



THE MAKER
OF MOONS
& OTHER TALES

ROBERT W.
CHAMBERS

volume II

illustrations SANTIAGO CARUSO

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selection & illustrations

SANTIAGO CARUSO

AGUIJÓN DE LA NOCHE

PREFACE

EXPANDING THE SET OF FOUR TALES THAT SPIN together the tragedy in *The King in Yellow* (1895) this second series of tales carefully selects its pages from the volumes *The Maker of Moons* (1896) and *The Mystery of Choice* (1897). A poem opens the path to the prose of each story, linking the delicacy of the word to the rust of the ancient legends, because the author was first a *dilettante* stimulated by the bohemia of the *belle époque* rather than a troubled dreamer of the province. But although Chambers' surname enjoyed then the same luster as Lord Dunsany's, it is eclipsed today by *The King in Yellow*, for all that his cursed book predates the *Necronomicon* of the famed Providence's mythologist.

Chambers's writing is a choker of fine detail, which unites North American literature to that pious and gloomy *fantastique* that the French Marcel Schwob also developed just before in *The King in the Golden Mask* (1892) rewriting legends and historical episodes in the key of the strange. Chambers's plot unfolds with a French sensibility, but it harks to the Middle East or even more remote landscapes with its tapestry imbued with exotic perfumes. Some of this occurs in the story "The Maker of Moons", the most particular of this volume, where a fictional Chinese cult menaces the heart of the United States economy, and where all the elements that Lovecraft will take later to configure his Cthulhu myths are show-cased: the finding of extremely rare objects; gentlemen of rancid nobility trying to preserve American *good manners* against an ancient race of brutal men; a fauna as ominous as deadly, linked to an exotic cult always reprehensible for the xenophobia of the ruling class.

However, Chambers' protagonists differ from Lovecraft's in that their daring is given as much to the search of the weird as to amorous conquest. Misogyny is not something that can be blamed so easily on its heroes; at they move in the chivalric dynamic that Christianity crowned in the heart of the Middle Ages, which is precisely the devotional object of the gentleman who was Chambers. His work demonstrates this, in the attempt to crown love over fear, even when the puerile sentimental ties that his characters draw are often menaced by the providence of a supernatural horror.

It is known that the mythical Carcosa, homeland of the King in Yellow, is inspired by Ambrose Bierce's dream story *An Inhabitant of Carcosa*, but there is another rhyme between *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* and "The Key to Grief", in my opinion, the best of the stories gathered here, in which the last words of *the wild* annihilated by the North American white-man resound loudly.

And even more are Chambers' creations that draw on the tradition of Bierce, whenever the fortune of the man out in the green turns into a disturbed experience, and the bourgeois spirit becomes entangled in the thorns of the curse spitted by the defeated of History over the dream of the daredevils.

Thus, an outlaw achieves a fleeting truce before the true pain is revealed; a traveler gets lost to regain the vision of Breton Atlantis in "The Demoiselle d'Ys"; an unholy corpse, comes back through centuries of bloodlines to fulfill his word. The flapping of "The Messenger" will be hovering over the next pages.

S. C.

*Little gray messenger,
Robed like painted Death,
Your robe is dust.
Whom do you seek
Among lilies and closed buds
At dusk?*

*Among lilies and closed buds
At dusk,
Whom do you seek,
Little gray messenger,
Robed in the awful panoply
Of painted Death?*

*All-wise,
Hast thou seen all there is to see
with thy two eyes?
Dost thou know all there is to know,
and so,
Omniscient,
Darest thou still to say
thy brother lies?*



THE MESSENGER

“THE BULLET ENTERED HERE” SAID MAX FORTIN, and he placed his middle finger over a smooth hole exactly in the centre of the forehead.

I sat down upon a mound of dry seaweed and unslung my fowling piece.

The little chemist cautiously felt the edges of the shot-hole, first with his middle finger, then with his thumb.

“Let me see the skull again,” said I.

Max Fortin picked it up from the sod.

“It’s like all the others,” he observed. I nodded, without offering to take it from him. After a moment he thoughtfully replaced it upon the grass at my feet.

“It’s like all the others,” he repeated, wiping his glasses on his handkerchief. “I thought you might care to see one of the skulls, so I brought this over from the gravel pit. The men from Bannalec are digging yet. They ought to stop.”

“How many skulls are there altogether?” I inquired.

“They found thirty-eight skulls; there are thirty-nine noted in the list. They lie piled up in the gravel pit on the edge of Le Bihan’s wheat field. The men are at work yet. Le Bihan is going to stop them.”

“Let’s go over,” said I; and I picked up my gun and started across the cliffs, Fortin on one side, *Môme* on the other.

“Who has the list?” I asked, lighting my pipe. “You say there is a list?”

“The list was found rolled up in a brass cylinder,” said the little chemist. He added: “You should not smoke here. You know that if a single spark drifted into the wheat--”

“Ah, but I have a cover to my pipe,” said I, smiling.

Fortin watched me as I closed the pepper-box arrangement over the glowing bowl of the pipe.

Then he continued:

“The list was made out on thick yellow paper; the brass tube has preserved it. It is as fresh to-day as it was in 1760. You shall see it.”

“Is that the date?”

"The list is dated 'April, 1760.' The Brigadier Durand has it. It is not written in French."

"Nor written in French!" I exclaimed.

"No," replied Fortin solemnly, "it is written in Breton."

"But," I protested, "the Breton language was never written or printed in 1760."

"Except by priests," said the chemist.

"I have heard of but one priest who ever wrote the Breton language," I began.

Fortin stole a glance at my face.

"You mean--the Black Priest?" he asked.

I nodded.

Fortin opened his mouth to speak again, hesitated, and finally shut his teeth obstinately over the wheat stem that he was chewing.

"And the Black Priest?" I suggested encouragingly. But I knew it was useless; for it is easier to move the stars from their courses than to make an obstinate Breton talk. We walked on for a minute or two in silence.

"Where is the Brigadier Durand?" I asked, motioning *Môme* to come out of the wheat, which he was trampling as though it were heather. As I spoke we came in sight of the farther edge of the wheat field and the dark, wet mass of cliffs beyond.

"Durand is down there--you can see him; he stands just behind the Mayor of St. Gildas."

"I see," said I; and we struck straight down, following a sun-baked cattle path across the heather.

When we reached the edge of the wheat field, Le Bihan, the Mayor of St. Gildas, called to me, and I tucked my gun under my arm and skirted the wheat to where he stood.

"Thirty-eight skulls," he said in his thin, high-pitched voice; "there is but one more, and I am opposed to further search. I suppose Fortin told you?"

I shook hands with him, and returned the salute of the Brigadier Durand.

"I am opposed to further search," repeated Le Bihan, nervously picking at the mass of silver buttons which covered the front of his velvet and broadcloth jacket like a breastplate of scale armour.

Durand pursed up his lips, twisted his tremendous mustache, and hooked his thumbs in his sabre belt.

"As for me," he said, "I am in favour of further search."

"Further search for what--for the thirty-ninth skull?" I asked.

Le Bihan nodded. Durand frowned at the sunlit sea, rocking like a bowl of molten gold from the cliffs to the horizon. I followed his eyes. On the dark glistening cliffs, silhouetted against the glare of the sea, sat a cormorant, black, motionless, its horrible head raised toward heaven.

"Where is that list, Durand?" I asked.

The gendarme rummaged in his despatch pouch and produced a brass cylinder about a foot long. Very gravely he unscrewed the head and dumped out a scroll of thick yellow paper closely covered with writing on both sides. At a nod from Le Bihan he handed me the scroll. But I could make nothing of the coarse writing, now faded to a dull brown.

"Come, come, Le Bihan," I said impatiently, "translate it, won't you? You and Max Fortin make a lot of mystery out of nothing, it seems."

Le Bihan went to the edge of the pit where the three Bannalec men were digging, gave an order or two in Breton, and turned to me.

As I came to the edge of the pit the Bannalec men were removing a square piece of sailcloth from what appeared to be a pile of cobblestones.

"Look!" said Le Bihan shrilly. I looked. The pile below was a heap of skulls. After a moment I clambered down the gravel sides of the pit and walked over to the men of Bannalec. They saluted me gravely, leaning on their picks and shovels, and wiping their swearing faces with sunburned hands.

"How many?" said I in Breton.

"Thirty-eight," they replied.

I glanced around. Beyond the heap of skulls lay two piles of human bones. Beside these was a mound of broken, rusted bits of iron and steel. Looking closer, I saw that this mound was composed of rusty bayonets, sabre blades, scythe blades, with here and there a tarnished buckle attached to a bit of leather hard as iron.

I picked up a couple of buttons and a belt plate. The buttons bore the royal arms of England; the belt plate was emblazoned with the English arms, and also with the number "27."

"I have heard my grandfather speak of the terrible English regiment, the 27th Foot, which landed and stormed the fort up there," said one of the Bannalec men.

"Oh!" said I; "then these are the bones of English soldiers?"

"Yes," said the men of Bannalec.

Le Bihan was calling to me from the edge of the pit above, and I handed the belt plate and buttons to the men and climbed the side of the excavation.

"Well," said I, trying to prevent *Môme* from leaping up and licking my face as I emerged from the pit, "I suppose you know what these bones are. What are you going to do with them?"

in the Lake of the Stars while the spider-like satellites roam through the Cardinal Woods. The game has fled, the forests around the lake are empty of any living creatures save the reptiles than creep when the Xin moves in the depths of the lake.

General Drummond knows what he has lost in Barris, and we, Pierpont and I, know what we have lost also. His will we found in the drawer, the key of which he had handed me. It was wrapped in a bit of paper on which was written: *Yue-Laou the sorcerer is here in the Cardinal Woods. I must kill him or he will kill me. He made and gave to me the woman I loved,—he made her,—I saw him,—he made her out of a white water-lotus bud. When our child was born, he came again before me and demanded from me the woman I loved. Then, when I refused, he went away, and that night my wife and child vanished from my side, and I found upon her pillow a white lotus bud. Roy, the woman of your dream, Ysonde, may be my child. God help you if you love her for Yue-Laou will give,—and take away, as though he were Xangi, which is God. I will kill Yue-Laou before I leave this forest...or he will kill me.*

FRANKLYN BARRIS.

Now the world knows what Barris thought of the Kuen-Yuin and of Yue-Laou. I see that the newspapers are just becoming excited over the glimpses that Li-Hung-Chang has afforded them of Black Cathay and the demons of the Kuen-Yuin. The Kuen-Yuin are on the move.

Pierpont and I have dismantled the shooting box in the Cardinal Woods. We hold ourselves ready at a moment's notice to join and lead the first Government party to drag the Lake of Stars and cleanse the forest of the crab reptiles. But it will be necessary that a large force assembles, and a well-armed force, for we never have found the body of Yue-Laou, and, living or dead, I fear him. Is he living?

Pierpont, who found Ysonde and myself lying unconscious on the lake shore, the morning after, saw no trace of corpse or blood on the sands. He may have fallen into the lake, but I fear and Ysonde fears that he is alive. We never were able to find either her dwelling place or the glade and the fountain again. The only thing that remains to her of her former life is the gold serpent in the Metropolitan Museum and her golden globe, the symbol of the Kuen-Yuin; but the latter no longer changes color.

David and the dogs are waiting for me in the count yard as I write. Pierpont is in the gun room loading shells, and Howlett brings him mug after mug of my ale from the wood. Ysonde bends over my desk. I feel her hand on my arm, and she is saying, "Don't you think you have done enough to-day, dear?"



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