

THE 48 LAWS OF

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ROBERT GREENE

A JOOST ELFFERS PRODUCTION

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PROFILE BOOKS

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Robert Greene

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LAW I page 1

NEVER OUTSHINE THE MASTER

Always make those above you feel comfortably superior. In your desire to please or impress them, do not go too far in displaying your talents or you might accomplish the opposite-inspire fear and insecurity. Make your masters appear more brilliant than they are and you will attain the heights of power.

LAW 2 page 9

NEVER PUT TOO MUCH TRUST IN FRIENDS, LEARN HOW TO USE ENEMIES

Be wary of friends-they will betray you more quickly, for they are easily aroused to envy. They also become spoiled and tyrannical. But hire a former enemy and he will be more loyal than a friend, because he has more to prove. In fact, you have more to fear from friends than from enemies. If you have no enemies, find a way to make them.

LAW 3 page 21

CONCEAL YOUR INTENTIONS

Keep people off-balance and in the dark by never revealing the purpose behind your actions. If they have no clue what you are up to, they cannot prepare a defense. Guide them far enough down the wrong path, envelop them in enough smoke, and by the time they realize your intentions, it will be too late.

LAW 4 page 39

ALWAYS SAY LESS THAN NECESSARY

When you are trying to impress people with words, the more you say, the more common you appear, and the less in control. Even if you are saying something banal, it will seem original if you make it vague, open-ended, and sphinx-like. Powerful people impress and intimidate by saying less. The more you say, the more likely you are to say something foolish.

LAW 5 page 47

SO MUCH DEPENDS ON REPUTATION-GUARD IT WITH YOUR LIFE

Reputation is the cornerstone of power. Through reputation alone you can intimidate and win; once it slips, however, you are vulnerable, and will be attacked on all sides. Make your reputation unassailable. Always be alert to potential attacks and thwart them before they happen. Meanwhile, learn to destroy your enemies by opening holes in their own reputations. Then stand aside and let public opinion hang them.

LAW 6 page 56

COURT ATTENTION AT ALL COST

Everything is judged by its appearance; what is unseen counts for nothing. Never let yourself get lost in the crowd, then, or buried in oblivion. Stand out. Be conspicuous, at all cost. Make yourself a magnet of attention by appearing larger, more colorful, more mysterious than the bland and timid masses.

LAW 7 page 73

GET OTHERS TO DO THE WORK FOR YOU, BUT ALWAYS TAKE THE CREDIT

Use the wisdom, knowledge, and legwork of other people to further your own cause. Not only will such assistance save you valuable time and energy, it will give you a godlike aura of efficiency and speed. In the end your helpers will be forgotten and you will be remembered. Never do yourself what others can do for you.

LAW 8 page 81

MAKE OTHER PEOPLE COME TO YOU-USE BAIT IF NECESSARY

When you force the other person to act, you are the one in control. It is always better to make your opponent come to you, abandoning his own plans in the process. Lure him with fabulous gains-then attack. You hold the cards.

LAW 9 page 89

WIN THROUGH YOUR ACTIONS, NEVER THROUGH ARGUMENT

Any momentary triumph you think you have gained through argument is really a Pyrrhic victory: The resentment and ill will you stir up is stronger and lasts longer than any momentary change of opinion. It is much more powerful to get others to agree with you through your actions, without saying a word.

Demonstrate, do not explicate.

LAW 10 page 99

INFECTION: AVOID THE UNHAPPY AND UNLUCKY

You can die from someone else's misery-emotional states are as infectious as diseases. You may feel you are helping the drowning man but you are only precipitating your own disaster. The unfortunate sometimes draw misfortune on themselves; they will also draw it on you. Associate with the happy and fortunate instead.

LAW 11 page 107

LEARN TO KEEP PEOPLE DEPENDENT ON YOU

To maintain your independence you must always be needed and wanted. The more you are relied on, the more freedom you have. Make people depend on you for their happiness and prosperity and you have nothing to fear. Never teach them enough so that they can do without you.

LAW 12 page 117

USE SELECTIVE HONESTY AND GENEROSITY TO DISARM YOUR
VICTIM

One sincere and honest move will cover over dozens of dishonest ones. open-hearted gestures of honesty and generosity bring down the guard of even the most suspicious people. Once your selective honesty opens a hole in their armor, you can deceive and manipulate them at will. A timely gift-a Trojan horse-will serve the same purpose.

LAW 13 page 125

WHEN ASKING FOR HELP, APPEAL TO PEOPLE'S SELF-INTEREST,
NEVER TO THEIR MERCY OR GRATITUDE

If you need to turn to an ally for help, do not bother to remind him of your past assistance and good deeds. He will find a way to ignore you. Instead, uncover something in your request, or in your alliance with him, that will benefit him, and emphasize it out of all proportion. He will respond enthusiastically when he sees something to be gained for himself

LAW 14 page 135

POSE AS A FRIEND, WORK AS A SPY

Knowing about your rival is critical. Use spies to gather valuable information that will keep you a step ahead. Better still: Play the spy yourself In polite social encounters, learn to probe. Ask indirect questions to get people to reveal their weaknesses and intentions. There is no occasion that is not an opportunity for artful spying.

LAW 15 page 139

CRUSH YOUR ENEMY TOTALLY

All great leaders since Moses have known that a feared enemy must be crushed completely. (Sometimes they have learned this the hard way.) If one ember is left alight, no matter how dimly it smolders, a fire will eventually break out. More is lost through stopping halfway than through total annihilation: The enemy will recover, and will seek revenge. Crush him, not only in body but in spirit.

LAW 16 page 149

USE ABSENCE TO INCREASE RESPECT AND HONOR

Too much circulation makes the price go down: The more you are seen and heard from, the more common you appear. If you are already established in a group, temporary withdrawal from it will make you more talked

about, even more admired. You must learn when to leave. Create value through scarcity.

LAW 17 page 159

KEEP OTHERS IN SUSPENDED TERROR: CULTIVATE AN AIR OF
UNPREDICTABILITY

Humans are creatures of habit with an insatiable need to see familiarity in other people's actions. Your predictability gives them a sense of control. Turn the tables: Be deliberately unpredictable. Behavior that seems to have no consistency or purpose will keep them off-balance, and they will wear themselves out trying to explain your moves. Taken to an extreme, this strategy can intimidate and terrorize.

LAW 18 page 167

DO NOT BUILD FORTRESSES TO PROTECT YOURSELF-ISOLATION
IS DANGEROUS

The world is dangerous and enemies are everywhere-everyone has to protect themselves. A fortress seems the safest. But isolation exposes you to more dangers than it protects you from-it cuts you off from valuable information, it makes you conspicuous and an easy target. Better to circulate among people, find allies, mingle. You are shielded from your enemies by the crowd.

LAW 19 page 177

KNOW WHO YOU'RE DEALING WITH-DO NOT OFFEND THE WRONG
PERSON

There are many different kinds of people in the world, and you can never assume that everyone will react to your strategies in the same way. Deceive or outmaneuver some people and they will spend the rest of their lives seeking revenge. They are wolves in lambs' clothing. Choose your victims and opponents carefully, then- never offend or deceive the wrong person.

LAW 20 page 187

DO NOT COMMIT TO ANYONE

It is the fool who always rushes to take sides. Do not commit to any side or cause but yourself. By maintaining your independence, you become the master of others-playing people against one another, making them pursue you.

LAW 21 page 203

PLAY A SUCKER TO CATCH A SUCKER-SEEM DUMBER THAN YOUR
MARK

No one likes feeling stupider than the next person. The trick, then, is to make your victims feel smart-and not just smart, but smarter than you are. Once convinced of this, they will never suspect that you may have ulterior motives.

LAW 22 page 211

USE THE SURRENDER TACTIC: TRANSFORM WEAKNESS INTO POWER

When you are weaker, never fight for honor's sake; choose surrender instead.

Surrender gives you time to re- cover, time to torment and irritate your conqueror, time to wait for his power to wane. Do not give him the satisfaction of fighting and defeating you-surrender first. By turning the other cheek you infuriate and unsettle him. Make surrender a tool of power.

LAW 23 page 221

CONCENTRATE YOUR FORCES

Conserve your forces and energies by keeping them concentrated at their strongest point. You gain more by finding a rich mine and mining it deeper, than by flitting from one shallow mine to another-intensity defeats extensity every time. When looking for sources of power to elevate you, find the one key patron, the fat cow who will give you milk for a long time to come.

LAW 24 page 229

PLAY THE PERFECT COURTIER

The perfect courtier thrives in a world where everything revolves around power and political dexterity. He has mastered the art of indirection; he flatters, yields to superiors, and asserts power over others in the most oblique and graceful manner. Learn and apply the laws of courtiership and there will be no limit to how far you can rise in the court.

LAW 25 page 245

RE-CREATE YOURSELF

Do not accept the roles that society foists on you. Re-create yourself by forging a new identity, one that commands attention and never bores the audience. Be the master of your own image rather than letting others define it for you.

Incorporate dramatic devices into your public gestures and actions---your power will be enhanced and your character will seem larger than life.

LAW 26 page 255

KEEP YOUR HANDS CLEAN

You must seem a paragon of civility and efficiency: Your hands are never soiled by mistakes and nasty deeds. Maintain such a spotless appearance by using others as scapegoats and cat 's-paws to disguise your in- volvement.

LAW 27 page 2 75

PLAY ON PEOPLE'S NEED TO BELIEVE TO CREATE A CULTLIKE
FOLLOWING

People have an overwhelming desire to believe in something. Become the focal point of such desire by offering them a cause, a new faith to follow. Keep your words vague but full of promise; emphasize enthusiasm over rationality and clear thinking. Give your new disciples rituals to perform, ask them to make sacrifices on your behalf In the absence of organized religion and grand causes, your new belief system will bring you untold power.

LAW 28 page 293

ENTER ACTION WITH BOLDNESS

If you are unsure of a course of action, do not attempt it. Your doubts and hesitations will infect your execution. Timidity is dangerous: Better to enter with boldness. Any mistakes you commit through audacity are easily corrected with more audacity. Everyone admires the bold; no one honors the timid.

LAW 29 page 307

PLAN ALL THE WAY TO THE END

The ending is everything. Plan all the way to it, taking into account all the possible consequences, obstacles, and twists of fortune that might reverse your hard work and give the glory to others. By planning to the end you will not be overwhelmed by circumstances and you will know when to stop. Gently guide fortune and help determine the future by thinking far ahead.

LAW 30 page 319

MAKE YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS SEEM EFFORTLESS

Your actions must seem natural and executed with ease. All the toil and practice that go into them, and also all the clever tricks, must be concealed.

When you act, act effortlessly, as if you could do much more. Avoid the temptation of revealing how hard you work-it only raises questions. Teach no one your tricks or they will be used against you.

LAW 31 page 331

CONTROL THE OPTIONS: GET OTHERS TO PLAY WITH THE CARDS
YOU DEAL

The best deceptions are the ones that seem to give the other person a choice:

Your victims feel they are in control, but are actually your puppets. Give people options that come out in your favor whichever one they choose. Guide

them to make choices between the lesser of two evils, both of which serve your purpose. Put them on the horns of a dilemma: They are gored wherever they turn.

LAW 32 page 343

PLAY TO PEOPLE'S FANTASIES

The truth is often avoided because it is ugly and unpleasant. Never appeal to truth and reality unless you are prepared for the anger that comes from disenchantment. Life is so harsh and distressing that people who can manufacture romance or conjure up fantasy are like oases in the desert:

Everyone flocks to them. There is great power in tapping into the fantasies of the masses.

LAW 33 page 354

DISCOVER EACH MAN'S THUMBSCREW

Everyone has a weakness, a gap in the castle wall. That weakness is usually an insecurity, an uncontrollable emotion (ff need; it can also be a small secret pleasure. Either way, once found, it is a thumbscrew you can turn to your advantage.

LAW 34 page 373

BE ROYAL IN YOUR OWN FASHION: ACT LIKE A KING TO BE TREATED LIKE ONE

The way you carry yourself will often determine how you are treated: In the long run, appearing vulgar (ff common will make people disrespect you. For a king respects himself and inspires the same sentiment in others. By acting regally and confident of your powers, you make yourself seem destined to wear a crown.

LAW 35 page 385

MASTER THE ART OF TIMING

Never seem to be in a hurry-hurrying betrays a lack of control over yourself, and over time. Always seem patient, as if you know that everything will come to you eventually. Become a detective of the right moment; sniff out the spirit of the times, the trends that will carry you to power. Learn to stand back when the time is not yet

ripe, and to strike fiercely when it has reached fruition.

LAW 36 page 399

DISDAIN THINGS YOU CANNOT HAVE: IGNORING THEM IS THE BEST REVENGE

By acknowledging a petty problem you give it existence and credibility. The more attention you pay an enemy, the stronger you make him; and a small mistake is often made worse and more visible when you try to fix it. It is sometimes best to leave things alone. If there is something you want but cannot have, show contempt for it.

The less interest you reveal, the more superior you seem.

LAW 37 page 413

CREATE COMPELLING SPECTACLES

Striking imagery and grand symbolic gestures create the aura of power--- everyone responds to them. Stage spectacles for those around you, then, full of arresting visuals and radiant symbols that heighten your presence. Dazzled by appearances, no one will notice what you are really doing.

LAW 38 page 425

THINK AS YOU LIKE BUT BEHAVE LIKE OTHERS

If you make a show of going against the times, flaunting your unconventional ideas and unorthodox ways, people will think that you only want attention and that you look down upon them. They will find a way to punish you for making them feel inferior. It is far safer to blend in and nurture the common touch. Share your originality only with tolerant friends and those who are sure to appreciate your uniqueness.

LAW 39 page 437

STIR UP WATERS TO CATCH FISH

Anger and emotion are strategically counterproductive. You must always stay calm and objective. But if you can make your enemies angry while staying calm yourself, you gain a decided advantage. Put your enemies off-balance: Find the chink in their vanity through which you can rattle them and you hold the strings.

LAW 40 page 449

DESPISE THE FREE LUNCH

'What is offered for free is dangerous-it usually involves either a trick or a hidden obligation. 'What has worth is worth paying for. By paying your own way you stay clear of gratitude, guilt, and deceit. It is also often wise to pay the full price--there is no cutting corners with excellence. Be lavish with your money and keep it circulating, for generosity is a sign and a magnet for power.

LAW 41 page 473

AVOID STEPPING INTO A GREAT MAN'S SHOES

'What happens first always appears better and more original than what comes after. If you succeed a great man or have a famous parent, you will have to

accomplish double their achievements to outshine them. Do not get lost in their shadow, or stuck in a past not of your own making: Establish your own name and identity by changing course. Slay the overbearing father; disparage his legacy, and gain power by shining in your own way.

LAW 42 page 489

STRIKE THE SHEPHERD AND THE SHEEP WILL SCATTER

Trouble can often be traced to a single strong individual-the stirrer, the arrogant underling, the poisoner of goodwill. If you allow such people room to operate, others will succumb to their influence. Do not wait for the troubles they cause to multiply, do not try to negotiate with them-they are irredeemable. Neutralize their influence by isolating or banishing them. Strike at the source of the trouble and the sheep will scatter.

LAW 43 page 501

WORK ON THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF OTHERS

Coercion creates a reaction that will eventually work against you. You must seduce others into wanting to move in your direction. A person you have seduced becomes your loyal pawn. And the way to seduce others is to operate on their individual psychologies and weaknesses. Soften up the resistant by working on their emotions, playing on what they hold dear and what they fear. Ignore the hearts and minds of others and they will grow to hate you.

LAW 44 page 515

DISARM AND INFURIATE WITH THE MIRROR EFFECT

The mirror reflects reality, but it is also the perfect tool for deception: 'When you mirror your enemies, doing exactly as they do, they cannot figure out your strategy. The Mirror Effect mocks and humiliates them, making them overreact. By holding up a mirror to their psyches, you seduce them with the illusion that you share their values; by holding up a mirror to their actions, you teach them a lesson. Few can resist the power of the Mirror Effect.

LAW 45 page 539

PREACH THE NEED FOR CHANGE, BUT NEVER REFORM TOO MUCH AT ONCE

Everyone understands the need for change in the abstract, but on the day-to-day level people are creatures of habit. Too much innovation is traumatic, and will lead to revolt. If you are new to a position of power; or an outsider trying to build a power base, make a show of respecting the old way of doing things. If change is necessary, make it feel like a gentle improvement on the past.

LAW 46 page 551

NEVER APPEAR TOO PERFECT

Appearing better than others is always dangerous, but most dangerous of all is to appear to have no faults or weaknesses. Envy creates silent enemies. It is smart to occasionally display defects, and admit to harmless vices, in order to deflect envy and appear more human and approachable. Only gods and the dead can seem perfect with impunity.

LAW 47 page 567

DO NOT GO PAST THE MARK YOU AIMED FOR; IN VICTORY, LEARN WHEN TO STOP

The moment of victory is often the moment of greatest peril. In the heat of victory, arrogance and overconfidence can push you past the goal you had aimed for, and by going too far; you make more enemies than you defeat. Do not allow success to go to your head. There is no substitute for strategy and careful planning. Set a goal, and when you reach it, stop.

LAW 48 page 579

ASSUME FORMLESSNESS

By taking a shape, by having a visible plan, you open yourself to attack. Instead of taking a form for your enemy to grasp, keep yourself adaptable and on the move. Accept the fact that nothing is certain and no law is fixed. The best way to protect yourself is to be as fluid and formless as water; never bet on stability or lasting order. Everything changes.

PREFACE

The feeling of having no power over people and events is generally unbearable to us--when we feel helpless we feel miserable. No one wants less power; everyone wants more. In the world today, however, it is dangerous to seem too power hungry, to be overt with your power moves. We have to seem fair and decent. So we need to be subtle-congenial yet cunning, democratic yet devious.

This game of constant duplicity most resembles the power dynamic that existed in the scheming world of the old aristocratic court. Throughout

history, a court has always formed itself around the person in power—king, queen, emperor, leader. The courtiers who filled this court were in an especially delicate position: They had to serve their masters, but if they seemed to fawn, if they curried favor too obviously, the other courtiers around them would notice and would act against them. Attempts to win the master's favor, then, had to be subtle. And even skilled courtiers capable of such subtlety still had to protect themselves from their fellow courtiers, who at all moments were scheming to push them aside.

Meanwhile the court was supposed to represent the height of civilization and refinement. Violent or overt power moves were frowned upon; courtiers would work silently and secretly against any among them who used force. This was the courtier's dilemma: While appearing the very paragon of elegance, they had to outwit and thwart their own opponents in the subtlest of ways. The successful courtier learned over time to make all of his moves indirect; if he stabbed an opponent in the back, it was with a velvet glove on his hand and the sweetest of smiles on his face. Instead of using coercion or outright treachery, the perfect courtier got his way through seduction, charm, deception, and subtle strategy, always planning several moves ahead. Life in the court was a never-ending game that required constant vigilance and tactical thinking. It was civilized war.

Today we face a peculiarly similar paradox to that of the courtier: Everything must appear civilized, decent, democratic, and fair. But if we play by those rules too strictly, if we take them too literally, we are crushed by those around us who are not so foolish. As the great Renaissance diplomat and courtier Niccolo Machiavelli wrote, "Any man who tries to be good all the time is bound to come to ruin among the great number who are not good." The court imagined itself the pinnacle of refinement, but underneath its glittering surface a cauldron of dark emotions—greed, envy, lust, hatred—boiled and simmered. Our world today similarly imagines itself the pinnacle of fairness, yet the same ugly emotions still stir within us, as they have forever. The game is the same. Outwardly, you must seem to respect the niceties, but inwardly, unless you are a fool, you learn quickly to be prudent, and to do as Napoleon advised: Place your iron hand inside a velvet glove. If, like the courtier of times gone by, you can master the arts of indirection, learning to seduce, charm, deceive, and subtly outmaneuver your opponents, you will attain the heights of power. You will be able to

make people bend to your will without their realizing what you have done. And if they do not realize what you have done, they will neither resent nor resist you.

To some people the notion of consciously playing power games--no matter how indirect--seems evil, asocial, a relic of the past. They believe they can opt out of the game by behaving in ways that have nothing to do with power. You must beware of such people, for while they express such opinions outwardly, they are often among the most adept players at power. They utilize strategies that cleverly disguise the nature of the manipulation involved. These types, for example, will often display their weakness and lack of power as a kind of moral virtue. But true powerlessness, without any motive of self-interest, would not publicize its weakness to gain sympathy or respect. Making a show of one's weakness is actually a very effective strategy, subtle and deceptive, in the game of power (see Law 22, the Surrender Tactic).

Another strategy of the supposed non player is to demand equality in every area of life. Everyone must be treated alike, whatever their status and strength. But if, to avoid the taint of power, you attempt to treat everyone equally and fairly, you will confront the problem that some people do certain things better than others. Treating everyone equally means ignoring their differences, elevating the less skillful and suppressing those who excel. Again, many of those who behave this way are actually deploying another power strategy, redistributing people's rewards in a way that they determine.

Yet another way of avoiding the game would be perfect honesty and straightforwardness, since one of the main techniques of those who seek power is deceit and secrecy. But being perfectly honest will inevitably hurt and insult a great many people, some of whom will choose to injure you in return. No one will see your honest statement as completely objective and free of some personal motivation. And they will be right: In truth, the use of honesty is indeed a power strategy, intended to convince people of one's noble, good-hearted, selfless character. It is a form of persuasion, even a subtle form of coercion.

Finally, those who claim to be non players may affect an air of naivete, to protect them from the accusation that they are after power. Beware again, however, for the appearance of naivete can be an effective means of deceit (see Law 21, Seem Dumber Than Your Mark). And even genuine naivete is not free of the snares of power. Children may be naive in many ways, but they often act from an elemental need to gain

control over those around them. Children suffer greatly from feeling powerless in the adult world, and they use any means available to get their way. Genuinely innocent people may still be playing for power, and are often horribly effective at the game, since they are not hindered by reflection. Once again, those who make a show or display of innocence are the least innocent of all.

You can recognize these supposed non players by the way they flaunt their moral qualities, their piety, their exquisite sense of justice. But since all of us hunger for power, and almost all of our actions are aimed at gaining it, the non players are merely throwing dust in our eyes, distracting us from their power plays with their air of moral superiority. If you observe them closely, you will see in fact that they are often the ones most skillful at indirect manipulation, even if some of them practice it unconsciously. And they greatly resent any publicizing of the tactics they use every day.

If the world is like a giant scheming court and we are trapped inside it, there is no use in trying to opt out of the game. That will only render you powerless, and powerlessness will make you miserable. Instead of struggling against the inevitable, instead of arguing and whining and feeling guilty, it is far better to excel at power. In fact, the better you are at dealing with power, the better friend, lover, husband, wife, and person you become. By following the route of the perfect courtier (see Law 24) you learn to make others feel better about themselves, becoming a source of pleasure to them. They will grow dependent on your abilities and desirous of your presence. By mastering the 48 laws in this book, you spare others the pain that comes from bungling with power-by playing with fire without knowing its properties. If the game of power is **inescapable, better to be an artist** than a denier or a bungler: Learning the game of power requires a certain way of looking at the world, a shifting of perspective. It takes effort and years of practice, for much of the game may not come naturally. Certain basic skills are required, and once you master these skills you will be able to apply the laws of power more easily.

The most important of these skills, and power's crucial foundation, is the ability to master your emotions. An emotional response to a situation is the single greatest barrier to power, a mistake that will cost you a lot more than any temporary satisfaction you might gain by expressing your feelings. Emotions cloud reason, and if you cannot see

the situation clearly, you cannot prepare for and respond to it with any degree of control.

Anger is the most destructive of emotional responses, for it clouds your vision the most. It also has a ripple effect that invariably makes situations less controllable and heightens your enemy's resolve. If you are trying to destroy an enemy who has hurt you, far better to keep him off-guard by feigning friendliness than showing your anger.

Love and affection are also potentially destructive, in that they blind you to the often self-serving interests of those whom you least suspect of playing a power game. You cannot repress anger or love, or avoid feeling them, and you should not try. But you should be careful about how you express them, and most important, they should never influence your plans and strategies in any way.

Related to mastering your emotions is the ability to distance yourself from the present moment and think objectively about the past and future. Like Janus, the double-faced Roman deity and guardian of all gates and doorways, you must be able to look in both directions at once, the better to handle danger from wherever it comes. Such is the face you must create for yourself—one face looking continuously to the future and the other to the past.

For the future, the motto is, "No days unalert." Nothing should catch you by surprise because you are constantly imagining problems before they arise. Instead of spending your time dreaming of your plan's happy ending, you must work on calculating every possible permutation and pitfall that might emerge in it. The further you see, the more steps ahead you plan, the more powerful you become.

The other face of Janus looks constantly to the past—though not to remember past hurts or bear grudges. That would only curb your power. Half of the game is learning how to forget those events in the past that eat away at you and cloud your reason. The real purpose of the backward glancing eye is to educate yourself constantly—you look at the past to learn from those who came before you. (The many historical examples in this book will greatly help that process.) Then, having looked to the past, you look closer at hand, to your own actions and those of your friends. This is the most vital school you can learn from, because it comes from personal experience.

You begin by examining the mistakes you have made in the past, the ones that have most grievously held you back. You analyze them in terms of the 48 laws of power, and you extract from them a lesson and

an oath: "I shall never repeat such a mistake; I shall never fall into such a trap again." If you can evaluate and observe yourself in this way, you can learn to break the patterns of the past-an immensely valuable skill. Power requires the ability to play with appearances. To this end you must learn to wear many masks and keep a bag full of deceptive tricks. Deception and masquerade should not be seen as ugly or immoral. All human interaction requires deception on many levels, and in some ways what separates humans from animals is our ability to lie and deceive. In Greek myths, in India's Mahabharata cycle, in the Middle Eastern epic of Gilgamesh, it is the privilege of the gods to use deceptive arts; a great man, Odysseus for instance, was judged by his ability to rival the craftiness of the gods, stealing some of their divine power by matching them in wits and deception. Deception is a developed art of civilization and the most potent weapon in the game of power.

You cannot succeed at deception unless you take a somewhat distanced approach to yourself-unless you can be many different people, wearing the mask that the day and the moment require. With such a flexible approach to all appearances, including your own, you lose a lot of the inward heaviness that holds people down. Make your face as malleable as the actor's, work to conceal your intentions from others, practice luring people into traps. Playing with appearances and mastering arts of deception are among the aesthetic pleasures of life. They are also key components in the acquisition of power.

If deception is the most potent weapon in your arsenal, then patience in all things is your crucial shield. Patience will protect you from making moronic blunders. Like mastering your emotions, patience is a skill-it does not come naturally. But nothing about power is natural; power is more godlike than anything in the natural world. And patience is the supreme virtue of the gods, who have nothing but time. Everything good will happen-the grass will grow again, if you give it time and see several steps into the future. Impatience, on the other hand, only makes you look weak. It is a principal impediment to power.

Power is essentially amoral and one of the most important skills to acquire is the ability to see circumstances rather than good or evil. Power is a game-this cannot be repeated too often-and in games you do not judge your opponents by their intentions but by the effect of their actions. You measure their strategy and their power by what you can see and feel. How often are someone's intentions made the issue only to cloud and deceive! What does it matter if another player, your friend or

rival, intended good things and had only your interests at heart, if the effects of his action lead to so much ruin and confusion? It is only natural for people to cover up their actions with all kinds of justifications, always assuming that they have acted out of goodness. You must learn to inwardly laugh each time you hear this and never get caught up in gauging someone's intentions and actions through a set of moral judgments that are really an excuse for the accumulation of power.

It is a game. Your opponent sits opposite you. Both of you behave as gentlemen or ladies, observing the rules of the game and taking nothing personally. You play with a strategy and you observe your opponent's moves with as much calmness as you can muster. In the end, you will appreciate the politeness of those you are playing with more than their good and sweet intentions. Train your eye to follow the results of their moves, the outward circumstances, and do not be distracted by anything else.

Half of your mastery of power comes from what you do *not* do, what you do *not* allow yourself to get dragged into. For this skill you must learn to judge all things by what they cost you. As Nietzsche wrote, "The value of a thing sometimes lies not in what one attains with it, but in what one pays for it-what it *costs* us." Perhaps you will attain your goal, and a worthy goal at that, but at what price? Apply this standard to everything, including whether to collaborate with other people or come to their aid. In the end, life is short, opportunities are few, and you have only so much energy to draw on. And in this sense time is as important a consideration as any other. Never waste valuable time, or mental peace of mind, on the affairs of others-that is too high a price to pay. Power is a social game. To learn and master it, you must develop the ability to study and understand people. As the great seventeenth-century thinker and courtier Baltasar Gracian wrote: "Many people spend time studying the properties of animals or herbs; how much more important it would be to study those of people, with whom we must live or die!" To be a master player you must also be a master psychologist. You must recognize motivations and see through the cloud of dust with which people surround their actions. An understanding of people's hidden motives is the single greatest piece of knowledge you can have in acquiring power. It opens up endless possibilities of deception, seduction, and manipulation.

People are of infinite complexity and you can spend a lifetime watch

ing them without ever fully understanding them. So it is all the more important, then, to begin your education now. In doing so you must also keep one principle in mind: Never discriminate as to whom you study and

i whom you trust. Never trust anyone completely and study everyone, including friends and loved ones.

Finally, you must learn always to take the indirect route to power.

Disguise your cunning. Like a billiard ball that caroms several times before it hits its target, your moves must be planned and developed in the least obvious way. By training yourself to be indirect, you can thrive in the modern court, appearing the paragon of decency while being the consummate manipulator.

Consider *The 48 Laws of Power* a kind of handbook on the arts of indirection. The laws are based on the writings of men and women who have studied and mastered the game of power. These writings span a period of more than three thousand years and were created in civilizations as disparate as ancient China and Renaissance Italy; yet they share common threads and themes, together hinting at an essence of power that has yet to be fully articulated. The 48 laws of power are the distillation of this accumulated wisdom, gathered from the writings of the most illustrious strategists (Sun-tzu, Clausewitz), statesmen (Bismarck, Talleyrand), courtiers (Castiglione, Gracian), seducers (Ninon de Lenclos, Casanova), and con artists ("Yellow Kid" Weil) in history.

The laws have a simple premise: Certain actions almost always increase one's power (the observance of the law), while others decrease it and even ruin us (the transgression of the law). These transgressions and observances are illustrated by historical examples. The laws are timeless and definitive.

The 48 Laws of Power can be used in several ways. By reading the book straight through you can learn about power in general. Although several of the laws may seem not to pertain directly to your life, in time you will probably find that all of them have some application, and that in fact they are interrelated. By getting an overview of the entire subject you will best be able to evaluate your own past actions and gain a greater degree of control over your immediate affairs. A thorough reading of the book will inspire thinking and reevaluation long after you finish it. The book has also been designed for browsing and for examining the law that seems at that particular moment most pertinent to you. Say you

are experiencing problems with a superior and cannot understand why your efforts have not lead to more gratitude or a promotion. Several laws specifically address the master-underling relationship, and you are almost certainly transgressing one of them. By browsing the initial paragraphs for the 48 laws in the table of contents, you can identify the pertinent law.

Finally, the book can be browsed through and picked apart for entertainment, for an enjoyable ride through the foibles and great deeds of our predecessors in power. A warning, however, to those who use the book for this purpose: It might be better to turn back. Power is endlessly seductive and deceptive in its own way. It is a labyrinth-your mind becomes consumed with solving its infinite problems, and you soon realize how pleasantly lost you have become. In other words, it becomes most amusing by taking it seriously. Do not be frivolous with such a critical matter. The gods of power frown on the frivolous; they give ultimate satisfaction only to those who study and reflect, and punish those who skim the surfaces looking for a good time.

Any man who tries to be good all the time is bound to come to ruin among the great number who are not good. Hence a prince who wants to keep his authority must learn how not to be good, and use that knowledge, or refrain from using it, as necessity requires.

THE PRINCE, Niccolo Machiavelli, 7469-7527