

ROBERT GREENE

THE 33 STRATEGIES OF

WAR

—
From the author of the
NATIONAL BESTSELLER
The 48 Laws of
POWER
—



A JOOST ELFFERS BOOK

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THE 33 STRATEGIES OF WAR

Robert Greene, the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The 48 Laws of Power*, *The 33 Strategies of War*, *The Art of Seduction*, *Mastery*, *The 50th Law* (with 50 Cent), *The Laws of Human Nature*, and *The Daily Laws*, is an internationally renowned expert on power strategies and human behavior. He lives in Los Angeles.

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Life is endless battle and conflict, and you cannot fight effectively unless you can identify your enemies. Learn to smoke out your enemies, to spot them by the signs and patterns that reveal hostility. Then, once you have them in your sights, inwardly declare war. Your enemies can fill you with purpose and direction.

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What most often weighs you down and brings you misery is the past. You must consciously wage war against the past and force yourself to react to the present moment. Be ruthless on yourself; do not repeat the same tired methods. Wage guerrilla war on your mind, allowing no static lines of defense—make everything fluid and mobile.

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The problem in leading any group is that people inevitably have their own agendas. You have to create a chain of command in which they do not feel constrained by your influence yet follow your lead. Create a sense of participation, but do not fall into groupthink—the irrationality of collective decision making.

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The critical elements in war are speed and adaptability—the ability to move and make decisions faster than the enemy. Break your forces into independent groups that can operate on their own. Make your forces elusive and unstoppable by infusing them with the spirit of the campaign, giving them a mission to accomplish, and then letting them run.

7

TRANSFORM YOUR WAR INTO A CRUSADE: MORALE STRATEGIES

The secret to motivating people and maintaining their morale is to get them to think less about themselves and more about the group. Involve them in a cause, a crusade against a hated enemy. Make them see their survival as tied to the success of

the army as a whole.

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We all have limitations—our energies and skills will take us only so far. You must know your limits and pick your battles carefully. Consider the hidden costs of a war: time lost, political goodwill squandered, an embittered enemy bent on revenge. Sometimes it is better to wait, to undermine your enemies covertly rather than hitting them straight on.

9

TURN THE TABLES: THE COUNTERATTACK STRATEGY

Moving first—initiating the attack—will often put you at a disadvantage: You are exposing your strategy and limiting your options. Instead, discover the power of holding back and letting the other side move first, giving you the flexibility to counterattack from any angle. If your opponents are aggressive, bait them into a rash attack that will leave them in a weak position.

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CREATE A THREATENING PRESENCE: DETERRENCE STRATEGIES

The best way to fight off aggressors is to keep them from attacking you in the first place. Build up a reputation: You're a little crazy. Fighting you is not worth it. Uncertainty is sometimes better than overt threat: If your opponents are never sure what messing with you will cost, they will not want to find out.

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Retreat in the face of a strong enemy is a sign not of weakness but of strength. By resisting the temptation to respond to an aggressor, you buy yourself valuable time

—time to recover, to think, to gain perspective. Sometimes you can accomplish most by doing nothing.

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Grand strategy is the art of looking beyond the battle and calculating ahead. It requires that you focus on your ultimate goal and plot to reach it. Let others get caught up in the twists and turns of the battle, relishing their little victories. Grand strategy will bring you the ultimate reward: the last laugh.

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KNOW YOUR ENEMY: THE INTELLIGENCE STRATEGY

The target of your strategies should be less the army you face than the mind of the man or woman who runs it. If you understand how that mind works, you have the key to deceiving and controlling it. Train yourself to read people, picking up the signals they unconsciously send about their innermost thoughts and intentions.

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In a world in which many people are indecisive and overly cautious, the use of speed will bring you untold power. Striking first, before your opponents have time to think or prepare, will make them emotional, unbalanced, and prone to error.

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CONTROL THE DYNAMIC: FORCING STRATEGIES

People are constantly struggling to control you. The only way to get the upper hand is to make your play for control more intelligent and insidious. Instead of trying to dominate the other side's every move, work to define the nature of the relationship

itself. Maneuver to control your opponents' minds, pushing their emotional buttons and compelling them to make mistakes.

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HIT THEM WHERE IT HURTS: THE CENTER-OF-GRAVITY STRATEGY

Everyone has a source of power on which he or she depends. When you look at your rivals, search below the surface for that source, the center of gravity that holds the entire structure together. Hitting them there will inflict disproportionate pain. Find what the other side most cherishes and protects—that is where you must strike.

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Never be intimidated by your enemy's appearance. Instead, look at the parts that make up the whole. By separating the parts, sowing dissension and division, you can bring down even the most formidable foe. When you are facing troubles or enemies, turn a large problem into small, eminently defeatable parts.

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People will use any kind of gap in your defenses to attack you. So offer no gaps. The secret is to envelop your opponents—create relentless pressure on them from all sides and close off their access to the outside world. As you sense their weakening resolve, crush their willpower by tightening the noose.

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No matter how strong you are, fighting endless battles with people is exhausting, costly, and unimaginative. Wise strategists prefer the art of maneuver: Before the battle even begins, they find ways to put their opponents in positions of such weakness that victory is easy and quick. Create dilemmas: Devise maneuvers that give them a choice of ways to respond—all of them bad.

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Before and during negotiations, you must keep advancing, creating relentless pressure and compelling the other side to settle on your terms. The more you take, the more you can give back in meaningless concessions. Create a reputation for being tough and uncompromising, so that people are back on their heels before they even meet you.

22

KNOW HOW TO END THINGS: THE EXIT STRATEGY

You are judged in this world by how well you bring things to an end. A messy or incomplete conclusion can reverberate for years to come. The art of ending things well is knowing when to stop. The height of strategic wisdom is to avoid all conflicts and entanglements from which there are no realistic exits.

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Since no creature can survive without the ability to see or sense what is going on around it, make it hard for your enemies to know what is going on around them, including what you are doing. Feed their expectations, manufacture a reality to match their desires, and they will fool themselves. Control people's perceptions of reality and you control them.

24

TAKE THE LINE OF LEAST EXPECTATION: THE ORDINARY-EXTRAORDINARY STRATEGY

People expect your behavior to conform to known patterns and conventions. Your task as a strategist is to upset their expectations. First do something ordinary and conventional to fix their image of you, then hit them with the extraordinary. The terror is greater for being so sudden. Sometimes the ordinary is extraordinary because it is unexpected.

25

OCCUPY THE MORAL HIGH GROUND: THE RIGHTEOUS STRATEGY

In a political world, the cause you are fighting for must seem more just than the enemy's. By questioning your opponents' motives and making them appear evil, you can narrow their base of support and room to maneuver. When you yourself come under moral attack from a clever enemy, do not whine or get angry; fight fire with fire.

26

DENY THEM TARGETS: THE STRATEGY OF THE VOID

The feeling of emptiness or void—silence, isolation, nonengagement with others—is for most people intolerable. Give your enemies no target to attack, be dangerous but elusive, then watch as they chase you into the void. Instead of frontal battles, deliver irritating but damaging side attacks and pinprick bites.

27

SEEM TO WORK FOR THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS WHILE FURTHERING YOUR OWN: THE ALLIANCE STRATEGY

The best way to advance your cause with the minimum of effort and bloodshed is to create a constantly shifting network of alliances, getting others to compensate for your deficiencies, do your dirty work, fight your wars. At the same time, you must work to sow dissension in the alliances of others, weakening your enemies by isolating them.

28

GIVE YOUR RIVALS ENOUGH ROPE TO HANG THEMSELVES: THE ONE-UPMANSHIP STRATEGY

Life's greatest dangers often come not from external enemies but from our supposed colleagues and friends who pretend to work for the common cause while scheming to sabotage us. Work to instill doubts and insecurities in such rivals, getting them to think too much and act defensively. Make them hang themselves through their own self-destructive tendencies, leaving you blameless and clean.

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TAKE SMALL BITES: THE FAIT ACCOMPLI STRATEGY

Overt power grabs and sharp rises to the top are dangerous, creating envy, distrust, and suspicion. Often the best solution is to take small bites, swallow little territories, playing upon people's relatively short attention spans. Before people realize it, you have accumulated an empire.

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Communication is a kind of war, its field of battle the resistant and defensive minds of the people you want to influence. The goal is to penetrate their defenses and occupy their minds. Learn to infiltrate your ideas behind enemy lines, sending messages through little details, luring people into coming to the conclusions you desire and into thinking they've gotten there by themselves.

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DESTROY FROM WITHIN: THE INNER-FRONT STRATEGY

By infiltrating your opponents' ranks, working from within to bring them down, you give them nothing to see or react against—the ultimate advantage. To take something you want, do not fight those who have it, but rather join them—then either slowly make it your own or wait for the moment to stage a coup d'état.

32

DOMINATE WHILE SEEMING TO SUBMIT: THE PASSIVE-AGGRESSION STRATEGY

In a world where political considerations are paramount, the most effective form of aggression is the best hidden one: aggression behind a compliant, even loving exterior. To follow the passive-aggression strategy you must seem to go along with people, offering no resistance. But actually you dominate the situation. Just make sure you have disguised your aggression enough that you can deny it exists.

33

SOW UNCERTAINTY AND PANIC THROUGH ACTS OF TERROR: THE CHAIN-REACTION STRATEGY

Terror is the ultimate way to paralyze a people's will to resist and destroy their ability to plan a strategic response. The goal in a terror campaign is not battlefield victory but causing maximum chaos and provoking the other side into desperate overreaction. To plot the most effective counterstrategy, victims of terror must stay balanced. One's rationality is the last line of defense.

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PERMISSIONS

EXCERPT FROM THE LAWS OF HUMAN NATURE

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To Napoleon, Sun-tzu, the goddess Athena, and my cat BRUTUS.

PREFACE

We live in a culture that promotes democratic values of being fair to one and all, the importance of fitting into a group, and knowing how to cooperate with other people. We are taught early on in life that those who are outwardly combative and aggressive pay a social price: unpopularity and isolation. These values of harmony and cooperation are perpetuated in subtle and not-so-subtle ways—through books on how to be successful in life; through the pleasant, peaceful exteriors that those who have gotten ahead in the world present to the public; through notions of correctness that saturate the public space. The problem for us is that we are trained and prepared for peace, and we are not at all prepared for what confronts us in the real world—war.

The life of man upon earth is a warfare.

JOB 7:1

This war exists on several levels. Most obviously, we have our rivals on the other side. The world has become increasingly competitive and nasty. In politics, business, even the arts, we face opponents who will do almost anything to gain an edge. More troubling and complex, however, are the battles we face with those who are supposedly on our side. There are those who outwardly play the team game, who act very friendly and agreeable, but who sabotage us behind the scenes, use the group to promote their own agenda. Others, more difficult to spot, play subtle games of passive aggression, offering help that never comes, instilling guilt as a secret weapon. On the surface everything seems peaceful enough, but just below it, it is every man and woman for him- or herself, this dynamic infecting even families and relationships. The culture may deny this reality and promote a gentler picture, but we know it and feel it, in our battle scars.

Qui desiderat pacem, praeparet bellum (let him who wants peace prepare for war)

VEGETIUS, A.D. FOURTH CENTURY

It is not that we and our colleagues are ignoble creatures who fail to live up to ideals of peace and selflessness, but that we cannot help the way we are. We have aggressive impulses that are impossible to ignore or repress. In the past, individuals could expect a group—the state, an extended family, a company—to take care of them, but this is no longer the case, and in this uncaring world we have to think first and foremost of ourselves and our interests. What we need are not impossible and inhuman ideals of peace and cooperation to live up to, and the confusion that brings us, but rather practical knowledge on how to deal with conflict and the daily battles we face. And this knowledge is not about how to be more forceful in getting what we want or defending ourselves but rather how to be more rational and strategic when it comes to conflict, channeling our aggressive impulses instead of denying or repressing them. If there is an ideal to aim for, it should be that of the strategic warrior, the man or woman who manages difficult situations and people through deft and intelligent maneuver.

[Strategy] is more than a science: it is the application of knowledge to practical life, the development of thought capable of modifying the original guiding idea in the light of ever-changing situations; it is the art of acting under the pressure of the most difficult conditions.

HELMUTH VON MOLTKE, 1800–1891

Many psychologists and sociologists have argued that it is through conflict that problems are often solved and real differences reconciled. Our successes and failures in life can be traced to how well or how badly we deal with the inevitable conflicts that confront us in society. The common ways that people deal with them—trying to avoid all conflict, getting emotional and lashing out, turning sly and manipulative—are all counterproductive in the long run, because they are not under conscious and rational control and often make the situation worse. Strategic warriors operate much differently. They think ahead toward their long-term goals, decide which fights to avoid and which are inevitable, know how to control and channel their emotions. When forced to fight, they do so with indirection and subtle maneuver, making their manipulations hard to trace. In this way they can maintain the peaceful exterior so cherished in these political times.

This ideal of fighting rationally comes to us from organized warfare,

where the art of strategy was invented and refined. In the beginning, war was not at all strategic. Battles between tribes were fought in a brutal manner, a kind of ritual of violence in which individuals could display their heroism. But as tribes expanded and evolved into states, it became all too apparent that war had too many hidden costs, that waging it blindly often led to exhaustion and self-destruction, even for the victor. Somehow wars had to be fought more rationally.

The word “strategy” comes from the ancient Greek word *strategos*, meaning literally “the leader of the army.” Strategy in this sense was the art of generalship, of commanding the entire war effort, deciding what formations to deploy, what terrain to fight on, what maneuvers to use to gain an edge. And as this knowledge progressed, military leaders discovered that the more they thought and planned ahead, the more possibilities they had for success. Novel strategies could allow them to defeat much larger armies, as Alexander the Great did in his victories over the Persians. In facing savvy opponents who were also using strategy, there developed an upward pressure: to gain an advantage, a general had to be even more strategic, more indirect and clever, than the other side. Over time the arts of generalship became steadily more sophisticated, as more strategies were invented.

Although the word “strategy” itself is Greek in origin, the concept appears in all cultures, in all periods. Solid principles on how to deal with the inevitable accidents of war, how to craft the ultimate plan, how to best organize the army—all of this can be found in war manuals from ancient China to modern Europe. The counterattack, the flanking or enveloping maneuver, and the arts of deception are common to the armies of Genghis Khan, Napoleon, and the Zulu king Shaka. As a whole, these principles and strategies indicate a kind of universal military wisdom, a set of adaptable patterns that can increase the chances for victory.

“Well, then, my boy, develop your strategy So that prizes in games won’t elude your grasp. Strategy makes a better woodcutter than strength. Strategy keeps a pilot’s ship on course When crosswinds blow it over the wine-blue sea. And strategy wins races for charioteers. One type of driver trusts his horses and car And swerves mindlessly this way and that, All over the course, without reining his horses. But a man who knows how to win with lesser horses Keeps his eye on the post and cuts the turn close, And from the start keeps tension on the reins With a firm hand as he watches the leader.”

THE ILLAD, HOMER, CIRCA NINTH CENTURY B.C.

Perhaps the greatest strategist of them all was Sun-tzu, author of the

ancient Chinese classic *The Art of War*. In his book, written probably the fourth century B.C., can be found traces of almost all the strategic patterns and principles later developed over the course of centuries. But what connects them, in fact what constitutes the art of war itself in Sun-tzu's eyes, is the ideal of winning without bloodshed. By playing on the psychological weaknesses of the opponent, by maneuvering him into precarious positions, by inducing feelings of frustration and confusion, a strategist can get the other side to break down mentally before surrendering physically. In this way victory can be had at a much lower cost. And the state that wins wars with few lives lost and resources squandered is the state that can thrive over greater periods of time. Certainly most wars are not waged so rationally, but those campaigns in history that have followed this principle (Scipio Africanus in Spain, Napoleon at Ulm, T. E. Lawrence in the desert campaigns of World War I) stand out above the rest and serve as the ideal.

War is not some separate realm divorced from the rest of society. It is an eminently human arena, full of the best and the worst of our nature. War also reflects trends in society. The evolution toward more unconventional, dirtier strategies—guerrilla warfare, terrorism—mirrors a similar evolution in society, where almost anything goes. The strategies that succeed in war, whether conventional or unconventional, are based on timeless psychology, and great military failures have much to teach us about human stupidity and the limits of force in any arena. The strategic ideal in war—being supremely rational and emotionally balanced, striving to win with minimum bloodshed and loss of resources—has infinite application and relevance to our daily battles.

Inculcated with the values of our times, many will argue that organized war is inherently barbaric—a relic of man's violent past and something to be overcome for good. To promote the arts of warfare in a social setting, they will say, is to stand in the way of progress and to encourage conflict and dissension. Isn't there enough of that in the world? This argument is very seductive, but not at all reasonable. There will always be those in society and in the world at large who are more aggressive than we are, who find ways to get what they want, by hook or by crook. We must be vigilant and must know how to defend ourselves against such types. Civilized values are not furthered if we are forced to surrender to those who are crafty and strong. In fact, being pacifists in the face of such wolves is the source of endless tragedy.

The self is the friend of a man who masters himself through the self, but for a man without self-mastery, the self is like an enemy at war.

THE BHAGAVAD GITA, INDIA, CIRCA A.D. FIRST CENTURY

Mahatma Gandhi, who elevated nonviolence into a great weapon for social change, had one simple goal later on in his life: to rid India of the British overlords who had crippled it for so many centuries. The British were clever rulers. Gandhi understood that if nonviolence were to work, it would have to be extremely strategic, demanding much thought and planning. He went so far as to call nonviolence a new way of waging war. To promote any value, even peace and pacifism, you must be willing to fight for it and to aim at results—not simply the good, warm feeling that expressing such ideas might bring you. The moment you aim for results, you are in the realm of strategy. War and strategy have an inexorable logic: if you want or desire anything, you must be ready and able to fight for it.

Others will argue that war and strategy are primarily matters that concern men, particularly those who are aggressive or among the power elite. The study of war and strategy, they will say, is a masculine, elitist, and repressive pursuit, a way for power to perpetuate itself. Such an argument is dangerous nonsense. In the beginning, strategy indeed belonged to a select few—a general, his staff, the king, a handful of courtiers. Soldiers were not taught strategy, for that would not have helped them on the battlefield. Besides, it was unwise to arm one's soldiers with the kind of practical knowledge that could help them to organize a mutiny or rebellion. The era of colonialism took this principle further: the indigenous peoples of Europe's colonies were conscripted into the Western armies and did much of the police work, but even those who rose to the upper echelons were rigorously kept ignorant of knowledge of strategy, which was considered far too dangerous for them to know. To maintain strategy and the arts of war as a branch of specialized knowledge is actually to play into the hands of the elites and repressive powers, who like to divide and conquer. If strategy is the art of getting results, of putting ideas into practice, then it should be spread far and wide, particularly among those who have been traditionally kept ignorant of it, including women. In the mythologies of almost all cultures, the great gods of war are women, including Athena of ancient Greece. A woman's lack of interest in strategy and war is not biological but social and perhaps political.

Instead of resisting the pull of strategy and the virtues of rational warfare