
**A PRE-ORDER
BONUS FOR
MASTERY**

**H
I
D
D
E
N

P
O
W
E
R
S**

**ROBERT
GREENE**

The Author of **The 48**

Laws of Power

Robert Greene

HIDDEN POWERS

IN MY NEW BOOK MASTERY

(Viking/Penguin, November 2012), I propose a

radical new way of looking at human intelligence and high achievement, countering the various misconceptions we have about talent and genius. I make the case that mastery is a latent power within us all, the gift of millions of years of brain evolution. It is a power that we awaken through a process that can be described and followed. It is not a power reserved for the intellectually superior, but a level of intelligence almost all of us can attain, if we understand where it comes from and work at it. The key lies within our own willpower and the intensity of our desire.

To complete this book required a lengthy journey that began with the work on my previous four books and ended with the writing of *Mastery* itself. I want to share with you the process that went into the creation of the book because I think it reveals an important lesson about the intelligence I describe in it and how far our willpower can carry us.

One day in early 2007 I had an epiphany. For the previous eleven years I had immersed myself in a study of the most powerful people in history. I had read one biography after another about great political figures, strategists, scientists, artists, and inventors. And on that particular day, as I was reviewing some old material, it finally struck me: all of these people—no matter their field, culture, or moment in history—followed more or less the same pattern or pathway to power. At first, I could see only the broad outlines of this, but as I thought about it more, in the days to come this pattern came into focus.

It goes like this: in childhood these high-achieving types experience a powerful attraction towards a particular subject or activity—math, music, games and sports. As they get older, this interest gets stronger, to the point of becoming an obsession. They end up following a career path that corresponds to this primal interest. Because the subject or activity stimulates their natural curiosity, they learn at a faster rate than others. They pay deeper attention and absorb lessons more thoroughly. While often still quite young they acquire a high skill level in this field, which makes them find more pleasure in the practice or training period, which leads them to practice harder. They tend to gain attention early on for their proficiency, which leads them to be given responsibilities or chances to practice what they have learned on a public stage. At this point, they enter a cycle of accelerated returns—more practice and

experience leads to higher skill levels and more chances to prove themselves, more valuable feedback, and so on.

Inevitably a point is reached where they begin to experiment with what they have learned and become creative with their knowledge. Since they are often still young, they retain a freshness, and a somewhat rebellious attitude towards authority. They are not afraid to go against conventions. In the process of experimenting, they hit upon new ways of doing things or seeing the world. They become the ones who rewrite the rules they had learned so diligently in their apprenticeships.

At the endpoint of this process, these types reveal signs of a qualitatively higher intelligence. I call this intelligence high-level intuition. As opposed to mere hunches or anything mystical, this intuition is based on years of intense experience. They have internalized so much knowledge that they have a feel for their field. It has become hardwired into their nervous system. They can spot solutions or trends with great speed and fluidity, and this brings them tremendous practical power.

The epitome of this would be Napoleon Bonaparte. As a child he found himself drawn to games of strategy, and to books that presented examples of leadership in action. Entering a military academy, he was not focused on a military career and fitting into the system. Instead, he had an obsessive need to learn as much as he could about all aspects of the military arts. He read voraciously. The extent of his knowledge impressed his superiors. At a very early age he was given an unusual amount of responsibility. He learned quickly how to keep his cool, derive the right lessons from his experiences, and recover from mistakes. By the time he was given greater responsibilities on the battlefield, he had gone through an apprenticeship that was double or triple the intensity of his peers. Being so young, ambitious and disdainful of authority, when he was given leadership positions, he proceeded to effect the greatest revolution in military history, changing the size and shape of armies, singlehandedly introducing maneuver into battle, and so on.

At the endpoint of his development, he came to possess a remarkable feel for battle and the overall shape of a campaign. In his case this became known as his infamous *coup d'oeil*, his ability to assess a situation with a glance of his eye. This made his lieutenants and rivals imagine that he possessed mystical powers.

This realization of a common pattern or path to power set me to thinking. We normally imagine those who achieve great things in the world as somehow possessing a larger brain or some innate talent, giving them the raw materials out of which they can transform themselves into geniuses and Masters. Based on my research and thinking this did not seem to be the case at all. Many of the figures I had studied were mediocre students; they often came from poverty or broken homes; their parents or siblings did not display any kind of exceptional ability. Their powers did not appear in their early years, but were clearly the fruits of intense labor. Although genetics might play role, it seemed to be a minor one.

What separates Masters from the rest of us is the degree to which they feel connected to their primal inclinations and natural interests. All of us have such inclinations. They are a reflection of our uniqueness at birth, the singularity of our DNA. As we get older, however, we tend to lose contact with this. We pay greater attention to what our parents or peers say, than that voice from within. When it comes to career decisions, we often think first of money and comfort. Masters do not lose their sense of connection and child-like curiosity. This fuels their intense desire to learn and sharpens their ability to focus.

The human brain, as it evolved over the course of millions of years, developed as a kind of lens for looking at the world. When we focus deeply on whatever is before us, we slowly gain greater powers of mental perception. We see deeper and deeper into things. We see the connections between phenomena. We awaken higher levels of intelligence. We are hardly aware of the powers we actually possess when we focus this lens. Masters awakens these powers through the intensity of their connection to what they are learning. Their willpower is engaged and all of their energies concentrated. Feeling connected and motivated, they are able to also develop patience when dealing with the drudgery of practice, persistence when confronting obstacles, and enough confidence to handle petty criticisms. Their powers do not reflect some freakish intellect or innate talent, but a profound emotional connection to their primal inclinations and their calling in life.

As I advanced these thoughts in the days and weeks after my initial realization, I became increasingly excited. Since time began people have been searching for quick fixes, for some magical way to power. They want to uncover ancient Secrets that reveal laws of attraction and success. They want formulas. All they come up with are ideas that are vague and impossible to exploit in the real world. Here, however, was something concrete and real. It was not so much a formula as a simple chain of events

that are sparked by a critical first step—discovering your calling in life and moving in directions that maximize your child-like curiosity. From there, the proper focus is generated, and the path to creative and intuitive powers can unfold naturally.

Based on these thoughts, I decided I would write a book that would reveal this pattern and path to everyone. I would show how the brain evolved to bring us this higher intelligence and how each one of us essentially possesses latent mental powers that can be awakened through a process I would lay out. For that purpose, I would give readers a detailed roadmap as to how they could discover their calling in life, enter into an ideal apprenticeship and set off the cycle of accelerated returns. I would paint the creative, intuitive powers that can come to anyone who pursues this path over enough time. I would show how necessary it has become to possess these powers in the modern world. I would debunk once and for all elitist notions of genius and talent. In this book, I would show how certain choices determine our fate, and how far we can alter our circumstances through the intensity of our desire and willpower.

I sold the idea to Penguin in early 2008 and after completing *The 50th Law*, I began serious work on the project in early 2010. I saw the elaboration of the book in a series of steps—initial in-depth research on neuroscience, cognition, the evolution of the human brain, creativity, and high reasoning skills. Following this, I would consume biographies on as many iconic Masters in all fields as I could reasonably accomplish. To put everything in a modern context, I would interview as many contemporary Masters as I could, showing how this intelligence could be adapted to the 21st century. I would somehow combine all of this into one coherent book.

As I entered this process, however, I sensed a problem—the complexity of the project. I would have to draw upon books from many different fields and make many connections between disparate sources. Unlike my previous projects, there would be no single or small group of source books that would serve as a foundation—such as the works of Machiavelli or Sun-tzu. I would be exploring some uncharted territory, particularly when it came to high-level intuition. For the biographies, I would have to dig deeper than usual for what I needed, because a lot of the key material was buried in early childhood or teen years. For someone like Charles Darwin, I would have to read three or four books. The research on the contemporary Masters would require a lot of labor and time—finding and wooing them, setting up the interviews, going over the transcripts and incorporating the notes into the book research. On top of it all, I would have to find a way to actually shape and structure the book itself, from so many strands.

If I were not careful I would find myself overwhelmed by the material. I would not *master* the subject. This could weaken the book in several ways. Never quite feeling on top of it all, I would tend to resort to simple ideas and to some of my own pre-digested notions. I would rely too much on what others had written and would not be able to think far enough for myself. The book would not come to life. This could be deadly when it came to the chapters on creativity and intuition, which required me to be at the level of the subject.

Furthermore, this could lead to a debilitating cycle of tiredness. I had felt this on previous books and did what I could to fight it off, but inevitably near the end of the project I would grow exhausted. I would force my way to the end and then take a good four months to recuperate. Here, the dangers would be greater, considering the complexity of the project. So many books we read nowadays tend to peter out half way or two thirds of the way through. Writers begin with an exciting idea, which is reflected in the energy of the first chapters. Then, they get somewhat lost in the material. The organization of the book falls apart. They start to repeat the same ideas. The last few chapters do not have the same verve of the opening ones. It is hard to maintain one's enthusiasm, energy and freshness over the course of months and years that a book requires. If I succumbed to the tiredness cycle too soon, the book could fall apart at precisely the most important part of my argument.

To help me avoid such a fate, I decided to conduct an experiment on myself. (I had conducted such experiments on previous books. With *War*, for instance, I took up several games in which I could test out some strategy ideas on a micro level.) For *Mastery*, the experiment would be conducted on two fronts—physical and mental.

*

*

*

*

Going back many years, I have adhered to a rigorous workout schedule, alternating my exercise between swimming, bicycling, and a stretching routine. When it came to the period during which I actually did the writing (as opposed to doing research or publicity) I generally ramped this down, in order to reserve more energy. (Writing can be quite draining.) I still exercised every day, but not as hard; or I swam less often.

I decided that this time I would do the opposite. I would slightly increase the distances or time of each routine and I would adhere to this throughout the production of the book, including the writing. The


goal was to reach what I would call the plateau effect, a phenomenon that athletes such as Lance Armstrong have described. If we increase our level of workout by a slight increment we eventually reach a point at which it is no longer so tiring. If we then increase the level again, we start to get diminishing returns as we experience deeper levels of tiredness that undermine further progress. If instead we remain at the earlier level longer (the plateau), we would make substantial gains in endurance.

Normally after exercise we experience cycles of lows and highs—tiredness and bursts of energy during the rest of the day. If we stay at the plateau, eventually these highs and lows even out. Our energy levels blend into one relatively stable cycle. We build up more endurance. I saw *Mastery* as a marathon race. If I had more endurance, I might avoid the tiredness cycle and the petering out effect.

On the mental front of the experiment I would take up Zen meditation. I had long been fascinated by Zen Buddhism and had incorporated this interest in *The 33 Strategies*, particularly as it related to the Samurai tradition in Japan. Certain Zen Masters would be profiled in *Mastery*. I decided I would initiate a Zen meditation routine (known as *zazen*) of thirty minutes every morning. In this form of meditation (referred to as *shikantaza*) the main goal is to learn how to empty the mind, develop superior powers of focus (*yoriki*), and gain access to more unconscious, intuitive forms of thinking. I believed such a routine would help me concentrate better on my work and relieve me of the obsessive thought patterns that would often wear me out during the long haul of producing the book. I hoped it would help me keep my mind more fluid and open, capable of greater flow. This could be critical when it came time to writing the chapters on creativity and intuition.

I could not be sure if this experiment would yield the results I wanted, but I had faith that something would come of it. The key was to adhere to the two routines with utmost discipline, no matter if I was physically ill, or on the road.

In the first months of the research phase, all proceeded according to plan. By the fall of 2010, I felt like I had reached the plateau level. Certainly I had more endurance in the various exercise routines. The meditation was also having an affect, although subtle at first. When reading or taking notes, I could concentrate better, and for longer times. The nuisances that used to get under my skin could now be largely ignored or forgotten. I was sleeping better. The improvement on both fronts was enough to convince me the experiment was bearing fruit.



In May 2011 I began the writing. I realized right away that this would be a book that would require a tremendous amount of energy and focus to pull off, considering the tight deadline I was operating under. With each passing day, however, I was falling behind the schedule I had set for myself. I knew this was happening but I felt helpless to stop it. I tried to not look ahead but by January 2012 I had to confront an unpleasant reality. I had completed the Introduction and four of the six chapters. The first chapters focused primarily on the opening steps towards mastery—discovering your calling, completing an ideal apprenticeship, working with mentors, and gaining social intelligence. The final two chapters, on creativity and high-level intuition, would be longer and more difficult to write. I had to be at the top of my game. But it was clear by then that I had entered the petering-out phase.

For months on end, without the break of a single day, I had been concentrating on the book and writing, to the point where my mind was beginning to rebel and slow down. Despite my experiment, it seemed that I was hitting the wall a bit too early and showing definite signs of accumulated tiredness—just as I had feared. This depressed me. It was like a pattern or cycle I could not avoid falling into with each book I write. If only I could write faster and not feel so drained. I was confronting my own limitations. I had to somehow pick up the pace and a part of me doubted I could do so.

In the midst of this, the publishers hit me with some bad news. We had hoped to publish the book in September 2012, but I was too late in delivering the material to reach that goal. To have it come out at some point in the fall, I would have to finish it all by March 31, no later. If not, the book would have to be postponed, and all sorts of bad consequences would ensue. And yet to organize all of the material I had amassed for the final two chapters and write them at the level I desired, all within about ten to eleven weeks, seemed impossible. I would have to substantially increase my pace of work, which would be hard enough if I already was not so tired. But I had no other viable option. I was on death ground and I would have to fight my way out as best I could.

In the first few days, under the new deadline, I felt like I was suffocating under the weight of all I had to do. After a week of this, I stopped looking ahead. I thought only of the goals for each day. The writing began to pick up. I did not have the luxury of wasting a day or a few hours. After two weeks, I noticed another change: the feeling of tiredness was gone. I was experiencing a second wind. I could not be sure, but I had the feeling that the experiment was now paying off. I was calling upon reserves of energy that I had built up over the course of two years. Several weeks into this there was yet another

transformation—ideas were coming to me out of nowhere. I was working on the chapter on creativity and my personal experience was oddly mirroring what I was writing about. Under the intensity of my focus and the desire to finish on time, my brain was sparking to life with all kinds of interesting questions, new thoughts, and interpretations. I felt at times as if I could witness the process of my own unconscious, as if I could grasp where these sudden associations were coming from. The chapter I had planned was growing richer.

This accelerated as I worked on the final chapter. The years of research and the months of writing had led me to the point where I finally had that inside, living–breathing command of the subject. I felt like I had mastered it. The historical and contemporary figures I was profiling were coming to life, as if I were inside their skin. I could write of their experiences from a deeper place. I had gone from an initial feeling of suffocation to one of great lightness, the book seemingly writing itself. I had the sensation I could think *through* any potential problems or blocks. The strangest sensation of all was that of some destiny guiding the project. For instance, it seemed fated that I would have to face this deadline, which heated my brain up to the proper temperature. Ideas and historical figures I had introduced in the opening chapters were now naturally returning in the final chapter, with a logic all their own.

I turned the final piece of writing in at 11:55pm on March 31. Much to my dismay, I was then informed that I had only one month to go through the edits, do any final rewrites, and compile all of the secondary material. I managed to slog my way through this final phase, yet again turning it in minutes before the deadline. Thirty–six hours later I fell quite ill from some kind of flu virus and was laid up for over a week.

In the weeks to come, I pondered certain strange aspects of this experience and what they could mean. For instance, if I had fallen ill with the flu bug at any point prior to early May, particularly during the last three months, I would have never made it to the end. I became sick at precisely the moment I could afford to. This could not simply be a coincidence. Some hidden part of me was marshalling my energies, but all of this on an unconscious level.

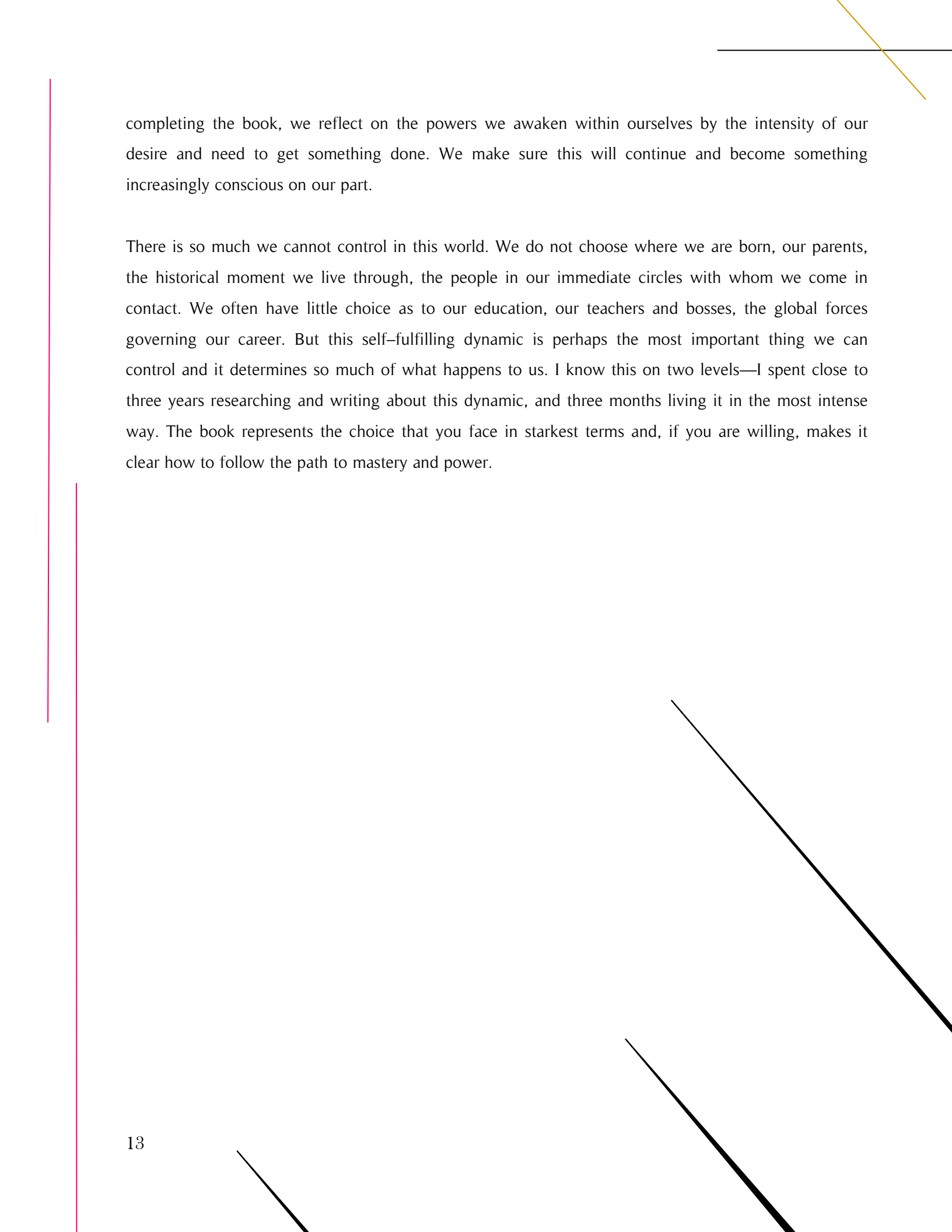
Similarly, when I thought back on the actual writing during this period, I had the impression that certain powers were coming from the outside. Ideas were sparking in my brain and words flowing out of me. Once again, some hidden part of me was driving this.

In retrospect, I had the distinct impression that I had unconsciously willed myself to the death-ground point. A part of me understood that I would need something extreme to make the writing come together for the final two chapters. Perhaps, below the level of conscious awareness, I had kept my pace below a certain level in the first eight months, knowing where this would lead me.

These thoughts led me to the following conclusion: in so many ways, we create a self-fulfilling dynamic in our lives that tends to go in one of two directions. The first is determined by our overall sense of fear when confronting the world. This makes us value comfort and security above all else. We choose career paths or tasks that are easy and offer minimal resistance. We unconsciously set before ourselves certain limits and we do not wish to explore beyond them. These limits represent what we believe we are capable of, how far we can go. Keeping them narrow, we lower our chances of experiencing painful failure. We then shrink to the size of our small aspirations. We may not be consciously aware of this process, but it is affecting our levels of energy and focus, and our health. As we get older, our options tend to decrease—we fall behind the trends in our career, we are replaced by people who are younger. We feel bitter, angry and frustrated, unaware of the extent to which our own fears have set up the self-fulfilling dynamic.

The other direction is expansive. We fill ourselves with a sense of purpose, not fear. On a smaller scale, we embrace challenges and deliberately place ourselves on death ground. The intensity of the experience makes us rise to the occasion. On the larger scale, we connect to our inclinations and choose career paths that spark our interest. We have goals to accomplish; we want to achieve what we are capable of. All of this tends to increase our energy levels, as we have more at stake with our decisions. We have not opted for the easy route. Inevitably we find ourselves pushing past previous limits, which excites us and gives us more energy, more momentum. It becomes a pleasure to explore the outer reaches of our capabilities, of realizing the hidden powers latent in us all. The confidence we gain in the process keeps the self-fulfilling dynamic in motion.

I discovered another aspect to these two opposing directions in life. When we unconsciously opt for the narrow, fearful path, we tend to repress any awareness of what is going on. The fear that is at the root of it prevents us from reflecting on how we are getting in our own way, which only worsens the problem and makes us point the finger at everyone and everything else but ourselves. When we move in the other direction the opposite happens. We *feel* the momentum we gain by engaging our willpower to the fullest. We look back and see how our health and focus were greatly enhanced. As I did after



completing the book, we reflect on the powers we awaken within ourselves by the intensity of our desire and need to get something done. We make sure this will continue and become something increasingly conscious on our part.

There is so much we cannot control in this world. We do not choose where we are born, our parents, the historical moment we live through, the people in our immediate circles with whom we come in contact. We often have little choice as to our education, our teachers and bosses, the global forces governing our career. But this self-fulfilling dynamic is perhaps the most important thing we can control and it determines so much of what happens to us. I know this on two levels—I spent close to three years researching and writing about this dynamic, and three months living it in the most intense way. The book represents the choice that you face in starkest terms and, if you are willing, makes it clear how to follow the path to mastery and power.

Robert Greene

Robert Greene is the author of three bestselling books: *The 48 Laws of Power*, *The Art of Seduction*, and *The 33 Strategies of War*. He attended the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Wisconsin—Madison, where he received a degree in classical studies. He has worked in New York as an editor and writer at several



magazines, including *Esquire*; and in Hollywood as a story developer and writer. Greene has lived in London, Paris, and Barcelona; he speaks several languages and has worked as a translator. He currently lives in Los Angeles.