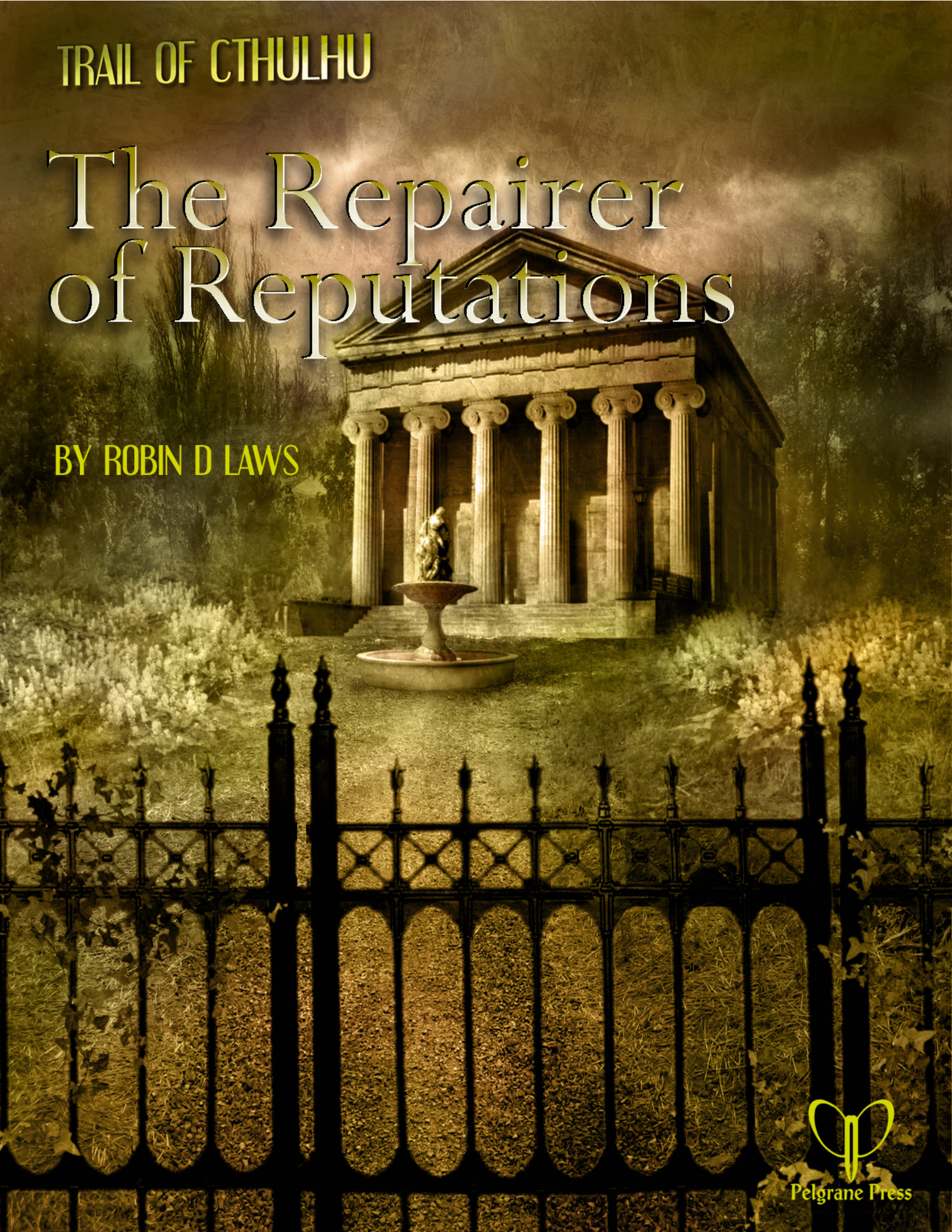


TRAIL OF CTHULHU

The Repairer of Reputations

BY ROBIN D LAWS



Pelgrane Press

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Repairer of Reputations



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TRAIL OF CTHULHU

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The Repairer of Reputations

THE STORY

Robert W. Chambers, 1895



“Ne raillons pas les fous; leur folie dure plus longtemps que la nôtre.... Voilà 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 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

The Repairer of Reputations is a *Trail of Cthulhu* scenario based on the story of the same name by Robert W. Chambers. It is one of four short horror stories incorporating Chambers’ mythology of *The King In Yellow*, a decadent play whose publication brings madness and supernatural presences into the world. His mythology was later subsumed into the Cthulhu canon when H. P. Lovecraft, and his circle and later followers, made reference to it in their tales of the mythos.

This scenario allows the players to recreate an alternate version of the story, in which their characters, who do not appear in the original, confront the nation-shaking conspiracy of its central villains. They either destroy it, or are destroyed themselves.

“The Repairer of Reputations” is a work of speculative fiction, published in 1895 but set twenty-five years later, in 1920. Today, close to a century after that date, it reads as an alternate history. Viewed through modern eyes, its seemingly utopian future takes on a distinctly nightmarish quality. The scenario plays with this by suggesting that the publication of *The King in Yellow* has warped history in a disturbing direction. The alien beings described in the play are as real as the antagonists believe them to be. They want their literal heir of Hastur, Hildred Castaigne, to ascend to the Imperial throne of their America—Hastur’s America.

We’ll return to the scenario in a moment. For ease of reference, we first present the original story (which is now in the public domain), in lightly annotated form.

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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 exclusion of foreign-born Jews as a measure of self-preservation, the settlement of the new independent negro state of Suane, 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 minded was the mistake which he made 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 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, and he laughed heartily, and asked me to call once in a while. I did so, hoping for a chance to even up accounts, but 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, and above all—oh, above all else—ambitious. There was only one thing which 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 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 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 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 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,

1 The memory of abolitionist and Native American rights activist William Earle Dodge (1805-1883) is clearly anathema to the placid oppression of Hastur's America. Although Prohibition is in force in this version of 1920s America, just as it was in our timeline, Dodge's role as a temperance campaigner wasn't enough to save his statue from demolition.

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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. 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 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 old².

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 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 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 of human creatures from whose desponding ranks new victims of self-destruction 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 Bleecker 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 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 pretty hand, but I saw the blush of disappointment on her cheeks, and knew that it 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 ting!

2 Yvain appears in another of Chamber's Yellow Sign stories, "The Mask."

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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.

Constance worked with the embroidery over her knees, now and then pausing to examine more closely the pattern in the coloured plate from the Metropolitan Museum.

"Who is this for?" I asked.

Hawberk explained, that in addition to the treasures of armour in the Metropolitan Museum of which he had been appointed armourer, he also had

charge of several collections belonging to rich amateurs. This was the missing greave of a famous suit which a client of his had traced to a little shop in Paris on the Quai d'Orsay. He, Hawberk, had negotiated for and secured the greave, and now the suit was complete. He laid down his hammer and read me the history of the suit, traced since 1450 from owner to owner until it was acquired by Thomas Stainbridge. When his superb collection was sold, this client of Hawberk's bought the suit, and since then the search for the missing greave had been pushed until it was, almost by accident, located in Paris.

"Did you continue the search so persistently without any certainty of the greave being still in existence?" I demanded.

"Of course," he replied coolly.

Then for the first time I took a personal interest in Hawberk.

"It was worth something to you," I ventured.

"No," he replied, laughing, "my pleasure in finding it was my reward."

"Have you no ambition to be rich?" I asked, smiling.

"My one ambition is to be the best armourer in the world," he answered gravely.

Constance asked me if I had seen the ceremonies at the Lethal Chamber. She herself had noticed cavalry passing up Broadway that morning, and had wished to see the inauguration, but her father wanted the banner finished, and she had stayed at his request.

"Did you see your cousin, Mr. Castaigne, there?" she asked, with the slightest

tremor of her soft eyelashes.

"No," I replied carelessly. "Louis' regiment is manoeuvring out in Westchester County." I rose and picked up my hat and cane.

"Are you going upstairs to see the lunatic again?" laughed old Hawberk. If Hawberk knew how I loathe that word "lunatic," he would never use it in my presence. It rouses certain feelings within me which I do not care to explain. However, I answered him quietly: "I think I shall drop in and see Mr. Wilde for a moment or two."

"Poor fellow," said Constance, with a shake of the head, "it must be hard to live alone year after year poor, crippled and almost demented. It is very good of you, Mr. Castaigne, to visit him as often as you do."

"I think he is vicious," observed Hawberk, beginning again with his hammer. I listened to the golden tinkle on the greave plates; when he had finished I replied:

"No, he is not vicious, nor is he in the least demented. His mind is a wonder chamber, from which he can extract treasures that you and I would give years of our life to acquire."

Hawberk laughed.

I continued a little impatiently: "He knows history as no one else could know it. Nothing, however trivial, escapes his search, and his memory is so absolute, so precise in details, that were it known in New York that such a man existed, the people could not honour him enough."

"Nonsense," muttered Hawberk, searching on the floor for a fallen rivet. "Is it nonsense," I asked, managing to suppress what I felt, "is it nonsense when

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he says that the tassets and cuissards of the enamelled suit of armour commonly known as the 'Prince's Emblazoned' can be found among a mass of rusty theatrical properties, broken stoves and ragpicker's refuse in a garret in Pell Street?"

Hawberk's hammer fell to the ground, but he picked it up and asked, with a great deal of calm, how I knew that the tassets and left cuissard were missing from the "Prince's Emblazoned."

"I did not know until Mr. Wilde mentioned it to me the other day. He said they were in the garret of 998 Pell Street."

"Nonsense," he cried, but I noticed his hand trembling under his leathern apron.

"Is this nonsense too?" I asked pleasantly, "is it nonsense when Mr. Wilde continually speaks of you as the Marquis of Avonshire and of Miss Constance—"

I did not finish, for Constance had started to her feet with terror written on every feature. Hawberk looked at me and slowly smoothed his leathern apron.

"That is impossible," he observed, "Mr. Wilde may know a great many things—"

"About armour, for instance, and the 'Prince's Emblazoned,'" I interposed, smiling.

"Yes," he continued, slowly, "about armour also—may be—but he is wrong in regard to the Marquis of Avonshire, who, as you know, killed his wife's traducer years ago, and went to Australia where he did not long survive his wife."

"Mr. Wilde is wrong," murmured Constance. Her lips were blanched, but her voice was sweet and calm.

"Let us agree, if you please, that in this one circumstance Mr. Wilde is wrong," I said.



I climbed the three dilapidated flights of stairs, which I had so often climbed before, and knocked at a small door at the end of the corridor. Mr. Wilde opened the door and I walked in.

When he had double-locked the door and pushed a heavy chest against it, he came and sat down beside me, peering up into my face with his little light-coloured eyes. Half a dozen new scratches covered his nose and cheeks, and the silver wires which supported his artificial ears had become displaced. I thought I had never seen him so hideously fascinating. He had no ears. The artificial ones, which now stood out at an angle from the fine wire, were his one weakness. They were made of wax and painted a shell pink, but the rest of his face was yellow. He might better have revelled in the luxury of some artificial fingers for his left hand, which was absolutely fingerless, but it seemed to cause him no inconvenience, and he was satisfied with his wax ears. He was very small, scarcely higher than a child of ten, but his arms were magnificently developed, and his thighs as thick as any athlete's. Still, the most remarkable thing about Mr. Wilde was that a man of his marvellous intelligence and knowledge should have such a head. It was flat and pointed, like the heads of many of those unfortunates whom people imprison in asylums for the weak-minded. Many called him insane, but I knew him to be as sane as I was.

I do not deny that he was eccentric; the mania he had for keeping that cat and teasing her until she flew at his face like a demon, was certainly eccentric. I

never could understand why he kept the creature, nor what pleasure he found in shutting himself up in his room with this surly, vicious beast. I remember once, glancing up from the manuscript I was studying by the light of some tallow dips, and seeing Mr. Wilde squatting motionless on his high chair, his eyes fairly blazing with excitement, while the cat, which had risen from her place before the stove, came creeping across the floor right at him. Before I could move she flattened her belly to the ground, crouched, trembled, and sprang into his face. Howling and foaming they rolled over and over on the floor, scratching and clawing, until the cat screamed and fled under the cabinet, and Mr. Wilde turned over on his back, his limbs contracting and curling up like the legs of a dying spider. He was eccentric.

Mr. Wilde had climbed into his high chair, and, after studying my face, picked up a dog's-eared ledger and opened it.

"Henry B. Matthews," he read, "book-keeper with Whysot Whysot and Company, dealers in church ornaments. Called April 3rd. Reputation damaged on the race-track. Known as a welcher. Reputation to be repaired by August 1st. Retainer Five Dollars." He turned the page and ran his fingerless knuckles down the closely-written columns.

"P. Greene Dusenberry, Minister of the Gospel, Fairbeach, New Jersey. Reputation damaged in the Bowery. To be repaired as soon as possible. Retainer \$100."

He coughed and added, "Called, April 6th."

"Then you are not in need of money, Mr. Wilde," I inquired.

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"Listen," he coughed again.

"Mrs. C. Hamilton Chester, of Chester Park, New York City. Called April 7th. Reputation damaged at Dieppe, France. To be repaired by October 1st Retainer \$500.

"Note.—C. Hamilton Chester, Captain U.S.S. 'Avalanche', ordered home from South Sea Squadron October 1st."

"Well," I said, "the profession of a Repairer of Reputations is lucrative."

His colourless eyes sought mine, "I only wanted to demonstrate that I was correct. You said it was impossible to succeed as a Repairer of Reputations; that even if I did succeed in certain cases it would cost me more than I would gain by it. To-day I have five hundred men in my employ, who are poorly paid, but who pursue the work with an enthusiasm which possibly may be born of fear. These men enter every shade and grade of society; some even are pillars of the most exclusive social temples; others are the prop and pride of the financial world; still others, hold undisputed sway among the 'Fancy and the Talent.' I choose them at my leisure from those who reply to my advertisements. It is easy enough, they are all cowards. I could treble the number in twenty days if I wished. So you see, those who have in their keeping the reputations of their fellow-citizens, I have in my pay."

"They may turn on you," I suggested.

He rubbed his thumb over his cropped ears, and adjusted the wax substitutes. "I think not," he murmured thoughtfully, "I seldom have to apply the whip, and then only once. Besides they like their wages."

"How do you apply the whip?" I

demanded.

His face for a moment was awful to look upon. His eyes dwindled to a pair of green sparks.

"I invite them to come and have a little chat with me," he said in a soft voice.

A knock at the door interrupted him, and his face resumed its amiable expression.

"Who is it?" he inquired.

"Mr. Steylette," was the answer.

"Come to-morrow," replied Mr. Wilde.

"Impossible," began the other, but was silenced by a sort of bark from Mr. Wilde.

"Come to-morrow," he repeated.

We heard somebody move away from the door and turn the corner by the stairway.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"Arnold Steylette, Owner and Editor in Chief of the great New York daily."

He drummed on the ledger with his fingerless hand adding: "I pay him very badly, but he thinks it a good bargain."

"Arnold Steylette!" I repeated amazed.

"Yes," said Mr. Wilde, with a self-satisfied cough.

The cat, which had entered the room as he spoke, hesitated, looked up at him and snarled. He climbed down from the chair and squatting on the floor, took the creature into his arms and caressed her. The cat ceased snarling and presently began a loud purring which seemed to increase in timbre as he stroked

her. "Where are the notes?" I asked. He pointed to the table, and for the hundredth time I picked up the bundle of manuscript entitled—

"THE IMPERIAL DYNASTY OF AMERICA."

One by one I studied the well-worn pages, worn only by my own handling, and although I knew all by heart, from the beginning, "When from Carcosa, the Hyades, Hastur, and Aldebaran," to "Castaigne, Louis de Calvados, born December 19th, 1877," I read it with an eager, rapt attention, pausing to repeat parts of it aloud, and dwelling especially on "Hildred de Calvados, only son of Hildred Castaigne and Edythe Landes Castaigne, first in succession," etc., etc. When I finished, Mr. Wilde nodded and coughed.

"Speaking of your legitimate ambition," he said, "how do Constance and Louis get along?"

"She loves him," I replied simply.

The cat on his knee suddenly turned and struck at his eyes, and he flung her off and climbed on to the chair opposite me.

"And Dr. Archer! But that's a matter you can settle any time you wish," he added. "Yes," I replied, "Dr. Archer can wait, but it is time I saw my cousin Louis."

"It is time," he repeated. Then he took another ledger from the table and ran over the leaves rapidly. "We are now in communication with ten thousand men," he muttered. "We can count on one hundred thousand within the first twenty-eight hours, and in forty-eight hours the state will rise en masse. The country follows the state, and the portion that will not, I mean California

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and the Northwest, might better never have been inhabited. I shall not send them the Yellow Sign."

The blood rushed to my head, but I only answered, "A new broom sweeps clean."

"The ambition of Caesar and of Napoleon pales before that which could not rest until it had seized the minds of men and controlled even their unborn thoughts," said Mr. Wilde.

"You are speaking of the King in Yellow," I groaned, with a shudder.

"He is a king whom emperors have served."

"I am content to serve him," I replied.

Mr. Wilde sat rubbing his ears with his crippled hand. "Perhaps Constance does not love him," he suggested.

I started to reply, but a sudden burst of military music from the street below drowned my voice. The twentieth dragoon regiment, formerly in garrison at Mount St. Vincent, was returning from the manoeuvres in Westchester County, to its new barracks on East Washington Square. It was my cousin's regiment. They were a fine lot of fellows, in their pale blue, tight-fitting jackets, jaunty busbys and white riding breeches with the double yellow stripe, into which their limbs seemed moulded. Every other squadron was armed with lances, from the metal points of which fluttered yellow and white pennons. The band passed, playing the regimental march, then came the colonel and staff, the horses crowding and trampling, while their heads bobbed in unison, and the pennons fluttered from their lance points. The troopers, who rode with the beautiful English seat, looked brown as berries from their bloodless campaign

among the farms of Westchester, and the music of their sabres against the stirrups, and the jingle of spurs and carbines was delightful to me. I saw Louis riding with his squadron. He was as handsome an officer as I have ever seen. Mr. Wilde, who had mounted a chair by the window, saw him too, but said nothing. Louis turned and looked straight at Hawberk's shop as he passed, and I could see the flush on his brown cheeks. I think Constance must have been at the window. When the last troopers had clattered by, and the last pennons vanished into South Fifth Avenue, Mr. Wilde clambered out of his chair and dragged the chest away from the door.

"Yes," he said, "it is time that you saw your cousin Louis."

He unlocked the door and I picked up my hat and stick and stepped into the corridor. The stairs were dark. Groping about, I set my foot on something soft, which snarled and spit, and I aimed a murderous blow at the cat, but my cane shivered to splinters against the balustrade, and the beast scurried back into Mr. Wilde's room.

Passing Hawberk's door again I saw him still at work on the armour, but I did not stop, and stepping out into Bleeker Street, I followed it to Wooster, skirted the grounds of the Lethal Chamber, and crossing Washington Park went straight to my rooms in the Benedick. Here I lunched comfortably, read the Herald and the Meteor, and finally went to the steel safe in my bedroom and set the time combination. The three and three-quarter minutes which it is necessary to wait, while the time lock is opening, are to me golden moments. From the instant I set the combination to the moment when I grasp the knobs and swing back the solid steel doors, I

live in an ecstasy of expectation. Those moments must be like moments passed in Paradise. I know what I am to find at the end of the time limit. I know what the massive safe holds secure for me, for me alone, and the exquisite pleasure of waiting is hardly enhanced when the safe opens and I lift, from its velvet crown, a diadem of purest gold, blazing with diamonds. I do this every day, and yet the joy of waiting and at last touching again the diadem, only seems to increase as the days pass. It is a diadem fit for a King among kings, an Emperor among emperors. The King in Yellow might scorn it, but it shall be worn by his royal servant.

I held it in my arms until the alarm in the safe rang harshly, and then tenderly, proudly, I replaced it and shut the steel doors. I walked slowly back into my study, which faces Washington Square, and leaned on the window sill. The afternoon sun poured into my windows, and a gentle breeze stirred the branches of the elms and maples in the park, now covered with buds and tender foliage. A flock of pigeons circled about the tower of the Memorial Church; sometimes alighting on the purple tiled roof, sometimes wheeling downward to the lotos fountain in front of the marble arch. The gardeners were busy with the flower beds around the fountain, and the freshly turned earth smelled sweet and spicy. A lawn mower, drawn by a fat white horse, clinked across the green sward, and watering-carts poured showers of spray over the asphalt drives. Around the statue of Peter Stuyvesant, which in 1897 had replaced the monstrosity supposed to represent Garibaldi³, children played in the spring sunshine, and nurse girls wheeled elaborate baby carriages with a reckless disregard for the pasty-faced occupants, which could probably be explained by the presence of half a dozen

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trim dragoon troopers languidly lolling on the benches. Through the trees, the Washington Memorial Arch glistened like silver in the sunshine, and beyond, on the eastern extremity of the square the gray stone barracks of the dragoons, and the white granite artillery stables were alive with colour and motion.

I looked at the Lethal Chamber on the corner of the square opposite. A few curious people still lingered about the gilded iron railing, but inside the grounds the paths were deserted. I watched the fountains ripple and sparkle; the sparrows had already found this new bathing nook, and the basins were covered with the dusty-feathered little things. Two or three white peacocks picked their way across the lawns, and a drab coloured pigeon sat so motionless on the arm of one of the "Fates," that it seemed to be a part of the sculptured stone.

As I was turning carelessly away, a slight commotion in the group of curious loiterers around the gates attracted my attention. A young man had entered, and was advancing with nervous strides along the gravel path which leads to the bronze doors of the Lethal Chamber. He paused a moment before the "Fates," and as he raised his head to those three mysterious faces, the pigeon rose from its sculptured perch, circled about for a moment and wheeled to the east. The young man pressed his hand to his face, and then with an undefinable gesture sprang up the marble steps, the bronze doors closed behind him, and half an hour later the loiterers slouched away, and the frightened pigeon returned to its perch in the arms of Fate.

I put on my hat and went out into the park for a little walk before dinner. As I

crossed the central driveway a group of officers passed, and one of them called out, "Hello, Hildred," and came back to shake hands with me. It was my cousin Louis, who stood smiling and tapping his spurred heels with his riding-whip.

"Just back from Westchester," he said; "been doing the bucolic; milk and curds, you know, dairy-maids in sunbonnets, who say 'haeow' and 'I don't think' when you tell them they are pretty. I'm nearly dead for a square meal at Delmonico's. What's the news?"

"There is none," I replied pleasantly. "I saw your regiment coming in this morning."

"Did you? I didn't see you. Where were you?"

"In Mr. Wilde's window."

"Oh, hell!" he began impatiently, "that man is stark mad! I don't understand why you—"

He saw how annoyed I felt by this outburst, and begged my pardon.

"Really, old chap," he said, "I don't mean to run down a man you like, but for the life of me I can't see what the deuce you find in common with Mr. Wilde. He's not well bred, to put it generously; he is hideously deformed; his head is the head of a criminally insane person. You know yourself he's been in an asylum—"

"So have I," I interrupted calmly.

Louis looked startled and confused for a moment, but recovered and slapped me heartily on the shoulder. "You were completely cured," he began; but I stopped him again.

"I suppose you mean that I was simply

acknowledged never to have been insane."

"Of course that—that's what I meant," he laughed.

I disliked his laugh because I knew it was forced, but I nodded gaily and asked him where he was going. Louis looked after his brother officers who had now almost reached Broadway.

"We had intended to sample a Brunswick cocktail, but to tell you the truth I was anxious for an excuse to go and see Hawberk instead. Come along, I'll make you my excuse."

We found old Hawberk, neatly attired in a fresh spring suit, standing at the door of his shop and sniffing the air.

"I had just decided to take Constance for a little stroll before dinner," he replied to the impetuous volley of questions from Louis. "We thought of walking on the park terrace along the North River." At that moment Constance appeared and grew pale and rosy by turns as Louis bent over her small gloved fingers. I tried to excuse myself, alleging an engagement uptown, but Louis and Constance would not listen, and I saw I was expected to remain and engage old Hawberk's attention. After all it would be just as well if I kept my eye on Louis, I thought, and when they hailed a Spring Street horse-car, I got in after them and took my seat beside the armourer.

The beautiful line of parks and granite terraces overlooking the wharves along the North River, which were built in 1910 and finished in the autumn of 1917, had become one of the most popular promenades in the metropolis. They extended from the battery to 190th

3 Italian national hero and revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882) is disdained in Hastur's America, both as a revolutionary and as a symbol of Italian-American pride.

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Street, overlooking the noble river and affording a fine view of the Jersey shore and the Highlands opposite. Cafés and restaurants were scattered here and there among the trees, and twice a week military bands from the garrison played in the kiosques on the parapets.

We sat down in the sunshine on the bench at the foot of the equestrian statue of General Sheridan. Constance tipped her sunshade to shield her eyes, and she and Louis began a murmuring conversation which was impossible to catch. Old Hawberk, leaning on his ivory headed cane, lighted an excellent cigar, the mate to which I politely refused, and smiled at vacancy. The sun hung low above the Staten Island woods, and the bay was dyed with golden hues reflected from the sun-warmed sails of the shipping in the harbour.

Brigs, schooners, yachts, clumsy ferry-boats, their decks swarming with people, railroad transports carrying lines of brown, blue and white freight cars, stately sound steamers, déclassé tramp steamers, coasters, dredgers, scows, and everywhere pervading the entire bay impudent little tugs puffing and whistling officiously;—these were the craft which churned the sunlight waters as far as the eye could reach. In calm contrast to the hurry of sailing vessel and steamer a silent fleet of white warships lay motionless in midstream. Constance's merry laugh aroused me from my reverie.

"What are you staring at?" she inquired. "Nothing—the fleet," I smiled.

Then Louis told us what the vessels were, pointing out each by its relative position to the old Red Fort on Governor's Island.

"That little cigar shaped thing is a

torpedo boat," he explained; "there are four more lying close together. They are the Tarpon, the Falcon, the Sea Fox, and the Octopus. The gun-boats just above are the Princeton, the Champlain, the Still Water and the Erie. Next to them lie the cruisers Faragut and Los Angeles, and above them the battle ships California, and Dakota, and the Washington which is the flag ship. Those two squatty looking chunks of metal which are anchored there off Castle William are the double turreted monitors Terrible and Magnificent; behind them lies the ram, Osceola."

Constance looked at him with deep approval in her beautiful eyes. "What loads of things you know for a soldier," she said, and we all joined in the laugh which followed.

Presently Louis rose with a nod to us and offered his arm to Constance, and they strolled away along the river wall. Hawberk watched them for a moment and then turned to me.

"Mr. Wilde was right," he said. "I have found the missing tassets and left cuissard of the 'Prince's Emblazoned,' in a vile old junk garret in Pell Street." "998?" I inquired, with a smile.

"Yes."

"Mr. Wilde is a very intelligent man," I observed.

"I want to give him the credit of this most important discovery," continued Hawberk. "And I intend it shall be known that he is entitled to the fame of it."

"He won't thank you for that," I answered sharply; "please say nothing about it."

"Do you know what it is worth?" said

Hawberk.

"No, fifty dollars, perhaps."

"It is valued at five hundred, but the owner of the 'Prince's Emblazoned' will give two thousand dollars to the person who completes his suit; that reward also belongs to Mr. Wilde."

"He doesn't want it! He refuses it!" I answered angrily. "What do you know about Mr. Wilde? He doesn't need the money. He is rich—or will be—richer than any living man except myself. What will we care for money then—what will we care, he and I, when—when—"

"When what?" demanded Hawberk, astonished.

"You will see," I replied, on my guard again.

He looked at me narrowly, much as Doctor Archer used to, and I knew he thought I was mentally unsound. Perhaps it was fortunate for him that he did not use the word lunatic just then.

"No," I replied to his unspoken thought, "I am not mentally weak; my mind is as healthy as Mr. Wilde's. I do not care to explain just yet what I have on hand, but it is an investment which will pay more than mere gold, silver and precious stones. It will secure the happiness and prosperity of a continent—yes, a hemisphere!"

"Oh," said Hawberk.

"And eventually," I continued more quietly, "it will secure the happiness of the whole world."

"And incidentally your own happiness and prosperity as well as Mr. Wilde's?" "Exactly," I smiled. But I could have throttled him for taking that tone.

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He looked at me in silence for a while and then said very gently, "Why don't you give up your books and studies, Mr. Castaigne, and take a tramp among the mountains somewhere or other? You used to be fond of fishing. Take a cast or two at the trout in the Rangelys."

"I don't care for fishing any more," I answered, without a shade of annoyance in my voice.

"You used to be fond of everything," he continued; "athletics, yachting, shooting, riding—"

"I have never cared to ride since my fall," I said quietly.

"Ah, yes, your fall," he repeated, looking away from me.

I thought this nonsense had gone far enough, so I brought the conversation back to Mr. Wilde; but he was scanning my face again in a manner highly offensive to me.

"Mr. Wilde," he repeated, "do you know what he did this afternoon? He came downstairs and nailed a sign over the hall door next to mine; it read:

"MR. WILDE, REPAIRER OF REPUTATIONS. Third Bell."

"Do you know what a Repairer of Reputations can be?"

"I do," I replied, suppressing the rage within.

"Oh," he said again.

Louis and Constance came strolling by and stopped to ask if we would join them. Hawberk looked at his watch. At the same moment a puff of smoke shot from the casemates of Castle William, and the boom of the sunset gun rolled

across the water and was re-echoed from the Highlands opposite. The flag came running down from the flag-pole, the bugles sounded on the white decks of the warships, and the first electric light sparkled out from the Jersey shore. As I turned into the city with Hawberk I heard Constance murmur something to Louis which I did not understand; but Louis whispered "My darling," in reply; and again, walking ahead with Hawberk through the square I heard a murmur of "sweetheart," and "my own Constance," and I knew the time had nearly arrived when I should speak of important matters with my cousin Louis.



One morning early in May I stood before the steel safe in my bedroom, trying on the golden jewelled crown. The diamonds flashed fire as I turned to the mirror, and the heavy beaten gold burned like a halo about my head. I remembered Camilla's agonized scream and the awful words echoing through the dim streets of Carcosa. They were the last lines in the first act, and I dared not think of what followed—dared not, even in the spring sunshine, there in my own room, surrounded with familiar objects, reassured by the bustle from the street and the voices of the servants in the hallway outside. For those poisoned words had dropped slowly into my heart, as death-sweat drops upon a bed-sheet and is absorbed. Trembling, I put the diadem from my head and wiped my forehead, but I thought of Hastur and of my own rightful ambition, and I remembered Mr. Wilde as I had last left him, his face all torn and bloody from the claws of that devil's creature, and what he said—ah, what he said. The alarm bell in the safe began to whirr harshly, and I knew my time was up; but I would not heed it, and replacing the flashing circlet upon my head I turned defiantly

to the mirror. I stood for a long time absorbed in the changing expression of my own eyes. The mirror reflected a face which was like my own, but whiter, and so thin that I hardly recognized it. And all the time I kept repeating between my clenched teeth, "The day has come! The day has come!" while the alarm in the safe whirled and clamoured, and the diamonds sparkled and flamed above my brow. I heard a door open but did not heed it. It was only when I saw two faces in the mirror:—it was only when another face rose over my shoulder, and two other eyes met mine. I wheeled like a flash and seized a long knife from my dressing-table, and my cousin sprang back very pale, crying: "Hildred! For God's sake!" then as my hand fell, he said: "It is I, Louis, don't you know me?" I stood silent. I could not have spoken for my life. He walked up to me and took the knife from my hand.

"What is all this?" he inquired, in a gentle voice. "Are you ill?"

"No," I replied. But I doubt if he heard me.

"Come, come, old fellow," he cried, "take off that brass crown and toddle into the study. Are you going to a masquerade? What's all this theatrical tinsel anyway?"

I was glad he thought the crown was made of brass and paste, yet I didn't like him any the better for thinking so. I let him take it from my hand, knowing it was best to humour him. He tossed the splendid diadem in the air, and catching it, turned to me smiling.

"It's dear at fifty cents," he said. "What's it for?"

I did not answer, but took the circlet from his hands, and placing it in the safe shut the massive steel door. The

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alarm ceased its infernal din at once. He watched me curiously, but did not seem to notice the sudden ceasing of the alarm. He did, however, speak of the safe as a biscuit box. Fearing lest he might examine the combination I led the way into my study. Louis threw himself on the sofa and flicked at flies with his eternal riding-whip. He wore his fatigue uniform with the braided jacket and jaunty cap, and I noticed that his riding-boots were all splashed with red mud.

"Where have you been?" I inquired.

"Jumping mud creeks in Jersey," he said. "I haven't had time to change yet; I was rather in a hurry to see you. Haven't you got a glass of something? I'm dead tired; been in the saddle twenty-four hours."

I gave him some brandy from my medicinal store, which he drank with a grimace.

"Damned bad stuff," he observed. "I'll give you an address where they sell brandy that is brandy."

"It's good enough for my needs," I said indifferently. "I use it to rub my chest with." He stared and flicked at another fly.

"See here, old fellow," he began, "I've got something to suggest to you. It's four years now that you've shut yourself up here like an owl, never going anywhere, never taking any healthy exercise, never doing a damn thing but poring over those books up there on the mantelpiece."

He glanced along the row of shelves. "Napoleon, Napoleon, Napoleon!" he read. "For heaven's sake, have you nothing but Napoleons there?"

"I wish they were bound in gold," I said. "But wait, yes, there is another book,

The King in Yellow." I looked him steadily in the eye.

"Have you never read it?" I asked.

"I? No, thank God! I don't want to be driven crazy."

I saw he regretted his speech as soon as he had uttered it. There is only one word which I loathe more than I do lunatic and that word is crazy. But I controlled myself and asked him why he thought *The King in Yellow* dangerous.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, hastily. "I only remember the excitement it created and the denunciations from pulpit and Press. I believe the author shot himself after bringing forth this monstrosity, didn't he?"

"I understand he is still alive," I answered.

"That's probably true," he muttered; "bullets couldn't kill a fiend like that."

"It is a book of great truths," I said.

"Yes," he replied, "of 'truths' which send men frantic and blast their lives. I don't care if the thing is, as they say, the very supreme essence of art. It's a crime to have written it, and I for one shall never open its pages."

"Is that what you have come to tell me?" I asked.

"No," he said, "I came to tell you that I am going to be married."

I believe for a moment my heart ceased to beat, but I kept my eyes on his face.

"Yes," he continued, smiling happily, "married to the sweetest girl on earth."

"Constance Hawberk," I said

mechanically.

"How did you know?" he cried, astonished. "I didn't know it myself until that evening last April, when we strolled down to the embankment before dinner."

"When is it to be?" I asked.

"It was to have been next September, but an hour ago a despatch came ordering our regiment to the Presidio, San Francisco. We leave at noon to-morrow. To-morrow," he repeated. "Just think, Hildred, to-morrow I shall be the happiest fellow that ever drew breath in this jolly world, for Constance will go with me."

I offered him my hand in congratulation, and he seized and shook it like the good-natured fool he was—or pretended to be.

"I am going to get my squadron as a wedding present," he rattled on. "Captain and Mrs. Louis Castaigne, eh, Hildred?"

Then he told me where it was to be and who were to be there, and made me promise to come and be best man. I set my teeth and listened to his boyish chatter without showing what I felt, but—

I was getting to the limit of my endurance, and when he jumped up, and, switching his spurs till they jingled, said he must go, I did not detain him.

"There's one thing I want to ask of you," I said quietly.

"Out with it, it's promised," he laughed. "I want you to meet me for a quarter of an hour's talk to-night."

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"Of course, if you wish," he said, somewhat puzzled. "Where?"

"Anywhere, in the park there."

"What time, Hildred?"

"Midnight."

"What in the name of—" he began, but checked himself and laughingly assented. I watched him go down the stairs and hurry away, his sabre banging at every stride. He turned into Bleeker Street, and I knew he was going to see Constance. I gave him ten minutes to disappear and then followed in his footsteps, taking with me the jewelled crown and the silken robe embroidered with the Yellow Sign. When I turned into Bleeker Street, and entered the doorway which bore the sign—

MR. WILDE, REPAIRER OF REPUTATIONS. Third Bell.

I saw old Hawberk moving about in his shop, and imagined I heard Constance's voice in the parlour; but I avoided them both and hurried up the trembling stairways to Mr. Wilde's apartment. I knocked and entered without ceremony. Mr. Wilde lay groaning on the floor, his face covered with blood, his clothes torn to shreds. Drops of blood were scattered about over the carpet, which had also been ripped and frayed in the evidently recent struggle.

"It's that cursed cat," he said, ceasing his groans, and turning his colourless eyes to me; "she attacked me while I was asleep. I believe she will kill me yet."

This was too much, so I went into the kitchen, and, seizing a hatchet from the pantry, started to find the infernal beast and settle her then and there. My search was fruitless, and after a while I gave it up and came back to find Mr. Wilde

squatting on his high chair by the table. He had washed his face and changed his clothes. The great furrows which the cat's claws had ploughed up in his face he had filled with collodion, and a rag hid the wound in his throat. I told him I should kill the cat when I came across her, but he only shook his head and turned to the open ledger before him. He read name after name of the people who had come to him in regard to their reputation, and the sums he had amassed were startling.

"I put on the screws now and then," he explained.

"One day or other some of these people will assassinate you," I insisted.

"Do you think so?" he said, rubbing his mutilated ears.

It was useless to argue with him, so I took down the manuscript entitled Imperial Dynasty of America, for the last time I should ever take it down in Mr. Wilde's study. I read it through, thrilling and trembling with pleasure. When I had finished Mr. Wilde took the manuscript and, turning to the dark passage which leads from his study to his bed-chamber, called out in a loud voice, "Vance." Then for the first time, I noticed a man crouching there in the shadow. How I had overlooked him during my search for the cat, I cannot imagine.

"Vance, come in," cried Mr. Wilde.

The figure rose and crept towards us, and I shall never forget the face that he raised to mine, as the light from the window illuminated it.

"Vance, this is Mr. Castaigne," said Mr. Wilde. Before he had finished speaking, the man threw himself on the ground before the table, crying and grasping,

"Oh, God! Oh, my God! Help me! Forgive me! Oh, Mr. Castaigne, keep that man away. You cannot, you cannot mean it! You are different—save me! I am broken down—I was in a madhouse and now—when all was coming right—when I had forgotten the King—the King in Yellow and—but I shall go mad again—I shall go mad—"

His voice died into a choking rattle, for Mr. Wilde had leapt on him and his right hand encircled the man's throat. When Vance fell in a heap on the floor, Mr. Wilde clambered nimbly into his chair again, and rubbing his mangled ears with the stump of his hand, turned to me and asked me for the ledger. I reached it down from the shelf and he opened it. After a moment's searching among the beautifully written pages, he coughed complacently, and pointed to the name Vance.

"Vance," he read aloud, "Osgood Oswald Vance." At the sound of his name, the man on the floor raised his head and turned a convulsed face to Mr. Wilde. His eyes were injected with blood, his lips tumefied. "Called April 28th," continued Mr. Wilde. "Occupation, cashier in the Seaforth National Bank; has served a term of forgery at Sing Sing, from whence he was transferred to the Asylum for the Criminal Insane. Pardoned by the Governor of New York, and discharged from the Asylum, January 19, 1918. Reputation damaged at Sheepshead Bay. Rumours that he lives beyond his income. Reputation to be repaired at once. Retainer \$1,500.

"Note.—Has embezzled sums amounting to \$30,000 since March 20, 1919, excellent family, and secured present position through uncle's influence. Father, President of Seaforth Bank."

I looked at the man on the floor.

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"Get up, Vance," said Mr. Wilde in a gentle voice. Vance rose as if hypnotized. "He will do as we suggest now," observed Mr. Wilde, and opening the manuscript, he read the entire history of the Imperial Dynasty of America. Then in a kind and soothing murmur he ran over the important points with Vance, who stood like one stunned. His eyes were so blank and vacant that I imagined he had become half-witted, and remarked it to Mr. Wilde who replied that it was of no consequence anyway. Very patiently we pointed out to Vance what his share in the affair would be, and he seemed to understand after a while. Mr. Wilde explained the manuscript, using several volumes on Heraldry, to substantiate the result of his researches. 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," he muttered, but I do not believe Vance heard him. Then by degrees he led Vance along the ramifications of the Imperial family, to Uoht and Thale, from Naotalba and Phantom of Truth, to Aldones, and then tossing aside his manuscript and notes, he began the wonderful story of the Last King. Fascinated and thrilled I watched him. He threw up his head, his long arms were stretched out in a magnificent gesture of pride and power, and his eyes blazed deep in their sockets like two emeralds. Vance listened stupefied. As for me, when at last Mr. Wilde had finished, and pointing to me, cried, "The cousin of the King!" my head swam with excitement.

Controlling myself with a superhuman effort, I explained to Vance why I alone was worthy of the crown and why my cousin must be exiled or die. I made

him understand that my cousin must never marry, even after renouncing all his claims, and how that least of all he should marry the daughter of the Marquis of Avonshire and bring England into the question. I showed him a list of thousands of names which Mr. Wilde had drawn up; every man whose name was there had received the Yellow Sign which no living human being dared disregard. The city, the state, the whole land, were ready to rise and tremble before the Pallid Mask.

The time had come, the people should know the son of Hastur, and the whole world bow to the black stars which hang in the sky over Carcosa.

Vance leaned on the table, his head buried in his hands. Mr. Wilde drew a rough sketch on the margin of yesterday's Herald with a bit of lead pencil. It was a plan of Hawberk's rooms. Then he wrote out the order and affixed the seal, and shaking like a palsied man I signed my first writ of execution with my name Hildred-Rex.

Mr. Wilde clambered to the floor and unlocking the cabinet, took a long square box from the first shelf. This he brought to the table and opened. A new knife lay in the tissue paper inside and I picked it up and handed it to Vance, along with the order and the plan of Hawberk's apartment. Then Mr. Wilde told Vance he could go; and he went, shambling like an outcast of the slums. I sat for a while watching the daylight fade behind the square tower of the Judson Memorial Church, and finally, gathering up the manuscript and notes, took my hat and started for the door.

Mr. Wilde watched me in silence. When I had stepped into the hall I looked back. Mr. Wilde's small eyes were still fixed on me. Behind him, the shadows gathered in the fading light. Then I closed the

door behind me and went out into the darkening streets.

I had eaten nothing since breakfast, but I was not hungry. A wretched, half-starved creature, who stood looking across the street at the Lethal Chamber, noticed me and came up to tell me a tale of misery. I gave him money, I don't know why, and he went away without thanking me. An hour later another outcast approached and whined his story. I had a blank bit of paper in my pocket, on which was traced the Yellow Sign, and I handed it to him. He looked at it stupidly for a moment, and then with an uncertain glance at me, folded it with what seemed to me exaggerated care and placed it in his bosom.

The electric lights were sparkling among the trees, and the new moon shone in the sky above the Lethal Chamber. It was tiresome waiting in the square; I wandered from the Marble Arch to the artillery stables and back again to the lotos fountain. The flowers and grass exhaled a fragrance which troubled me. The jet of the fountain played in the moonlight, and the musical splash of falling drops reminded me of the tinkle of chained mail in Hawberk's shop. But it was not so fascinating, and the dull sparkle of the moonlight on the water brought no such sensations of exquisite pleasure, as when the sunshine played over the polished steel of a corselet on Hawberk's knee. I watched the bats darting and turning above the water plants in the fountain basin, but their rapid, jerky flight set my nerves on edge, and I went away again to walk aimlessly to and fro among the trees.

The artillery stables were dark, but in the cavalry barracks the officers' windows were brilliantly lighted, and the sallyport was constantly filled with troopers in fatigue, carrying straw and

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harness and baskets filled with tin dishes.

Twice the mounted sentry at the gates was changed while I wandered up and down the asphalt walk. I looked at my watch. It was nearly time. The lights in the barracks went out one by one, the barred gate was closed, and every minute or two an officer passed in through the side wicket, leaving a rattle of accoutrements and a jingle of spurs on the night air. The square had become very silent. The last homeless loiterer had been driven away by the gray-coated park policeman, the car tracks along Wooster Street were deserted, and the only sound which broke the stillness was the stamping of the sentry's horse and the ring of his sabre against the saddle pommel. In the barracks, the officers' quarters were still lighted, and military servants passed and repassed before the bay windows. Twelve o'clock sounded from the new spire of St. Francis Xavier, and at the last stroke of the sad-toned bell a figure passed through the wicket beside the portcullis, returned the salute of the sentry, and crossing the street entered the square and advanced toward the Benedick apartment house.

"Louis," I called.

The man pivoted on his spurred heels and came straight toward me.

"Is that you, Hildred?"

"Yes, you are on time."

I took his offered hand, and we strolled toward the Lethal Chamber.

He rattled on about his wedding and the graces of Constance, and their future prospects, calling my attention to his captain's shoulder-straps, and the triple gold arabesque on his sleeve and fatigue cap. I believe I listened as much to the

music of his spurs and sabre as I did to his boyish babble, and at last we stood under the elms on the Fourth Street corner of the square opposite the Lethal Chamber. Then he laughed and asked me what I wanted with him. I motioned him to a seat on a bench under the electric light, and sat down beside him. He looked at me curiously, with that same searching glance which I hate and fear so in doctors. I felt the insult of his look, but he did not know it, and I carefully concealed my feelings.

"Well, old chap," he inquired, "what can I do for you?"

I drew from my pocket the manuscript and notes of the Imperial Dynasty of America, and looking him in the eye said:

"I will tell you. On your word as a soldier, promise me to read this manuscript from beginning to end, without asking me a question. Promise me to read these notes in the same way, and promise me to listen to what I have to tell later."

"I promise, if you wish it," he said pleasantly. "Give me the paper, Hildred."

He began to read, raising his eyebrows with a puzzled, whimsical air, which made me tremble with suppressed anger. As he advanced his, eyebrows contracted, and his lips seemed to form the word "rubbish."

Then he looked slightly bored, but apparently for my sake read, with an attempt at interest, which presently ceased to be an effort. He started when in the closely written pages he came to his own name, and when he came to mine he lowered the paper, and looked sharply at me for a moment. But he kept his word, and resumed his reading, and I let the half-formed question die on his lips unanswered. When he came to

the end and read the signature of Mr. Wilde, he folded the paper carefully and returned it to me. I handed him the notes, and he settled back, pushing his fatigue cap up to his forehead, with a boyish gesture, which I remembered so well in school. I watched his face as he read, and when he finished I took the notes with the manuscript, and placed them in my pocket. Then I unfolded a scroll marked with the Yellow Sign. He saw the sign, but he did not seem to recognize it, and I called his attention to it somewhat sharply.

"Well," he said, "I see it. What is it?"

"It is the Yellow Sign," I said angrily.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Louis, in that flattering voice, which Doctor Archer used to employ with me, and would probably have employed again, had I not settled his affair for him.

I kept my rage down and answered as steadily as possible, "Listen, you have engaged your word?"

"I am listening, old chap," he replied soothingly.

I began to speak very calmly.

"Dr. Archer, having by some means become possessed of the secret of the Imperial Succession, attempted to deprive me of my right, alleging that because of a fall from my horse four years ago, I had become mentally deficient. He presumed to place me under restraint in his own house in hopes of either driving me insane or poisoning me. I have not forgotten it. I visited him last night and the interview was final."

Louis turned quite pale, but did not move. I resumed triumphantly, "There are yet three people to be interviewed

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in the interests of Mr. Wilde and myself. They are my cousin Louis, Mr. Hawberk, and his daughter Constance."

Louis sprang to his feet and I arose also, and flung the paper marked with the Yellow Sign to the ground.

"Oh, I don't need that to tell you what I have to say," I cried, with a laugh of triumph. "You must renounce the crown to me, do you hear, to me."

Louis looked at me with a startled air, but recovering himself said kindly, "Of course I renounce the—what is it I must renounce?"

"The crown," I said angrily.

"Of course," he answered, "I renounce it. Come, old chap, I'll walk back to your rooms with you."

"Don't try any of your doctor's tricks on me," I cried, trembling with fury. "Don't act as if you think I am insane."

"What nonsense," he replied. "Come, it's getting late, Hildred."

"No," I shouted, "you must listen. You cannot marry, I forbid it. Do you hear? I forbid it. You shall renounce the crown, and in reward I grant you exile, but if you refuse you shall die."

He tried to calm me, but I was roused at last, and drawing my long knife barred his way.

Then I told him how they would find Dr. Archer in the cellar with his throat open, and I laughed in his face when I thought of Vance and his knife, and the order signed by me.

"Ah, you are the King," I cried, "but I shall be King. Who are you to keep me from Empire over all the habitable

earth! I was born the cousin of a king, but I shall be King!"

Louis stood white and rigid before me. Suddenly a man came running up Fourth Street, entered the gate of the Lethal Temple, traversed the path to the bronze doors at full speed, and plunged into the death chamber with the cry of one demented, and I laughed until I wept tears, for I had recognized Vance, and knew that Hawberk and his daughter were no longer in my way.

"Go," I cried to Louis, "you have ceased to be a menace. You will never marry Constance now, and if you marry any one else in your exile, I will visit you as I did my doctor last night. Mr. Wilde takes charge of you to-morrow." Then I turned and darted into South Fifth Avenue, and with a cry of terror Louis dropped his belt and sabre and followed me like the wind. I heard him close behind me at the corner of Bleecker Street, and I dashed into the doorway under Hawberk's sign. He cried, "Halt, or I fire!" but when he saw that I flew up the stairs leaving Hawberk's shop below, he left me, and I heard him hammering and shouting at their door as though it were possible to arouse the dead.

Mr. Wilde's door was open, and I entered crying, "It is done, it is done! Let the nations rise and look upon their King!" but I could not find Mr. Wilde, so I went to the cabinet and took the splendid diadem from its case. Then I drew on the white silk robe, embroidered with the Yellow Sign, and placed the crown upon my head. At last I was King, King by my right in Hastur, King because I knew the mystery of the Hyades, and my mind had sounded the depths of the Lake of Hali. I was King! The first gray pencillings of dawn would raise a tempest which would shake two hemispheres. Then as I stood, my every

nerve pitched to the highest tension, faint with the joy and splendour of my thought, without, in the dark passage, a man groaned.

I seized the tallow dip and sprang to the door. The cat passed me like a demon, and the tallow dip went out, but my long knife flew swifter than she, and I heard her screech, and I knew that my knife had found her. For a moment I listened to her tumbling and thumping about in the darkness, and then when her frenzy ceased, I lighted a lamp and raised it over my head. Mr. Wilde lay on the floor with his throat torn open. At first I thought he was dead, but as I looked, a green sparkle came into his sunken eyes, his mutilated hand trembled, and then a spasm stretched his mouth from ear to ear. For a moment my terror and despair gave place to hope, but as I bent over him his eyeballs rolled clean around in his head, and he died. Then while I stood, transfixed with rage and despair, seeing my crown, my empire, every hope and every ambition, my very life, lying prostrate there with the dead master, they came, seized me from behind, and bound me until my veins stood out like cords, and my voice failed with the paroxysms of my frenzied screams. But I still raged, bleeding and infuriated among them, and more than one policeman felt my sharp teeth. Then when I could no longer move they came nearer; I saw old Hawberk, and behind him my cousin Louis' ghastly face, and farther away, in the corner, a woman, Constance, weeping softly.

"Ah! I see it now!" I shrieked. "You have seized the throne and the empire. Woe! Woe to you who are crowned with the crown of the King in Yellow!"

[**EDITOR'S NOTE.**—Mr. Castaigne died yesterday in the Asylum for Criminal Insane.]

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THE SCENARIO

Robin D. Laws, 2011

The story “*The Repairer of Reputations*” is told from the point of view of an unreliable narrator. The uncertainty of how much of the conspiracy is real and how much is delusion contributes to our sense of unease as we read it. In the scenario, however, the scheme of Hildred Castaigne and the bizarre Mr. Wilde is portrayed as a genuine threat.

In the story, bank cashier Osgood Oswald Vance quashes the conspiracy in the cradle by mortally wounding Wilde, instead of murdering Louis Castaigne, as he has been ordered to do, and then hurling himself into a Government Lethal Chamber.

In the scenario, Vance skips the first step, heading straight to the Chamber without facing Wilde. This sets back the conspiracy but does not put a stop to it. That becomes the PCs’ responsibility.

The Spine

The players meet their characters, and the strange world of the Hasturized 1920s, in a prologue sequence entitled *The Inauguration of the Government Lethal Chamber*.

The mystery launches in earnest when one of the PCs, an employee of the Seaforth National Bank, is asked by its President to perform a discreet inquiry into *The Suicide of O. O. Vance*. This brief scene leads them to Vance’s Lodgings, which in turn may lead them

to *The Yellow Sign*, an inquiry into the decadent drama that changed the world, or *The Twentieth Dragoon Regiment*, in which they reunite with old comrades, most notably Louis Castaigne. Depending on which clues they decide to follow up, they may discover Mr. Wilde and *His Fantastical Cat*, interact with Hawberk and Constance, or brace Hildred. At some point, they may face *The Chamber In Action*. Alternate avenues of investigation may take them to Mrs. Starkfield, an employee at the bank who directed Vance to Wilde, or to nose into his gambling activities at Sheepshead Bay, leading them to a criminal named Diamond Dan. Following Hildred’s deepest animus leads them to discover the murdered corpse of Dr. Archer.

The Horrible Truth

As in the story, Hildred Castaigne and Mr. Wilde conspire to bring about Hastur’s final plan for America: the former’s ascension to an imperial throne. They’ll use Wilde’s vast network of blackmailers, blackmail victims, and maddened victims of the Pallid Mask to stage the necessary coup.

A Subtly Awful World

During the early sequences, introduce the Hasturized alternate timeline as a series of facts the characters not only take for granted, but regard as right and proper. Details of the timeline appear opposite. In the prologue sequence (“*The Inauguration of the Government Lethal Chamber*”), you’ll supply a number of these facts. Others you’ll work in as you

go along. They are presented in point form, with check boxes, so you can track what you’ve revealed so far. Don’t worry about including all or even most of these points. Drop them in as asides during scene transitions. No single detail matters as much as conveying the overall impression of an oppressive order lurking beneath a facade of order and beauty.

These details are drawn from the story, with a few extrapolations to cover likely player questioning. You may have to make further extrapolations of your own.

- Outgoing President Winthrop leaves office having achieved a new era of tranquility.
- Political power has been centralized to the executive branch, curtailing Congress and the judiciary.
- Protective Tariffs ensure American prosperity.
- Agitators of the Labor movement have been neutered.
- America has just won a war with Germany.
- It began with Germany’s seizure of the Samoan Islands.
- It ended in the wake of a disastrous German amphibious invasion of New Jersey.
- Coastal cities are now heavily fortified.
- America boasts a standing army of 300,00 organized under the

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- Prussian system, with a million reserve troops.
- Many ships of its magnificent navy can now be seen anchored in the New York harbor.
- Treaties with England and France assure its security on the world stage.
- Chicago suffered a second great fire, wiping out the horrible skyscrapers erected in the wake of the first.
- These have been replaced by grand structures in the white, imperial neoclassical style that also dominates a revitalized New York Chicago.
- People view this shift in style as part of a return to moral decency.
- Generous subsidies assure the production of art that soothes, comforts and quiets America's once-boisterous spirit.
- National Mounted Police ensure order beyond urban enclaves.
- Restrictive immigration laws have been enacted.
- They in particular exclude foreign-born Jews.
- Negroes have been resettled to the independent Negro state of Suanee, located where parts of Alabama, Arkansas and Mississippi used to be.
- White residents of those areas have been in turn resettled to Tennessee, the Carolinas, and Oklahoma.
- An accord has been reached with the Indians.
- As part of the arrangement, they comprise elite cavalry units in the army.

- Mainline Christian denominations, including Catholics, have been subsumed into one ecumenical faith after a landmark Congress Of Religions. A popular slogan, which most people take at face value, claims that this development put an end to bigotry.
- Though still a part of the union, California remains a bastion of resistance against the new tranquility - Jews, ethnics, intellectuals and other outcasts have fled there to escape the tide of cultural conformity.
- Epitomizing the growth of enlightened social values has been rising demand not only for a repeal of anti-suicide laws, but for a government infrastructure to aid those who wish to end their lives.
- When the laws were repealed, only a small number of people took advantage of them.
- The absence of these malcontents from the public sphere is widely thought a pivotal factor in the new tranquility.

New York, 1920

Through extensive urban renewal, New York has transformed to a clean, beautiful and ostentatiously orderly city. Regrettable signs of foreign culture have been systematically scrubbed away.

- Trees line New York's widened boulevards.
- Streets are wider, well paved and lighted.
- Public squares appear throughout the city with enlightened regularity.
- Elevated train lines have

been demolished, replaced with underground roads.

- Signs of government authority are omnipresent in the city's new geography, in the form of neoclassical buildings and sturdy military barracks.
- The stone quays that formerly surrounded Manhattan are now parks.
- As part of the great beautification, shabby establishments favored by foreigners, like French or Italian cafes and restaurants, were torn down.
- As in our 1920, temperance laws have gone into effect.
- But gentlemen of good background can naturally secure quality brandy, if they do so discreetly.

Quick Character Creation

This one-off scenario allows the players to create and detail their characters on the fly, giving them more personalization than a standard set of pregens.

Pass out the character sheets, found at the end of the scenario. They provide names for the characters but no other details.

Tell the players that they can assign up to 65 points to their general abilities. They do not spend these yet. Instead, they decide how many points to invest in a given rating when they first want to call on it during play. Once they assign a rating to an ability, it remains fixed; they can't add more points to it later.

Trail regulars will note that a truncated investigative ability list appears on the character sheets.

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The number of points players assign to their investigative abilities vary, as follows:

# of players	Investigative Build Points
2	21
3	18
4	15
5-6	12

The scenario calls on only a subset of the abilities listed on the sheet, but others might come into play if players, as is their wont, take unexpected action.

As with general abilities, players spend their build points during play, buying ratings on a one-time basis, until they run out of points.

When a scene provides information via an investigative ability no one yet has, nudge things along by asking who among the group has that ability. (If some characters remain un-introduced, one of them might have the ability, ushering him into the narrative; see below.)

If this is your group's first exposure to *Trail of Cthulhu*, warn them that this is a stripped-down rules variant tuned for a special setting. Give them a sense of the different typical ranges for investigative and general abilities.

Cut out the six Drives cards and lay them face up on the gaming table.

The characters appear in the prologue. During that introductory sequence, we learn little about them, aside from their names, and the fact that they are friends and contemporaries. They are further introduced during play, as they would be in a story.

Assembling the Group

The group appears together in the prologue scene. They then go their separate ways, only to gradually reassemble during the early stages of the case proper.

Then one player becomes the focus of the true introduction to the case, "The Suicide of O. O. Vance." Identify the player who will next have a birthday. That player chooses one of the six Drive cards. It defines the character's motivation and attitudes. At this time, inform the player that he served, perhaps with some or all of the other PCs, in the Twentieth Dragoon Regiment during the recent war against Germany. He was discharged with distinction during the demobilization and is now a member of the army reserves.

After the interview with Wilson Osgood Vance concludes, the next situation requiring the use of an ability

brings in the next character. The first player, knowing that the task suits the talents of one of his friends, calls on him and brings him into the case. In doing so, the first player fundamentally defines the second's character. For example:

- "It would be deucedly convenient to get into Vance's rooms. I know; in our college days, Fallowby was quite the prankster, and would often break into our rooms to lay the groundwork for practical jokes. I'll drop him a note and get him over here."
- "Braith is always hanging about the natural history museum. He'll know what kind of beast made this devilishly strange scratch wound."
- "We need someone intimidating to convince this fellow. Let's bring in Rowden. He's six foot six and built like the Supreme Court building."

Lingo

The characters of Hasturized New York talk more like it's the 1890s, when the story was written, than the 1920s, when it is set. The upper-class east coast Americans who populate the story affect an Anglicized mode of speech. Authority figures, villains, and women talk in a formal, elevated style. Young gentlemen like Louis Castaigne speak in a jaunty, high-toned slang. The PCs do, too, if the players are up to it.

Here are some (spoiler-trimmed) lines of dialogue from the story to give them the drift:

- "Really, old chap, I don't mean to run down a man you like, but for the life of me I can't see what the deuce you find in common with him."
- "Come, come, old fellow, take that off and toddle into the study."
- "Just think, to-morrow I shall be the happiest fellow that ever drew breath in this jolly world."

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These introductions must be in keeping with two facts: the characters are all in their early twenties, and hail from the same elevated social circle. Introducing players are free to specify that the characters they're bringing in also served in the 20th Dragoon.

The introduced player must spend at least 4 points on the specified ability if it is general, or 2 points if it is investigative. The player now chooses the character's Drive.

The next time another ability is called for, the second player defines and brings in the third player's character. The third player introduces the fourth PC, and so on, until the entire group is on the case.

Use the character tracker, below, for quick reference during play. The group tie tells you what binds him to the others—schooling, military service, social acquaintance, familial relationship, and so on. Ask the introducing player to specify where this is not implicit from the starting definition.

Sanity and the Yellow Sign

Aside from its references to *The King in Yellow*, the scenario makes no direct mention of the Cthulhu Mythos. (If you were to use it as a springboard for an alternate-1920s campaign set in Hastur's America, you might later decide whether to incorporate some straight-up Lovecraft material, or leave it strictly in Chambers territory.)

Accordingly, the Sanity stat works differently here than in a standard Trail game.

Sanity remains undefined for all players until *The King in Yellow* is first mentioned. Ask the players if their characters have read this dread book.

If so, they have Sanity ratings of 1.

If not, their Sanity ratings depend on their Drives:

Drive	Sanity
Aesthete	4
Adventure	5
Curiosity	6
Good Breeding	7
Fellowship	8
Champion of Order	10

In this scenario, Sanity is treated as a general ability, albeit one the players don't have to pay build points for. It allows them to resist the impulse to perform crazy acts under the influence of the Yellow Sign.

A character who acquires a copy of *The King In Yellow* and reads it during play loses all but 1 rating point of Sanity.

If at any time a player mentions a familiarity with the original "Repairer of Reputations" story or the King in Yellow mythology, even when speaking out of character, his PC's Sanity drops by half, or to 0, whichever is worse.

The character experiences this as an eerie feeling, as if someone has walked over their grave. If it occurs during the last hour or so of the session, the character undergoes a dread epiphany: History was not meant to go this way. All of America—no, make that the world—has been warped by the Yellow Sign.

Sanity does not refresh during the short span of this standalone adventure.

SCENES

The Inauguration of the Government

Lethal Chamber

Scene Type: Prologue / Alternate

Lead-Out: The Suicide of O. O. Vance

As good chums who often attend events together, the PCs show up en masse for the grand public event that is the inauguration of the Government Lethal Chamber.

Character Tracker

Character	Player	Group Tie	Drive
Henley Braith			
Jack Elliot			
Sim Fallowby			
Clifford Rowden			
Richard Selby			
Stanley Trent			

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Supporting Character Tracker

As you improvise the scenario you will likely find yourself inventing additional supporting characters who will help or obstruct the PCs. Use the following note sheet to track their roles in the story, in case the players want to interact with them more than once. These names are taken from other works by Robert W. Chambers, with first and last names rearranged.

Men	
<i>Name</i>	<i>Distinguishing Feature</i>
Lawrence van der Luyden	
Percy Beaufort	
Hubert Jackson	
Paul Lefferts	
Helmsley Mingott	
Guy Dorset	
Hector Rosedale	
Newland Stepney	
Sillerton Selden	
Ted van Osburgh	
Samuel Haffen	
Rutherford Bry	
Charlie Hatch	
Ralph Haines	
Elmer Hale	
Raymond Howe	
Abner Gow	
Freddy Conroy	
Gabriel Malins	
Dan Ivors	
Don Higgins	
Frank O'Callaghan	
Shawn Kerrigan	
Brendan Duffy	
Redmond McCann	
Tony Donnelly	

Women	
<i>Name</i>	<i>Distinguishing Feature</i>
Jackie Saxton	
Julia Brympton	
Lily Blinder	
Bertha Ranford	
Gwen Wace	
Lucy Wellan	
Mattie Roberts	
Rose Schuyler	



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This is where you lay out the basics of Chambers' superseded future, as point-formed on p. 20.

Describe the pomp and ceremony of the occasion, and its cheery, celebratory atmosphere. Paraphrase, if desired, Chamber's equivalent passage, on p. 4. The first player's character spots his co-worker, Osgood Oswald Vance, on the edges of the crowd. He seems nervous and uneasy, but then Vance, an older fellow who wears on his features the ravages of a difficult life, has always been of an anxious disposition.

As this scene establishes that the first player's character works in a bank, give the character 1 free point of **Accounting**. If the player wants to invest additional points in the ability, he should do so now.

If the player chooses this moment to invest in the **Assess Honesty** ability, and goes to talk to Vance, he intuits that Vance is more than usually tense today. If asked why, Vance claims to be upset by the spectacle: "A terrible thing, a machine like that. I know they're popular, but I simply cannot credit that. And brass bands and lofty speeches? It doesn't seem right!"

At that, Vance begs off further contact and disappears into the crowd.

Answer any further questions the players have about the setting, then cut to the next scene.

The Suicide of O. O. Vance

Scene Type: Introduction

Lead-In: The Inauguration of the Government Lethal Chamber

Lead-Outs: Vance's Lodgings, Mrs. Starkfield

Several days later, the first player's character, a junior manager of the Seaforth National Bank, stands in the luxurious austerity of its president's office. The president, Wilson Osgood Vance, is an archetypal Eastern banker, all stiff collars and pinstripes. In his mid-sixties, he speaks with a weary but formal authority.

"I have a task of great importance for a man who is canny, resourceful, and, above all, discreet. Reports of your progress here at the bank, and your army record before that, attest to the former qualities. Your good family name tells me I needn't worry about the latter."

Vance reports that an employee of the bank, who should be known to him, has been among the first New Yorkers to make use of the Government Lethal Chamber. Although the right to suicide has been ceded after much popular outcry, it is nonetheless unseemly for a bank to have its people publicly disposing of themselves in this manner. Moreover, the action came as a complete surprise to Vance. He wishes to understand what prompted this decision, and to see any potential scandal arising from the employee's demise allayed.

Numbed by grief, he must be prompted for the victim's name: it is Osgood Oswald Vance, a cashier. The character knows that Osgood was Wilson's nephew.

Assess Honesty: Vance's shock at his nephew's use of the chamber is genuine. He also seems to be withholding something he knows about Osgood.

Reassurance: Vance admits that Osgood harbored a secret. "I wish to know how hard it is for you to find it out," he says. "This will tell me whether others are likely to nose it out, as well."

Vance lacks a key to his nephew's apartment, but can supply the address. This ought to prompt the player to spontaneously bring in the second player, specifying that the character is a dab hand with a lock pick.

The character himself recalls Osgood as a nervous chap who kept his colleagues at a remove. If he seemed on friendly terms with anyone, it was Hazel Starkfield, a matronly stenographer.

A visit to the stenography pool reveals that Hazel is not at work today. She has called in sick. Her supervisor, Mrs. Tilden, took the call. Mrs. Tilden is reluctant to speak out of turn. **Bureaucracy** reminds her of her responsibility to the character, as a representative of the bank. If so prompted, she ventures to say that Mrs. Starkfield seemed not so much ill as emotionally overcome.

Vance's Lodgings

Scene Type: Core

Lead-In: The Suicide of O. O. Vance

Lead-Outs: The Yellow Sign; The Twentieth Dragoon Regiment

The younger Mr. Vance lives in a brownstone manor in the Bronx. Manhattan has been thoroughly made over, but improvements to the outer boroughs are still in progress. Vance's home is among the improved properties.

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Arriving in the neighborhood, the characters note that neighborhood residents have been busily effacing signs of their Jewish heritage. Hebrew letters have vanished from storefront signage. Butcher shops no longer advertise their wares as kosher.

Accounting: A refurbished brownstone of this size, in this location, should have beyond Vance's means, based on his cashier's salary.

Locksmith grants access to the house.

If you want to induce a note of suspense in the early going, require the characters to pair the **Locksmith** use with a Difficulty 4 **Stealth** test, to avoid detection by vigilant neighbors. On a failed test, their search of the property is interrupted by police, who must be mollified or bought off with a 2-point spend of **Bargain, Bureaucracy, or Reassurance**.

Vance's sitting room is well-appointed for the entertainment of guests.

Accounting: The furnishings are real. **Art History:** The sculptures and paintings are valuable.

Chemistry: The spirits stocked in his bar are quality merchandise, and therefore extravagantly expensive.

Law: Like many fast-living men, Vance chose to flout Prohibition statutes.

Any part of the lodgings which would not be seen by visiting guests are, by contrast, shabbily decorated and furnished.

The nightstand in his bedroom is strewn with heavily annotated racing forms. The races he highlights are primarily run at the Sheepshead Bay track.

Gentlemanly Pursuits shows that Vance is not only an obsessive bettor on the ponies, but a blasted fool as well. None of these wagers would have paid off, had he lived to make them.

Vance has taped a sheet of paper to the side of his nightstand. In pencil he has created a homemade calendar, on which he seems to have habitually tallied his days. **Anthropology** suggests that this is an obsessive habit acquired during confinement, either in prison or a mental hospital.

Under a loose floorboard beneath the bed, the gentleman investigators find a locked metal box. **Locksmith** opens it. It contains an old, dog-eared photograph and two pieces of paper.

The photograph shows a younger, disheveled-looking Vance in an institutional uniform of a patient or prisoner, unhappily posed against a brick wall.

(core clue) The first piece of paper is a crudely drawn mystical sign. **Art History** reveals this to be the Yellow Sign, an occult symbol associated with the notorious banned text called *The King In Yellow*.

(core clue) The second piece of paper contains a hand-drawn map of a barracks building. And not just any barracks—it's the home of the Twentieth Dragoon Regiment. At least one of the characters served in this regiment during the war. Any player may at any time specify that his character was with the Twentieth Dragoon.

Gentlemanly Pursuits

This ability represents the characters' comfort in, and knowledge of, their social world. As an interpersonal ability, it permits a character to bond with peers and assert dominance over social inferiors.

It also conveys knowledge of the affairs and customs of male upper-crusters, both in their official capacity and in their secret world of illicit pleasures.

It fulfills many of the same functions as the standard Credit Rating ability, without the fine-tuning needed for a game in which group members may hail from a broad spectrum of class and wealth backgrounds.

While all characters are from the same social strata, only those who choose to purchase the ability can use it to gain information or solve problems through spends.

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Mrs. Starkfield Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-In: The Suicide of O. O. Vance

Lead-Outs: Mr. Wilde and His Fantastical Cat

Mrs. Starkfield lives in a modest single-family dwelling in Queens. If the investigators attempt to reach her by phone, they are answered by a brusque male voice. It belongs to the widow Starkfield's disreputable nephew Harry. Fearing that she knows too much, Hazel has asked him to stay with her and deflect any inquiries concerning Osgood Vance.

If the PCs call on Mrs. Starkfield, Harry comes to the door. He tells the investigators that his aunt is ill and unable to receive visitors—even a representative of her employer.

Harry is tall, broad-shouldered, and muscular. From his demeanor, **Gentlemanly Pursuits** identifies him immediately as a man of dubious character. A 1-point **Anthropology** spend shows that behind his streetwise body language lurks a hint of low-grade military authority: he holds himself as a sergeant would.

Though a nasty sort, Harry is genuinely concerned for his aunt and serving in an unusual white knight capacity in the present situation. **Assess Honesty** suggests that his intentions toward his aunt are truly protective.

A further 1-point spend indicates that he's not worried about the investigators intentionally bringing harm to his aunt, but over the unwelcome attention their inquiries might bring her way. A 2-point spend suggests that he's also frightened for himself.

Intimidation, or a 2-point **Gentlemanly Pursuits** plus a threat to bring important connections to bear, gets the group past this gatekeeper.

In an alternately frightened and weepy voice, Mrs. Starkfield, when prompted by relevant questioning, unburdens herself of the following:

- Mr. Vance (by which she means Osgood) was a misunderstood soul, brought low by failings he had not the will to conquer.
- He was afraid that he had disgraced himself for a second time.
- His first disgrace occurred when he served a term for forgery.
- He received his second chance in the form of a pardon from the governor of New York.
- But he got into some other trouble, and worried about getting caught.
- Mrs. Starkfield then introduced him to Harry, who thought he might be able to help.
- Harry did help, but perhaps the help was not so helpful.

Mrs. Starkfield will not elaborate beyond this point.

Harry will then, out of his aunt's presence, reveal a little more:

- He met with Vance, who revealed that he'd been living beyond his means, trying to impress various sharpers and gamblers. Vance hoped they'd set him up with one of their shady money-making deals, so he could escape the humiliating grind of lowly bank work.
- Instead, of impressing them, he wound up in debt to them, thanks

to his weakness for racetrack betting.

- Harry might have told him about someone who might have been able to help. And the less said about that, the better.

Harry must be further pressed, with a 1-point **Intimidation**, **Law** or **Reassurance** spend, to reveal anything more. His fear for his own safety now becomes evident via simple **Assess Honesty** use.

- There's talk, in certain quarters, of a man called the Repairer of Reputations. He's a sort of reverse blackmailer who, for a fee, covers up your mistakes for you.
- When he told Vance about this man, Harry didn't realize how long his reach was.
- The Repairer has a legion of followers at his beck and call.
- Harry doesn't want to be mixed up with this in any way. And he certainly doesn't want his aunt involved.
- With great reluctance, if further pressed, Harry supplies Wilde's address, above a dingy armorer's shop on Bleecker Street.

Sheepshead Bay Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-In: Vance's Lodgings

Lead-Out: Diamond Dan

A trip to the Sheepshead Bay racetrack fills in a few details of Vance's activities mostly available elsewhere. Assign a name and personality to the witness, depending on what sort of person they seek out there. A louche or shady sort responds to Bargain (bribery); a raffish upper-cruiser spills the

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facts if prompted by the reflexive class camaraderie of **Gentlemanly Pursuits**.

- Though he was supposed to be some kind of banker or something, Vance ran with a fast crowd.
- He spent like mad trying to impress them.
- Instead, he wound up over his head in gambling debt.
- Word was, he did some time in Sing Sing for forgery, and some more time after that in a nut house.
- They threatened, or so the scuttlebutt goes, to publicize his past, so his rich uncle would have to fire him from his job as a banker.
- Then one day all was fine again between Osgood and his creditors.
- Shortly after that he stopped coming to the track.
- (2-point Bargain or Intimidation)
One of Vance's main creditors was a dangerous customer called "Diamond Dan" Bartlett.

Alternately, a player can introduce a new PC by stipulating that he's a regular at Sheepshead Bay, at which point the new character gets 2 free points of **Gentlemanly Pursuits** and can himself supply the above information.

Diamond Dan

Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-In: Sheepshead Bay

Lead-Out: Mr. Wilde and His Fantastical Cat

Gentlemanly Pursuits shows that Diamond Dan is no gentleman, and not to be crossed lightly. A 1-point spend

arranges, through intermediaries, for a meeting in Bartlett's boxing gym. Dan is an extravagantly tailored man who affects the tall hat and mutton chops of an earlier era of criminality. He's a gruff fellow who does his best to talk all charming like.

A 2-point Bargain (offer of bribe or future favors) gets him to reveal the

following, all of which is either available without spends by other means, or is tangential to the plot:

- [Anything the investigators failed to get from their Sheepshead Bay witness.]
- Osgood fixed things by going to a guy named Mr. Wilde.



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- Wilde can be found above a dingy armorer's shop on Bleeker Street. But don't let the lowly circumstances fool you.
- Wilde's no ordinary criminal. His reach goes deeper than that.
- Things have grown tough for men like Diamond Dan, what with the new tranquility and all. But he's a survivor. And one thing his survivor's instincts tell him is: don't get in the way of a guy like Mr. Wilde.

Diamond Dan's Boys

General Abilities: Athletics 6, Driving 6, Firearms 8, Health 8, Scuffling 8, Weapons 8

The Yellow Sign Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-In: Vance's Lodgings

Lead-Out: Mr. Wilde and His Fantastical Cat

When the characters find the Yellow Sign in Vance's lockbox, ask (if you haven't already) which of them has read *The King in Yellow*.

Although you shouldn't suggest this, it may occur to a player to introduce a new character by specifying that this person has read the book. This is permissible—and sneaky.

Anyone who has read the play, or simply uses the Law ability, knows that it is considered a threat to public order. It may not be imported or published in America, and certainly not staged!

Bureaucracy: The New York official responsible for hunting down and destroying copies of this forbidden text is the Superintendent of Public Morals, Augustus Foxhall.

They may seek appointment with him at his office, located a palatial government structure near the harbor.

Foxhall is a weary, sober-minded man. He despises *The King in Yellow* and all it represents. The realization that he will never entirely succeed in suppressing the book eats away at his soul.

He reveals the following:

- Even as the city grows ever safer and more beautiful, copies of this accursed tome proliferate.
- Many young gentlemen of good families—"much like yourselves"—fall prey to its wiles, succumbing to unhygienic habits and general moral decline. They wind up in asylums, or die from yphilis or opiate consumption.
- In the past months, persons arrested for various crimes have been found carrying pieces of paper inscribed with the Yellow Sign. Foxhall has never been able to prove it—or in fact get even the simplest of charges to stick against them—but is sure a vast conspiracy is afoot.
- (**core**) One of these suspects turned informant, implicating a Mr. Wilde of Bleeker Street as their superior.
- Before Foxhall could stage a raid on Wilde's apartment, the commissioner of police intervened, demanding that he surrender all of his files and allow another agency to investigate. Since then nothing has happened.

If anyone hints that they possess a copy of the book, Foxhall bristles. He demands that they surrender it

immediately or face criminal charges. They can mollify him with a 2-point **Law**, **Bureaucracy**, **Reassurance** or **Gentlemanly Pursuits** spend. Otherwise, he complicates their investigation by sending police officers to shadow them.

Whether they're unwillingly dogged by him or request his assistance, Foxhall, after this scene, acts as nothing but a hindrance to them. Agents of Mr. Wilde have penetrated his organization from top to bottom. They effectively sabotage any attempt on the part of Foxhall's office to stop him. If they know about the PCs, they instead use his officers to hamper their efforts. Foxhall or some of his men might wind up horribly dead at the hands of Wilde's operatives, if:

- You need an additional complication or mystery.
- A note of overt horror seems called for.
- You need to show the players that their characters are the protagonists, and have to rely on their own efforts to end the conspiracy.

Attempts to follow up with the police commissioner are categorically rebuffed. Persistent investigators are threatened with prosecution if they don't back off. **Law** reveals no valid grounds for prosecution, but recognizes the commissioner's near-unlimited power to harass and slander them.

Foxhall might flip from hindrance to help at the very conclusion of the scenario. At this point, if the PCs give him the evidence he needs to launch a real prosecution, he might roll up the remnants of Wilde's conspiracy.

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The Twentieth Dragoon Regiment

Scene Type: Core

Lead-In: Vance's Lodgings

Lead-Outs: Hildred, Dr. Archer

As previously mentioned, some or all of the PCs know the barracks of the 20th well, having been quartered there during the war.

If they arrive during the day (likely if they head here after searching Vance's lodgings) they find their former comrades drilling on the parade grounds. Magnificent on horseback, the hussar's wheel, and the lancers lunge.

If they arrive during the night (for example, if they spend their time talking to the Starkfields or Foxhall before finally making their way to the barracks), they find the men in jolly repose inside the barracks. Cards, brandy, and cigars provide a foreground for hearty laughter. Veterans of the regiment know everyone here but are closest to its lieutenant, Louis Castaigne. He welcomes them with firm shoulder-claps. With chipper cluelessness he happily reveals what little he knows:

- He has never met or so much as heard of Osgood Vance.
- He has no idea why he would possess a map of the barracks and grounds.
- There is no conceivable reason why anyone would wish to harm him.
- **(core)** If asked about The Yellow Sign, he pronounces the whole business a great load of rot. "You might ask poor Hildred about that. The wretched fellow foolishly read that nonsense

after his spill, and has never been quite the same since."

He opines further on the subject of Hildred only if prompted. He curtly answers in response to specific questioning.

Assess Honesty suggests that his disinterest in dwelling on the poor fellow derives from a combination of pity and weariness with his depressive personality.

- Hildred is his cousin.
- And his only living relative, now that you mention it.
- He was as hale and sunny a fellow as you could possibly ask for, until that dreadful fall from his horse four years ago.
- The injury was more than physical; he spent some time in an asylum, under the care of a Dr. Archer.
- But don't mention that if you speak to him; he's fretfully touchy when reminded of it.
- In fact, it might be better not to get him all riled about The King In Yellow. He becomes visibly unhinged whenever he speaks of it.

Although other former comrades are pleased to chat, they have little more to offer, aside from the following:

- One cavalryman, Lance Corporal Claud Burling, saw a figure lurking outside the barracks the night before last. His body language seemed suspicious. Burling challenged the man, who departed quickly, without giving an account of himself.
- If shown the photograph of Osgood Vance found in his lodgings, Burling

says that it could have been him—although older. However, he got only a fleeting glimpse of the man, in bad lighting, so he can't say for sure.

Ultimately Louis is more interested in an announcement of his own:

- He is due to be married to his longtime sweetheart, Constance Hawberk.
- As a sort of early wedding gift, the brass has chosen to promote him to colonel, and commander of the regiment. Louis demands that they share a celebratory drink with them.

(Gentlemanly Pursuits: It of course is only right and proper that heroic officers of the German war enjoy full access to quality brandy. No authority would dare question this.)

Mr. Wilde and his Fantastical Cat

Scene Type: Core

Lead-Ins: The Yellow Sign, Mrs. Starkfield, Diamond Dan

Lead-Outs: Hawberk and Constance, Arnold Steylette, Revisiting Wilde

As the investigators head to Wilde's, describe the shop below his apartment: Hawberk's Armorers.

If the scene "The Twentieth Dragoon Regiment" has yet to occur, tell players who have specified that they were in the regiment that the name rings a bell. (On a 1-point **Gentlemanly Pursuits** spend, they recall that their friend and former superior officer, Lt. Louis Castaigne has for a long time

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been courting a Constance Hawberk.)

If the scene has occurred, the name should ring a bell without prompting. The PCs could conceivably delay their confrontation with Wilde to pay their respects to Constance, in which case that scene nests within this one.

When they reach the creaky second-floor landing that leads to Wilde's door, they see a moderately well-dressed man knocking on it, to no avail. He pays them no mind as he shouts through the door:

"I am Arnold Steylette, owner and editor-in-chief of The Great New York. I would like to interview you, Mr. Wilde, for my newspaper."

In response, the PCs hear only muffled refusals.

Steylette has evidently been banging

on the door for a while. He shrugs and heads down the stairs, brushing past the PCs.

If they decide to brace him before going on to talk with Wilde, the scene "Arnold Steylette" nests within this one.

As they should deduce from seeing the overtly information-seeking Steylette turned away, Wilde refuses to see them if they announce that they've come to ask him questions.

He will invite them in if they seem to be potential clients, which they might achieve, depending on the precise tactic they adopt, via **Bargain, Gentlemanly Pursuits, or Reassurance**.

As you'll recall from the story, Wilde is a bizarre-looking man of distinctly menacing demeanor. A pair of spectacles fix obviously prosthetic wax ears to his

bald head. All of the fingers of his left hand are missing. Deep scratches, some fresh, some old and scarred, rake every area of exposed flesh, his face most especially.

The mere sight of him occasions a Difficulty 4 **Stability** test.

Gloom suffuses his ill-lit office. A monstrous cat hunches in a corner, back arched, fangs bared, hissing furiously at him. At some point, it interrupts the discussion to launch itself at Wilde, viciously clawing him, partially dislodging Wilde's artificial ears.

Wilde can influence the minds of people who have read *The King In Yellow*. He can immediately tell when he meets someone who has done so.

A copy of the book sits in solitary



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prominence on a small display shelf. Wilde draws no attention to it. He happily lends it if asked, knowing he will achieve dominance over its readers. If a reader of the book is present, Wilde continues the discussion even when it becomes apparent that the investigators are pumping him for information. If not, he brings the meeting to a curt conclusion as soon as he comes to suspect this. Gauge this by the quality of the players' performance. The fiendishly clever Wilde quickly sees through any hint of deception.

The best way to forestall this realization is to let him take the lead, asking questions of them. They'll have to weave a convincing cover story about a reputation they want repaired. The fewer PCs are taking part in the talk, the easier this will be. His questions convey the outlines of his activities.

- Yes, he does act as a Repairer of Reputations. Naturally the service only works so long as its beneficiaries remain discreet.
- He will need to know the nature of the indiscretion in order to determine the best means of repairing it.
- To this end, he will dispatch his discreet agents to research the situation. This initial phase of the service will be billed on an hourly basis.
- This will be surprisingly inexpensive. Wilde has trained his employees to work with both industry and parsimony.
- Should Wilde determine that he is able to help, he will then quote a flat fee for the reputation repair.
- Naturally anything compromising Wilde discovers in the course of the

repair will be kept strictly secret. To do anything else would be to obviate the entire project!

- (core) **Assess Honesty**: Wilde is lying when he makes this assurance.
- *The King in Yellow* is a sublime and misunderstood piece of literature.
- Its banning is regrettable; it's supposed effect on malleable minds, entirely apocryphal.
- (**Assess Honesty**) Wilde is lying.
- His interest in this book arises from his leisurely contemplation of arts and letters, and in no way relates to his vocation as a Repairer of Reputations.
- (**Assess Honesty**) Liar, liar, pants on fire.

The following questions alert him to the PCs' true intent. He will answer one of them and end the meeting. All of his answers read as deceptive against **Assess Honesty**.

- He never met Osgood Vance.
- He does not know Hildred Castaigne.
- Although he has been briefly introduced to Louis Castaigne, who is courting the daughter of the armorer downstairs, he takes no particular interest in him.

Characters familiar with *The King In Yellow* see a large, technically advanced safe standing against the wall behind Wilde.

Those who have not perceive only a biscuit box on a worm-eaten side table. If asked about the safe, Wilde appears baffled: "It is only a biscuit box."

When the characters realize that some of them are seeing one thing and others another, call for Difficulty 4 **Stability** rolls (+2 Difficulty for King in Yellow readers.) Failed results cause characters to become nauseous and visibly distraught, and to feel compelled to leave Wilde's presence immediately. Another PC can calm one character affected in this way, allowing him to remain in the room, with a 2-point **Reassurance** spend.

A gentleman testing Wilde's reaction with **Assess Honesty** concludes that it is disingenuous.

Wilde will show them what's in the biscuit box if asked: it's a brass crown one might find in a costume shop.

King in Yellow readers instead see a fabulous jeweled diadem. If this happens after they have already freaked out and been calmed down by the biscuit box/safe dichotomy, another round of **Stability** tests occurs, but at Difficulty 6 for non-readers and Difficulty 8 for readers.

Revisiting Wilde Scene Type: Antagonist Reaction

Lead-In: Mr. Wilde and His Fantastical Cat

Though player initiative ought to trump best-laid plans, the most effective story pacing will see the characters meet Wilde once, conclude that he's highly suspicious, and then come back later to escalate matters.

Or Wilde might appear somewhere else, to bring the escalation to them.

Transforming Wilde into a suitable antagonist for a group of PCs requires that he prove himself more effective than he does in the story.

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Wilde can use his power over King In Yellow readers to force them to harm themselves, or to attack their saner comrades. He can do this from afar. A Difficulty 4 **Sanity** success allows characters to resist this force. If he is present, the Difficulty increases to 8.

He might, for example, impel one character to shoot at another. Wilde's actions allow you to assign ratings to a PCs' unassigned general abilities. You might decide that the influenced character has 10 points of **Firearms**, for example.

Wilde automatically achieves control over NPCs who have read the book. He induces them to attack the PCs or NPCs whose lives they value, like Louis or Constance.

Simply by flashing a hand-drawn Yellow Sign, Wilde can cause people to lose consciousness. To resist this effect requires a Difficulty 4 **Sanity** test—8 for readers.

Should you need to cast subtlety aside, either Wilde or his cat might turn out be physical threats, fueled by the power of Hastur.

Monstrous Mr. Wilde

Abilities: Athletics 9, Firearms 13, Health 11, Scuffling 13
Hit Threshold: 6 (to readers of *The King In Yellow*); 4 (to non-readers)
Alertness Modifier: +1
Armor: Scuffling does half damage

Monstrous Cat

Abilities: Athletics 9, Firearms 26, Health 11
Hit Threshold: 5 (small and fast)
Alertness Modifier: +1
Weapon: +1 (claws)

Wilde's Network

Scene Type: Alternate/ Antagonist Reaction

If Wilde suspects that the PCs are onto him, he assigns members of his network and other blackmail victims to impede them. They're told to wait and attempt to secretly pick them off when alone and vulnerable. But minions, being minions, might take rash action allowing for an exciting fight or chase sequence when needed.

General Abilities: Athletics 4, Driving 4, Firearms 4, Health 4, Scuffling 6, Weapons 4
Alertness Modifier: +1
Stealth Modifier: +2

Captured minions or blackmail victims prove equally close-mouthed.

Minions being minions, willing members of his network are easily broken by **Interrogation**. Half-crazed declarations follow:

- "The world has been changing, invisibly, for generations, ever since the printing of the Yellow Book!"
- "Hastur's handiwork is all about us!"
- "The Emperor shall soon take his throne!"
- "You may have stopped me, fools, but you are doomed! Doomed!"
Wilde then senses that they're spilling the beans and overwhelms them with remote psychic influence. Where circumstances allow it, they go into a frenzy and commit suicide, perhaps by recklessly attacking the PCs, soldiers, or policemen. If constrained, they die babbling, their lives snuffed out by spontaneous cerebral hemorrhages.

Blackmail victims acting unwillingly for fear of exposure respond to 3-point **Reassurance** spends, and promises that their secrets will be kept. They confess that Wilde put them up to it. They will tell of their own indiscretions. Mere pawns all, they know nothing of the Yellow Sign or Wilde's broader scheme. They make it clear that they'll suffer imprisonment before testifying in court. Foxhall, hemmed in by Wilde's high-placed allies, can't use mere off-the-record comments to launch a raid against him.

Hawberk and Constance

Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-In: Mr. Wilde and His Fantastical Cat, The Twentieth Dragoon Regiment

In his tiny shop, Mr. Hawberk repairs antique armor and weapons, often in the company of his pretty daughter, Constance. He works both as chief armorer for the Metropolitan Museum, and as consultant to wealthy collectors. Hawberk regards this as a solemn vocation.

Art History notes a curious coincidence: his name suits his profession, as a hauberk is the term for a chainmail tunic.

History spots a tiny detail in the crest-like design on Hawberk's sign. It is a reversal of the crest of the English Marquisate of Avonshire.

If asked about this, Hawberk visibly dissembles, none-too-smoothly changing the subject.

A 2-point **History** spend, or later free use of the ability in a library, reveals that the Marquisate stands without an heir. The previous Marquis killed a man

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who slandered his wife. She took to her bed and succumbed to a preexisting illness. He fled to Australia, where he supposedly died. However, an image of the Marquis looks oddly like Old Hawberk.

Wilde knows that Hawberk is the Marquis. He fears that their aristocratic connections, if revealed, might cause England to involve itself in the imperial accession. Its diplomatic interference might induce Louis to withdraw his

concession of imperial rights to Hildred, leaving the throne of Hastur in dispute. This is why Wilde wants Louis and perhaps Constance dead. (Hildred also wants him dead due to his unrequited desire for Constance.)

Hawberk knows that Wilde is onto him but neither he nor Constance have any inkling of the rest. Hawberk is anxious to keep his true identity secret, most especially from his daughter.

He can attest that Wilde is a strange bird, who knows more than he should about many things. For example, he recently discovered a piece of antique armor thought lost to history, and revealed its location to Hawberk. The old man suspects that Wilde did so merely to show him up in his area of expertise.

Constance requires **Reassurance** before speaking of private matters to relative strangers, even if they are Louis' friends.

- She has noted Hildred's unbecoming glances at her, but is too demure to make an issue of them.
- Wilde is a strange and sinister man, with people coming and going from his offices at all hours. Of his true activities, she claims no specific knowledge.

Arnold Steylette

Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-In: Mr. Wilde and His Fantastical Cat

PCs can speak to the editor of The Great New York at its offices, or when they first meet him, in the corridor outside Wilde's apartment.

Steylette will discuss his interest in Wilde if the PCs agree to share information (**Bargain**) or wildly praise his obscure broadsheet (**Flattery**.)

- He has heard from several sources (who spoke to him under conditions of strict confidentiality) that Wilde acts as a "Repairer of Reputations."
- Men in trouble allegedly go to him, and he somehow arranges for their scandals to be forgotten.
- To this aim, he supposedly employs



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a legion of anonymous operatives.

- Steylette wishes to know more of this enterprise—precisely how it is managed, and at what cost to its customers.
- **Assess Honesty** shows that this statement gilds the truth. Like any newspaperman, Steylette thrives on scandal. The PC guesses that he probably wants to uncover the indiscretions Wilde has apparently swept under the carpeting.
- Steylette has heard of the Yellow Sign but not in connection with this case. If the PCs suggest to him that Wilde somehow ties into *The King in Yellow*, he visibly blanches.

- Although he doesn't say so, **Assess Honesty** allows a character to accurately guess that Steylette will back off the story if it has a Yellow Sign aspect to it. Scandal is one thing. The depths of inexplicable madness are quite another. A 1-point spend prompts him to admit this.

Steylette can be induced to do legwork for the PCs, if it seems like it will lead to a high-profile story for his newspaper (requires 1-point **Bargain** spend.) If this happens, they later discover his mangled corpse—he's been brutally murdered by Hildred Castaigne, or by a member of Wilde's blackmail network.

Hildred

Scene Type: Core

Lead-In: The Twentieth Dragon Regiment

Lead-Outs: Mr. Wilde and His Fantastical Cat, Dr. Archer

Hildred Castaigne is arrogant, spiteful, defensive, and completely mad. Before a fall from his horse four years ago, he was a slightly sulky but otherwise normal young man of society. While convalescing, he defied doctor's orders and read a secretly procured copy of *The King in Yellow*. Thereafter, falling in with Wilde—who spotted the telltale symptoms of Hastur influence on him when he called on Constance at her father's shop—he accepts that he is of Hastur's bloodline, and the rightful Emperor of America.

Wilde's network will execute the coup needed to place him on the throne. It will all happen within days. Meanwhile, Hildred has settled a score, murdering his alienist, Dr. Archer, who had the temerity to question his sanity.

He expected the coup to occur last night, with the assassination of his cousin, Louis. When the PCs find him, either at his home or club, they find him in an agitated state he is at pains to conceal. (Play him so that this comes across to the players, signaling it to a player with **Assess Honesty** if the point doesn't seem to be getting through.) It now seems that he killed Dr. Archer prematurely, and might be laid low by this mistake before he can seize the crown. He didn't tell Wilde that he was going to do this, and so is reluctant to go to him for help.

(Although Wilde will make him Emperor, he still finds the man alarming and repulsive. Once his Imperial position is secure, he'll find a way to

The Renunciation

As pacing needs dictate, Louis might approach the group in the late going to regale them with a most curious anecdote:

- Hildred just came to him and demanded that he renounce all claims to the imperial throne of America!
- He claimed they were both descended from some chap named Hastur, who is portrayed in that damnable play.
- In fact, Louis is supposedly Hastur's closest heir, with Hildred second in the lineage.
- He even had a family tree to show him.
- Somehow this absurd connection confers some sort of regal title.
- What poppycock! The poor blighter's gone completely off his bean—again.

This happens only after the PCs have spoken to both Castaignes.

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dispose of him, mind-bending powers and all.)

Under questioning by the players, he makes the following assertions:

- He is indeed a frequent visitor to the amusingly eccentric Mr. Wilde, whose bizarre assertions provide hours of diversion.
- It is impossible to believe that anyone would want to harm good old, charming, empty-headed Louis.
- He is fond of Constance and happy that she will be happy with Louis.
- He did indeed read *The King In Yellow*. Its first act plods a bit, but the rest may be held as a sublime example of literature's decadent school, surpassing even Rimbaud and Huysmans.
- The idea that the play unhinges the mind is puerile idiocy. The crystalline certitude of Hildred's faculties is proof of that!

Assess Honesty shows that he's hiding something huge, and that his answers were riddled with falsehoods. It does not allow the players to more reliably separate fact from fabrication.

(*core*) His agitation breaks through to the surface if he is asked about his stay in a mental hospital. He claims never to have been insane. Then he turns white and asks them if they've been to see Dr. Archer. If they say no, he relaxes again. If they accuse him of killing Archer, he attempts to flee. Should they obstruct him, he pulls a pistol on them.

General Abilities: Athletics 12, Driving 4, Firearms 12, Health 12, Scuffling 12, Weapons 12
Alertness Modifier: +2
Stealth Modifier: +2

Dr. Archer

Scene Type: Alternate

Lead-Ins: **The Twentieth Dragoon Regiment, Hildred**

A trip to John Archer's Madison Avenue home finds no one present to answer the doorbell.

Locksmith shows that the front door was recently jimmied open. It also allows the PCs to enter.

From the kitchen, they find the cellar door ajar. At the bottom of its wooden steps lies Dr. Archer. His throat has been slashed open.

Medicine reveals that:

- He was likely killed with a straight razor.
- He has been dead since about the time of Vance's suicide. (Don't make this correlation outright. Instead, give an estimated time of death that squares with the timeline.)

Having made this discovery, the PCs might then conduct an illicit search of Hildred's home. You may want to make this a suspense sequence, in which they evade the attention of Hildred or Wilde's minions.

They then discover a bloodied shirt and straight razor stuffed in a bathroom cupboard. **Medicine**, with laboratory access, shows that the blood matches Archer's type.

The Chamber

in Action

Scene Type: Antagonist Reaction

Having made so much hay of the Government Lethal Chamber, it would be a shame to withhold from the players the chance to interact with it.

As you construct antagonist reactions to keep the horror and suspense going, look for a way to stage a chase, action or escape scene in the new subterranean levels beneath New York.

- They might pursue a minion, or Hildred, into the underground roadways that replaced the elevated trains, or, better yet, the trackless support tunnels used in their construction.
- One or more of them might wake up in a basement after being knocked out by Wilde's psychic influence.

The caper to this sequence occurs when a PC escapes upwards through a hatch, only to find himself in the Lethal Chamber. Although the players have probably been expecting a sterile booth that kills with gas or electricity, they learn—as they are sliced to paste—that it works by an efficient arrangement of high-velocity blades.

If this occurs too early in the session, you'll want to allow **Athletics** tests to avoid hideous death. The later it occurs, the more equanimity the players will feel as their one-off characters meet a gruesome, but well laid, fate.

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Endings

Scene Type: Conclusion

The breadth of possible player actions and antagonist reactions allows for any number of satisfying endings: some triumphant, others horrific.

Maximum Horror: Almost everyone dies as the coup finally proceeds to its conclusion, and a new American era begins. In their last moments, readers of *The King In Yellow* see a vision of its key image, the Pallid Mask, superimposed over the warships in New York Harbor. *Descent Into Madness:* Influenced from afar by Wilde, the crazy half of the party wipes out the sane half, as the delayed coup finally occurs.

Sanity Prevails: The PCs gather enough evidence against Wilde and Hildred to inspire Foxhall to action. He has them assist in neutralizing the highest-placed members of the conspiracy while a handpicked cadre of loyal men sweeps up the conspiracy.

Constance Held Hostage: A panicked and resentful Hildred seizes Constance. He demands the characters' compliance with a razor held to her porcelain throat. (Wilde might do this instead, if Hildred has already been neutralized.)

The Veil-Out: Chambers' story ends with a terse note informing us that narrator Hildred Castaigne died soon after in an asylum. Maybe its narrator is even more unreliable than we think. What if the story is a cover-up of actual events, written by someone else, in Hildred's voice?

The account leads the reader to dismiss the Wilde-Castaigne conspiracy as mere insanity. After they foil the scheme, the scenario might conclude with the Esoterorists-style realization that the truth must be hidden from history. Which PC of our well-bred, heroic gentlemen steps forward to author the misleading tale? And which of them is willing to complete the cover-up, by killing Hildred in cold blood?

Not Scary Enough For You?

The weirdness of this scenario derives from its sense of a placid, creeping tyranny in a world that should not be, and from the evocative strangeness of its primary villain, Mr. Wilde.

If the action becomes too prosaic, look for ways to insert horror into the proceedings by triggering the incipient madness of characters exposed to the book. Call for Sanity rolls early and often.

Bring in Wilde's minions to threaten them physically.

Confront them with GMCs whose minds have been shattered by *The King In Yellow*, and are further along the path of madness than they are.



TRAIL OF CTHULHU

BY KENNETH HITE

Player Name:

Sanity¹

0	1	2	3
4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15

Hit Threshold³

Stability

-12	-11	-10	-9
-8	-7	-6	-5
-4	-3	-2	-1
0	1	2	3
4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15

Health

-12	-11	-10	-9
-8	-7	-6	-5
-4	-3	-2	-1
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² Occupational abilities are half price. Mark them with a * before assigning points.

³ Hit Threshold is 3, 4 if your Athletics is 8 or higher

⁴ These General abilities double up as Investigative abilities

⁴ Usually, you can't start with Cthulhu Mythos. Sanity is limited to 10-Cthulhu Mythos.

⁵ In a Pulp game If your Firearms rating is 5 you can fire two pistols at once (see p. 42)

⁶ Assign one language per point, during play. Record them here.

⁷ Any Fleeing rating above twice your Athletics rating costs one point for two.

⁸ Only Alienists and Parapsychologists can buy Hypnosis, and only in a Pulp game

⁹ You start with 4 free Sanity points, 1 Health and 1 Stability point.

Investigator Name: Henley Braith

Drive:

Occupation:²

Occupational benefits:

Pillars of Sanity:

Build Points:

Academic Abilities

Accounting

Anthropology

Archaeology

Architecture

Art History

Biology

Cthulhu Mythos⁴

Cryptography

Geology

History

Languages⁶

Law

Library Use

Medicine

Occult

Physics

Theology

Interpersonal Abilities

Assess Honesty

Bargain

Bureaucracy

Cop Talk

Credit Rating

Flattery

Interrogation

Intimidation

Oral History

Reassurance

Streetwise

Gentlemanly Pursuits

Art

Astronomy

Chemistry

Craft

Evidence Collection

Forensics

Locksmith

Outdoorsman

Pharmacy

Photography

General Abilities

Athletics

Conceal

Disguise⁽¹⁾

Driving

Electrical Repair⁽¹⁾

Explosives⁽¹⁾

Filch

Firearms⁵

First Aid

Fleeing⁷

Health⁹

Hypnosis⁸

Mechanical Repair⁽¹⁾

Piloting

Preparedness

Psychoanalysis

Riding

Sanity⁹

Stability⁹

Scuffling

Sense Trouble

Shadowing

Stealth

Weapons

SOURCES OF STABILITY:

CONTACTS AND NOTES

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

BY KENNETH HITE

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Investigator Name: Jack Elliot

Drive:

Occupation:²

Occupational benefits:

Pillars of Sanity:

Build Points:

Academic Abilities

Accounting

Anthropology

Archaeology

Architecture

Art History

Biology

Cthulhu Mythos⁴

Cryptography

Geology

History

Languages⁶

Law

Library Use

Medicine

Occult

Physics

Theology

Interpersonal Abilities

Assess Honesty

Bargain

Bureaucracy

Cop Talk

Credit Rating

Flattery

Interrogation

Intimidation

Oral History

Reassurance

Streetwise

Gentlemanly Pursuits

Technical Abilities

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Filch

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Fleeing⁷

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Hypnosis⁸

Mechanical Repair⁽¹⁾

Piloting

Preparedness

Psychoanalysis

Riding

Sanity⁹

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Sense Trouble

Shadowing

Stealth

Weapons

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Investigator Name: Sim Fallowby

Drive:

Occupation:²

Occupational benefits:

Pillars of Sanity:

Build Points:

Academic Abilities

Accounting

Anthropology

Archaeology

Architecture

Art History

Biology

Cthulhu Mythos⁴

Cryptography

Geology

History

Languages⁶

Law

Library Use

Medicine

Occult

Physics

Theology

Interpersonal Abilities

Assess Honesty

Bargain

Bureaucracy

Cop Talk

Credit Rating

Flattery

Interrogation

Intimidation

Oral History

Reassurance

Streetwise

Gentlemanly Pursuits

Technical Abilities

Art

Astronomy

Chemistry

Craft

Evidence Collection

Forensics

Locksmith

Outdoorsman

Pharmacy

Photography

General Abilities

Athletics

Conceal

Disguise¹⁰

Driving

Electrical Repair¹⁰

Explosives¹⁰

Filch

Firearms⁵

First Aid

Fleeing⁷

Health⁹

Hypnosis⁸

Mechanical Repair¹⁰

Piloting

Preparedness

Psychoanalysis

Riding

Sanity⁹

Stability⁹

Scuffling

Sense Trouble

Shadowing

Stealth

Weapons

SOURCES OF STABILITY:

CONTACTS AND NOTES

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Investigator Name: Clifford Rowden

Drive:

Occupation:²

Occupational benefits:

Pillars of Sanity:

Build Points:

Academic Abilities

Accounting
Anthropology
Archaeology
Architecture
Art History
Biology
Cthulhu Mythos⁴
Cryptography
Geology
History
Languages⁶

Interpersonal Abilities

Assess Honesty
Bargain
Bureaucracy
Cop Talk
Credit Rating
Flattery
Interrogation
Intimidation
Oral History
Reassurance
Streetwise
Gentlemanly Pursuits

General Abilities

Athletics
Conceal
Disguise ⁽¹⁾
Driving
Electrical Repair⁽¹⁾
Explosives⁽¹⁾
Filch
Firearms⁵
First Aid
Fleeing⁷
Health⁹
Hypnosis⁸
Mechanical Repair⁽¹⁾

Law

Library Use
Medicine
Occult
Physics
Theology

Technical Abilities

Art
Astronomy
Chemistry
Craft
Evidence Collection
Forensics
Locksmith
Outdoorsman
Pharmacy
Photography

Piloting
Preparedness
Psychoanalysis
Riding
Sanity⁹
Stability⁹
Scuffling
Sense Trouble
Shadowing
Stealth
Weapons

SOURCES OF STABILITY:

CONTACTS AND NOTES

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Investigator Name: Richard Selby

Drive:

Occupation:²

Occupational benefits:

Pillars of Sanity:

Build Points:

Academic Abilities

Accounting

Anthropology

Archaeology

Architecture

Art History

Biology

Cthulhu Mythos⁴

Cryptography

Geology

History

Languages⁶

Law

Library Use

Medicine

Occult

Physics

Theology

Interpersonal Abilities

Assess Honesty

Bargain

Bureaucracy

Cop Talk

Credit Rating

Flattery

Interrogation

Intimidation

Oral History

Reassurance

Streetwise

Gentlemanly Pursuits

Technical Abilities

Art

Astronomy

Chemistry

Craft

Evidence Collection

Forensics

Locksmith

Outdoorsman

Pharmacy

Photography

General Abilities

Athletics

Conceal

Disguise¹⁰

Driving

Electrical Repair¹⁰

Explosives¹⁰

Filch

Firearms⁵

First Aid

Fleeing⁷

Health⁹

Hypnosis⁸

Mechanical Repair¹⁰

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Investigator Name: Stanley Trent

Drive:

Occupation:²

Occupational benefits:

Pillars of Sanity:

Build Points:

Academic Abilities

Accounting

Anthropology

Archaeology

Architecture

Art History

Biology

Cthulhu Mythos⁴

Cryptography

Geology

History

Languages⁶

Law

Library Use

Medicine

Occult

Physics

Theology

Interpersonal Abilities

Assess Honesty

Bargain

Bureaucracy

Cop Talk

Credit Rating

Flattery

Interrogation

Intimidation

Oral History

Reassurance

Streetwise

Gentlemanly Pursuits

Technical Abilities

Art

Astronomy

Chemistry

Craft

Evidence Collection

Forensics

Locksmith

Outdoorsman

Pharmacy

Photography

General Abilities

Athletics

Conceal

Disguise ⁽¹⁾

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Electrical Repair⁽¹⁾

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Health⁹

Hypnosis⁸

Mechanical Repair⁽¹⁾

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Psychoanalysis

Riding

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Stability⁹

Scuffling

Sense Trouble

Shadowing

Stealth

Weapons

SOURCES OF STABILITY:

CONTACTS AND NOTES

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

The Repairer of Reputations

DRIVE CARDS

Good Breeding

You are not one to seek out danger. However, as an able-bodied fellow of unimpeachable family connections, you understand that it is your duty to protect society, including your social inferiors, when it is threatened. To shirk this would cast a shadow on the family name. There is no worse failure than that.

Fellowship

As you learned while fighting in the recent war, there is no greater virtue than comradeship. If your friends are in danger, you must follow them, boldly and heartily.

Adventure

Although it is good that the war has ended, the cessation of hostilities has left you feeling vaguely dispirited. At no time did you ever feel more completely alive than when you were under fire. The sunny days of safety you once yearned for now seem dull and hollow. If there is a new fight to be fought, you'll be first into the breach.

Curiosity

When something strange is afoot, you can't help poking your nose in it. Several times that has nearly resulted in your losing that nose.
(Come to mention it, you can't help but feel that something very curious has happened, and that all of your ordinary existence is the greatest mystery of all.)

Aesthete

Although the current fashion, in this age of new tranquility, is for art that soothes and quiets the soul, you discreetly maintain an interest in the decadent works of the prior generation. You remember when poetry plumbed the depths of the human soul, when paintings depicted the weird as well as the beautiful. One day you will show the world your own verse, and once again crack open the doors of perception. But first you must write some verse, yes? And to do that, you must look into shadowed corners, where others dare not glimpse.

Champion of Order

History comprises an eternal struggle between chaos and order. As anarchy embroils Europe, you remain vigilant to its symptoms here, in the United States. The blood you and others shed in the recent war must not have been shed in vain. Wherever disorder looms, you will be there to tamp it down.