

THE **YELLOW**
 **KING**
ROLEPLAYING GAME

ABSINTHE IN CARCOSA

QUICKSHOCK
GUMSHOE

Dean Engelhardt and Robin D. Laws



Pelgrane Press

ABSINTHE IN CARCOSA

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FOREWORD TO THE FACSIMILE EDITION

At the turn of the last century an unknown person created, and gifted to other unknown acquaintances, a remarkable achievement in document collage. Labeled by its creator *Absinthe in Carcosa*, it combines pages from widely available books of the time, plus idiosyncratic ephemera and compellingly peculiar marginal notes. Together these elements present an elaborate piece of mordant whimsy to its intended recipients, and now to us.

Internal evidence shows that both the scrapbooker and his intended audience were American art students attending the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. As part of an elaborate jape, perhaps a preexisting extended in-joke shared between the creator and the friends he assembled the book for, it posits a conspiracy of supernatural proportions unfolding across the city. A passage excerpted from one of its main sources refers to hazing rituals senior students visit upon new arrivals at the École. This document, with its running commentary of winking demonic doorways, murderous foreign agents and fiery ghosts, comprises a literary and artistic prank of the highest order—a precursor, if you will, to the détourned texts of Dadaism and the surreal collages of Duchamp and Ernst. In its motifs it draws on contemporary literary movements, chiefly the French Gothic tradition of Eugène Sue, Paul Feval and even Communard revolutionary turned science horror pioneer Louise Michel. One also detects the influence of Symbolist and Decadent literature, from Joris-Karl Huysmans and Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, to the Comte de Lautréamont.

In both its fractured, compelling marginal notes and the eerie arrangement of its components, it evokes the fervid imaginings of a world about to die, to plunge into the nihilism and terror of the Great War.

Absinthe in Carcosa was purchased for \$3 in 1963 by the trailblazing American ephemera collector Henry Littlefield, at a junk shop outside Dobbs Ferry, New York. He engaged multiple experts, working in a then-fallow field, to authenticate it. They unanimously pronounced it a genuine product of an American hand in fin de siècle Paris.

The texts used by the author in creating the scrapbook have been identified as:

- ☛ *Paris From the Earliest Period to the Present Day, Volume II*, 1899, by William Walton, George Barrie and Sons, Philadelphia.
- ☛ *Bohemian Paris of To-Day*, 1900 by W. C. Morrow, illustrated by Eduard Cucuel, J. B. Lippincott and Company, Philadelphia
- ☛ *Bradshaw's Illustrated Guide To Paris and Environs*, 1880

The scrapbook maker cut up at two copies of each to assemble the work.

During the 2004 dispersal at auction of the Littlefield collection the book was sold for £26,000 to an anonymous collector. We thank this individual for generously allowing us to reproduce the book in this edition. This process, not without peril, ultimately resulted in restoration work preserving this strange treasure for future generations.

— KERUBO OKENO-KENNEDY

Editor-in-Chief, Editions Melotte, London, 2018

IF YOU FOUND THIS BOOK, IT WAS MADE FOR YOU

I remember events that haven't happened yet.

For that reason I made this book.

I will leave it (from your point of view have already left it) in a place where you will find it, and pick it up and are ~~sitting~~ reading these words now.

Do not dismiss them as the scrawls of a madman.

(Though looking at them now I see a number of notations I do not recall making, some of which make sense to me and others which do not.)

When you first meet me I will deny all of this. The reasons for my caution will, I fervently hope, become fully apparent as you go to the places described therein and undertake the actions which will undo that which has been done, countering the machinations of the jaune-mantled monarch and his pair of devil daughters.

In these glued pages I present a view of immortal Paris focused on the information you will need as you perform tasks necessary to your survival here.

This book travels like a day from light to dark, morning to night. From the hopes and optimism of your arrival and the finding of lodgings, to the practicalities of transport and money, to your lives as artists and friends of artists. Clubs and cabarets where mysteries may be revealed or further obscured. Then to the sources of information you will require as you begin to investigate the conspiracy of C _____: museums and libraries, universities and institutions of science and research. Places to find lost, obscured or misdirected objects.

Then, in case of trouble, facts concerning the police, and, should trouble multiply rather than dissipate, the court system I hope you will navigate only as observers. Discussion of court leads naturally to prison. Then to the purgatories of the unfortunate, hospitals and institutions of care, where you will find those who looked too closely at the mask and were disassembled by it. Finally to funerals and cemeteries, here as orderly and jumbled as any part of Paris.

And at the end a few odd places that did not fit otherwise, including city landmarks and the towns and villages on Paris' outskirts. For once one glues a clipping into place, one can only unglue it so many times.

When you have enacted the events it hints at (if you and thus we enjoy good fortune) lucky) perhaps you will have traveled in reverse, from the dark of Haiti back to the light of a good honest American lake, such as Champlain or Erie.

I beg your forgiveness in advance for the knife, and the Snake, and the arsenic.



view of Paris



BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF PARIS.

Overview

PARIS, the metropolis of France, is one of the largest and richest cities of Europe. It is situated in a valley on both banks of the Seine. The river crosses it from east to west, dividing it into two nearly equal parts; it then divides itself into two branches, which again unite after forming three considerable islands. The communication between the banks of the river and the islands is effected by a great number of bridges, many of which are remarkable for the beauty of their construction, and join the quays, which are intended rather for ornament than for business. The environs do not exhibit the same variety as those of London; instead of the gardens, parks, and country seats which surround our great metropolis Paris, on several sides, presents large tracts of uninclosed corn fields. The stream of life in the great streets, the crowd of wagons, carriages, and horsemen, is not so great as in the neighbourhood of our metropolis, though some of the busier streets approach the activity of our own. There is a great difference in this respect, according to the season of the year. In winter and spring (during the height of the season) the great thoroughfares, such as the Boulevards, from the Madeleine to the Rue Vivienne, are almost as crowded with vehicles as Regent Street in May. Most of the streets, however, are wide, airy, watered by numerous fountains, and full of magnificent hotels and shops. A history of Paris is, to a considerable degree, a history of France, so much has this city, during the last centuries, concentrated in itself all the vital action of France. The preponderance of Paris over all France, not only in a political sense, but in literature, arts, customs, &c., is

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DESCRIPTIVE.

immense, and has been most strikingly manifested during the revolutions of the last century. Paris—the common phrase runs—is France.

Paris is, without doubt, one of the most charming and luxurious capitals in the world. There is a perfect adaptability in its position, and construction, to all the ends and purposes of pleasure. The climate is, however, far from perfect, offering frequently a very cold, wet season in winter, and scorching glare in summer, which strips the trees early of their leaves. All that is possible is done to relieve this by an admirable system of irrigation, at great cost; yet the dust in summer, and mud in winter are, notwithstanding, a frequent nuisance. There is, however, a certain charm in the very aspect of Paris, in her boulevards, her gardens, her public promenades, which produces a fascination upon the senses, whilst there are few spots that have not some interest with which to attract the eye. May is the best time to enjoy Paris.

Standing on the Pont du Carrousel, a picture rich with beauty presents itself. Towards the east, and immediately before you, stands out, in bold relief, the Ile de la Cité, with its mass of irregular, tall, white houses; the solemn towers of Notre Dame; the gorgeous pinnacle of the Sainte Chapelle; the solid domes of the Palais de Justice; and the spired turrets of the Conciergerie. The river, descending by two channels, and here uniting, adds a peculiar grace to the scene. Immediately on our left extends the long line of lofty streets, abutting on the Quais, the houses of which gleam in the warm light of the sun and blue azure of the heavens. Sometimes a huge pile of building; sometimes a high Gothic tower; sometimes a colossal statue; sometimes a tiny spire rears itself in the midst. On the other side stands the Institute of France, with its domed centre, and circular wings; and between these two lines of buildings flows the swift current of the Seine, animated by the

motion of boats, and the presence of floating-houses, decorated with flags. If we turn to the west, a no less charming picture presents itself. On the right, the elegant facade of the Louvre, and the thickly-leaved avenue of the Tuileries. On the left, the Quai de Voltaire and the Palais d'Orsay, behind which, the river loses itself by a graceful bend, interrupt the view; whilst beyond, the green heights of Chaillot and Passy, dotted with glaring houses close a scene of unwonted character.

There are few streets in London—in fact there are none—which will bear comparison with the Boulevards of Paris; the oldest parts of which, from Rue St. Antoine to Rue St. Martin and Rue St. Honoré, mark the bounds of the first Paris Wall (page 2). They form wide and magnificent promenades, in the middle of which is an unpaved road; on each side of the road is a row of trees, and between each row of trees and the row of houses are wide asphalt walks for pedestrians. The waving line which these streets assume, adds greatly to the beauty of the Boulevards; the eye cannot reach the end of the prospect, and the uncommon width is productive of no vacuity or dullness. Among the attractions are the covered *Passages*, full of gay shops (like the Burlington Arcade), as Passage Vivienne and Colbert, near the Bourse; de l'Opéra and Choiseul, near the Opera; des Panoramas and Jouffroy, in Boulevard Montmartre; Delorme, in Rue Rivoli; du Saumon, in Rue Montmartre; du Pont Neuf on Quai Conti; and others. The *Bazaars* are those of Montmartre, Jouffroy, &c. The massy stone structures of Paris appear to greater advantage here than in the narrower streets. On the southern side of Paris the Boulevards extend a still greater length, and are planted with trees, but they are not considered equal to those on the other side of the city.



Arrondissements List

Paris, for civil purposes, is divided into 20 Arrondissements and 80 Quartiers or Quarters, as follow:—

Arrondissements and Quarters.

- 1st. LOUVRE.
1. St. Germain l'Auxerrois.—2. Halles.
—3. Palais Royal.—4. Place Vendôme,

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- 2nd. BOURSE.
5. Gaillon.—6. Vivienne.—7. Mail.—
8. Bonne Nouvelle.
3rd. TEMPLE.
9. Arts et Métiers.—10. Enfants Rouges.—11. Archives.—12. Ste. Avoie.
4th. HOTEL-DE-VILLE.
13. St. Merri.—14. St. Gervais.—15. Arsenal.—16. Notre Dame.
5th. PANTHEON.
17. St. Victor.—18. Jardin des Plantes.—19. Val de Grâce.—20. Sorbonne.
6th. LUXEMBOURG.
21. Monnaie.—22. Odéon.—23. Notre Dame des Champs.—24. St. Germain des Prés.
7th. PALAIS BOURBON.
25. St. Thomas d'Aquin.—26. Invalides.—27. Ecole Militaire.—28. Gros-Caillou.
8th. ELYSEE.
29. Champs Elysées.—30. Faubourg du Roule.—31. Madeleine.—32. Europe.
9th. OPERA.
33. St. Georges.—34. Chaussée d'Antin.—35. Faubourg Montmartre.—36. Rochefoucault.
10th. ENCLOS ST. LAURENT.
37. St. Vincent de Paul.—38. Porte St. Denis.—39. Porte St. Martin.—40. Hôpital St. Louis.
11th. POINCOURT.
41. Folie-Méricourt.—42. St. Ambroise.—43. Roquette.—44. Ste. Marguerite.
12th. REUILLY.
45. Bel Air.—46. Picpus.—47. Bercy.—48. Quinze-Vingts.
13th. Gobelins.
49. Salpêtrière.—50. Gare.—51. Maison Blanche.—52. Croulebarbe.

- 14th. OBSERVATOIRE.
53. Montparnasse.—54. Santé.—55. Petit-Montrouge.—56. Plaisance.
15th. VAUGIRARD.
57. St. Lambert.—58. Necker.—59. Grenelle.—60. Javel.
16th. PASSY.
61. Auteuil.—62. La Muette.—63. Porte Dauphine.—64. Des Bassins.
17th. BATIGNOLLES MONCEAUX.
65. Ternes.—66. Plaine Monceaux.—67. Batignolles.—68. Epinettes.
18th. BUTTE MONTMARTRE.
69. Grandes Carrières.—70. Clignancourt.—71. Goutte d'Or.—72. La Chapelle.
19th. BUTTES CHAUMONT.
73. La Villette.—74. Pont de Flandre.—75. Amérique.—76. Combat.
20th. MENILMONTANT.
77. Belleville.—78. St. Fargeau.—79. Père-Lachaise.—80. Charonne.
There is a mayor to each Arrondissement; the chief mayor being the Préfet of the Seine (resident at the Tuileries, *pro tem*, till the Hotel de Ville is rebuilt). The Préfet of the Police is at the City Barrack, Palais de Justice. The police are called "Sergents de Ville."

Paris divides itself into wards called Arrondissements, spiralling out from a central circle the way your consciousness will spiral into fragments of time shattered across the dimensions to foster improbable new histories of the future as playgrounds for the Carcosan royal family to despoil and deplete. Your other selves will continue the struggle there but my nose is bleeding onto the page again so I must stop.

You will care less about the arrondissement numbers than the neighborhoods:

Latin Quarter: student District. You live here.

Saint-Germain-des-Prés: where you go to school: Ecole de Beaux Arts, bookshops

Montmartre: painters, poets, clubs

Marais: medieval old city (haunted)

Batignolles: where the Impressionists are

Belleville: working class & radicals

Passy: bourgeoisie

Faubourg Saint Germain: the rich

Île de la Cité: island in the Seine — Notre Dame, Palais de Justice, police headquarters

Pigalle: Montmartre's needy cousin