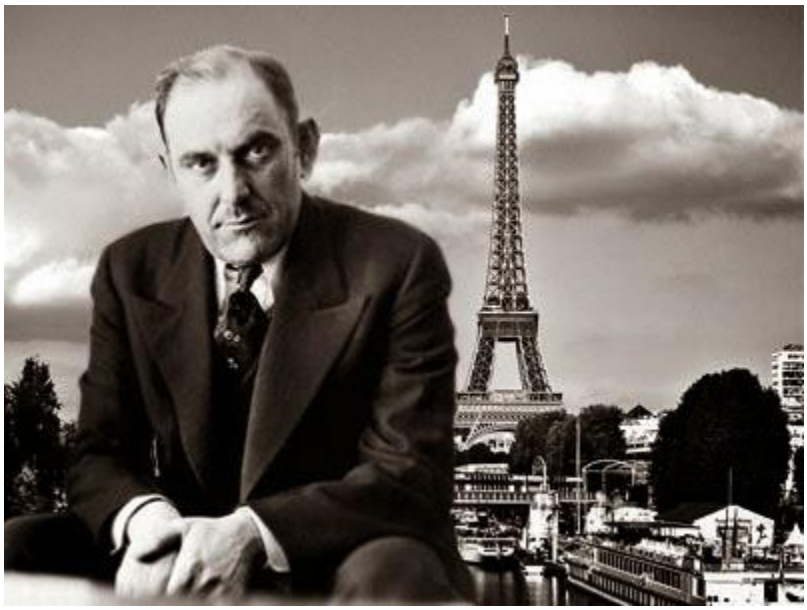
Victor Lustig Document (Part 1)

The Man Who Sold The Eiffel Tower



Context:

Count Victor Lustig is an obvious alias. Lustig had gone by at least 45 recorded aliases throughout his career, but for the document's sake we'll refer to him as Victor Lustig. (Concealment)

Despite his proclaimed status later, Lustig was born into poverty, therefore; he nor his family was never given the title of Count ever. (Fabrication)

Victor was born into poverty, and had an abusive father. Records indicate he was beaten unmercifully with a bullwhip, with frequent thrashings by his abusive father. He was a very free-willed child, but mentally strong as well. At the age of 7, he was walking 3 miles every day to and from his school. Although Victor always appeared strong to his classmates, he was sick a great deal. He managed to keep this securely hidden from everyone around him. Migraines continued to plague him, his hands mysteriously swelled up in the summer months, and, on a trip to Prague, he fell and broke his collarbone. Nonetheless, he hated to miss even a day of school, where he had a perfect attendance record. (Stress Tolerance, Concealment)

Victor was a very innovative child. For instance, he produced elaborate plans for a flying bicycle to his little brother and best friends. When Victor was 12, the school took a weeks' break due to an Easter holiday, so Victor realized that anything he did during this time wouldn't affect his perfect attendance record. Thus, he decided to go on an escapade to Paris. For reference, he is currently in Hostinné, a town in the Czech Republic. At the age of 12, Victor had managed to travel over 700 miles (a 10 hour distance) to Paris. It's impossible that he could have gotten there on foot, and taking into consideration his family was not financially well-off, the only way he could have realistically gotten there is by hitching rides and convincing strangers to drive him. Accounts show that he convinced the head of a house of prostitution to let him rest during his stay in Paris. Victor had planned his escapade so perfectly that by the time he reached Paris and explored the city, just about a week would have passed. So he made himself easily accessible to the police so that they would return him to his father and that he wouldn't have to hitch rides back, and thus make it back just in time for school's re-opening, meaning he wouldn't break his perfect attendance record. (Creativity, Divergent Thinking, Persuasion, Prediction, Strategy Success Rate)

In boarding school, Victor was considered by his teachers a genius. (Academics)

Whilst hunting for scraps outside a fancy restaurant, a 12 year old Victor observed a couple just arriving. They ordered some food, but before the food came Victor noticed the atmosphere becoming more and more intense as the women made advances towards her lover. The man took out a large stack of bills and put it on the table, leaving with the women just as the waiter had arrived with their food. Seeing the food untouched, Victor resolved that there were people among them who didn't deserve their wealth, and that it was his purpose to address this. (Perception, Goal-Setting)

At the age of 14, Victor convinced a village girl of his own age to accompany him back to his empty family home, where he had sex with her. (Persuasion)

At the age of 16, Victor took a trip to Vienna in pursuit of finding out what he wanted his career to be. In order to do so, he wanted to quietly observe his surroundings. He walked down to State Savings Bank, a building that appealed to him on both the visual and symbolic levels. He noted his observations of the heavy, barred windows and smooth stone walls. In fact, he spent hours standing in place there, noting his observations through sunbreaks and thunderstorms, noting down everything – the weather, the passing carriages, the ladies' fashions, a sudden

cacophony of striking clocks, the smell of the wet cobblestones – all grouped around his central fascination with the bank itself. Through the above observations, his mind allowed him to broadly sympathise with those he saw as fellow class strugglers against the system. (Observation, Empathy)

Accounts show Victor often confided in his friend, Karl, and shared with him his more intricate thought processes, such as: why didn't the world treat everyone fairly, why were people such idiots, or why did they waste their lives pandering to the rich and powerful instead of seizing the moment and making something of themselves. (Divergent Thinking)

By the age of 17, Victor was fluent in Czech, German, English, French, and Italian. He was gifted in billiards and chess. (Crystallized Intelligence, VCI)

Lustig had always been a courteous, affable man. He was known to be scrupulously polite, even to his captors. On the night Britain declared war on Germany in August 1914, Lustig was unbotheringly admiring the mist in the night sky. (Charisma, Composure)

Many people viewed Victor in different ways, with two major divides: people who were close to him and people who weren't. Lustig's daughter had stated she could not tell the difference between the man whom she said 'I loved every day of my life, and who loved me tenderly in return' with the man who for the most part saw others as mere props or statistics rather than individuals. A US Secret Serviceman regarded him as a "genuinely charming fellow, but there was a kind of film between him and the rest of the world. He didn't have feelings in the way other people do." Very nearly every man, woman and child he met over the course of thirty years was a potential patsy for one of his schemes. He always seemed to be receptive, or sympathetic. He was popular with women, especially American women, who responded warmly to his polished manner. (Acting Skills, Charisma, Emotional Management)

Victor slowly progressed from shoplifter to pickpocket, to petty thief to card sharp. Already, at 18, Victor was described in the Viennese police files, which noted that his hands were "as swift as the west wind." One victim wrote of him half-admiringly: "He could make a deck of cards do everything but talk." (Crystallized Intelligence)

The first time the police encountered Lustig was on January 7th, 1908. He had turned 18 just three days earlier, and the complaint against him said that he had celebrated his birthday by installing himself in a suite of the Nemzeti Hotel and, sporting expensive new tailoring and a waxed moustache, posing as an apparently well-bred young insurance company executive sent on a continental tour by his associates in London. For only a token fee, he announced, he would be glad to take a piece of any potential client's jewellery, leave behind a receipt, and then have the item professionally appraised by an expert before returning it in the morning. He had walked off in this manner with an expensive necklace and matching earrings, after introducing himself to the owner of the valuables under the alias 'Earl Mountjoy' and mentioning that he hoped she might find time later in the spring to join him on his yacht as he cruised the French Riviera. That was the last the lady had seen either of Lustig or her valuables. When the police came for him,

Lustig remained calm. He told them his fiancée was his alibi. She didn't speak Hungarian, though. The police found the fiancée at the suburban address Lustig gave them, and brought her downtown for questioning. Speaking in a colourful mixture of German and Italian, she told them that herself and Lustig had been many miles away exploring the natural beauty of the Baradla caves and the surrounding countryside on Victor's birthday, making it quite impossible for Lustig to have presented himself that same day in the role of Earl Mountjoy in the hotel. He had never been out of her sight. She corroborated all his statements. Lustig was promptly released from police custody, getting away with the valuables. Lustig had foreseen the confrontation with the police and notified his fiancée on the cover story, ensuring she had it down to a solid. (Fabrication, Strategy Orchestration, Concealment, Strategy Fortification, Composure, Prediction)

Victor had courted multiple women throughout his "bachelor" years. While on honeymoon with his wife, he deceived her by seeing another woman under the name of Baron Eric von Kessler, while keeping this a secret from both. (Concealment)

To avoid getting caught by the authorities, Victor moved back and forth in a rough 300-mile semi-circle, rarely staying in any place for long. And if he did end up getting caught, he would trick the cops into believing he never committed the crime. (Preclusion, Misdirection)

Lustig was back into custody in February 1909, because the police came calling for him there on the 21st of the month. They wanted to ask him about a complaint they had received from the manager of the Grand Hotel. The manager had hired a carpenter to help remodel several of the hotel's rooms. But the workman he hired had done some questionable things. The workman had fashioned an invisible sliding door in one bedroom wall, hidden behind a desk. A guest had innocently laid out his valuables on that same desk before sleeping, and in the morning they had disappeared. Lustig told the police that they could question him all they wanted, but that they should also speak to his fiancèe, whom he particularly stressed was an 'honest young lady.' She would confirm that he had never offered his services anywhere as a carpenter, and what was more could vouch for his movements on both the day and the night in question. He denied having ever set foot in the Grand Hotel, and the manager there was unable to positively identify him. Following that, an exquisitely dressed young woman had presented herself for an interview. She confirmed all Lustig's statements, and he was released without charge. The police report concluded that, 'There is no stain on his character.' Of course, the perpetrator was none other than Victor, who had run a variation of one of his earlier scams. Victor's alibi of a year earlier had been slim and dark-haired, but the lady he introduced here was noted in the police report as 'statuesque and blonde.' Therefore, Victor must have courted a new woman, never keeping just one person purely in the know about his schemes to avoid capture. (Identity Deception, Creativity, Logical Manipulation, Concealment)

At the age of 20, Lustig courted a young African American woman who worked in theater. He went under the alias 'Baron von Kessler,' and after a few weeks of dating promised he would marry her. He just needed her to steal a few clothes and wigs from her place, saying he has a

professional need for disguises. After getting the disguises, Lustig promptly ghosted her with the items he conned. (Concealment, Seduction)

In the same year, the police took him in for questioning: once for impersonation and another for the offence of 'selling a bushel of finest Bintje potatoes knowing them to be poor imitations from Poland,' raised by a witness. On both occasions, they didn't have enough evidence he was involved so he was released. (Concealment)

Around the same time, a famous story was circulated that Lustig had seduced and danced with a young lady who was to be married to another man. (Seduction)

The FBI's file on Victor was the following: 'This is a quiet, responsive man. He expresses no feelings of hostility toward society … Overall, he shows a fair degree of persistence and continuity.' (Concealment, Misdirection)

By the age of 21, Lustig had already honed several professional skills that would serve him as an adult. He had a plausible manner, particularly with women. He was a fluent storyteller, not hesitant to embellish to make a point or gain an advantage. He preferred to work with his mind instead of his hands, although he wasn't above presenting himself in taxing physical roles like that of a human torch if it served his needs. He generally seemed to have plenty of money to lavish on travel and hotels, but no one really knew how much money he had or how he had acquired it. He bought a Parisian suit, and periodically grew a moustache to look older. (Charisma, Fabrication, Willingness To Act, Concealment).

Lustig had read books including Pierre Janet's *Symptoms of Hysteria*, Wilhelm Wundt's *Hypnotism and Suggestion* and Sigmund Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life.* (Knowledge)

While he was 21, Victor found himself celebrating the Easter holiday of 1911 with a well-heeled young woman in the Grand Hotel located in Budapest. He first took the time to shower her with gifts, including an 'antique Ottoman marble inkwell' before he made his play. He was temporarily low on funds, he told her. There had been some irritating technical delay in one bank communicating with another. He didn't mind for himself, of course, but there was the matter of the refuge for underprivileged children that it had been his honour to sponsor, and as he proceeded to describe the place and its poor, malnourished inmates with their hungry eyes and simple, trusting smiles the woman had started to cry. Lustig told her that he was certain it would be all right, and that the necessary wire transfer would surely arrive at any hour. His companion stopped crying for a moment, but seemed unconvinced, and started sobbing loudly again. In between her tears she told him that she would like to help. Victor went to some pains to tell her that she should not do so, but the more he protested the more determined she became. He accepted the loan only with the greatest show of reluctance, along with his promise to return to the hotel in an hour or two. That was the last she ever saw of him. (Flattery, Fabrication, Emotional Manipulation, Emotional Understanding, Acting Skills)

Since Victor traveled a lot, anytime he showed up in a new country he put his criminal status as "None." Every time he was apprehended by the police or forced to show up in court for any charges he may have been pressed for, this would therefore give him an easier sentence if he were to be convicted (about 14 days for a minor offence). During his time period (1900s) the courts took long periods of time to communicate to each other internationally, which Victor took full advantage of. (Fabrication, Logical Thinking)

Lustig decided, around this time, to enter the gold-and-white lobby of London's Carlton Hotel and announced himself as Count Franz Honiok of Hesse, visiting Britain on some 'small currency-exchange matter' involving the Bank of England. In the days that followed, he had said that nine months earlier he had been one of those on board the RMS Titanic when she sank in the icy waters of the North Atlantic, and had survived the ordeal only after sliding headlong down the ship's deck into the sea, where, surrounded by the drowned and drowning, he had remained for four hours before the occupants of a passing lifeboat pulled him to safety. He was very modest about it all. Lustig's life story included an account of youthful adventures fleeing from tomahawk-wielding Lakota Indians in Wyoming, and helping suppress the Asir Rebellion on the Arabian Peninsula. Lustig kept a card index of fellow guests at the hotel, whom he studied for any possible discrepancies between their public personas and private conduct. The celebrated American light opera composer might have an unhealthy interest in auditioning local choirboys for the chorus of his latest touring production, for instance, or the wealthy City financier with an attractive young lady at a corner table in the restaurant had a wife and six children waiting for him at home in Esher. Once Lustig had successfully applied the data to his own advantage, he tore up the card. He was always extremely generous when it came to tipping chambermaids and waiters. They were among his most trusted informants. Several of the staff formed up in a receiving line for him, bowing and curtseying, when he finally checked out of the hotel. (Concealment, Fabrication, Info Gathering, Aura)

Victor had a knack for spotting and communicating with some of the most influential people in history before they were influential. He befriended a dishwasher in a hotel named Nguyen Sinh Cung. The two men were the same age, and they seem to have struck up a friendship in their short time together, because Victor gave him not only a pound note but also a sliver of wood held in a small glass phial that he pulled with some ceremony from a chain around his neck. It was taken from the wreckage of the Titanic, he claimed, and hoped it would bring him luck. That man later became Ho Chi Minh, the former president of North Vietnam. He later around the same time encountered a fellow drifter in a Vienna cafe. This individual was described as a 'deathly pale, skinny adolescent with a rough voice'. Just eight months older than Lustig, with whom he shared a broadly similar family background and frustrated artistic ambitions, he apparently dominated their conversation, speaking heatedly about society and politics 'not avoiding vulgarisms, in a very impetuous way.' Lustig let him talk and express his own ideals. The young man gave his name as Adolf Hitler, the notorious dictator of Germany. Victor was a man who was able to see the inner psyche of someone with just one interaction. (Influence Building, Fabrication, Emotional Perception)

Lustig, adopting the alias Count Otiok, persuaded a young woman whom he met one Friday evening at the Hotel de Crillon, that he happened to have just received a large inheritance and wished to distribute this to various local children's charities. But he was a foreigner from Berlin and there were administrative problems with transferring the funds. The young woman assured him that she had no such inhibitions. In fact she would be glad to help him. And she did, giving Lustig ample cash to satisfy his charitable efforts until the banks opened for business the following Monday morning. Over her protests, he insisted on leaving the woman an exquisite gold watch as security against the loan. The funds then changed hands, and Lustig, adopting the job of a distinguished professor of molecular diffusion, told his friend that he would return immediately after delivering a brief Saturday-lunchtime lecture at the nearby college. She waited for many hours before calling at the society's offices. They had never heard of a Count Otiok, and after some investigation the watch was found to be made of a then little-known material called stainless steel, with a thin veneer of gold paint. The woman told the police that, the central deceit aside, Lustig had treated her with 'the utmost courtesy.' (Concealment, Emotional Manipulation, Fabrication, Charisma)

During Lustig's time, he lived through two World Wars. You might be wondering if he served any military experience. The simple answer is: Anytime someone came knocking on his door, he would produce a certificate supposedly signed by the adjutant-general of the central army recruitment office in Prague. 'Unfit for combatant and auxiliary duties on grounds of severe nasal occlusion,' it read. 'Unable to bear arms.' This allowed him to carry out his schemes in peace. (Forgery)

Lustig started to carry a diary with him to note all of his observations and views of people, while also using it to gather valuable information. (Observation, Info Gathering)

An unmarried Vienna schoolteacher named Sylvia Nenni immediately took a liking to Victor when they met in the spring of 1914, charmed by his 'unspoiled nature' and 'quiet demeanour', as well as by his obvious affinity for her. Often, after they had had tea or gone dancing together, she remembered, 'He would make a great fuss of me as he described his hopes and dreams for the future, and how I had brought the first gleam of real light to his life.' Lustig had grown up with no money, not much love, and little in the way of guidance, she believed. As a result, he had the air of a 'lost child whom you wanted to clasp and foster.' All of these feelings, however, were an act by Lustig, who had the ability to shape people's perception of himself. (Charisma, Flattery, Acting Skills, Emotional Engagement)

Victor was described to be able to turn on an easygoing, cosmopolitan charm when it suited him. Often slovenly as a younger man, in recent years he had smartened up, leaving an image of a 'vigorous and elegant gentleman' in the mind of the manager of the Carlton Hotel and also those of his staff. Like many dishonest people, he had the gift of inspiring confidence. Sylvia soon tearfully agreed to marry him after Victor had led her to believe he was suffering from a terminal illness. She had immediately given him the funds with which to consult a specialist in Paris, praying that there might yet be hope for their future together. That was the end of their

relationship, as Lustig swiftly took the funds and fled. (Charisma, Aura, Social Engineering, Emotional Manipulation)

Oftentimes, Victor liked to practice his deception on others to make sure he still had it. Although he already had a valid excuse to not participate in the war effort, he was always looking for more innovation in his craft. During the British's war with Germany, Victor wore ragged clothes and went to a London donation center. He presented himself as Otiok and reached into the pocket of his shabby jacket and produced a diamond necklace. He had extracted the gems with his own hands from a mine in which he had an interest in German South West Africa, he told the astonished official. It had been a hard struggle to successfully export them when he subsequently emigrated to Europe. Crocodiles were wrestled, terrible thirst endured, battles fought with murderous business rivals. Lustig had finally arrived in Paris, where the jewels were set into a necklace. Victor had kept the piece locked safely in his apartment while he went about town trying to establish himself as a painter. After several weeks he had been lucky enough to win a small commission to design the murals on a government building. He decided to relocate across the Channel and dedicate himself to the British cause. Regrettably, his health was indifferent and thus he would not himself be able to bear arms. But he hoped this small token of his regard for his adopted country might nonetheless be acceptable. The official at the front desk thanked him for his loyalty and gladly accepted the gem, pardoning him from any war efforts. (Creativity, Fabrication)

Having mastered his con skills, Victor looked about for a field in which to apply them. He noticed wealthy international people had taken to ship travel on fleets of glittering new vessels. The jaded and rich millionaires on board the ships, Victor reasoned, would make perfect targets of his deception. (Observation, Logical Reasoning)

Victor's primary endeavour for doing so was the poker table. Sometimes he worked alone, perfecting his skills as a 'mechanic' who could palm, switch or steal cards from the table. Sometimes he teamed with an older passenger named Julius Arnstein in a so-called 'squeeze play,' goading an innocent third party to keep raising the stakes until the cash was heaped up on the table, at which point one of the two would triumphantly sweep up the entire pot. Throughout the game, Lustig and Arnstein had worked out a system of signals and codes beforehand to ensure they had everything under control. He would obviously need to memorize and process every hand signal from Arnstein (which couldn't be up for longer than a few seconds to avoid suspicion) to cheat their way to victory. (Methods, Coercion, Creativity, WMI, PSI)

At the age of 24 and as a foreshadowing of his Eiffel Tower heist, Victor successfully sold Tower Bridge (a famous bridge in London) to a wealthy Australian tourist for $2,931 (about $76,210 today), telling the tourist that he was the chief treasurer of the London County Council, the competent local government body for the city, and that they needed the funds for emergency civil defence measures. He disappeared like a ghost once the funds were deposited. (Fabrication)

In 1915, a new ship called the Brittianic was being put to the test in numerous 'sea trials,' (basically just making sure the ship was ready to start taking large numbers of passengers) so they invited wealthy rich men to board their test run. The dangerousness of being on board a ship during its trial was precarious, but this actually further incentivized the men to go, to thrill seek in a way. Lustig saw and took advantage of their gullibility or greed; but above all appealed to their sense of the precariousness of life. As there was a possibility they could be killed on the ship, they were willing to be more reckless and wasteful with their expenses. Lustig would never push his victim to the card table. He always let them suggest the game. That way they would feel in control. They would feel the need to gamble, and he would simply give him what they desire. Victor serenely wrote in his diary that he had gotten $17,000 from gambling on the same day the London press reported the news that 60,000 British soldiers had been killed or wounded. (Emotional Understanding, Indirect Manipulation, Composure)

One morning, Lustig observed a group of German soldiers getting out of a truck. They had all been wounded in the fighting and given a week's medical leave to stay in a nearby lodge on the banks of the Elbe. Lustig wrote in his journal that the men had a 'distant stare' to their eyes, sunken cheeks, seemed 'visibly weakened' both by injury and malnutrition, and 'hobbled off, some in boots still caked in battlefield mud, others [on] bandaged feet leaning on a comrade's arm'. He added: 'It is the more pitiful because they are only boys drafted from nice homes, knowing nothing about the conflict or the great issues at stake in London or Berlin or Paris. They just don't see what it is all about.' (Observation, Profiling)

Lustig next posed as a musical producer who sought investment in his latest production. The production in question was either an acknowledged hit, which required only a small further injection of capital – or other times it existed solely in Victor's imagination. The target would be invited to dinner and had a drink, and sooner or later the conversation would turn to the theatre and Victor would mention what very little capital he needed left to ensure that the chorus line of young ladies would continue to entertain the public in the times ahead, and how the girls themselves would be personally grateful to their patron, and at that point the target would acknowledge that he had always been keen on the stage, a detail Lustig had known from the start. He presented himself as 'André Dupre', a displaced Parisian musical manager, at a series of meetings in the newly opened Ritz Hotel. A respectable specialist named Cyril McLintock had stated that 'Monsieur Dupre offered me a quarter-share in his new West End enterprise for only £500 ($18,431). It was literally a steal, as no such revue existed.' According to Dr. McLintock, 'It seems easier to pretend to be what you are not than to conceal what you are. The person with whom I enjoyed those splendid dinners could accomplish both. He was a consummate manipulator.' (Disguise, Fabrication, Emotional Understanding, Info Gathering, Concealment, Aura)

Around the age of 25, Lustig decided to travel to the ever-bubbling population of New York. He displayed a hardworking ethic during his first months in New York. He took correspondence courses to improve his English during the day, and devoted every free moment to concocting new ways to extract money from Americans. One of Victor's minor swindles was sex workers. Upon leaving the premises, he would show a $50 bill which he would apparently tuck into their

upper pocket, telling them that if they looked before the next day it would turn into tissue paper. The girls were naturally unable to stop themselves, and would look the moment Lustig left. They found tissue paper and, according to Lustig, would only have themselves to blame for it. What Lustig really did was use a sleigh of hand trick to hide the $50 under his sleeve and switch it out with tissue paper right when he put it in the pocket. Sex workers were uneducated, thus; they were easy targets of Lustig's scam. Whether they checked the money instantly, it would have "turned into tissue paper," or if they checked the money the next day, Lustig would've been long gone. (Academics, Creativity, Fabrication, Exploiting Weaknesses, Tactics)

As Lustig got older, his scams became more intricate. There was his role, for instance, in the phony off-track betting caper. The idea was to lure a wealthy person on to the premises and, once having won his confidence, invite him to wager on the outcome of a nearby horse race. Of course, the entire operation was simply a theatrical set, everyone there besides the wealthy person was an actor, and the 'broadcasts' from the track were actually being made up by an announcer in the back room. Lustig introduced himself as 'Count von Kessler,' a fellow high-stakes gambler, and his role was to lend an air of European class to the proceedings. Since con men are really actors, he pulled it off with success. A diary entry from 1916 (He was 26) shows that he successfully conned $300 in that scam, $8,890 today. (Coercion, Strategy Fortification, Fabrication)

Victor soon found himself having a talent for forgery. He was able to pass off documents from at least fifty historical figures, including George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Marie Curie and the flying Wright brothers. Some of these works changed hands for 'hundreds,' which would be at the very least $3,000 today. (Crystallized Intelligence)

Victor briefly set up his own small church in Manhattan. He hung a notice on the door announcing the date and time of a special service that would 'swell all hearts and souls with joy' and, what was more, guarantee those in attendance an 'eternal place of rest in God's acre.' There was a massive turnout on the day. Lustig recited a speech by Adolf Bertram, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Breslau, in front of his huge audience, translating it from the original German, adding one or two words of motivation, and pretending that he had originated the ideas. It all went over so well that he collected over $90 ($2,400 today) in the offering plate. (Emotional Understanding, Leadership)

All accounts of Victor agree that he already possessed two priceless qualities that helped shape his adult career. He was fiercely ambitious, often rising at two in the morning to walk 3 miles to his first fishing job. And that he was completely composed in a crisis. (Mental Fortitude, Composure)

Around this time, a mysterious series of hijackings took place in and around Wall Street. The major New York banks all employed messengers to transfer large bags of cash from one location to another. In several cases, the person carrying the cash never arrived. Sometimes he would be waylaid and relieved of his goods, while on other occasions both he and his cargo inexplicably vanished. The police could never identify a suspect. The few eyewitnesses spoke of

the assaults as being carried out by an individual variously disguised as a rabbi, a priest or even a nun. Over an eighteen-month period from the spring of 1917 to the autumn of 1918 more than $3 million in cash vanished, the equivalent of some $70 million today. There is no direct evidence that Lustig himself was personally tied up in this crime wave. He had an alibi for most of the dates, and no known history of personal violence. On the other hand, he moved in the same circles as both Arnold Rothstein and Nicky Arnstein, who it's widely believed were the masterminds behind the robberies. And in November 1918, just as the spree of Wall Street thefts came to an end, he moved into an eight-room home on Manhattan's Upper East Side – a notable step up the social ladder for someone who'd been employed in a fish market just three years earlier. The striking thing about Lustig at this time is that he really appeared to be several different people. There was the hard-working immigrant who, his daughter would insist, was then 'as straight as a die – he didn't know any criminals and was never in trouble with the law'. And by contrast there was the unlicensed immigrant who forged documents. Lustig could successfully organize his affairs, and kept the details of his numerous scams in his head. (Concealment, Disguise)

One of Lustig's swindles following his arrival in America was the 'pocketbook' scam. Victor would find himself with a suitably prosperous-looking stranger in a bar, on a train, or even while waiting to cross a busy New York street. Looking down, he would suddenly notice a well-stuffed wallet, which he picked up and showed to the other party. Together they would carefully examine it for any identifying name and address, and, once having found these, Lustig would propose that they walk the short distance to the rightful owner's house and return his property. The two good Samaritans would politely decline the grateful man's subsequent offer of a cash reward. But then the wallet's owner – Lustig's accomplice – would suggest an alternative formula. He would bet all the money in his wallet on the outcome of a horse race and, were he to win, as he was confident he would, share his good fortune equally with his two benefactors. At that point the victim was asked if he might wish to invest some of his own cash in the wager, thus increasing the expected jackpot, and in most cases they would. From there, the victim, Lustig, and his accomplice would go to a rigged horse race where everyone else were actors, and purposefully 'lose.' Lustig and the accomplice would then just take the money from the actors once the victim left the betting grounds. On this note, Lustig later wrote: 'The successful [con] hinges on desire – what can the [perpetrator] offer the victim that will make him abandon rational thought for the promise of a fantasy? It's very easy. All you really have to do is to probe and be patient. Sooner or later, the sap will tell you their innermost dreams, [and] then you pull the trigger. Victims don't ask a lot of questions. They answer a lot of questions.' (Methods, Logical Manipulation, Lateral Thinking, Emotional Understanding)

A Manhattan doctor's secretary named Ruth Spivack later wrote that she had been dating Lustig at this time, and that he had been a perfect gentleman. Forty years later she still spoke affectionately of a 'handsome young man with a mischievous smile … He was a suave and sophisticated New Yorker in a straw hat with a courtly European manner. We were enchanted by his looks and charm. All of the girls were mad about him at once.' (Charisma, Social Skills)

In February 1918 he beat the legendary gambler and boxing promoter George Rickard for $500 at poker after having first taken the trouble both to bribe the game's dealer, and to spend hours practicing a straight face in front of a mirror. (Bribery, Composure)

At the beginning of the next year, a German exile threw a bomb into the club where Victor was in the process of relieving some other players of their money. Three people died in the blast, and more than a dozen were injured. 'We were scared to death,' a witness named Paul Maze later told the Toronto Star. 'When the smoke cleared there were terrible scenes … the [room] was nothing less than a vision of hell, with the tables blown to splinters and the ground strewn with burned and hideously charred bodies.' Amidst the chaos, a bruised and bloodied Lustig helped to pull survivors to safety, 'and acted as calmly and quietly as the way one might sweep up after a summer storm'. When the worst was over and the victims had been removed, Lustig proposed that they repair to a nearby hotel where, despite the official prohibition of alcohol, he was able to buy everyone a round of drinks. 'He may have been putting on a show [for] our benefit,' Maze thought, but he couldn't help but feel a sense of admiration for Victor's grace under pressure. (Composure, Coercion, Aura)

In each town where he settled he would quickly establish himself with a new circle of friends, charm them with his wit, intimidate them with his brilliance, flatter them with his confidences, and then separate them from their money, leave, then repeat in a whole new town. (Influence Building, Charisma, Social Skills)

One of Lustig's new dates who previously had a minuscule social life described the night she met Lustig. 'The world suddenly became larger,' she wrote of their first days together. 'Somehow, things glowed … He never seemed to have enough of life, never seemed to tire.' (Aura)
He was furthermore described by his wife as a 'superb judge of character and situation,' he stole only from those who could afford it; and whatever his other moral lapses, 'he always treated me like a lady'. (Emotional Understanding, Charisma)

Stuart Greene, a good friend of Lustig, had become an adviser to the state's new Democratic governor, Al Smith. However, an enemy of Smith known as The Judge attempted to sabotage Greene in a preliminary step to destroying Smith. Lustig in turn resolved to instead destroy the judge, which he did with the help of some forged French police files he brought back with him from Paris. Lustig first approached the judge as the honourable Baron Kessler claiming that he had irrefutable evidence of Greene's immoral actions while stationed in France during the war. The judge quickly agreed to buy the incriminating documents for the sum of $15,000. But when Lord Judge tried to reveal these documents in court; the apparently official French papers were revealed as a complete forgery. Greene was vindicated, and the judge retired into private life. Somehow he was never able to locate the 'Baron Kessler' who had sold him the material in the first place. (Decision Making, Forgery, Fabrication, Concealment)

Smith later consulted Greene about doing some "unorthodox tactics" in order to gain another political advantage. But Greene advised against any such covert activity without Lustig himself,

arguing that any attempt to imitiate his Lustig's methods would pose a considerable risk, because Lustig has a singular genius for this sort of operation. (Crystallized Intelligence)

Lustig's latest money-making device was in fact literally just that: an impressive-looking heavy oak chest with brass trim that could supposedly reproduce any dollar that was put into it. The idea was to lure a victim with a well-made meal in a luxury hotel, and then to invite him into a private room upstairs to inspect the wonder machine. Lustig would produce a genuine $100 bill from his wallet, insert it into one of the box's two end slots, and turn a lever that sucked the bill into the interior. Into the other slot he fed a sheet of dollar-sized white linen paper. After twirling a few knobs, Victor would tell the expectant customer that they needed to wait a further six hours in order for the miracle of alchemy to take effect. The delay served only to heighten the air of anticipation. Lustig would spend that 6 hours chatting it up with the victim and buying them more drinks. However, Americans aren't totally fools: Why would Lustig want to sell a literal money-making machine? While he spoke to his victim, the idea of the money box was brought up when he was discussing his financial problems: he desperately needed $30,000 to invest in his new company or mortgage his house, but since the machine can only print out $400 a day due to the 6 hour cool-down, he wouldn't be able to get that money quickly so he thought of just selling it for that money outright. After all, the victim would just get their money back. When the two men returned, possibly influenced by more drinks, the demonstration would swiftly end. After Lustig again carefully adjusted all the knobs and turned the crank, the box issued two crisp $100 bills, the original and its duplicate. Both were quite genuine. Lustig had concealed the second bill in the device before his victim ever set foot in the room. The results were hugely successful from Victor's point of view. Sometimes he sold one of the boxes, which typically took him a couple of hours to knock up in his workshop, for as much as $30,000 ($800,000 today). The device's new owner would eagerly repeat the procedure he had just witnessed with his own eyes, but somehow no more money would ever emerge. The six-hour waiting period was generally more than enough for Lustig to put a couple of hundred miles between himself and the scene of the crime. Lustig reasoned that the victim buying the box themselves was dishonest, they were also embarrassed for falling for the scam. Therefore, they would be unlikely to report this to the police. (Creativity, Strategy Building, Fabrication, Logical Manipulation, Strategy Efficiency, Inductive Reasoning)

Lustig had frequently subscribed to mailing services from Time Corporation with titles such as *The 100 All-Time Classics of Literature* or *The Twelve Ages of Man.* 'He knew a lot of basic world history, and a smattering of undergraduate-level philosophy,' said a US Prison Bureau psychologist who later examined him. (Knowledge)

One spring day, Lustig had his chauffeur drive him and his family 200 miles upstate to a New York racecourse. There he bet the significant sum of $350 ($10,000 today) on the outcome of the first race, announcing to another one of his daters, Roberta, that he was 'very sure' of the result. Lustig had good grounds for his confidence, because he had previously paid off all five competing jockeys to finish in a certain order designed to maximise his winnings. He had been officially warned about this practice in the past, but the police weren't able to gather enough evidence to prosecute him. Unfortunately, one of the horses had tripped and fallen, bringing

down the horse behind it, and in the ensuing confusion the other riders had failed to keep to the agreed sequence. Commendably calm in the face of this calamity, Lustig had quickly improvised a plan to cut his losses. He set up a wooden stand, under a professionally printed banner reading '"KOSHER" VON KESSLER – NO WAGER REFUSED' (he kept a variety of such promotional material in the back of the car, ready for any contingency), and offered notably attractive odds, he took a large number of cash bets on the next race of the day's card, handing each better a neatly printed receipt as he did so. Victor had cleared over $700 ($11,300) in this way. When the race itself began, Lustig took the opportunity to swiftly take the banner and the stand into the back of the car, before collecting his wife and instructing the chauffeur to head out of town without further delay. They relocated to Florida for several weeks after that. (Bribery, Concealment, Composure, Improvisation, Anticipation, Strategy Efficiency)

Once, later that same year, a New York FBI agent happened to notice Emil Lustig (Victor's older brother) enjoying a cup of coffee in a hotel lobby. The agent wanted to speak to the elder Lustig brother about an outstanding warrant for his arrest. Emil unknowingly led the officer to a nearby cigar stand, where Victor was waiting for him (they had plans to meet up earlier). Victor instantly spotted the agent tailing his brother. He also spotted a blind man, with a tin cup and pencils, not far from him. Before the blind man realized what was happening, he was hustled into the Rolls-Royce Vic was using, with Victor's chauffeur at the wheel. The touch of a $100 bill in his hand assured the man that whatever was happening was good for him, and didn't complain. Victor quickly swapped clothes with him and the blind man was riding away smiling from ear to ear in the chauffeured limousine. On the street, he covered his eyes with dark glasses, in ragged clothes and with a hat pulled down over a seemingly weary face. He clutched a tin cup filled with pencils and cried out weakly, 'Help a poor blind man, sir.' As he was passing by, the FBI agent dropped a coin in his cup. (Observation, Quick Thinking, Bribery, Concealment, Acting Skills)

After the blind man incident, Lustig decided that from now on he would have to communicate with Emil by more indirect means. Employing an elaborate system of couriers, Victor arranged for a friend named Robert Holles, who worked in the insurance trade, to deliver private letters to a business contact at the Wall Street branch of Mellon Bank, Walter Reeve, who would in turn pass them to Emil when he came in each Friday morning (he was told the letters were private as they had details of Emil's financial portfolio). Lustig also invented his own code for sending messages to his brother that didn't require logbooks or any other decrypting device. Sometimes Lustig asked that Emil's messages to him be embedded in the columns of the newspaper. Such a message might read: 'Saw your note in yesterday's paper. It came too late. You must try to forget. Brown Eyes.' Victor would know what to do with this information, which was generally either a warning that the police were watching for him in a particular neighbourhood or that the coast was clear for a scheme in a more remote New York location such as 'Dagestan.' Emil mailed a postcard with a beach scene and a postmark from the New Jersey resort of Asbury Park. The card noted that the writer had been on the pier's 'merry-go-round, [and] seen all the sights as I spun every which way. The weather is fine.' The message, as understood by Lustig, was that Emil had taken the opportunity to monitor the area, that law enforcement seemed not to be in attendance, and that it was a good place for them to meet. (Decision Making, Fabrication, Creativity, Abductive Reasoning)

In August 1922, using the alias Count Kokum, Lustig set up shop for a late-summer season in Cape May, New Jersey, a popular vacation resort about 150 miles down the coast from Manhattan. Kokum told people that, for a small fee, they could watch him create “magical” messages on regular playing cards by pressing the cards against someone’s forehead. One such message, he insisted, bore spirit tidings from the late President Lincoln. Later in the demonstration Kokum went on to flourish a small blackboard and place this on the ground hidden from view by the lace cloth covering his table. When he retrieved it a few moments later, the board displayed a message – generally some phrase along the lines of ‘Love of money will ruin a man’ – allegedly brought from the beyond. What Lustig really did was use his feet to ‘hold’ the chalk and wrote down the phrase under the curtain. Kokum’s last performance of the season had ended in some disarray, when rival groups of sceptics and believers had begun to pelt one another with food, the scene fast becoming a war zone. Lustig had a keen intuition to know when to flee, and so before the fight reached its peak he took his stuff and vanished. (Concealment, Fabrication, Methods, Intuition)

Lustig relocated 200 miles south to the small farm community of Springfield, Missouri. Lustig lost no time in taking advantage of his anonymity and began to exude respectability among his new neighbours. He started to go by ‘T. Robert Roebel’, president of United Chemists, Inc, of New York. He walked into the office of Springfield’s American Savings Bank under this title. He remarked to Mr Marchand, the branch manager, that he was in town to purchase land for a new chemical works, having been disappointed by the terms offered to him for a similar venture in nearby St Louis. ‘Roebel’ went on to add that he had already spent many years travelling the country from coast to coast in order to establish a chain of more than a dozen such plants, and that in all his long experience in the field the present location seemed to him to be the most ideal – ‘both for its natural setting, and the presence of ready capital and sound business judgement.’ They went to a neglected swampland on the edge of town, which Lustig declared would be perfect for his new business premises. After some negotiations, the men agreed on a cash price of $10,000. Lustig said that he would return to the bank in the morning to sign the papers, and in the meantime he agreed to host a hurriedly convened meeting of Springfield residents held in Casper’s Chili Joint downtown to give them the good news that up to 400 new jobs would be coming their way, a significant boom in a town of only 18,000. Lustig further made himself likeable himself to his audience by providing them with hot meals alongside the finest coffee. When Lustig returned to the offices of the American Savings Bank in the morning, he brought with him a $20,000 Liberty Bond in front of Mr Marchand and his head cashier. Lustig explained that he had nothing smaller on hand, and that perhaps the bank could oblige him by letting him have his $10,000 change in cash. Not unreasonably, Mr Marchand first examined the bond carefully, finding it to be completely legitimate. At that point, he placed the bond in an unlocked drawer of his desk and left to get the necessary paperwork for the land along with the $10,000 change. Lustig pocketed the cash and was about to sign the papers when a terrible altercation came over him. Mr. Marchand later said in an instant his face became flushed’ and ‘bloated’, his whole body ‘violently convulsed’, and he seemed to grow alternately ‘lucid and delirious’, calling out hoarsely for a glass of water. The bank manager later insisted that he had then left his guest unattended for only ‘ten or twelve seconds’ while he walked quickly to and from a sink situated behind a wooden partition in a corner of the room. When he returned, Lustig

drank the glass of water at a gulp, and then thanked him, saying that, while greatly improved thanks to the water, he would nonetheless prefer to rest a while in his hotel before returning to conclude our business later in the afternoon. But Lustig did not go to his hotel. Instead he walked swiftly around the corner to a waiting cab and instructed the driver to take him to Springfield station. A short time later he was on the fast train east to St Louis, wearing a nondescript workman's cap and overalls and further disguised by a rather grubby walrus moustache. He looked nothing like the smooth Wall Street operator who had circulated among the public of Springfield during the previous twenty-four hours. It was later discovered that he had used the few seconds that he was left alone at the bank, while apparently choking, to lift his original legitimate $20,000 Liberty Bond from the manager's desk drawer. There never was any such organisation as United Chemists, nor a 'T. Robert Roebel' known anywhere in New York financial circles. Lustig had waled away with a handsome $10,000 ($300,000 today) for his day's work. He was arrested while hiding in plain sight in New York on November 13th, 1922 and returned to Springfield on a charge of defrauding the American Savings Bank. Although the prosecution seemed to have an closed case, it completely underestimated the stubbornness and tenacity of Lustig. He raised a torrent of objections and tactical delays as the criminal proceedings against him dragged on at intervals through the winter. A master of evasive testimony, Victor turned the spotlight on his accusers. Victor was eventually able to propose that he return $2,800 of the $10,000 – all that remained, he told the court – and in April 1923 the government accepted this formula as resolution of the matter. (Exploiting Weaknesses, Fabrication, Flattery, Acting Skills, Concealment, Mental Fortitude)

Lustig decided to make some changes to his Rumanian box scam. The new, more ambitious version of the machine was an elegant machine with an enhanced series of highly polished brass knobs and dials. In time Lustig upped the scale of the basic con by withdrawing a thick pile of sequentially numbered $100 bills from the bank. He would set to work changing the serial numbers on each bill, so that all of them would have the same number. This was to point out to his customer the perfection of his machine's copies. Because all the numbers on the bills were the same after Victor's doctoring had taken place, the buyers thought that they were duplicate notes which the money box had made and which could be redeemed at any bank. Lustig soon took his portable cash machine on the road, selling it to two businessmen in Chicago for $10,000 each ($600,000 today) to a Kansas City banker for $22,000 ($650,000 today) and to a pool hall owner in copper-rich Butte, Montana, for the sum of $46,000 ($1.36 million today). (Creativity, Logical Manipulation, Strategy Success Rate)

In early 1923, Victor's chauffeur Tony fell foul of a notorious hoodlam named Olin Starkey. He was a loud mouthed, crude and boastful produce worker. One January night, Starkey had been engaged in a street brawl with a business competitor, and, seeing this, Lustig's chauffeur had leapt out of the car to intervene. The two fighters had promptly fled the scene, leaving the police to arrest Tony, who was found to be in possession of a knife. In time Lustig was able to bribe the presiding judge of the case to let Tony go, and the charges were dropped. But that wasn't the end of the matter. A day or two later Victor was back in his hotel suite, where he complained to his wife that his chronic nose infection had returned and that he wanted his nose cauterised again, no matter how painful the procedure. 'I don't feel any more pain,' he said, adding as an afterthought, 'Pain is meant to make a man hard.' He vowed to 'tear out this cancer by the

roots', then humiliate Starkey for his cowardice. 'He at least should have stood his ground when our friend met him. He ran away screaming like a little girl.' 24 hours later, Lustig was in another hotel room across town, demonstrating to Starkey and some of his associates the latest model of the Rumanian Box. He had used his brother Emil to lure him to a meeting. Posing as a potential wholesale customer, Emil had happened to remark that he was loaded with cash just then, before adding conspirationally: 'There is a machine of the most wonderful sort – a bank, really, financing those lucky enough to possess it, continuously pouring out large sums of money for a modest one-time investment.' Emil's revelation that the machine had recently been modified to produce 'literally dozens' of bills at regular intervals, rather than just one at a time, increased Starkey's enthusiasm. By 1923 Lustig was a master puppeteer, manipulating his marionettes, with the strings concealed. When Starkey appeared at the hotel to inspect the miraculous cash-making device, Lustig at first feigned reluctance to sell it to him. He was not in the business of randomly circulating crude counterfeit bills, he remarked with some emphasis. Instead, he started talking to Starkey about financial topics such as the newly created Federal Reserve's concept of the nation's money supply, and how this machine was created by the recent rise in key interest rates and the fall in investment, with lowered stock prices and the inevitable result. After some haggling, Starkey paid $50,000 ($1.48 million today) for a small wooden crate that was in reality worth a dollar or two as scrap. When asked for specific operating instructions, Lustig again mentioned the all-important point about the operator needing to wait a minimum of six hours in between each individual transaction, stressing that anything less than that would jeopardise the machine's delicate inner mechanism. Lustig left and quickly collected his wife and daughter from their suite at the hotel, summoned his Rolls-Royce and relocated back to Kansas City. In time Starkey hired a hitman and paid him $2,500 to kill the guy who had introduced himself as 'D.R. Crissinger' of Ohio. This latest fee only added to his already steep losses in the matter, because no one of that name existed. (Bribery, Stress Tolerance, Willingness To Act, Indirect Manipulation, Misdirection, Strategy Efficiency, Concealment)

Lustig, teaming up with a fellow conman called Tourbillion, presented themselves to a bank as local investors seeking a loan in order to open a competitively priced family restaurant in the area. They went to some lengths to stress the very tangible benefits their operation would bring to the cash-strapped public. The banker appeared to care little about it, but agreed to the deal once an off-the-books $5,000 cash sweetener was thrown in. As he later complained, 'the absolute charm and apparent propriety of the two merchants' and their 'unfailing courtesy' to him personally were among the reasons that he swallowed their hook so readily. It would be several days until he discovered that whereas his own loan of $15,000 ($288,000 today) was painfully real, the $5,000 bribe ($96,000 today) consisted of a neat pile of $50 and $100 bills, all of which bore the same serial number. Lustig and Tourbillion had promptly taken the loot back to their nearby hotel room, stuffed it into two laundry bags, dropped them into the arms of Lustig's chauffeur waiting in the alley below, then packed up their remaining belongings, paid their bill at the front desk, got in the car and drove off into the night. (Fabrication, Bribery, Charisma, Forgery)

Later that year, a man calling himself Baron von Lustig, later described in court papers as 'a dignified, neatly-shod European gentleman, pleasant faced, soft spoken, entirely without

ostentation', walked into the offices of the Citizens Trust Bank of Salina, Kansas, a community of about 25,000 people deep in the heart of country. What followed was a close variant of the property-buying scam he had pulled nearly two years earlier in Springfield, with certain new and improved rhetorical flourishes thrown in. Lustig told the manager who greeted him, Tormut Green, that he was a displaced Austrian nobleman who had recently been expelled from his ancestral castle by a Bolshevik-inspired mob. He spoke at some length of the terrible upheavals ripping the old European order apart, and how America in its bounty had provided a haven and a sanctuary for tens or hundreds of thousands of unhappy refugees like himself. He quoted the words inscribed on the Statue of Liberty. His voice quavering, Lustig told the banker that all he now desired in life was to purchase a simple farm where he and his dear family might settle, and that he had brought with him a small cache of $70,000 worth of Liberty Bonds – supposedly the amount he had been able to smuggle out from under the gaze of the barbaric Reds in the old country, but which he had in fact printed himself – to speed up the purchase. Lustig then handed over a single bond for $5,000, which looked sufficiently convincing to fool the professional banker. But the set-up didn't end quite yet. In an act of moving self-admittance, Lustig admitted that he was temporarily embarrassed for ready cash, and perhaps Mr Green could give him, say, $2,000 against the bond now in his hands? The financier obliged, and on that note they made an appointment for the following day to tour several nearby properties. The two parties quickly agreed terms for the sale of a freshly vacated tract of land. Lustig would pay $25,000 in addition to the $2,000 already given to him and a further $3,000 for a property probably worth only half as much. Lustig went on to propose that they finalise their deal not in the bank but in his nearby hotel suite. It was an unusual request, but Green seems to have raised no objection to it. He and his colleague John Rose quickly consented to do as their client asked, and to meet him to conclude their business. When they reconvened at the hotel the following morning, Lustig signed the property deed the bankers brought with them and then unlocked a desk drawer, extracted a bulky envelope, opened it, and fanned out an impressive number of Liberty Bonds. 'Thirty thousand dollars, gentlemen,' Lustig specified, if there was any doubt in the matter. Then he dropped the envelope back in the drawer and closed it. 'In Austria we have a small ceremony that accompanies the purchase of land,' Lustig continued. From a different drawer he produced a bottle of officially prohibited Canadian Club whiskey and three glasses. According to Agent Johnson of the Secret Service, who later investigated the matter: The bankers were more than ready to participate in the old Austrian ceremony. In fact, they participated several times, and since they were already heady with success, the liquor soon befuddled them. At last Lustig indicated the ceremony was completed. He handed them the package of bonds, received the deed, and repeated handshakes. By the time Green and Rose had made their somewhat dizzy way back to the bank, sat down at the conference table and begun the pleasant task of counting their money, a full hour had passed. When they finally opened the enticingly fat package they had brought with them, Green said nothing, staring open-mouthed at the appalling sight that greeted him. Rose was similarly at a loss, for the envelope Lustig had handed them, though apparently identical in every respect to the one they had seen invitingly stuffed full of government bonds, now contained only ripped up strips of old newspaper. Lustig, when tracked down in New York, made no efforts to deny his guilt in the affair. But before agreeing to accompany the two privately hired detectives who came for him, he suggested that they should perhaps check back with their employers. A public trial could raise troubling questions about the

soundness of the Citizens Trust Bank and its principal officers, he added. These matters might compromise the institution at a vulnerable moment in the nation's economy and undermine shareholder confidence. Lustig's alternative formula was that he simply return the bank's $5,000, minus $500 for his own trouble in the matter, and that he never again venture within 50 miles of their premises. Tormut Green quickly agreed to these terms, but then Lustig seemed to have a change of heart and requested another twenty-four hours to think it over. The next day, he called the bank to say that he believed he was entitled to a full $1,000 compensation, but that he would extend the exclusion zone to a radius of 100 miles in any direction from their front door. Again the bank consented, fearing their reputation shattered. He essentially gained $1,000 ($20,000 today) through this scheme. (Concealment, Charisma, Innovation, Fabrication, Tactics, Logical Manipulation)

Although still just 2 years old, Betty would apparently remember that Victor "charmed his three female companions one night by reading us beautiful poems he himself had composed … He turned down the lamps till the room was almost dark, then settling in a beautiful red damask armchair he began to recite those wonderful lines in the most melodious of voices … Even as a small child you hardly dared to draw breath lest the magic spell be broken." (Creativity, Charisma)

Discovering that one of his fellow guests at a hotel was a Vermont bank president named Linus Merton, Lustig first snatched Merton's wallet and then returned it to him intact the following day, claiming to have found it lying in the hallway. It was not difficult for him to win over the man's confidence from that point, and only a day or two later Merton found himself in another one of those phony off-track betting establishments, listening to an apparently live race broadcast actually being made up by one of Lustig's lieutenants in the back room. He lost $40,000 ($1.2 million today) and left town a broken man. (Fabrication, Social Skills)

After enjoying a family Christmas in New York, he was pulled in once more by the police in suburban Chicago in January 1925. Charged under the name of Albert Grauman for kiting $10,175 in homemade Liberty Bonds, the arrest file briefly ends: 'Freed.' Lustig simply paid off a prison guard to let him out. He always carried a large stash of high-denomination bills sewn into the lining of his coat for just such a predicament. (Concealment, Bribery, Contingencies)

Lustig always professed that he bore little or no personal malice toward his victims, and rarely ever ruined anyone just for the thrill of it. He clearly made a distinction in his own mind between scientifically extracting people's money and sadistically persecuting them. In order to do this, he often made it a habit to first find a character flaw in his victims, whether they be a Vermont banker like Linus Merton or a big-city jerk like Olin Starkey. Once having deemed the men as morally faulty, Victor then proceeded with a clear conscience. (Analysis)

There was a note of grudging respect of the sort often seen in official accounts of Lustig's criminal deceptions. 'This individual's mind is abnormally fertile … [and] he combines assiduousness with an originality and vivacity, no-care-madcap-devil-of-a-temperament that distinguishes him from the common thief.' (Cunning)

Lustig had been planning one of his most famous and notorious cons that would cement his career as the ultimate con man. In the early 1920s, there had been many controversies surrounding the Eiffel Tower, mainly that it was an eyesore for France, cost way too much to maintain, and should have been torn down linh ago. Lustig was well aware of the controversy about whether the Tower was in fact a monument for the ages or just an ugly monstrosity. One of Lustig's goals that year was to persuade a small but influential group of Paris businessmen that the Tower was sufficiently unloved to encourage the government in their belief that they should sell it off. He and his accomplices fed to their victims the sort of prevailing criticism – 'physically grotesque', a 'matchstick prank', 'impossible to maintain', and above all with 'no redeeming military or scientific potential, as once claimed' – that suggested the city government would be only too glad to see it go to the scrapheap. When he informed a room full of hardened Paris industrialists that he was an accredited member of the new administration (it helped his cause that these changed on such a regular basis) on a mission of the state, they immediately swallowed the bait. On the first morning of the plan, Lustig sat behind an antique desk in his office telling his invited guests that the information he was about to give them was of the utmost delicacy. In fact, each one of them would be required to sign a formal secrecy agreement sealed with wax before they proceeded. He was going to talk to them about the high cost of maintaining the Eiffel Tower, Lustig continued, and to reveal in the strictest confidence that the government now proposed to demolish it. He was bringing in an independent financial expert to examine the Tower, he added, and to propose a fair evaluation. Lustig introduced this strictly disinterested assessor as Robert Tourbillon, a supreme French patriot who had fought for his country at Verdun. Tourbillon 'radiates integrity', he assured the room. Really, Tourbillon was just Lustig's accomplice. Tourbillon presented each of the potential bidders with an impressively detailed ledger listing the Tower's assets and liabilities. The bottom line was that the monument was attracting around a million paid admissions a year, but was still operating far in the red. Although the government had now reluctantly renewed its lease, he reported, 'it will be a day of intense satisfaction to see the monster's raw components [repurposed] for bridge or railway construction'. Lustig then opened the negotiations in earnest. Over the next two days he sat down in private sessions with eleven individual scrap dealers. Each meeting lasted for just one hour. Lustig explained to his visitors not only about the Tower's financial plight, with an annual operating cost of 3 million francs, but also threw in what one half-admiring victim later called a 'generous and amusing history lesson on the subject as well'. Lustig essentially gave a an hour speech on the Eiffel Tower, which contained all true facts he had researched and recalled back into his memory so fluidly he was able to flawlessly convince the scrap dealers of his legitimacy. As Victor himself recalled, 'The buyers were entranced by what they heard … They knew they were getting not only a good deal, but also the chance to possess a piece of history.' The Tower was first envisioned as a centrepiece for that earlier Parisian festival, the 1889 Exposition, Lustig reminded his guests. Back in his suite at the hotel, Lustig kept a steadily growing file on the Tower, adding in any newspaper comment he could find on its various scandals and squabbles. Victor may not have been the first party ever to take advantage of such an unmistakable target of opportunity. But he was the only one who now went on to lay plans for such a literally monumental score beyond the resources or imagination of any mere confidence trickster. How calmly he went about his business as he approached his date with destiny could only be described as surreal. Roberta, his current wife, insisted that her husband had never said

a word to her about the specific reason they were in Paris, far less taken her into his confidence about the mechanics of the crime. Lustig did pay attention when on the morning of April 29th two representatives of the police came to the hotel to question him about some stolen money. There had been an armed robbery on the nearby Rue Saint-Florentin, they announced, and they were interviewing all foreign hotel guests in the vicinity. Lustig disguised any concern he may have felt at this confrontation with the cops by smoothly producing a restaurant bill that placed his family and him several miles away at the time in question. Roberta and young Betty corroborated the story, and the two policemen departed the suite, impressed by his smoothness, leaving behind only a brief note for the file: "We found the gentleman in a large room. He was with his family and a secretary. They treated [us] with courtesy. After lengthy questioning, we withdrew with their [alibi] document in hand … Monsieur saw us to the door with the same cordial gait." Nonetheless, something about Lustig's demeanour was not altogether convincing, because the officers added: "It was not considered that he was culpable of the robbery, but we could not have complete certainty of this. There was a sensation to [Lustig's] handshake that emanated evil." On April 30th, the Eiffel Tower job got under way in earnest. Lustig's accomplice Tourbillion, under Lustig's instructions, had quickly gone on to befriend a young woman who worked as a file clerk at the Ministry of Commerce. This was the office that bore primary responsibility for the upkeep of several buildings deemed to be of outstanding national significance, and ensuring they were kept safe and properly maintained for public use. Tourbillion took his new friend out on the town, lavishing her with gifts and attention. She was 'most amenable' to his advances, he wrote in a report to Lustig later that night. The lady's name was Fleur, a slight, thin woman in her early thirties whose former fiancé had died in the fighting at Amiens in August 1918. Tourbillion modestly told his new friend that although he happened to own a large estate back home in New York thanks to his good fortune on Wall Street, his real calling in life was as a poet. In time, he shyly recited a few lines of one of his recent compositions to Fleur. Soon Tourbillion was gazing deep into Fleur's eyes over their candlelit dinner table and informing her that the face was his experience and the hands were his soul. Things went as planned because on the morning of, Tourbillon – or Dante, as he now called himself – sent a note by hand upstairs to Lustig's suite at the hotel: 'Mademoiselle F has strong psychological need for love,' he wrote. 'This has now been achieved.' A day or two later Tourbillion and Fleur were having lunch at a pavement cafe on the Left Bank, and after they finished he made a rather unusual suggestion to her. He said that as it was a Sunday, and the place would therefore be empty, he would love to take a private tour of her office at the ministry. Fleur apparently thought it mildly odd, but then he told her that he wanted to know all about her life and how she spent her time each day, so that he could imagine her better when they were apart. When he put it that way Fleur found that she actually quite liked the idea. She let them in with a pass key, and as they went up in the lift Tourbillion said that he didn't really want to waste their precious time together looking at government office fixtures after all, but perhaps they could find somewhere upstairs to express their 'great mutual devotion,' and she agreed to the proposal. In due course Fleur briefly left him to use the bathroom, and in the few minutes she was gone Tourbillion took a sheet of headed stationery from someone's desk and wrote out a few suitable lines of an endearing new poem for her. Fleur was duly impressed. She had no way of knowing that he pocketed half a dozen other sheets of headed notepaper folded carefully under his jacket. Meanwhile, Lustig himself had not been idle while at the hotel. With the help of

two hotel employees in his pay he had converted another little-used utility room in the basement to resemble something that a state agency might plausibly use in the event it needed to arrange a discreet negotiation room away from its official premises. The walls of the room were draped with special blackout curtains, and two green baize-topped tables, each with a simple carafe of water and a tray of glasses, lined the sides. A plain wooden desk was set up on a low platform at the far end of the room so that the individual seated there could look down on his audience to the left or right of him. There were no flowers or other decorations, although a framed photograph of Gaston Doumergue, the state president, silently observed the proceedings from a spot in the corner. In due course six sober-suited men, Lustig's victims, entered the room and sat down at the two tables. Lustig addressed them from his chair. The men represented the shortlist of the eleven candidates whom Victor had interviewed a few days earlier. He told them that his esteemed colleague had identified each one there as representing the best of the capital's scrap metal fraternity. What was more, his colleague had personally vouched for their discretion and honesty. Each man had now had a chance to examine the accounts of the property in question, Lustig noted, and in addition to this he now handed them in turn a brief statement typed on a sheet of official Ministry of Commerce notepaper:

I hereby authorise the bearer of this letter to represent the ministry in all matters concerning the civil project hitherto stated.

From Henry Cheron, Acting Director

(Info Gathering, Fabrication, WMI, Brainwashing, Planning Coverage, Composure, Concealment, Contingencies, Aura, Planning Acclimation, Flattery, Logical Manipulation)

According to Lustig, all six men were 'driven to the hotel in special automobiles that were sent to bring them', and each were 'hardly able to contain his mounting excitement' as he took his seat. The place cards set out on the green tabletops identified them as Messrs Reynaud, Maritan, Castaneri, Gourault, Blanquer and Poisson. At the head table Lustig looked like a French government official, with a centre-part in his hair, a dark three-piece suit and a neat blue, white and red tricolour ribbon in his lapel. He was thoroughly convincing. From time to time Emil Lustig entered the room and bowed to the guests. With his pale, expressionless face, hooded eyes and tight lips, he was the picture of a dutiful civil servant. Of the six men in the room, Lustig soon narrowed the field to two. Roger Blanquer was a well-established scrap dealer. With his long experience in the industry, Blanquer thought himself the best qualified of the six applicants. He therefore got angry when Lustig instead began speaking extensively to his sometime rival André Poisson, a quiet-spoken family man in his mid-thirties who had moved to Paris only a year earlier after helping supervise post-war clearance and reconstruction work around his home town of Merville. Poisson was bald, so he kept a rotating stable of wigs of varying lengths that he believed made him look more dignified, and he was only too happy to now find himself seated in a private room at the Hôtel de Crillon with such an eminent host as Victor Lustig. 'He looked at you and he owned you,' Poisson later stated. Part of Lustig's appeal to Monsieur Poisson lay in the mask of modesty he adopted in their meetings together. When Lustig made his way up and down the stairs between suites in the hotel, the staff found his movements as entrancing as his adversaries in the law did. 'You never saw him for more than

an instant,' an employee known only as Theo recalled. 'He was never there, and yet he was always there,' echoed a colleague. To André Poisson, Lustig was a sort of phantom of vast, indeterminate resources who operated largely through associates. He was the reputable principal who shook your hand and inquired about your journey before turning you over to his associates for the detailed discussions. It was Lustig's accomplice therefore, who at first assumed the primary responsibility for describing the many attractive features the Eiffel Tower had to offer to the interested scrap dealers. It was only after that various information were set before the suitably intrigued André Poisson that Lustig himself materialised in the room to make his clarifying announcement: the state was instead offering it outright as scrap. It was a bold solution to the problem, Lustig acknowledged, but something about the serene, level-voiced way he put it – and perhaps also the letter of authority he slipped Monsieur Poisson from the Ministry of Commerce – convinced Poisson that all was well. It was only at this delicate turn of events that Lustig favoured Poisson with the full force of his dazzling charm. He did not linger over the mechanics of the actual transaction. Instead he treated Poisson as a valued business partner who quickly became a friend. It was the little things he now came to do, such as standing at the hotel's front door, precisely dressed as always, waiting to vigorously shake his visitor's hand. But then that hand wasn't released. Still holding it, Lustig would look into Poisson's eyes and remark what a pleasure it was to welcome his distinguished guest, as if only just now encountering him for the first time. After that he would make some optimistic remark about the weather, even should it happen to have been pouring with rain. 'He'd say, "Don't worry. It's going to clear up any time. You see that little light in the east over there? It's going to dry up." Poisson recalled. 'He never dealt in negative terms. He entertained only sanguine thoughts, and you found yourself being swept along with him as a result.' Lustig's charm offensive kicked into gear when, following their latest morning conference at the hotel, he insisted on taking Poisson out to an extended lunch before finishing up at a discreet place of entertainment he knew well. Afterwards, he spoke to his guest with vigour on the importance of family, and moral values about 'always going home to the one you love' in order to indirectly convince Poisson of his integrity. Tourbillon, Lustig's accomplice, described the friendship that blossomed between his partner in crime and the young scrap merchant. 'Leaving them together the second or third time [Poisson] came to the hotel, I went outside to see to the cabman and ask him to wait. When I returned to the lobby I found the Count not so much sitting in a chair as reclining in it almost full-length, legs crossed, laughing and joking, the picture of self-contentment, with the hitherto muted M. Poisson also nearly convulsed with mirth. Not for the first time, I could only marvel at my esteemed friend's powers of enticement.' There seems to have been what amounted to a moment of pleasure in Poisson's life when, fortified by several glasses of Lustig's champagne, the two men had driven out late one evening to stand and gaze across the tulip fields at the illuminated Eiffel Tower. 'It was early May, and unseasonably cool,' Lustig remembered, 'but our friend [Poisson] was perspiring heavily, stamping his foot up and down in delight, dancing almost, celebrating his decision to seize the day. It was really a great expression of joy, the cri de coeur from this meek little soul who had now reached his moment of destiny as he looked up at that great structure shimmering with thousands of lights.' Over the next few days, Lustig took him on long walks through Paris, showing him the sights. 'This is our secret meeting-room' or 'our bomb refuge,' he told Poisson, pointing to some nondescript building apparently in classified government service. There were other little flourishes, too. Poisson noticed how

several pedestrians they passed in the street courteously bowed their hats to Lustig, one or two of them then greeting him as 'Monsieur le Ministre'. He replied with a gracious sweep of his hand. Sometimes he had a black Grand Luxe Renault limousine with a small tricolour flag fluttering from a front mount at their disposal. Lustig himself always wore a dark suit, and boasting his own patriotic lapel pin, as well as, once or twice, Poisson noticed, the green and red ribbon of the Croix de Guerre, awarded for 'some small service in the Ardennes', Lustig coyly hinted. He convincingly looked like the French government official of the 1920s. (Logical Manipulation, Aura, Identity Deception, Profiling, Hot Reading, Emotional Understanding, Seduction, Acting Skills, Flattery, Emotional Engagement, Indirect Manipulation, Social Skills, Analysis, Fabrication)

When Lustig announced one morning that he had been called away on state business, Poisson went too. They travelled down together in the chauffeured limo. Lustig apparently spent most of the next twenty-four hours tied up in high-level meetings, but before they left town he treated his guest to an extravagant meal served to them in the private room of a restaurant overlooking the sparkling River Garonne. Back in Paris, they were joined by some other colleagues (Lustig's accomplices) from the Ministry of Commerce for what Poisson later described to an old Merville school friend as a 'wonderfully varied evening' of dining, drinking and the most rarefied discussion.' By this stage, even some of Lustig's colleagues themselves well versed in the art of the swindle looked on him with unfeigned awe. After their latest dinner together, Tourbillon was impressed. 'You had him eating out of your hand, Victor. My God, it was masterly … You were right about everything.' Lustig had modestly deflected his friend's praise. 'It's still not over,' he reminded him. 'He hasn't been taken yet.' 'You don't think he'll get suspicious, do you? I mean, if he decides to go to the government and investigate …' 'My dear fellow,' said Lustig, 'to André Poisson we are the government.' The fated day came, and the terms of the contract was that Poisson would pay 1,200,000 francs, or around £170,000 (roughly $4.8 million today) by certified cheque, and the Eiffel Tower would then be his to dispose of as he saw fit. There were one or two subsidiary clauses concerning matters such as confidentiality and the timetable for the tower's demolition, but nothing that gave him any cause for alarm. There was just one further technical point, Lustig added. The cheque should be made out not to the Commerce bureau itself but to a Monsieur. It was all to do with the department's byzantine inner workings, Victor explained, adding that in this way the transaction would be immune to any tiresome interference from his ministerial colleague Anatole de Monzie, the Secretary of Finance. He was always careful to couch even the fine print of his deceits as logical explanations. Poisson again readily swallowed the hook. It was now that Lustig took the whole affair from the realm of a first-rate scam into one of true genius. Making sure they were alone, Lustig instructed his colleague to leave. He then favoured Poisson with a wry smile and said, 'André, we have one final bit of business that is outstanding.' In closing their historic deal, Lustig continued, now adopting a more subdued, almost apologetic tone, there was one party who was sadly excluded from the general air of celebration. That individual was himself. Lustig proceeded to make an affecting presentation to his new friend of his professional and personal circumstances. It was not easy serving as a mere functionary of the state, he confessed. Although there were occasional occupational benefits such as the hotel and the car, these were of course strictly dictated by the needs of official business. The life of a humble public servant such as himself

was more typically characterised by both the permanent spectre of unemployment. Each time a prime minister got fired, as happened on roughly an annual basis, such loyal assistants as him trembled for their jobs. Even at the best of times they were paid pitifully small wages. Their wives and loved ones lived lives of the utmost frugality. It was a constant struggle merely to put food on the table, Lustig confided. His own small children attended a paupers' school where up to eighty or ninety students were crammed into a basement room formerly used as a pig slaughterhouse. Sitting on planks suspended between old cradles used for skinning carcasses, and shuffling their feet across an indelibly bloodstained stone floor, the young pupils were confronted by a hellish overhead of spiked hooks and an ill-repaired roof that frequently admitted a drenching rain or an icy sleet on winter days. But for the presence of a few electric lightbulbs, Lustig added, it could all have been a scene out of the most primitive pre-colonial African village rather than a modern place of learning in the heart of Paris. André Poisson was suitably moved. It was now that Lustig made his crowning play. He went on to sheepishly inform Poisson that it was customary on an occasion such as this for a government official to receive a small cash commission. It was a regrettable state of affairs, he agreed, but there it was. It was a masterstroke. Lustig had judged his man to perfection. Not only did Poisson instantly buy this wrenching tale, it had the further effect of removing whatever lingering doubts he may have had about the whole Eiffel Tower matter. Although a relative newcomer to Paris, he was well aware of the culture of influence peddling that typically surrounded the French state contract system of the day. He had encountered it too often while engaged in the rebuilding operations around his homeland not to realise that it was simply an implicit part of the cost of doing business. Smiling in turn, Lustig billed Poisson another 70,000 francs, or £8,000 ($231,000 today) for his poor wife and their five shoeless children back in their nasty schoolroom. A day or two later, André Poisson presented himself as instructed for a meeting with the undersecretary of state at the Department of Commerce. He was there to discuss some of the practical details that would be involved in dismantling a 1,000ft, 8,000-ton wrought-iron structure in the centre of Paris. Expecting only the pleasant prospect of being greeted as a partner in an important private initiative, this was not what happened. Upon learning that there was no note of his appointment, nor anyone there familiar with his name, Poisson had a first queasy intimation of foul play. Eventually an elderly government retainer consented to meet him. Poisson told the man that he was now the rightful owner of the Eiffel Tower, and that he would like to discuss matters such as street closures and other public safety issues before his work crew dynamited the structure. After the laughter had died down, the official told him that the city of Paris approved a licence to operate the tower at their pleasure until January 1st, 1967. He had never heard of a Tourbillon, nor a Victor Lustig. Perhaps the whole affair had been some sort of misunderstanding, the worker suggested, as Poisson reeled back outside. He immediately knew that the situation was irreparable. Beyond acknowledging that Lustig had recently checked out, leaving no forwarding address, nobody at the hotel could help him. The hotel's downstairs utility room was never used for any guest functions, Poisson learned. When he inspected the area for himself he found it filled only with a janitor's cleaning supplies. Too embarrassed to go to the police, Poisson swallowed his loss. By the time André Poisson made his shattering discovery, Lustig had retreated 700 miles east to Vienna. (Fabrication, Flattery, Aura, Prediction, Risk Calculation, Analysis, Logical Manipulation, Emotional Manipulation, Concealment, Profiling)

A little after this, Lustig began dating a new woman called Irene Kreusch. She later wrote that she had immediately fallen in love with the generous ”Herr Duval” (as he called himself now) after she went out on a date with him. (Seduction)

Lustig repeated the same exact con with the Eiffel Tower only a few months later. Although he swiftly identified a mark and followed the Poisson playbook by entertaining the man and securing his signature on a contract, this time the disappointed buyer went straught to the police. As a result Lustig, although successfully banking a further down payment of 90,000 francs, or roughly £250,000 today ($291,000), was forced to leave Paris to evade the cops. (Strategy Efficiency, Concealment)

Victor had then gone to Dayton, Tennessee. He was there because of the Scopes Monkey Trial, in which a local high school teacher was accused of not teaching enough about the principles behind the theory of human evolution, in defiance of state law. It was a major news story with the press getting heavily involved. When he got to Dayton, Lustig bluffed his way through a police barricade by posing as an old friend of the presiding judge, John Raulston, and soon set up shop in a small room in the courthouse basement, where he advertised himself as the state’s official agent for the sale of souvenir merchandise, which he hosted with the aid of a trained chimpanzee dressed in a straw hat and cutaway jacket. After only a day’s work, Victor had made a profit of $600, or $15,000 today. He gave the chimp’s handler $50, and spent the rest treating himself and his chauffeur Tony to a nice resort. (Info Gathering, Bluffing, Fabrication, Sophistry)

Two black-suited FBI agents arrived on the premises of the hotel one afternoon and announced that they were looking for a Count Victor Lustig, who they wanted to question about the matter of some questionable Liberty Bonds that had been changing hands in New York. Lustig wriggled out of an arrest by insisting that he had been travelling abroad for several weeks, and that someone had obviously been impersonating him. The feds bought his story, and to prove there were no hard feelings all three men then went out to a bar on Caroline Street that night and drank rum punches (completely on Lustig’s tab). This would ensure the events of the day were a haze for the agents. (Logical Manipulation, Concealment)

Lustig decided to go bolder with his cons and set his sights on Al Capone, the notorious gang boss. Lustig made a date to meet Capone one late October morning in his office, in a railroad town located just west of downtown Chicago. When Lustig arrived he was met not by a secretary but by two thick-necked individuals who thoroughly frisked him for any concealed weapons. Their search did not, however, extend to Victor’s elegant brass-topped walking stick, which he promptly unscrewed once in Capone’s presence to reveal a thin hip flask full of whiskey. This was well received. Capone brought out two glasses and they toasted each other. The details of what transpired that October morning in Capone’s hotel suite are unclear, due to immaculate record-keeping by Lustig himself, but whatever Lustig said it was enough to persuade the notoriously hard-headed mobster to invest $50,000 ($1.2 million today) in a double your money scheme. Not surprisingly, he attached certain conditions to his participation. The essence of the deal was that Lustig would return in exactly sixty days and hand Capone his full $100,000 in cash. Although there was no tedious paperwork involved in the whole

transaction, both parties were clear about what was expected. 'I don't throw money away,' Capone announced, perhaps unnecessarily. 'When I go into a deal I'm serious about it.' To illustrate the point, Capone felt under his desk to push a button. When he did so a panel between the presidential portraits on the wall behind him slid open. It revealed a man sitting on a campstool at the controls of a Thompson Type C machine gun mounted on a tripod. The barrel of the gun was aimed directly at the visitor's head. 'I'm that serious,' Capone added. Victor slowly nodded and left the office. He went straight to the bank and put the $50K in a safe deposit box. Lustig returned to Capone's suite at the hotel more than a week before the sixty-day deadline expired. The mood in the room was less cheerful than before. Capone remained seated throughout the interview, and no one drank any toasts to anyone else. Keeping a level voice, Lustig explained that he had been unable to make good on their investment as he had hoped. He chose the words of his deception with care. He knew that a man was pointing a machine gun directly at him from only a few feet away behind his host's head. No one spoke for some moments after that. Reaching slowly inside his jacket, Lustig then extracted an envelope and laid out fifty thousand-dollar bills on Capone's desk. 'I'm sorry I couldn't turn a profit for you, but here's your stake money back,' he said. Apparently something about this gesture stirred Capone, because he restrained any urge he may have had to again push the button at his knee. Capone wilted in the face of Lustig's apparent selflessness. After a few moments, he asked him, 'You broke?' 'I find myself temporarily reduced,' Lustig admitted with dignity. At that, Capone scooped up some of the bills just laid out before him and returned them to his guest. 'Here's five grand,' he grunted. Lustig left the room at a measured pace, nodding affably to the armed bodyguards. Victor successfully conned Al Capone into believing that he had paid the $50K he lost from his own pocket, when in reality he had just returned the money Capone had given him in the first place. He made off with a cool $5K ($80,000) for his ingenuity. (Flattery, Concealment, Persuasion, Composure, Emotional Manipulation, Fabrication, Tactics)

Later in 1925, Lustig chose to scam the manager of a small savings bank in Manhattan, Kansas. This manager stood accused of widespread duplicity, systematic chicanery, financial gouging, profiteering, exploitation, and in some cases outright robbery of his rural customers. According to Lustig's daughter: "The banker had sent innocent friends to prison for crimes they had never committed, altered records, and misplaced files. He foreclosed on poor farmers … Victor found him to be an easy mark, ready to listen to any scheme that would make money for himself." The key to the scam lay in persuading the manager to stake $150,000 of his own money in a new start-up bank that, Lustig insisted, would soon be raking in from local depositors. In fact, he promised, the man would recoup his $150,000 and much more besides in as little as five days. Victor quickly produced detailed financial projections as well as meticulous architect's plans for the venture. It says something both for the banker's greed and Lustig's powers of persuasion that he never had Victor's background checked. When the moment came, Victor simply took the victim's cash and left town. His daughter would write admiringly that her father possessed a 'deep philosophical knowledge of human nature, and could deceive even those who considered themselves sharp in business.' (Decision Making, Info Gathering, Profiling, Fabrication, Sophistry, Brainwashing, Psychology)

While waiting for a trial (Victor could have rigged it, but didn't want to wait so long) Lustig got talking to his jailer, one Sheriff Richards, and discovered over a shared flask of whiskey that he

was not only short of money but had been dipping into public funds to tide him over. After that it wasn't long before Lustig brought up the Rumanian Box, and the end result was that for only $7,000 Sheriff Richards became the latest proud owner of the Rumanian Box while Lustig himself walked free. It seemed like a win for all parties. Six months later, however, Richards burst into Lustig's California hotel room carrying a loaded revolver and demanding a refund. He was now ruined and out of a job, and thus not in a mood to discuss the matter. Even so, Lustig kept his head. He explained that the lawman must have made an error when operating the device, and that he would be glad to correct the problem when he returned to Oklahoma in the near future. Following that, he handed over $7,000 in crisp new bills, plus a further $3,000 for his trouble, and the two men parted without further conflict. Some days later, Lustig read that the ex-sheriff had been arrested for using fake cash, and as a result faced a sentence of between eighteen and thirty years imprisonment. (Methods, Composure, Adaptability, Bribery, Quick Thinking).

Lustig was soon back with his Rumanian Box. His latest victim was a man named Herman Loller. Loller had done well out of wartime government contracts for shell casings, but recent years had proved a struggle for him. In a single day in November 1924 his company's stock price dove perpendicularly from 85 to 19, dragging with it to ruin a number of his small investors. Loller himself was down to his last $40,000 in cash and assets. While in Florida, Lustig dressed up in a white linen suit and straw hat, screwed a monocle into his right eye, and spent his afternoons sitting in an wicker chair carried down to the beach for him by a uniformed Japanese manservant, who then stood discreetly behind his employer ready to fan him with a large palm or pour out fresh-brewed tea into a monogrammed china cup. Occasionally, the attendant would trot back to the hotel and then reappear bearing a telegram on a silver tray. Each time he did so, Lustig received the message with a bored sigh, glanced at it, and told the flunkey there would be no reply. It took Herman Loller five days to find the nerve to approach the enigmatic stranger on the beach, and just two more for Lustig to fatally interest him in the Rumanian Box. Some technical exchange ensued over cocktails that the butler poured discreetly into two teacups. It was not the same thing at all as mere counterfeiting, Lustig assured his victim, as the box was really reproducing genuine bills. 'In fact,' he added on a note of unaffected if not entirely merited patriotic fervour, 'I'm doing the country some good, because I am increasing the amount of available currency in the system.' Another $25,000 soon changed hands. Lustig knew he had around six hours' leeway before Loller discovered he'd been conned, and he used the time to put as much distance between south Florida and himself as possible. It turned out that he needn't have rushed, because Loller had completely been entranced by Lustig. When the money machine at first failed to work, he persisted with it for weeks more to come. Eventually his wife, in a rage of frustration, smashed the box with a hammer. Even then Loller refused to accept the awful truth. 'It must be something to do with the paper or the ink,' he said. 'When I see the Count again I'll ask him about it and then we'll be rich.' (Info Gathering, Sophistry, Emotional Understanding, Logical Manipulation, Brainwashing)

While in Los Angeles later that spring, Victor met a 19-year-old woman named Estelle Sweeny who had come west to try her luck as an actress after finishing as runner-up in the annual beauty contest. She met the courtly, middle-aged man who introduced himself as a 'top New York producer' who happened to be in town scouting for talent to put on the Broadway stage.

‘There’ll be a lot of hard work ahead if you’re to succeed,’ he warned the wide-eyed actor, and she assured him that she would happily do whatever it took. In the words of a Secret Service agent, ‘That night he invited the girl to his hotel room and in a short time she ceased to be a virgin.’ (Fabrication, Seduction)

Lustig took Stella with him to Havana, a playground for wealthy vacationing Americans. Pretty soon, they met Ronald Dodge of Providence, Rhode Island, a farm equipment tycoon with a weakness for the musical stage. Lustig bought Ronald several well-lubricated dinners before shyly letting it slip that he was then putting a new show together with Stella as its leading lady. He estimated that the production’s entire start-up cost would run to $70,000, of which he had so far raised $20,000. While Ronald pondered that, he and Lustig went to a private room in their hotel in order to see Stella dance, and, as a later police report put it, ‘act up’. Following this closed-door audition, Victor invited both Stella and Ronald to join him on a short stroll to have lunch down on the beach. By the time they arrived there they were being followed by an excited mob of teenage boys, which Lustig pointed out was further irrefutable proof of Stella’s magnetic appeal to the opposite sex. He did not mention that he had been sporadically dropping cigarettes and coins behind them as they walked. As a result, Stella experienced something new – an audience who apparently appreciated her for her natural beauty, not just for her appearance in a bikini. Soon Ronald was begging to be allowed to put up the outstanding balance of $50,000, while Lustig, instead of the crude hustle of lesser con men, solemnly advised him of the risks involved in any such theatrical venture. The warnings served only to further increase Dodge’s eagerness to invest his money this way. A few days later the two men celebrated their partnership over the course of another lavish dinner at their hotel. About halfway through the meal, a bellboy walked up to their table, bowed, and told Lustig that there was an urgent phone call for him from London. Victor tipped the boy generously and excused himself from the table. When he returned a few minutes later he appeared to be calm but quietly happy with himself. ‘It seems we may open simultaneously in the West End,’ he announced, mentioning a British royal family member who was now apparently keen to back the production. In his own excitement, Dodge did not stop to consider that it would then have been around three o’clock in the morning in the English capital. After a further dinner or two, the $50,000 changed hands from Dodge to Lustig. Victor had promised to hire a pleasure boat on which all three interested parties could meet to toast their coming international hit while they cruised lazily around the Gulf of Mexico. When Ronald Dodge, Stella Swan and several other invited guests arrived at the harbour, they found that Lustig had already left. The truth seems to have dawned on his primary investor soon after that. Dodge greeted the fact of Lustig’s betrayal with that mixture of rage and self-reproach characteristic of Victor’s victims over the years. He wavered about whether or not he should report the matter to the police, but in the end he seems to have decided that to do so might raise awkward questions for him at home from his wife. He may also have felt that there was little realistic chance of him ever recovering his money. Dodge gently explained to Stella that there never had been any Broadway production of the kind Lustig had described, and that they were both the victims of a monstrous hoax. Even then, the aspiring starlet’s reaction was one of piteous disbelief. ‘He played us,’ Dodge repeated. Stella was still incredulous. Gently sobbing to herself on a bench at the back of a Cuban strip club, she simply didn’t want to believe what she heard. Up until then the young actress still seems to have clung

to the hope that it might all have been some sort of ghastly mistake. (Info Gathering, Flattery, Fabrication, Seduction, Sophistry, Emotional Manipulation, Acting Skills, Brainwashing, Profiling)

A partner of Lustig's, a Los Angeles showgirl named Rina Landon, would tell a newspaper reporter that around this time she and Victor had been in bed one night in 1926 at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel when there was an angry thump at the door. Watching her partner calmly produce a semi-automatic pistol and walk with it to greet their visitor, she exclaimed, 'You never told me you kept a loaded gun under your pillow!' Always keen to avoid violence if he possibly could, Victor merely spoke a few persuading words through the locked door, evidently persuading the caller that it was all a case of mistaken identity. The young woman heard the other party's footsteps disappear down the hallway, followed by Lustig announcing in the same level tone that perhaps they should gather their belongings and leave the building by way of the fire escape as the angry party could return. (Composure, Persuasion)

Later in 1926, Lustig was bold enough to again risk a con on an organised crime boss. This was Jack 'Legs' Diamond, a 29-year-old Irish American mobster with a controlling interest in several New York-area speakeasies. Lustig and his accomplice Dapper Dan Collins entered into an arrangement to supply brand-name liquor to Diamond's establishments after an upfront commission, but then switched the labels so that he in fact received a mixture of juniper oil cut with a dash of high-octane gin Victor concocted. The two co-conspirators left town before Diamond discovered their betrayal. (Decision Making, Creativity)

Lustig was again on the move in late December 1926. He spent Christmas of that year in Amarillo, Texas, where he arrived carrying two identical suitcases. One of the cases contained genuine US government Liberty Bonds, and Victor stuffed the other one with torn up strips of newspaper. Lustig's mark was Amarillo's sheriff, 52-year-old Roland 'Whitey' Jones. Lustig quickly secured an interview with Sheriff Jones on the Monday morning of January 3rd,1927. He told the lawman that he had $80,000 worth of Liberty Bonds with him and that, due to a temporary lack of ready funds, he would be willing to part with this treasure for only $60,000 in cash. The sheriff inspected the bonds and quickly agreed to the deal. When the two parties met again the following morning Lustig once more flipped open the suitcase, which by now had a few genuine Liberty Bonds on the top and, unbeknown to Jones, the strips of worthless newsprint underneath. In a further deception of which the sheriff was unaware, the chauffeur was stationed in a Rolls-Royce at the rear of the building, holding the other suitcase with the majority of the bonds in it, ready to leave at short notice. After a cursory inspection, Jones smilingly handed over $60,000 in cash, and accepted what amounted to about $500 in government deeds in exchange. Lustig stayed long enough to propose a brief toast to their mutual prosperity. Following that he excused himself from the sheriff's office and without further ado joined his driver in the car, instructing him to gun the engine and not stop until they crossed the state line. (Fabrication, Strategy Efficiency, Sophistry)

Lustig was soon back again in Europe, where he proceeded to give away fake US War Bonds for cash around the country before the police came for him. Even then, he kept his cool. When the arresting officers announced that they meant to deport him back to the United States, he told them, 'This is a diplomatic matter, monsieurs.' Lustig had an innate skill as an unusually

proficient lawyer. It was a notable fact of his long criminal career that he rarely felt the need to get a formally qualified attorney. Such was his aura of inner confidence, of someone possessing boundless insights into legal issues of the utmost complexity, that many law-enforcement professionals, some of them judges, seduced by his poise and general self-assurance, would entertain him. Lustig calmly informed the competent officials in this case that he was from both France and Czech, and that as such the Toulon force would need to contact the US State Department in the matter. Provided that the US Department formally requested his extradition, and, further, should the foreign ministries in both Paris and Prague grant the application, then he was at their disposal. The flustered officers glanced at one another, and then at Lustig, and back at each other again. After conferring further on the matter, Lustig was asked to leave the country within 24 hours and not to return. (Composure, Knowledge, Aura, Fabrication, Strategy Success Rate)

Context: Two members of the United States Secret Service confronted Lustig about the matter of some phony Liberty Bonds that had been changing hands up and down the east coast. The elder of the two was Peter Anthony Rubano was a 45-year-old, thickset federal agent from New York, known for his toughness and incorruptibility. He first gained fame by arresting the notorious mobster Ignazio “the Wolf” Lupo and later served with distinction in World War I, earning a gold watch from General Joffre. Returning to civilian life, he led major operations against anarchists and personally defused a bomb sent to the Attorney General, demonstrating his dedication to law enforcement. Married with two teenage children, he was described as “made of steel … when he shook your hand, it stayed shook, as if he was making an arrest, and his voice cut across a crowded room.” Even J. Edgar Hoover praised him for his meticulous, surgical approach to attacking criminals. (Context)

The first battle of wits between the two parties ended in an effective draw. James Johnson, who went on to become one of those assigned to Rubano’s force to catch Lustig, wrote of the encounter: Lustig was most cooperative and talked a great deal. But, strangely, little useful information seemed to be forthcoming. Rubano ordered lunch sent in, and after that continued the questioning. He was determined to pin the confidence man down … The fourth hour of questioning passed, and the fifth and sixth. Lustig showed no signs of fatigue or even of resentment when the questions became sharp and personal. It was a stalemate. Lustig politely denied knowing about any funny money circulating around the US, while entertaining his two guests with recollections of his youthful adventures in the likes of Vienna and Paris. After this, he again repeated that he alas had little personal familiarity with the world of Liberty Bonds or any other such instruments. He wished he could be more helpful, but there it was. The end of the meeting was that towards nightfall Victor walked out a free man and vanished into the streets of New York. The official file reads: ‘After several hours, [we] could not draw him into a serious sustained discussion of any specific criminal activity.’ (Concealment, Mental Fortitude, Stress Tolerance, Verbal Deception, Misdirection)

After scamming yet another sheriff for $15,000 by means of the Rumanian Box, Victor went on to invest some of the proceeds into scamming a victim named Steven J. Stone, a wealthy insurance executive from Albany, New York, of his life savings. Lustig told Stone that he owned a number of silver mines in a remote part of Colorado. They were all fabulously productive, and

would remain so for many years to come. But there was a problem. He, Victor, was a horrible gambler, and in one recent disastrous night he had lost many thousands at poker. As a result he found himself in need of ready funds, and thus had no option but to sell a large percentage in one of his mines for $80,000, or $2 million at today's prices. Of course, Lustig didn't expect Stone to simply take his word for it. He also produced authentic-looking deeds of ownership, and equally persuasive 'officially audited' statements of current and projected income. The documents had been run up by a friend of Lustig's brother in the back room of his shop in Throgs Neck, New York. Newspaper articles were similarly furnished that represented Victor as one of the great precious metal magnates and social benefactors of the day. They, too, were forged. Acclaimed as a major local entrepreneur, Lustig shyly admitted, the Denver Post had even named him their Man of the Year. He had been a fool at the card table, he acknowledged, but all he needed were some modest funds and the opportunity to keep his hundreds of hard-working employees and their poor families from starving. In a wrenching detail, Victor added that he had left his house one morning not long ago and found a little old lady waiting for him on the street with a bunch of handpicked flowers tied together in a plain newspaper wrapper clutched in her hands. Her subsequent presentation to him, and those of many other such worthy people, contributed to his determination to continue to provide for their welfare, whatever the cost. The old woman had told him that she was a widow and that her son was employed in one of Lustig's mines, where he made enough money to support both her, the son's wife, and the couple's seven young children. Victor was a saint, the lady had continued, pressing her ragged bouquet into his arms. Lustig told Stone that it would break his heart to close down even a single mine, and that he would do whatever it took both to avoid any layoffs and to continue to offer certain vital services to his employees, ranging from day-care nurseries to adult literacy classes for his undereducated workers. The $80,000 he was asking was 'practically a steal' he added. Stone parted with the money, at which point Lustig and his family took the next available fast train out of town to Detroit. (Fabrication, Sophistry, Emotional Manipulation)

After that Victor spent some extended time in western Canada under the name of Van Gross, a Catholic preacher. Six months later, a story in the New York Herald Tribune had the lead 'The Relentless Steven Stone Still Searches Every Major City in the United States for Count Lustig'. Victor was eventually arrested when he tried to sell another bogus mine in the same way, but he maneuvered his way out of trouble with a $20,000 bribe and the promise to leave town within sixty minutes. (Concealment, Influence, Bribery)

Due to his growing notorious influence in the US, Lustig had half a dozen different European passports ready in his office safe in the event of a hurried overseas departure. His chauffeur was instructed to always ensure a car was fully fuelled and ready to go at a moment's notice. Victor kept bundles of cash in different foreign currencies in left-luggage lockers located in train or bus stations scattered around at least five US cities. He maintained a fully furnished apartment in the remote hilltop village of Belarus. The only amenity the place offered was safety. It was a quiet little community with no industry and few if any foreign tourists, and at the time its government still had no deportation treaty with the United States. (Contingencies)

Later in 1928 Lustig pulled off another variant of his silver mine scam. His latest victim was a wealthy Texas rancher named Ray Murdoch. Murdoch was in stocks, buying them from a

brokerage house in New York. His account was large in size, and so he was not at all surprised when the home office sent one of its customer-relations men down to Texas to see him personally and offer further service and advice. Lustig, who had taken advantage of this, introduced himself to his unsuspecting client as George Simon. He told Murdoch that his account with the firm was ticking over nicely. With careful management, it would continue to return a yield of around 4 per cent a year. From there it was not difficult for Lustig to interest the Texan in a more ambitious money-making venture. All Murdoch needed to do was invest $20,000 in share certificates issued by a company called the Handleman Gold Mining Trust, and his only problem from then on would lie in having to rent extra storage space to accommodate all the cash that would roll in. 'I have the name and address of the mine's largest shareholder, a Mr. Jackson DeMuth,' Lustig confided. 'The man's in poor health, living in a small hotel in Brownsville, and wants to unload his stock while he still can. If we move quickly we may still be in time.' Lustig and Murdoch separately drove the 70 miles to the bedside of the stricken Jackson DeMuth, who feebly agreed to sell them his shares. He was an unemployed actor Victor had hired for the occasion. DeMuth duly handed some impressively engraved deed certificates to Lustig, and Victor in turn passed them to Murdoch. These documents were also the work of Emil's friend in his print shop at Throgs Neck. After that the money changed hands, and the parties exchanged celebratory toasts. Victor and "Jackson" promptly left town directly after. (Info Gathering, Fabrication, Analysis, Sophistry)

Context: At this point, so many people, whether they be from the Secret Service or Lustig's victims over the years, had made it their life's duty to track down the con man and have him jailed. Victor was aware of this and from this point on never went outside without a loaded gun. (Mass Influence, Social Awareness, Contingencies)

Lustig had forged and sold over 200 financial Liberty Bonds in the twelve months beginning in June 1928, and that had earned him around $60,000 in net profit. (Forgery)

The French police eventually escorted Lustig to a second-class cabin back on board the SS George Washington and shipped him home to New York. He arrived there in custody of Rubano from the Secret Service, who slapped handcuffs on him. Victor merely smiled and told his nemesis: 'Thank you for paying my passage. The accommodations were excellent.' (Insanity Inducement)

Lustig was transferred to the custody of the local authorities. Eventually a court date was arranged at the Boston police headquarters. It seemed that they finally had Lustig where they wanted him, but, just two days later, a judge miraculously granted him bail. Skilfully playing the legal system, Lustig took the time to then bombard the court with writs and petitions, eventually filing 3,028 closely typed pages of documentary evidence, the essence of which was that it was all a case of mistaken identity. In due course the same judge ruled that Lustig's $15,000 bond should be forfeited to the court as a contribution towards the 'transportation and subsistence costs' in the case, but set Lustig himself free. (Bribery, Mental Fortitude)

On Christmas Eve of 1929 he was arrested while trying to walk over the international border from El Paso into Juarez with a pocketful of counterfeit Mexican currency, and spent most of the

holiday week locked in a rural Texas jail cell as a result. Once again he played the system to his advantage. As Victor advocated he had technically neither left the country nor broken any state laws – or at least none that were currently on file – a judge ruled that he was free to go. (Logical Manipulation)

The following year, Lustig made a list called “The Ten Commandments of the Con,” that he attributed towards much success in his scams. They were:

1. Be a patient listener (it is this, not fast talking, that gets a con-man his coups).

2. Never look bored. (Acting Skills)

3. Wait for the other person to reveal any political opinions, then agree with them. (Flattery)

4. Let the other person reveal religious views, then have the same ones.

5. Hint at sex talk, but don’t follow it up unless the other fellow shows a strong interest.

6. Never discuss illness, unless some special concern is shown.

7. Never pry into a person’s personal circumstances (they’ll tell you all eventually). (Emotional Understanding)

8. Never boast. Just let your importance be quietly obvious. (Aura)

9. Never be untidy.

10. Never get drunk.

In time James Johnson of the Secret Service drew up a list of twenty-three Lustig copycats. While he considered eight of the men ‘particularly skilled in his field’, he concluded that ‘none had qualifications superior to the original’. (Crystallized Intelligence)

However flattering his reputation, Lustig knew that the forces of law and order were steadily closing in on him. In January 1929, one of Lustig’s colleagues anonymously provided the Secret Service with certain details of his former colleague’s preferred aliases and hideouts. Even as Victor continued to restlessly move around from one town to another, Peter Rubano and his task force hunted him mercilessly. He once woke up his daughter in the dead of the night, and told her to quickly pack a suitcase. A few minutes later the child found herself being driven at wild speed to the train station in downtown Chicago. Before long, she and her father were in a compartment on the ‘El Capitan’ transcontinental express to California. Lustig dressed up with a cast and wool blanket and instructed his chauffeur to hail a nurse to get him on board the train in a wheelchair. The moment the nurse got him inside with his chauffeur and daughter and closed the compartment blinds, he calmly removed the disguise. (Intuition, Stress Tolerance, Trap Evasion, Disguise, Composure)

Lustig's daughter, Betty, estimated she and her family had crossed the country evading the authorities 75 times. (Trap Evasion)

A few weeks after the Great Depression, Lustig knocked on the door of the curator's office at the Museum of History, Science and Art. Lustig told the man who greeted him that he had the good fortune to have known Claude Monet (a famous artist) who had died in 1926, and that the great artist had made him a gift of one of the preparatory sketches of his celebrated series of oil paintings of the flower garden at his home in Giverny in northern France. The curator invited the impeccably dressed stranger to return the following Monday morning with the piece in question. When he did so, Lustig unrolled a small sheet of paper showing a pencilled sketch of the famous Japanese bridge and surrounding water lilies. He added that Monsieur Monet himself had asked that the work be offered only to an institution able to display it for as many 'ordinary' people as possible who could enjoy it the year round, which is why he, Victor, had brought it to southern California. His presentation was remarkable in many ways: according to a later newspaper report, it was 'fluent and smooth, [and] astonishingly convincing in every regard, with a ready answer to every question asked of him'. Lustig, who had paid a starving art student living above a Chicago fish warehouse $200 for the canvas, left the gallery $6,000 richer. (Fabrication, Sophistry, Flattery, Adaptability)

In 1930 alone, Lustig posed as a rabbi, a priest, a real estate magnate, a hotel bellhop, a pilot, a surgeon and a member of President Hoover's kitchen cabinet. (Identity Deception)

Lustig did some investigating and found a master counterfeiter by the name of Watts. He implemented one of his trademark charm offensives, taking him to expensive dinners, introducing him to the girls at Billie Mae Scheible's establishment, and in time renting him a suite, under the name Ramsey, in a large rooming house with a glorious view. The deal he struck with Watts was to move his counterfeiting equipment 1,200 miles across the country. After that they would bring in adequate supplies of suitable paper and ink. Special copper plates would be used to fabricate the thin security ribbon threaded through each genuine banknote. After the various seals and serial numbers were stamped on using a press, Watts would finally hang the bogus currency up to dry by pinning it to a clothes line strung across his bathroom. Lustig then paid him $30 for each finished $100 bill. Using out-of-town banks, Victor made several test runs to ensure that there were no unforeseen problems. When that exercise proved satisfactory, Victor approached another one of his colleagues to act as his main distributor, paying him $30 for each bill successfully exchanged for legitimate currency, thus netting him a handsome $40 for each transaction ($30 out of every hundred for the two other men) which translated into about $800 a day, or the equivalent of about $200,000 ($5 million today) each year in clear profit. (Info Gathering, Flattery, Planning Acclimation, Sophistry, Preclusion, Planning Invincibility)

At this point, Lustig was being manhunted by the FBI and Secret Service. (Context)

Lustig was apprehended by the Mexican authorities on the charge of possessing fake currency. It took the Mexican judicial system until early February to decide what to do with the exotic stranger in their midst who claimed to be a Czech nobleman of some sort simply in search of a

little winter sun. International communications were then a more bothersome affair than they are now, and as a result the local judge didn't know many of the details of Lustig's past. If anything, he seems to have suspected the accused man of being a spy. What else explained the circumstances of his arrest? How had he come by the $7,500 found sewn into the lining of a suitcase stashed under the bed in his hotel room? Lustig said that he had earned it through his legitimate dealings on the New York commodity market. But why did he also have three different passports? Such things were quite common for citizens of the European states following the unpleasantness of 1914–18, Victor explained smoothly. And what about the women found in his company? A wholly respectable young lady whom he had been interviewing for a possible position as his daughter's governess back in the old country, Lustig said. He had had a thoroughly enjoyable stay in Mexico, he continued, but he felt sure he had trespassed on the country's hospitality long enough. They would be worrying about him back home. He was already overdue at his small family estate. If the court would free him, he would board the next available train to Los Angeles, proceed to New York, where his faithful chauffeur would be on hand to drive him to his modest house near Prague. Faced with this logical explanation, the Mexican judge let Victor go, with the request that he embark on his journey without delay. (Fabrication, Logical Manipulation, Flattery)

The police were waiting for Lustig when, just a few days later, he crossed the frontier into Eagle Pass, Texas .Lustig's first instinct on his arrest was to lie, claiming that his US passport had been stolen from him in Mexico, and that he would certainly apply for a replacement the moment he was able to do so. When that failed to persuade the Eagle Pass authorities, he changed tactics. If the chief of police went to the local train station and opened a certain numbered locker, Lustig confided, he would find a bag containing $8,000 awaiting him there with his name practically written on it. The lawman did as his prisoner advised. The following morning, posing by the name of J.R. Richards, Lustig once again walked free. (Quick Thinking, Tactics, Bribery, Concealment)

The police again came for Lustig on June 25th, 1931, and he spent the next three weeks in a St Louis jail cell. He had been staying at the city's Coronado Hotel, where he was registered as Robert Duval. The subsequent police report was impressive: 'This man is an internationally known confidence artist, and is wanted in Spokane, Wash, Crown Point, Indiana, Los Angeles and San Francisco, California, Detroit, Mich, Denver, Col, and multiple other areas.' Nonetheless, the file adds: 'The charges were dismissed on July 18, 1931 by the US District Attorney. The accused was then held for the US Immigration authorities, but gave bond, which he forfeited.' Lustig was fast developing a person of literal invincibility; no matter how often he was arrested, the difficulty lay in persuading a corrupt judge not to release him again. (Concealment, Mass/Global Influence, Bribery, Exploiting Weaknesses)

Lustig had distributed so much fake cash there was actual alarm towards the fact he was about to single handedly tank the economy. The Department of Labor in Washington DC soon redoubled its efforts to catch him. (Mass/Global Influence)

In March 1932 Lustig returned for an extended visit to Europe. With documents identifying him as Victor Mergler of Kansas City, he made his way to a first-class cabin on the SS California. He was travelling alone, although once on board he quickly made the acquaintance of a fellow passenger named Joan Dupont.The middle-aged lady came on board at the head of 'a great conga-line of maidservants, stewards [and] porters' bearing trunkloads of what he assumed to be expensive furs and jewellery. That same night he presented her with an accomplished charcoal drawing, saying it was a gift on how struck he had been by the scene of her arrival in California. Overall the work did not impress Mrs Dupont, who it turned out was a fine-art connoisseur, but she admitted that it was executed with some care. Taking her review in his stride, Lustig bowed politely and withdrew to his cabin. Later on, Joan Dupont found that her clothes, a pearl necklace, and currency, had been stolen from her room. (Concealment, Creativity, Sophistry, Misdirection)

Lustig then made his way to London (great place btw), where Victor used the business pages of a London phone book under the category of gentlemen's outfitters and placed a call to an establishment who agreed to send someone to Lustig's hotel to place an order. When the firm's junior assistant arrived at the hotel, Lustig invited him upstairs, poured him a drink, and briskly leafed through the samples his visitor had brought him. He expressed his interest in buying many clothes until the order amount reached £200. Lustig noticed the salesman's face brighten up and realized the young man was getting a commission. After their business was concluded, Victor shook his visitor's hand and casually mentioned that he would like to cash a small check downstairs at the front desk. The management was being tedious about this, he added, on account of his being a stranger in town. A few moments later, the tailor's assistant was on the phone to his supervisor. He reported on both the sizable pending order he had just taken from Lustig, and on Lustig's temporary shortage of ready funds. The supervisor rang the hotel manager and told him that his firm was only too happy to vouch for their guest Mr Mergler (Lustig was going by that name now.) Later that day Lustig successfully cashed his check, then returned upstairs, waited until nightfall and escaped the hotel by means of a drainpipe. The young salesperson later stated he had noticed three things: his host was European; he was a 'gent'; and behind him on the desk was a framed photograph of Herbert Hoover, inscribed 'With my deepest thanks and warmest esteem' over the US president's signature. This speaks to Lustig's proven talent for applying the scammer's trade of deception and manipulation to a given set of circumstances. (Verbal Deception, Observation, Abductive Reasoning, Concealment, Creativity, Charisma, Logical Manipulation, Adaptability)

Around this time, Victor told his brother that the heat was now well and truly on him in Washington, and that it might be best for him to keep a low profile in the immediate future. (Self-Awareness)

Peter Rubano and his crew were working under increased pressure from the FBI. J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the FBI,sent off a memo to William Moran, director of the Secret Service. Lustig 'could not possibly have acquired large amounts of cash by legitimate means', he began, reasonably enough. 'The subject has a long history as a confidence man. He must be apprehended. Bureau is putting every means available at your disposal.' (Mass/Global Influence)

Lustig turned 43 that week, and admitted that his health was becoming a worry. A later physical exam reported: 'Began to take hormone injections in 1932–33. Complained of poor functioning of intestines, and swollen sinuses. Electrocardiogram at that time indicated a worsening of heart condition. Also reported regular headaches and a hoarse throat.' Mentally, however, 'Subject exud[ed] a vigor and enterprise, pressing forward with high-energy plans extending to either coast.' The doctors concluded: 'His spirit was at no time broken … Others might have paused and desisted. He did not.' (Mental Fortitude)

On January 30th, 1933, Paul Niehaus of the Secret Service was instructed to go under a fake name and guise to a restaurant near Times Square to sit down for lunch with 'our bureau's number-one enemy', and to greet him 'without either causing or exhibiting alarm'. This put Niehaus's acting skills to the test when Lustig eventually arrived wearing an outfit akin to the one he wears when attempting to scam wealthy investors. Niehaus was there as part of an elaborately arranged sting operation, hoping to steer Lustig around to the subject of counterfeiting. But the interview did not go as intended. As the government man later reported: "Subject created a climate of warm friendship so rapidly that one felt one had made his acquaintance years earlier … He at no time spoke [of] currency, or financial instruments of any kind, but restricted himself to pleasantries about the weather and prospects of the New York Yankees … Later asked me if I was married, and on hearing that I was not promptly offered to introduce me to his sister." Agent Niehaus's report concluded with the sad admission that 'nothing useful' had resulted from the lunch, except that Lustig had left the moment he finished eating, leaving him to pay the bill. From the very beginning, Victor had seen through the agent completely and avoided discussing any incriminating topics. (Social Skills, Trap Evasion, Misdirection, STP)

Later that night Victor wrote to his brother Emil, who was in Florida: 'Following developments from Germany today. Disastrous news … "Hitler is Chancellor, [and] within less than a year I prophecy will have moulded the state into the shape he desires.' It took Hitler less than two months to consolidate his power through an enabling act. Lustig was more aware of the danger in the matter than the US State Department, which made no reference to Hitler in its daily briefing to President Hoover the following day. As Victor had actually met Hitler in his childhood years, his observations of him at the time must have led to this prophecy by Lustig. (Prediction, Insight)

One of Victor's girlfriends said that during this time: 'He liked to go through the crime pages of the newspaper, and [I] saw him make notes there,' she recalled. 'He told me he was looking for names he recognized, [and] especially those of police officers that he viewed with keen interest and no trace of resentment.' Lustig was far too experienced in the ways of law enforcement not to know that any halfway effective counterfeiting operation was bound to attract the full attention of the Secret Service. He was adequately informed of a meeting that spring of sixteen dark-suited men in an attic room in Manhattan where they had recently moved from their old quarters in Washington. '[Rubano] opened an envelope and removed a hundred-dollar bill from it,' Johnson wrote: It made the complete circle of the table without any of us saying anything. We were stunned, for this was the best counterfeit we'd ever seen. It would fool anyone but an expert … 'I think you can now see the reason for [this] assignment,' Rubano said. Lustig had

already advised William Watts to scale down his supply of counterfeit money, and warned his associates not to parade their wealth. He took his brother Emil out to a modest dinner one night in May 1933 and said: 'You need to keep all this quiet even from your wife. Don't put on any more style. They're watching us.' (Info Gathering, Forgery, Counteraction)

One warm Friday evening early in May, Lustig presented himself at the side door of the bank of the Embassy in downtown Washington DC. He told the clerk on duty in the front office that he was in the paper-manufacturing business, and would like to speak to a higher officer about the possibility of opening a factory – with substantial local employment opportunities – in the Ruhr Valley. It was a plausible enough story, and the clerk left Lustig alone for a few minutes while he went off to fetch a senior colleague in another room. While he was gone, Lustig inserted a tiepin in the lock of the clerk's filing cabinet, opened it, removed several documents and a bundle of cash and pocketed them, and shortly left the area. Embassy officials notified the local authorities that same night, however they failed to make an arrest in the case, or even to identify any suspects. (Fabrication, Concealment)

After Victor realized the manhunt on him was getting more and more dire, he drove out to Union City, twice changing cars en route, on the Monday afternoon of June 26th, 1933. He gave the pre-arranged coded knock to a hotel room, and went in to confer with his longtime colleague William Watts. He went on to tell his criminal accomplice that things had changed significantly since their last meeting nine months earlier. He explained about the squad now installed across the river in Manhattan working feverishly to bring about his downfall, and the pressures on him from other police forces around the nation. He proposed that Watts now bring his counterfeiting operation back to full speed, and that they mutually devote the next twelve months to carefully but steadily producing counterfeit bills. At the end of that period, Lustig remarked, both they and their associates would have enough genuine currency in their pockets to simply disappear. He had given the matter some thought, he concluded, and he was now resolved to take his 12-year-old daughter with him and start a new life somewhere in Europe. (Social Awareness, Contingencies, Planning Acclimation, Risk Assessment)

At this point, Lustig's appearance on American police posters as one Secret Service agent said, "was ubiquitous." (Mass/Global Influence)

Lustig moved to a modest, three-bedroomed family home located at 1614 W. Berteau Avenue in north Chicago. A widow named Edith Keep, who lived across the street, left behind a memoir in which she wrote that the American press had described Lustig with 'almost divine powers in his criminal performances … He seem[ed] to do things that could not be explained by the ordinary laws of nature, so brilliant were the tricks and so multifold the jigs he performed.' At first sight, Edith admitted, she met shuffling up Berteau Avenue one spring morning in 1935 and seemed somewhat disappointed to set this figure against this superhuman ideal. Now aged 45, Lustig had a stubby figure with unhealthy skin, a puffy face, and patches of receding grey hair he revealed when courteously lifting his hat. According to Edith, he was still 'friendly and approachable, with brilliantly clear eyes that seemed to snap an X-Ray picture of each person to whom he spoke'. Victor possessed such courtly charm and insinuating manners that people were instantly beguiled by him. (Aura, Charisma)

Lustig had plenty with which to occupy that mind. His family life was in some disarray. He was now effectively separated from his wife Susan. His ex-wife Roberta and her new husband were making trouble for him financially. Peter Rubano's elite team was on his case, and a few regional forces were interested in his activities. Some of his old associates were now in jail, he reflected, and others were already dead. On top of that, Lustig was also certain there would be another world war. What most troubled him wasn't the prospect of further bloodshed, but the 'blunders on our side' that allowed Hitler to grow stronger 'with each passing day of sloth' from the West. 'The British are sure all they have to do is give a tea party for him and he will fall back like a wolf who has had his fill,' Lustig wrote, adding: 'I do not believe it.' (Stress Tolerance, Prediction, Analysis)

Lustig moved freely around the American Midwest, continuing to pull off isolated frauds as he went. Although he obviously did so chiefly for the money, sometimes he seemed to take more pleasure from the clean professional finish of a well-executed scam. In late April, a Chicago banker named Albert S. Snary complained that a 'very smooth European character' had stopped him in the street and asked him to sign papers that he understood were a petition to fire the notoriously anti-business mayor of the city, Edward Kelly. He was really signing a loan application made out in favour of a Robert Duval. Snary realised his mistake only after the well-spoken stranger had successfully collected his money from the bank later that same day. His second mistake probably lay in reporting the crime to the police instead of making good the loss from his own pocket. The bank's directors soon learnt of the matter and wrote to formally dismiss their manager for his 'gross negligence' of judgement. They shifted the blame to Snary, who was fired. (Fabrication, Misdirection)

In 1935, Victor Lustig became America's most wanted fugitive. (Mass/Global Influence)

Thanks to listening in on a few select phone calls and a tip-off from one of Victor's upset girlfriends, the Secret Service went to Billie Mae Scheible's red-brick apartment building on 74th Street with suspicion Lustig would be there. On arrival, Johnson recalled: "We [got out] of the car and stood silent … As I paused there, immersed in gloom, a vision floated slowly before my eyes. It was a Chevy car and in the front seat Victor Lustig now sat talking animatedly to the driver. I blinked my eyes and looked again. It was no vision. It was reality. As Johnson and his colleagues watched, Lustig's car drew up and parked only some 50 yards from where they stood in their forlorn conference. There was a split-second of frozen silence like that of a football crowd reacting to a sudden goal, and then the [agents] were all moving together in a crouching run down the street, their weapons drawn, towards the parked car. When Johnson reached the right front side of the Chevrolet, he sprang upright and pulled open the door. 'Secret Service!' he said, seizing Lustig by the collar. 'Hands in the air.' Lustig did as he was told, calmly appraising the faces of the men now swarming all around him, until he noticed Peter Rubano. 'Oh, I remember you,' he said, as Rubano slapped on the cuffs. (Composure)

Part 2 in Progress