

0. Tricky Vic "Sells" the Eiffel Tower...Twice - Story Preface

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The Eiffel Tower as it appeared at the *Exposition Universelle*, in Paris, during 1889. Photo likely taken by Louis-Antonin Neurdein (1846-1914), a member of the French Society of Photographers. Online via the Library of Congress.

When World War I interrupted Lustig's money-box scams, on cruise ships, the "Count" remained in America where he found plenty of people to con during the war years.

After the war, Victor was back in France. Able to understand French, he read an article about problems with the Eiffel Tower. It was beginning to rust, and the people of Paris did not have a maintenance fund to keep it in good shape. Some Parisians even talked about tearing it down or moving it to a different location.

With these facts in mind, Lustig had an idea for a new con. He would try to sell the Eiffel Tower to an unsuspecting "mark."

How in the world could he sell a Parisian landmark which he didn't own?

Lustig, the master of aliases, would give himself a new title— Deputy General Director of the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs—and then invite several scrap dealers to a confidential meeting he'd hold at a Paris hotel. He'd offer the Eiffel Tower to the highest bidder who would then purchase the aging landmark, take it apart and sell the disassembled metal as scrap.

In May of 1925, when Paris itself was recovering from the war, Victor turned his idea into reality.



Using faked government stationery, which he had a forger create for him, Lustig invited around six scrap-metal dealers to a confidential meeting at the Hotel de Crillon in Paris. Everything seemed on the up-and-up to these individuals (who'd been "selected" to "bid" on the Eiffel-Tower tear down because they were honest businessmen).

After the scrap dealers arrived at the hotel, Lustig revealed why he'd invited them to a meeting. He urged the men to keep quiet about the plan to tear-down the tower since not all Parisians would be happy about removing the famous-but-aging landmark.

Despite their good reputations, however, the potential bidders did not realize they were actually dealing with a chap who was completely dishonest. He had no more authority to sell the Eiffel Tower than they did.

The unwitting men traveled to the tower, in a rented limousine, for a tour with Lustig. The “Count’s” real motivation, for the visit, was to assess which scrap-metal dealer was probably the most gullible and excited about the project.

“Tricky Vic,” as he is known today, asked the men to submit their bids, to purchase the Tower. He reminded them to keep quiet about the purchase process since the whole project was a state secret.

Although he accepted bids from everyone, Lustig had already narrowed his choice to one man—Andre Poisson. Not a member of the inner circle of Parisian businessmen, Poisson thought his ownership of the Eiffel Tower would substantially increase his standing in the city.

What it did, in fact, was to substantially decrease the money in his bank account. The amount of funds he actually paid, to buy the Tower, was even more than he'd originally envisioned because of an interesting turn of events.

Poisson’s wife was suspicious of Lustig and his plan. Who was this government official, she wondered? Why was he keeping government affairs so secret? Why was he insisting that the deal come together so quickly?

Learning of Madame Poisson’s concerns, Lustig arranged for another meeting. He “confessed” that his job as a government official did not pay enough for him to sustain the lifestyle he enjoyed. He needed to supplement his income, in other ways, which caused him to be discrete about his government dealings.

Poisson immediately concluded that the Deputy General Director of the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs was open to ... accepting bribes. And ... Poisson wanted the Eiffel-Tower deal so badly that he'd be willing to make a separate payment, to a corrupt government official, beyond the cost of buying the Tower.

Lustig’s initial idea had thus expanded into ... a con within a con.

After receiving the purchase price of the Tower, together with additional funds for the bribe, Lustig and his “secretary”—another con man known as “Dan Collins”—quickly boarded a train bound for Vienna. Their suitcase was stuffed with Poisson’s cash.



What happened after Poisson reported this criminal activity? Nothing ... because Andre Poisson was apparently too embarrassed to report he'd been so badly duped.

Since this con had worked so well, Lustig decided to try it again.

About a month later, he returned to Paris and invited another group of men to another meeting where he tried to sell the Eiffel Tower for scrap. This time, however, the victim reported the con, to the police, before Lustig

could close the deal and pocket the money.

Newspapers broke the story but, before any gendarme could arrest them, Lustig and Collins had fled Paris and traveled to ... America.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Tricky-Vic-Sells-the-Eiffel-Tower...Twice-Tricky-Vic-An-Impossibly-Good-Con-Man>

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Tricky-Vic-Sells-the-Eiffel-Tower...Twice-Tricky-Vic-An-Impossibly-Good-Con-Man>

Media Stream



Eiffel Tower in 1889

Image, described above, online via the Library of Congress.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Eiffel-Tower-in-1889>

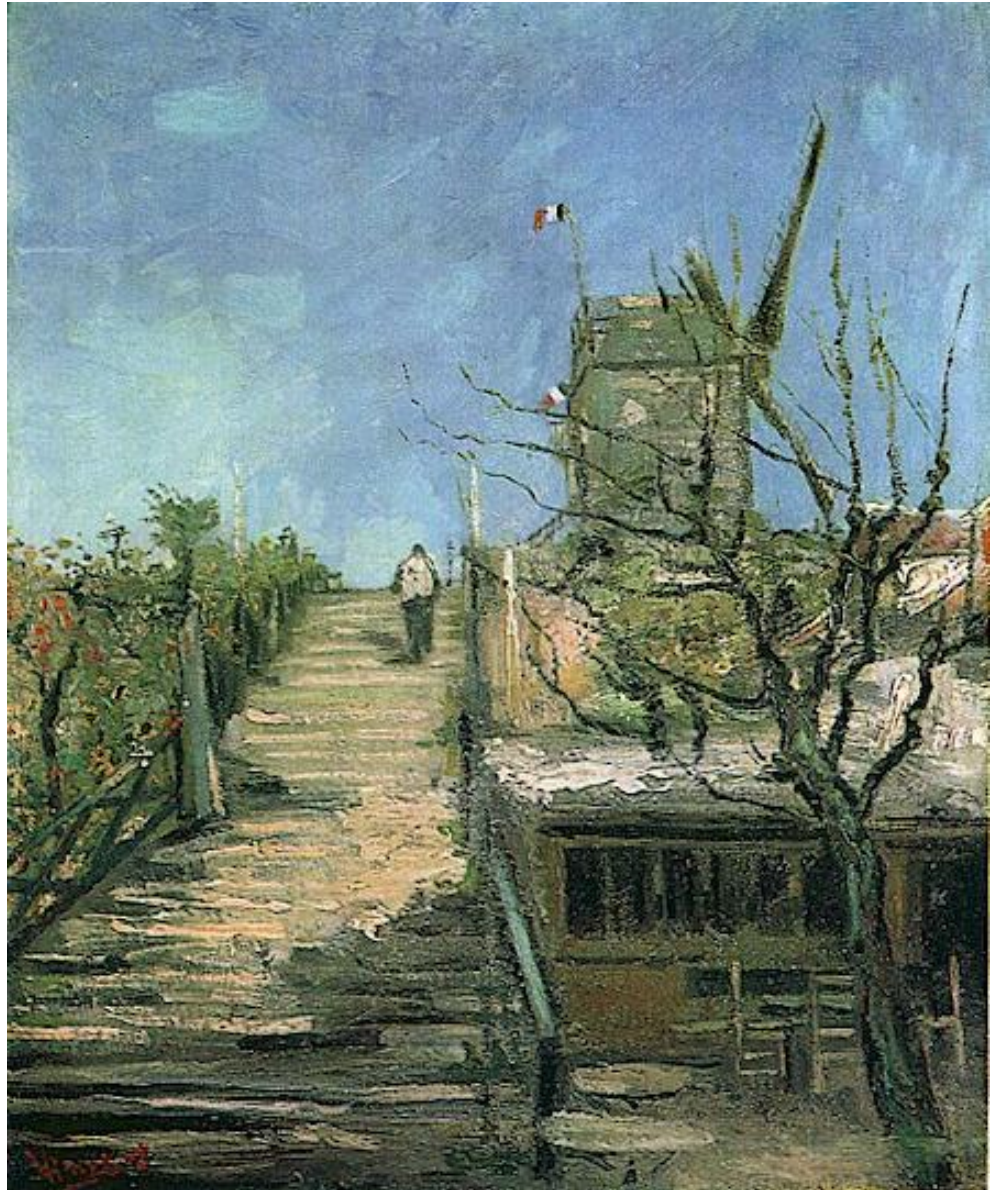
Paris in 1925

In this vintage postcard, created about seven years after the end of WWI, we see the Montmartre area of Paris as it appeared during 1925.

That was the year Victor Lustig concocted a scheme to sell the Eiffel Tower to a scrap-metal dealer.

Specifically, in this image, we are looking at Rue Lepic (Lepic Street)—an ancient, winding road which climbs the hill of Montmartre—as it is seen from Place Blanche, in the northern part of the city.

Vincent van Gogh, the famous Dutch painter, once lived (and worked) at 54 Rue Lepic. One of his paintings, which was destroyed in a fire, shows us how the Montmartre steps appeared in 1886 (four years before Victor Lustig was born).



Click on the top image for a much-better view.

Postcard from 1925, by an anonymous creator, online via Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Paris-in-1925>

Paris - Hotel de Crillon

The Place de la Concorde, in Paris, is famous for many reasons. It is here, for example, where King Louis XVI and his wife, Marie Antoinette, lost their heads during the French Revolution.

The square is centrally located in the French capital. Two identical stone palaces, dating back to 1758, face the Place de la Concorde.



The building on the left side of this picture is the Hôtel de Crillon, located at the foot of the Champs-Élysées (the most-famous street in Paris). The building on the right is the Hotel de la Marine (housing the French naval staff).

The Hôtel de Crillon open in 1909 as a luxury hotel. Given its age, since it is housed in an 18th-century building, it was closed for renovations with a reopening planned for 2015.

Count Victor Lustig—known as “Tricky Vic” in a children’s book by Greg Pizzoli—used the Hotel de Crillon as a place to run his most-famous scam: selling the Eiffel Tower to a scrap dealer ... twice.

Click on the image for a much-better view.

In this image of the Place de la Concorde, described above, we are facing north and have, in our immediate view, the fountain as it appears at the end of an afternoon.

Photo by Tristan Nitot; online via Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Paris-Hotel-de-Crillon>

Vienna - City of Dreams

After successfully conning Andre Poisson into paying him a huge sum of money to purchase the Eiffel Tower—which Poisson planned to dissemble and sell as scrap—Count Victor Lustig fled to Vienna.



Known, among other things, as the “City of Dreams”—because Sigmund Freud (the world’s first psychoanalyst lived there)—Vienna was a place where Lustig was able to live-out his own dreams as a very wealthy “Count.” It was the fruits of his Eiffel-Tower swindle which made that high-living possible.

In this image, we see a part of Vienna - which Austrians called *Wien*—known as *Donaustadt* (or, “Danube City”). It is in the eastern part of Austria’ capital, which is the 22nd District of Vienna.

Click on the image for a better view.

Photo of Vienna, described above, by Fabian Lackner. Online, via Wikimedia Commons; license: [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

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Eiffel Tower - The Original Idea and Sketch

Clip from [True Legend of the Eiffel Tower](#)

Director:

Simon Brook

Writers:

Simon Brook and Pascal Lainé

Key Cast Members:

Jacques Frantz - Gustave Eiffel

Annelise Hesme - Claire Eiffel

Nicolas Vaude - Edouard Barbier

Jean-Pierre Becker - Jean Compagnon

Marc Samuel - Minister Lockroy

Composer:

Laurent Petitgirard

Cinematographer:

Vincent Jeannot

Studio/Producer:

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Dubbed in English (from French)

Release Date: 2005

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Eiffel-Tower-The-Original-Idea-and-Sketch>

