

# HOW TO WIN AT LIFE



...BY  
CHEATING  
AT  
EVERYTHING!

**AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO ALL THINGS**

FROM CONNING YOUR WAY THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL TO BILKING A SMALL TOWN

WRITTEN BY MARK PEREZ ILLUSTRATIONS BY SCOTT SHAW!

PHOTOS BY ANNASTASIA GOLDBERG

## START CHEATING NOW—READ THE LAST CHAPTER FIRST



My plan working to perfection.

**T**his is your first lesson about any great racket or scheme. **You always start at the end.** When you do that, when you start where you want to finish, then you'll always know how it's going to turn out—well before it actually does. And that is key in this Game of Con. Always know the results ahead of time. In a boxing match. In a presidential election. In life. I mean, think about it: what if you could gauge how everything ended before it actually did? And imagine if you could do that with all the important moments in your life. Look into the future to see how things turned out, years ahead of time. For example:

What if you could see just how enormous your beautiful wife was going to balloon up to some twenty years after you married her?





Wouldn't it be great to see the dead-end your "promising job" was going to lead to before you devoted some thirty-five fucking years of your life to that pointless tripe?



And just imagine if you could see the galactic loser your sweet bundle of joy would turn out to be—before you spent a couple hundred thousand dollars and the best years of your life raising his ridiculously disappointing ass?



Well, the same is true when you're trying to pull off one of the biggest, most ambitious cons in the history of the art form. At the end of the day, a great con is not just about stealing millions of dollars via some underground computer hack (any egghead with no imagination can do that). No, this con was less about the size of the haul—and more about the scope of the crime. I had made enough loot. This was going to be the kind of swindle that would be talked about for years in the annals of con-dom (not the Trojan kind). Now, *that's* what I was after. A certain level of immortality. And as you'll see by reading this book, not only will I teach you the basics, but if you pay close attention, maybe take some notes in the margins, I might just show you how to steal an entire town.

And if you're really, really good, after you've scammed them all, you may even end up beloved there.



I'm sure when you were little, there was some asshole adult figure in your life—a guidance counselor, a Big Brother, maybe even a super flirty priest—who told you some bullshit about “keeping your feet on the ground and reaching for the stars.” Or maybe that was Casey Kasem. Either way, it's all garbage. “Trying your best” and “never giving up on your dreams” will usually lead to living a life well below the poverty line and playing rhythm guitar for a Maroon 5 cover band at Universal CityWalk. The only, and let me repeat that, *only* way to succeed in this life is to cheat. You don't believe me? Henry Ford became an industrial success in *good part* because he sold to both sides during World War II (and yes, one of those sides was the fucking Nazis). Joseph Kennedy basically *bought* the US presidency for his son by using the immense profits from a very illegal bootlegging operation. And New York billionaire Leona Helmsley was once quoted as saying, “We don't pay taxes. Only the little people pay taxes.” (A New York federal court disagreed—and gave her eighteen months in prison, by the way.) And while Leona was an asshole for actually saying it out loud—the witch was right.

You see, I wrote this book not only to prove that anybody can become a con man, but also, and more importantly, that *most* extremely successful people are con men in their own right. I also wanted to show that the greatest con man in the world

(hello, me) could accomplish anything if he put his mind to it. And not by reaching for the stars. Or being all I could be. But by using the library of skills I'm about to lay out for you, in detail, in the following pages. Which means you too can accomplish anything. You can con a whole town. And get rich while doing it. And, if you do it properly . . . you may even achieve something greater.



Because at the end of the day, this book is about *winning at life*. About getting everything you ever dreamed of. And oddly enough, it's a sort of love story, too. About two people you'd never imagine would end up together in the end . . . ending up together in the end. So now that you *know* how the story ends, how's about we get back to where it begins . . .



## COMMITTING CRIMES AS A TODDLER

I stole my first car when I was three. That's not a typo, folks. *Three*. Now, while I didn't pull off the scam entirely by myself, I was certainly a semi-willing accomplice, or at least as willing as you can be committing grand theft auto while still in pre-K. One of the first lessons to learn is that everything and everyone around you can always be used as potential tools to aid you in a **grift**. Maybe it's a **Michigan roll** (a few dollar bills wrapped around a roll of Xerox paper). Maybe it's a **cackle-bladder** (a squib of red dye you bite down on when you fake a slip-and-fall at Home Depot). Or maybe it's one of the most commonly used tools in **the Game**: a **skill**, also known as a **capper** (a seemingly innocent accomplice that makes people feel more comfortable when dealing with a total stranger—you).

It could be a dog with one leg. It could be an older person with a broken-down walker. Or it could be, as was the case in my first foray into the Game, a toddler.

People are generally trusting. I have no idea why that is. With all the history of cheating and deceiving that has been perpetrated over time, by individuals, religions, and just about every government that has ever existed on Earth, you'd think a healthy skepticism would have been ingrained in us, merely by natural selection. But luckily for guys like me, humankind remains genetically naive—dumb fuckers who may walk on two feet but still think like their ape ancestors. And sometimes all they need is a little push back to their more natural position: bent over on all fours.

Here's a quick list of quality skills and cappers:



### THE ELDERLY

Our country has decided to collectively deem old people useless and a burden on our society. I am here to tell you that notion is some totally ageist bullshit. I'll agree that they're super depressing to look at, and tend to repeat the same fond memories of the Korean conflict and institutionalized racism, but they do have a purpose in this world. A worthwhile function. A reason for taking that very dubious first breath every morning. And that purpose is to help you get over on somebody. Even if they're unaware of it at the time. *Especially* if they're



unaware. Which is what makes being a **confidence man** a true art form. Any asshole can storm into a bank and rob the joint with an ironic mask and a half-decent sub-machine gun. But it takes a true artisan to enter that same bank armed only with an octogenarian in a wheelchair and take the place for triple what the *Point Break* guys made off with. So make friends with an oldie. You'll find it makes suffering through those long, boring stories about how the Hollywood Jews faked the moon landing well worth it.



### ANIMALS

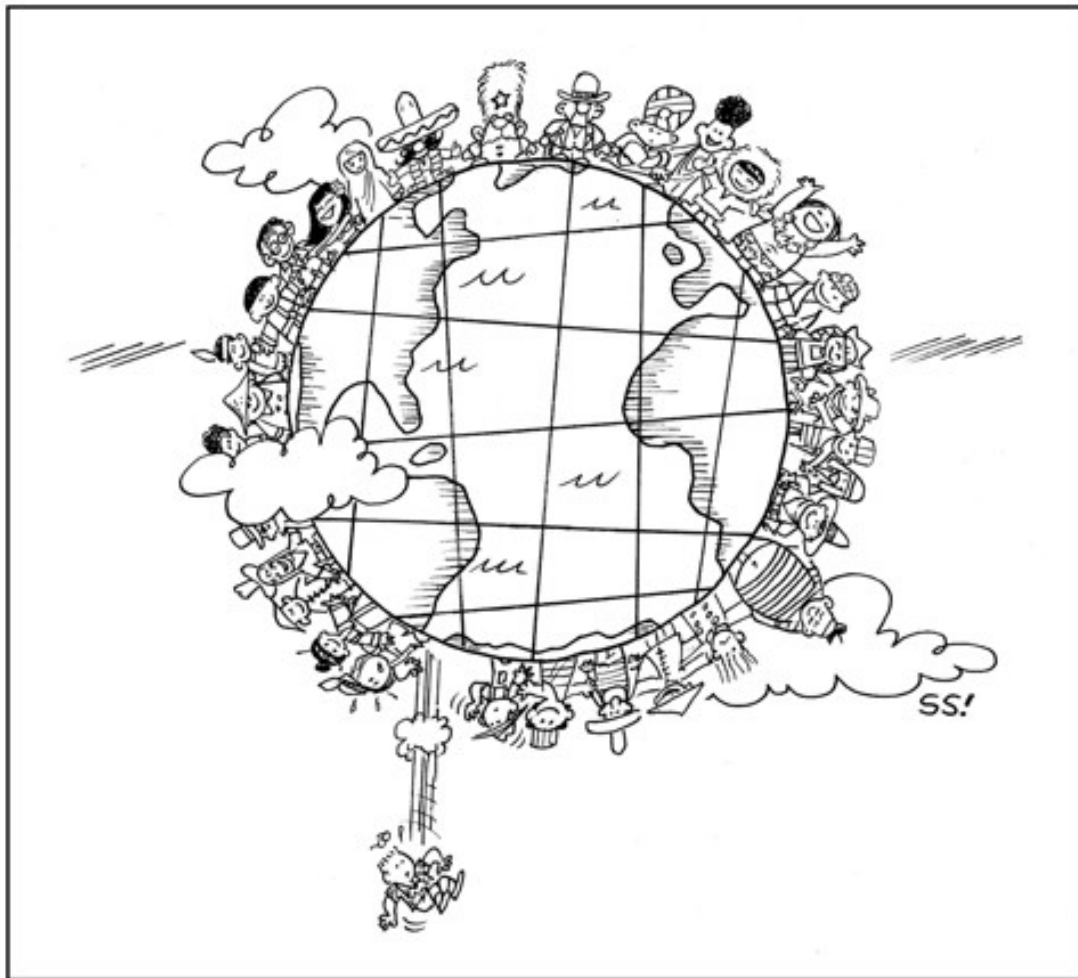
There's a reason that you may see thousands of people die in a disaster movie, but you *almost never* see a single dog killed. And that's because the powers that be know that people love dogs far more than they love each other. And although that may seem irrational and unsettling, think of it this way: Humans cheat, they murder, they pretend to have a debilitating back injury in order to receive a government check. Meanwhile, all a dog wants from you is love. Kinda makes sense when you think of it that way, doesn't it? Now, choosing *any* animal won't do. You need to pick just the right

one. If you're gonna bilk an old lady, usually a tabby cat works best. If you're gonna roll a meathead with a tribal tattoo, buy an obnoxiously large snake. And if you plan on duping your average Middle American rube, *always* go with a dog, preferably a puppy. (Note: Never use a parrot. You'll come off as the weird guy at the party that people expect to start juggling bowling pins. Unless you're trying to roll a pirate. Then it's apropos.)

### FOREIGNERS

I know what you're thinking. *Foreigners???* We're Americans, damn it. Americans have hated foreigners since the Pilgrims docked their cruise ship on Plymouth Rock and gave the natives syphilis and a hastily written eviction notice. This is all true, of course, but there are always exceptions to any rule. Generally speaking, foreigners can be divided into two categories, easily understood for your mildly racist American consumption. For example . . .





Safe foreigners: Chinese. Mexican (of the gardening and housekeeping variety). Almost all Europeans.



Dangerous foreigners: Middle Eastern. Mexican (of the gangbanging variety). And Russian.



You know those commercials? Where they show you some starving African kid from Malawi eating a handful of dust for breakfast? And then that fat, bald guy starts in with the whole “for just forty cents a day” rap, making you feel all terrible while you’re eating a bacon double cheeseburger and chili fries in front of your plasma TV? Well, it’s that same effect that you want to produce when you are perpetrating a ruse of this kind. I’m telling you, just as an experiment, go walk into any church accompanied by a skinny kid with terrible teeth from war-torn Burundi (or some other similarly shitty locale), and you’ll see just how quickly you’ll be getting donations to pay for the make-believe college he’s never going to attend.

And finally, that brings us to . . .



### CHILDREN

There is nothing, and I repeat, *not one thing* that works better at getting close to people than the sights and sounds of an innocent child. Me, personally, I hate kids. Always have. (Really they’re just shorter, more selfish versions of adults. And as you will clearly see, I already despise adults.) But I will stomach using a kid for an afternoon because the results are usually well worth it. When you’re entering the **sting phase** (the final stages of a con), no matter what the cheat is, carrying a baby on your arm works as a sort of shield. A vomiting, poopy-diaper-producing precautionary measure that can help you achieve your goals. And if you want to tweak those results? Make it a Filipino or a black baby. And if you really wanna go for broke, put some of those *Forrest Gump*-style polio crutches on that little fucker. People will be falling over themselves to help you steal money from them. And that’s exactly how my old man used me, God rest his soul.

And if you really wanna go for broke, put some of those *Forrest Gump*-style polio crutches on that little fucker. People will be falling over themselves to help you steal money from them. And that’s exactly how my old man used me, God rest his soul.

I don’t really remember every aspect of the scam that day, back when I helped my degenerate father steal a car. But I do remember the car: a 1984 Pontiac Fiero. Believe it or not, that was a very desirable car that year. (Note: Never name a car “Fiero” when it has a predilection for catching fire for absolutely no reason.) Anyway, I do recall my dad’s reaction after I helped him—pure elation. And I remember what he told me

