



CHAPTER ONE



Law 21 – play a sucker to catch a
sucker—seem dumber than your mark



Chapter Summary

This chapter emphasizes the importance of appearing less intelligent than your opponents to gain the upper hand in power dynamics. By making others feel intellectually superior, they are less likely to suspect your ulterior motives. Through historical examples, Greene illustrates how cunning can lead to grand deception, as seen in the case of Arnold and Slack, who successfully fooled financiers into believing in a nonexistent diamond mine. The chapter reveals that playing the part of the fool can serve strategic purposes, allowing individuals to manipulate situations and people to their advantage. Ultimately, embracing a naive persona can lead to profound opportunities and the collapse of overconfident adversaries.





Master Deception by Appearing Less Intelligent

A critical strategy in gaining power is making others feel smarter than you. By downplaying your own intelligence, you give others a false sense of superiority, disarming their suspicions. This technique allows you to manipulate situations without eliciting distrust.



Historical Example: The Diamond Mine Scam

The U.S. financier Asbury Harpending, lured by the prospect of a diamond mine, showed how appearances can be deceiving. The prospectors, Arnold and Slack, manipulated the circumstances to their favor by presenting themselves as naïve locals, leading the wealthy financiers into a colossal deception.

Intellectual Vanity Is a Double-Edged Sword

People's vanity about their intelligence can be exploited. Those who feel superior often overlook details that could prevent their manipulation. This chapter highlights the folly of underestimating less intelligent-seeming individuals.

"The feeling that someone else is smarter than us is almost intolerable, and it blinds our judgment."

Play Your Role with Naivety

By adopting a clumsy and naive demeanor, you can gain the trust of more accomplished individuals. In the eyes of those who think they are smarter, your perceived foolishness grants you the upper hand in negotiations and interactions.

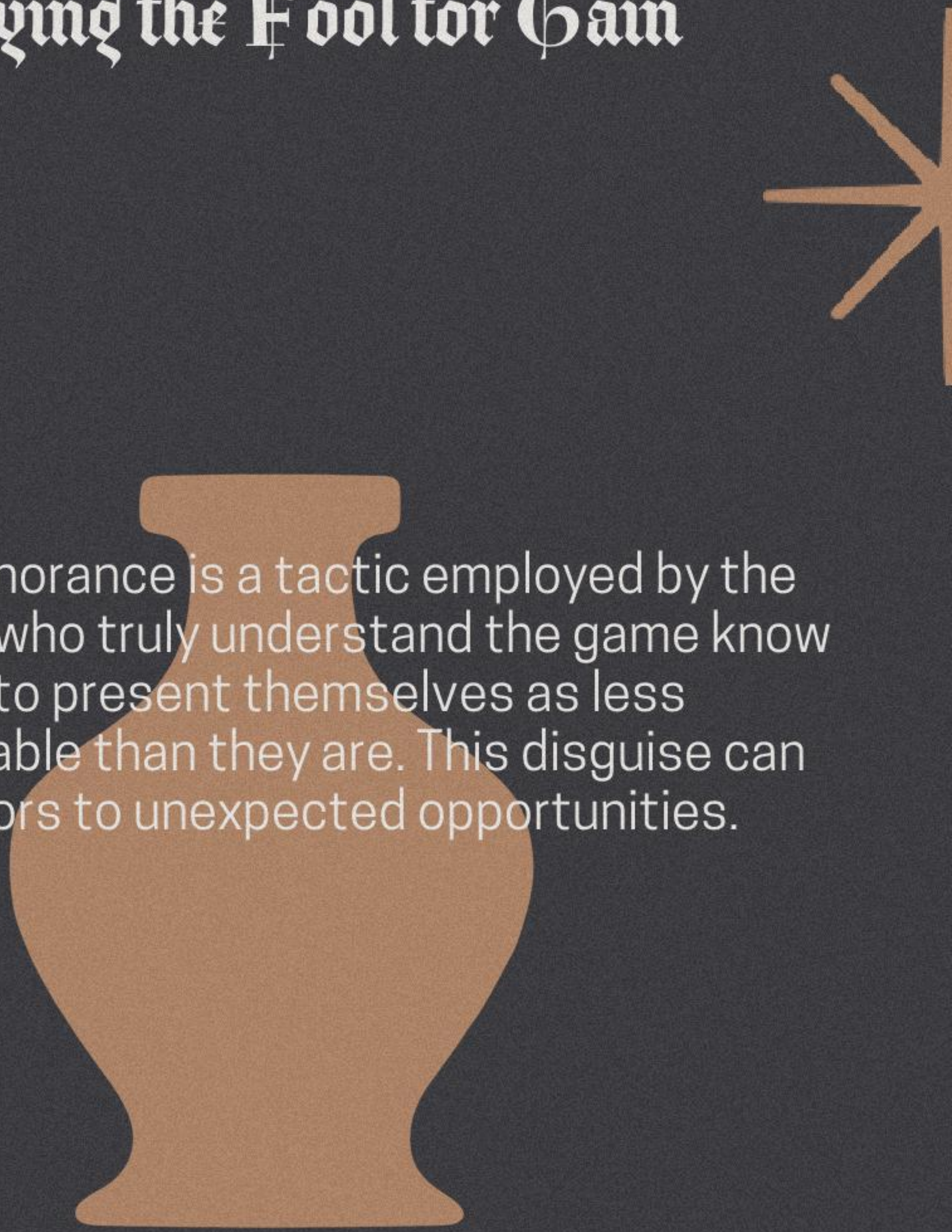
"Masquerading as a swine to kill the tiger; sometimes, playing the fool is the wisest strategy."

Beware of the Overconfident Adversary



Those who consider themselves highly intelligent are often vulnerable to deception. By exploiting their arrogance, one can successfully turn the tables. This chapter illustrates how intelligence can be both a shield and a weapon.

Playing the Fool for Gain



Feigning ignorance is a tactic employed by the wise. Those who truly understand the game know when to present themselves as less knowledgeable than they are. This disguise can open doors to unexpected opportunities.

Subtlety Over Brilliance

Letting others believe they are superior turns the situation to your favor. In politics and business, those who downplay their brilliance often emerge victorious, as they retain the element of surprise.

Authority Through Expertise

At times, it is beneficial to project authority and knowledge when necessary. This can make others more receptive to your ideas and influence the outcome of discussions and negotiations.




Final Lessons From Law 21



The essence of this law lies in the balance of intelligence and humility. Embrace the art of deception by making others feel superior. This not only facilitates manipulation but often leads to your desired outcome.



Recap

- "Make others believe they are more intelligent, and they will never suspect your true motives."
 - "Arnold and Slack played their parts to perfection, appearing as foolish prospectors while executing a grand scam."
 - "Arrogant tigers fall prey to those who seem harmless."
 - "Acting the fool can lead to a most advantageous outcome when others feel they have the upper hand."
 - "The wisest man plays the card of perceived ignorance to gain respect and access."
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