

THE RING IN YELLOW

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ARMITAGE HOUSE
SEATTLE
2005

EDITIO VULGATA

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Published by Armitage House
5536 25th Ave. NE
Seattle, WA 98105-2415
www.tccorp.com

First Hardcover Edition, Limited to 500 signed copies : February 2000
(Editio Princeps).

First Trade Paperback Edition: December 2005.

ISBN: 1-887797-19-X
Printed in the United States of America.

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INTRODUCTION

THE ENVELOPE held two tickets, emblazoned with the Yellow Sign. This was an ominous event.

The instructions directed us to drive two hours south to a town we had never been before, where we were to attend a dress rehearsal of a particular play. We drove. The play was in a crumbling old theatre, unsafe to enter, a piss-bum of a proscenium.

The cast was aghast. No one was expected to respond to the missive. We were seated hurriedly and with stammer.

Behind us, as we waited for the play to begin, we noticed: a figure in white, all in white, top of head to tip of toe, seated there, quiet, still. Had it been there from the first? We were unsure. Now it looked like a corpse wrapped, moments before the brain was extracted through the nose and the oils and spices bound into the casing.

We whispered. We craned our heads around to behold the specter. We fidgeted.

The figure coughed.

We did not look. We did not spin round. But we were electric, fear and dread, delicious like butter on bread.

One of us had a gun. I should explain. Before we entered the theatre, we cased the joint. Front and back, alleys and exits. If trouble ensued. We knew. We knew how to get out.

We had a gun. A compact revolver, palm-sized, with a flush hammer so it would not catch on the lining of your pocket when you pulled it out. We were taking no chances.

The figure coughed. It was alive. This thing seated behind us in the crumbling red velvet seats, it coughed or choked or perhaps swallowed a particularly toothsome bit of child.

The play started. The figure rose. It strode forward to the stage. Events unfolded.

The first act ended. We reeled. Silence fell. The playwright took the stage.

"Today we are only doing act one. We will perform the rest of the play on opening night."

We had a gun. We knew how to use it. We almost drilled a

Cassilda: *(Sings.)*
Along the shore the cloud waves break,
The twin suns sink behind the lake,
The shadows lengthen
In Carcosa.

Strange is the night where black stars rise,
And strange moons circle through the skies,
But stranger still is
Lost Carcosa.

Songs that the Hyades shall sing,
Where flap the tatters of the King,
Must die unheard in
Dim Carcosa.

Song of my soul, my voice is dead,
Die thou, unsung, as tears unshed
Shall dry and die in
Lost Carcosa.

(Polite, but scattered applause from the gathering crowd.)

Naotalba: *(Aside to Thale.)* She sings of Carcosa! How much does she know? Could it be she who thought for us to wear the prophesied Pallid Mask?

Thale: However much she knows, reverend father, her fears are far greater. She thinks that she is dying, rather, she thinks that we are killing her. She has not seen Carcosa.

Naotalba: Go to her. Find out from her whether or not she has seen it.

Thale: I doubt that she will talk to me.

Naotalba: You must try.

Stranger: I wear no mask.

Camilla: (*Terrified, aside to Cassilda.*) No mask? No mask!

Cassilda: (*Wonderment.*) I think he speaks the truth.

Stranger: I am truth.

Camilla: (*Shrieks, loudly.*) You've all gone crazy! You're crazy! The world's coming undone—oh, why won't you leave me alone? (*Increasingly hysterical.*) Signs and cities not there and that, that *thing* with no face, and dark stars and, and... (*Breaks down, sobbing.*) You're all crazy, and you're making me crazy, too!

Stranger: Mark these words, for they shall echo through the streets outside forever, when they are Carcosa's streets. There is no liberation. There is no end. There is no future...

Camilla: (*An agonized scream.*) No!

(CURTAIN)