil Torrance. Very exciting to be doing the promo artwork for the film. Basil is very enthusiastic about this play adaptation be is set to direct.

Jan. 3<sup>rd</sup> 1928

I can't get the play I read out of my mind. Its characters dominate my every waking moment. I try to work on my other projects, but all I can think of is that mysterious lake, the enigmatic King, and his coming...

Jan. 13th, 1928

My dreams are becoming ever more baunted now. I see myself at the shore of a silent lake, its waters lapping against a dark shore. Looking out across the black water, I see ripples spread from the center. There is something in the lake, and it is rising.

I must capture the essence of these dreams in my paintings. Carcosa....the lake of Hali...

Jan. 30th, 1928

Nothing else exists for me save the painting of my nightmares. I haven't left my apartment in days. The King is coming, and I am to be His herald...

# **Basil Torrance**

66 Hollywood Hills Dr.

Los Angeles, CA

February 13, 1928

Mr. Leland LaPonte Artist-in-Residence 4416 Chambers St. Los Angeles, CA

#### Dearest Leland:

Exciting news. Thule Studios has greenlit the Production. Shooting starts in a week. In addition to your poster work, we require your talents as a set painter. We will discuss details of this production at my home at 6 o'clock this evening. Your presence is requested. Important work awaits. The King Awaits.

Sincerely,

Basil Torrance