
THE KING IN YELLOW

By

Robert W. Chambers

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INTRODUCTION

The King in Yellow - named after a fictional play with the same title - is a book of short stories

by Robert W. Chambers, first published in 1895. The first half of the book features highly esteemed weird stories, and the book is described as a classic in the field of the supernatural.

The stories present in the book are:

1. "The Repairer of Reputations" – A powerful, weird story of egotism and paranoia that carries the imagery of the book's title.
2. "The Mask" – A dream story of art, love, and uncanny The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) science.
3. "In the Court of the Dragon" – A man is pursued by a sinister church organist who is after his soul.
4. "The Yellow Sign" – An artist is troubled by a sinister churchyard watchman who resembles a coffin worm.
5. "The Demoiselle d'Ys" – A ghost story, the theme of which anticipates H. G. Wells' "The Door in the Wall".
6. "The Prophets' Paradise" – A sequence of eerie prose poems that develop the style and theme of a quote from the fictional play The King in Yellow that introduces "The Mask".
7. "The Street of the Four Winds" – An atmospheric tale of an The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) artist in Paris who is The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) drawn to a The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) neighbor's room by a cat; the story ends with a macabre touch.
8. "The Street of the First Shell" – A war story set in the Paris Siege, 1870.
9. "The Street of Our Lady of the Fields" – Romantic American bohemians in Paris.
10. "Rue Barrée" – Romantic American bohemians in Paris, with a discordant ending that playfully reflects some of the tone of the first story.

The first *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) and fourth stories are set in an imagined future 1920s America, whereas the second and third *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) stories are set in Paris. The weird and haunting character gradually fades away during the remaining stories, and the last three are written in the romantic fiction style.

CHAPTER I. THE REPAIRER OF REPUTATIONS

I

"Ne railions pas les fous; leur folie dure plus longtemps que la nôtre.... Voila toute la différence."

Toward the end of the year 1920 the Government of the United States had practically completed the programme, adopted during the last months of President Winthrop's administration. The country was apparently tranquil. Everybody knows how the Tariff and Labour questions were settled. The war with Germany, incident on that country's seizure of the Samoan Islands, had left no visible scars upon the republic, and the temporary occupation of Norfolk by the *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) invading army had been forgotten in the joy over repeated naval victories, and the subsequent ridiculous plight of General Von Gartenlaube's forces in the State of New Jersey. The Cuban and Hawaiian investments had paid one hundred per cent and the territory of Samoa was well worth its cost as a coaling station. The country was in a superb state of defence. Every coast city had been well supplied with land fortifications; the army under the

parental eye of the General Staff, organized according to the Prussian system, had been increased to 300,000 men, with a territorial reserve of a million; and six magnificent squadrons of cruisers and battle-ships patrolled the six stations of the navigable seas, leaving a steam reserve amply fitted to control home waters. The gentlemen from the West had at last been constrained to acknowledge that a college for the training of diplomats was as necessary as law schools are for the training of barristers; consequently we were no longer represented abroad by incompetent patriots. The nation was prosperous; Chicago, for a moment paralyzed after a second great fire, had risen from its ruins, white and imperial, and more beautiful than the white city which had been built for its plaything in 1893. Everywhere good architecture was replacing bad, and even in New York, a sudden craving for decency had swept away a great portion of the existing horrors. Streets had been widened, properly paved and lighted, trees had been planted, squares laid out, elevated structures demolished and underground roads built to replace them. The new government buildings and barracks were fine bits of architecture, and the long system of stone quays which completely surrounded the island had been turned into parks which proved a god-send to the population. The subsidizing of the state theatre and state opera brought its own reward. The United States National Academy of Design was much like European institutions of the same kind. Nobody envied the Secretary of Fine Arts, either his cabinet position or his portfolio. The Secretary of Forestry and Game Preservation had a much easier time, thanks to the new system of National Mounted Police. We had profited well by the latest treaties with France and England; The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) the exclusion of foreign-born Jews as a measure of self-preservation, the settlement of the new independent negro state of Suaneë, the checking of immigration, the new laws concerning naturalization, and the gradual centralization of power in the executive all contributed to national calm and prosperity. When the Government solved the Indian problem and squadrons of Indian cavalry scouts in native costume were substituted for the pitiable organizations tacked on to the tail of skeletonized regiments by a former Secretary of War, the nation drew a long sigh of relief. When, after the colossal Congress of Religions, bigotry and intolerance were laid in their graves and kindness and charity began to draw warring sects together, many thought the millennium had arrived, at least in the new world which after all is a world by itself.

But self-preservation is the first law, and the United States had to look on in helpless sorrow as Germany, Italy, Spain and Belgium writhed in the throes of Anarchy, while Russia, watching from the Caucasus, stooped and bound them one by one.

In the city of New York the summer of 1899 was signalized by the dismantling of the Elevated Railroads. The summer of 1900 will live in the memories of New York people for many a cycle; the Dodge Statue was removed in that year. In the following winter began that agitation for the repeal of the laws prohibiting suicide which bore its final fruit in the month of April, 1920, when the first Government Lethal Chamber was opened on Washington Square.

I had walked down that day from Dr. Archer's house on Madison Avenue, where I had been as a mere formality. Ever since that fall from my horse, four years before, I had been troubled at times with pains in the back of my head and neck, but now for months they had been absent, and the doctor sent me away that day saying there was nothing more to be cured in me. It was hardly worth his fee to be told that; I knew it myself. Still I did not grudge him the money. What I

mind was the mistake which he made in *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) at first. When they picked me up from the pavement where I lay unconscious, and somebody had mercifully sent a bullet through my horse's head, I was carried to Dr. Archer, and he, pronouncing my *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) brain affected, placed me in his private asylum where I was obliged to endure treatment for insanity. At last he decided that I was well, and I, knowing that my mind had always been as sound as his, if not sounder, "paid my tuition" as he jokingly called it, and left. I told him, smiling, that I would get even with him for his mistake, *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) and he laughed heartily, and asked me to call once *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) in a while. I did so, hoping for a chance to even up accounts, *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) but *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) he gave me none, and I told him I would wait.

The fall from my horse had fortunately left no evil results; on the contrary it had changed my whole character for the better. From a lazy young man about town, I had become active, energetic, temperate, *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) and above all—oh, above all else—ambitious. There was only one thing which *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) troubled me, I laughed at my own uneasiness, and yet it troubled me.

During my convalescence I had bought and read for the first time, *The King in Yellow*. I remember after finishing the first act that it occurred to me that I had better stop. I started up and flung the book into the fireplace; the volume struck the barred grate and fell open on the hearth in the firelight. If I had not caught a glimpse of the opening words in the second act I should never have finished *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) it, but as I stooped to pick it up, my eyes became riveted to the open page, and with a cry of terror, or perhaps it *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) was of joy so poignant that I suffered in every nerve, I snatched the thing out of the coals and crept shaking to my bedroom, where I read it and reread it, and wept and laughed and trembled with a horror which at times assails me yet. This is the thing that troubles me, for I cannot forget Carcosa where black stars hang in the heavens; where the shadows of men's thoughts lengthen in the afternoon, when the twin suns sink into the lake of *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) Hali; and my mind will bear for ever the memory of the Pallid Mask. I pray God will curse the writer, as the writer has cursed the world with this beautiful, stupendous creation, terrible in its simplicity, irresistible in its truth—a world which now trembles *The King in Yellow* by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) before the King in Yellow. When the French Government seized the translated copies which had just arrived in Paris, London, of course, became eager to read it. It is well known how the book spread like an infectious disease, from city to city, from continent to continent, barred out here, confiscated there, denounced by Press and pulpit, censured even by the most advanced of literary anarchists. No definite principles had been violated in those wicked pages, no doctrine promulgated, no convictions outraged. It could not be judged by any known standard, yet, although it was acknowledged that the supreme note of art had been struck in *The King in*

Yellow, all felt that human nature could not bear the strain, nor thrive on words in which the essence of purest poison lurked. The very banality and innocence of the first act only allowed the blow to fall afterward with more awful effect.

It was, I remember, the 13th day of April, 1920, that the first Government Lethal Chamber was established on the south side of Washington Square, between Wooster Street and South Fifth Avenue. The block which had formerly consisted of a lot of shabby old buildings, used as cafés and restaurants for foreigners, had been acquired by the Government in the winter of 1898. The French and Italian cafés and restaurants were torn down; the whole block was enclosed by a gilded iron railing, and converted into a lovely garden with lawns, flowers and fountains. The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) In the centre of the garden stood a small, white building, severely classical in architecture, and surrounded by thickets of flowers. Six Ionic columns supported the roof, and the single door was of bronze. A splendid marble group The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) of the "Fates" stood before the door, the work of a young American sculptor, Boris Yvain, who had died in Paris when only twenty-three years old.

The inauguration ceremonies were in progress as I crossed University Place and entered the square. I threaded my way through the silent throng of spectators, but was stopped at Fourth Street by a cordon of police. A regiment of United States lancers were drawn up in a hollow square round the Lethal Chamber. On a raised tribune facing Washington Park stood the Governor of New York, and behind him were grouped the Mayor of New York and Brooklyn, the Inspector-General of Police, the Commandant of the state troops, Colonel Livingston, military aid to the President of the United States, General Blount, commanding at Governor's Island, Major-General Hamilton, commanding the garrison of New York and Brooklyn, Admiral Buffby of the The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) fleet in the North River, Surgeon-General Lanceford, the staff of the National Free Hospital, Senators Wyse and Franklin of New York, and the Commissioner of Public Works. The tribune was surrounded by a squadron of hussars of the National Guard.

The Governor was finishing his reply to the short speech of the Surgeon-General. I heard him say: "The laws prohibiting suicide and providing punishment for any attempt at self-destruction have been repealed. The Government The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) has seen fit to acknowledge the right of man to end an existence which may have become intolerable to him, through physical suffering or mental despair. It is believed that the community will be benefited by the removal of such people from their midst. Since the passage of this law, the number of suicides in the United States has not increased. Now the Government has determined to establish a Lethal Chamber in every city, town and village in the country, it remains to be seen whether or not that class The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) of human creatures from whose desponding ranks new victims of self-destruction The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) fall daily will accept the relief thus provided." He paused, and turned to the white Lethal Chamber. The silence in the street was absolute. "There a painless death awaits him who can no longer bear the sorrows of this life. If death is welcome let him seek it there." Then quickly turning to the military aid of the President's household, he said, "I declare the Lethal Chamber open," and again facing the vast crowd he

cried in a clear voice: "Citizens of New York and of the United States of America, through me the Government declares the Lethal Chamber to be open."

The solemn hush was broken by a sharp cry of command, the squadron of hussars filed after the Governor's carriage, the lancers wheeled and formed along Fifth Avenue to wait for the commandant of the garrison, and the mounted police followed them. I left the crowd to gape and stare at the white marble Death Chamber, and, crossing South Fifth Avenue, walked along the western side of that thoroughfare to Bleeker Street. Then I turned to the right and stopped before a dingy shop which bore the sign:

HAWBERK, ARMOURER.

I glanced in at the doorway and saw The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) Hawberk busy in his little shop at the end of the hall. He looked up, and catching sight of me cried in his deep, hearty voice, "Come in, Mr. Castaigne!" Constance, his daughter, rose to meet me as I crossed the threshold, and held out her The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) pretty hand, but I saw the blush of disappointment on her cheeks, and knew that it The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) was another Castaigne she had expected, my cousin Louis. I smiled at her confusion and complimented her on the banner she was embroidering from a coloured plate. Old Hawberk sat riveting the worn greaves of some ancient suit of armour, and The King in Yellow by Robert W. Chambers: Annotated Edition (Lovecraftian Librarium) the ting! ting! ting! of his little hammer sounded pleasantly in the quaint shop. Presently he dropped his hammer, and fussed about for a moment with a tiny wrench. The soft clash of the mail sent a thrill of pleasure through me. I loved to hear the music of steel brushing against steel, the mellow shock of the mallet on thigh pieces, and the jingle of chain armour. That was the only reason I went to see Hawberk. He had never interested me personally, nor did Constance, except for the fact of her being in love with Louis. This did occupy my attention, and sometimes even kept me awake at night. But I knew in my heart that all would come right, and that I should arrange their future as I expected to arrange that of my kind doctor, John Archer. However, I should never have troubled myself about visiting them just then, had it not been, as I say, that the music of the tinkling hammer had for me this strong fascination. I would sit for hours, listening and listening, and when a stray sunbeam struck the inlaid steel, the sensation it gave me was almost too keen to endure. My eyes would become fixed, dilating with a pleasure that stretched every nerve almost to breaking, until some movement of the old armourer cut off the ray of sunlight, then, still thrilling secretly, I leaned back and listened again to the sound of the polishing rag, swish! swish! rubbing rust from the rivets.

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