

CHAPTER 1

Mememes and Manipulation: The Battle for Control of Your Mind



The Forces Aligned to Keep You Dumb, Sick, and Broke



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It was that thin line between Saturday night and Sunday morning. I had just returned from an evening at a club. As I parked on the street and got out of my car, a tall stranger bounded up to me. I figured he probably wanted to bum a cigarette or ask directions.

I didn't notice the gun until it was too late.

Turns out the guy was a crackhead desperate for his next fix. This was the eighties, the "wild west" days of Miami and the advent of the crack epidemic, when we were overrun by petty criminals from the Mariel boatlift and the infamous Cocaine Cowboys. South Beach, where I lived, sat at the epicenter of drug activity.

And I was about to become the next statistic. . . .

The guy held the gun to my temple, and his eyes glassed over as though looking right through me. A white Pontiac Fiero pulled up behind us, apparently waiting for my assailant.

Although I practiced martial arts, this situation didn't call for

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physical defense. The gun remained pointed at my brain, and I knew that if you get shot there, you're done. Even if you're not dead, you're dead. I had no idea whether the accomplice in the car had another gun. (I found out later he did.) And, of course, he could just run me over if he wanted to.

So I elected to try and calm down my attacker, give him my money, and steer the incident to a peaceful resolution. Which works a lot better if you have more than \$7 in your pocket! Since a rock of crack cocaine cost five bucks in those days, I kept telling him to take the money, get himself a rock, and we'd just forget about the whole thing. But he wasn't buying that, insisting I had more money and I'd better hand it over.

I kept trying to rationally explain that the seven bucks was all the money I had on me, and he should just take it and get to the crack house. I pointed out why he didn't want the situation to escalate, with probable repercussions being arrest, felony charges, and prison. Of course, crackheads are not known for their rational thinking . . .

Finally, he told me to get back in my car. I don't know how or why, but I knew that if I did get in the car, I wouldn't come out alive. So I refused.

"You have my money, and here are the car keys. You can have the car, but I'm not getting in it. Just take the money, get a rock, I'll walk away, and we'll forget this ever happened."

We were standing under the periphery of a streetlight's glow. I kept slowly edging back toward the bright light in the event someone might drive by or look out from an apartment window. I could see him getting jumpier by the second. The driver of the Fiero revved his engine.

Suddenly he moved the gun away from my head and pressed it against my abdomen. Then he said something very ominous. I re-

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member wondering whether what he said was directed at me, at the world in general, or to himself. It was one of those mysterious statements that could mean many things. I remember discussing it with people soon afterwards, debating who he was talking to and what he meant.

The fascinating thing is, when I try and recall those words now, I can't. I believe my mind has shut out that entire experience, to protect me from reliving too vividly what happened next. . . .

He pulled the trigger.

It wasn't like TV. The noise was deafening, especially at that time, reverberating off my apartment building and echoing out across the neighborhood. I clutched my stomach as I fell backwards onto the street. Then time slowed down to Matrix speed . . .

I calmly watched the shooter get into the car, which drove off towards Miami. I remember thinking for a second that I'd been had, that the gun must have been a starter pistol or shooting blanks, because I didn't feel anything. But when I looked down to where I was holding my abdomen, I saw blood streaming through my fingers.

Then I felt the pain. A lot.

As a writer and professional speaker, I pride myself on my ability to communicate ideas, concepts, and stories. But I simply don't have the words to adequately describe to you what a bullet tearing through vital organs feels like. We're talking white-hot, searing, thermonuclear hurt.

Because the shot was so loud, I expected lights would flash on, people would lean out windows, open doors, and then someone would come out and take care of me.

None of the above. Complete stillness.

I sat in the street, my legs splayed out under the streetlight. I re-

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mained there for who knows how long, suffering from shock, locked in a surreal, detached state, as I watched the pool of blood surrounding me grow larger. Suddenly I realized that if I didn't get up, go to my apartment, and call for help, I would die in the street.

I ripped off my shirt and tied it around me to stop the bleeding as best I could. I struggled up, crossed the street, climbed a flight of stairs, and entered my apartment. I managed to dial 911, then collapsed into a chair. I felt my life slowly ebbing away from me, as more and more of my blood flowed down onto the carpet.

By the time the paramedics arrived, I was so weak they picked up the chair with me in it and carried me down to the ambulance. When they lifted me onto the gurney, I writhed in pain as blood gushed from my gut. On the way to the hospital my blood pressure dropped so low they had to put me in a pressurized space suit to keep my heart pumping.

Once we arrived, emergency nurses greeted me with four IVs and a catheter. The doctors rushed me into surgery and sewed up my large intestine. My life had been saved, but I had yet to go through the worst agony I would ever experience . . .

For the next few days I could neither eat nor drink. They gave me a cotton swab to moisten my lips. A tube running through my nose, down my throat and into my stomach kept gagging me. Even through the fog of drugs, the pain was excruciating. When I choked on my own mucus and vomit, I ripped the tube out, only to have them reinstall it and threaten to strap my arms to the bedrails if I tried to remove it again.

The operations and recovery that followed made the next several months the most excruciatingly painful period of my life. The sutures ripped out of my stomach and infection set in. I couldn't find any comfortable way to sit, stand, or lie down. Two years passed

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before I felt normal again. What I endured I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy.

Yet imagine my shock when I realized later that I had subconsciously wished it all on myself.

Now, if you had told me this at the time, I no doubt would have slapped you into next week. But as you'll soon discover, I had indeed subconsciously attracted the whole painful experience. I was unknowingly following a pattern of victimhood that had been programmed into my subconscious mind since childhood. I was a helpless pawn, blindly manipulated by forces greater than I—just as you, too, probably have unknowingly manifested challenges for yourself, subconsciously attracted adversity, and even sabotaged your own success.

Now why would I do this? And why would you?

Later I'll explain the bizarre and robotic series of actions that caused me to bring such misfortune, suffering, and pain on myself. But first, let's explore whether you are being manipulated by these same forces—and might be sabotaging your own success and settling for less than you deserve in life.

And by *forces* I don't mean the usual suspects: the devil, terrorists, or communist insurgents. I'm not suggesting a *Da Vinci Code* conspiracy, nor am I reserving a seat on the next comet out. I'm talking about common, ever-present, and well-regarded people and institutions all around you right now, such as your family, your social circle, the place you worship, your government, and the media.

Because herein lies the real danger. If you are like most people, you think these institutions are part of your support network and working for your highest good. What you probably don't realize is that instead, *they are actually keeping you dumb, sick, and broke.*

It's not that your family doesn't love you or your friends don't like

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you. They probably do. And I doubt that your rabbi, minister, or priest consciously wants to cause you great harm. Your congressperson doesn't really have a vendetta against you, and the columnist in your daily newspaper isn't on a mission to harm you. At least not consciously.

But that won't stop all of these people, and thousands more, from causing you to subconsciously wreck your marriage, get passed over for promotions, manifest an illness or injury, sabotage your business, ingest substances that destroy your body, or do any one of a million other behaviors and actions that can prevent you from reaching the health, happiness, and prosperity that are your birthright.

I understand this may all sound crazy to you. Allow me to suggest the possibility that you have been so totally brainwashed with feelings of unworthiness, prejudice about wealth, and false beliefs about success, that you have unknowingly become your own worst enemy.

To find the cause, we have to go back to the formative years of your childhood—to look at the subconscious programming you were exposed to and the core beliefs that programming created. We must explore the world of *memes*, which are actually viruses of the mind.

Memes are like computer viruses in that they parasitize the host and cause it to replicate the memes. A hit song that you can't get out of your head is a meme, as is a catchy expression like "Just Do It!" Those are innocent enough memes. But there are many more memes that aren't so innocent.

Some of the memes you'll be exposed to during the course of a week are likely to include "Buy furniture with no money down and no payments for two years," "If you drink our beer, you will be sexy and popular," and "When you buy our SUV, you'll be able to traverse fjords, climb mountains, and splash through rivers on your way to the dry cleaners."

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Those endless chain e-mails that state, “Send this to everyone you know, and the people who care about you will send it back,” “Help find this lost girl,” and “Watch this amazing slide show of *Conversations with God*” are perfect examples of memes in action. When people receive these e-mails, they experience an emotional reaction and instantly feel compelled to forward them to everyone they know. (The term *meme* and the science of memetics were pioneered by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene*. And you’ll learn much more about them in the book *Virus of the Mind* by Richard Brodie.)

The more emotion involved, the more likely a meme is to replicate. Of particular strength are memes involving children. (You’ll see that demonstrated later in this chapter.) Case in point is all those new mothers who feel compelled to place “Baby on Board” decals in their car windows. What practical purpose could these signs actually achieve? Do they really think drivers in other cars are more cautious or slow down because they see one of these signs in the minivan window? But imagine the argument you would get from the mother of a newborn if you questioned this practice.

There is a whole group of memes that are interrelated (known as a *memplex*) in the area of money and success. But these memes are about keeping you from achieving money and success, instead of helping you get it. They are very prevalent today, and a vast majority of the population is infected with them. These memes are readily accepted and replicated because they allow people to validate their lack of progress in their life goals. They include:

- Money is bad.
- Rich people are evil.

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- It is spiritual or noble to be poor.
- If you struggle and grind it out, you'll be accepted by the rest of the nice people doing the same.
- Underdogs and the little guys are good; big entities are bad.
- You have to sell your soul to get rich.
- Rich people lie, cheat, and steal.
- CEOs, movie stars, and pro athletes are overpaid.
- Rich people have lots of money, but they also have many additional problems. Being rich isn't worth it.
- Money causes good people to go bad.
- If you deny yourself now, God will provide true prosperity in the afterlife.

It may be hard to believe that something a teacher or parent said when you were six years old is preventing you from getting a promotion today, but it could very well be so. You may doubt that a TV show you watched when you were 15 could be causing your marriage to suffer 20 years later, but that might be the case. You may find it far-fetched to think the books you read or the movies you enjoy could be causing you to stay sick or manifest disease.

But in fact, this is exactly what is happening to millions of people. And most likely you are one of them. As you are exposed to these people, institutions, and environments, you are likely to be infected by thousands of potential memes. Just as exposure to raw sewage can cause you to be infected with germs, microbes, and other nasty things, prolonged exposure to the *data-sphere* (meaning TV, radio, movies, books, magazines, newspapers, the Internet, and e-mail) will infect you with many nasty viruses of your mind.

Memes are as real—and deadly—as biological viruses. Just like computer viruses, memes parasitize the host (your mind), replicate,

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and spread to others. And just like other viruses, an epidemic of memes is sweeping through our society today.

Society spends billions to protect us from biological and computer viruses. Yet most people have never even heard of a mind virus. And they may be the most dangerous of all, because you don't realize you've been exposed to and then infected with them.

Obviously one of the big culprits is the data-sphere. All of these information and entertainment sources come with a slant—a bias, an opinion, or a point of view.

The obvious ones are not so much a problem. You probably listen to or watch a political commentator who you know is a rabid right-winger or bleeding-heart liberal. You know going in that Rush Limbaugh and Bill O'Reilly have a conservative bias, and that Howard Stern and Al Franken have a liberal one. That's not our concern.

The real danger is the insidious *subliminal* and *subconscious* programming you are getting—programming that is imprinted in your subconscious mind without your knowledge.

Let me give you an example. Suppose you're eight years old and your family drives by a mansion. You're impressed and say something about it. Your mother tells you that people who live in big houses like that aren't happy. The odds are quite good that you will be infected with the "money doesn't buy happiness" mind virus without even knowing it. It stays on your hard drive the rest of your life, but you don't even know the program was installed.

What's truly scary is that 90 percent of the programming you're exposed to today is the negative programming of lack, fear, and limitation. This programming causes you to self-sabotage your success and repel health and happiness. And it gets reinforced almost every time you watch TV, go to the movies, read a book, or have any connection with the data-sphere.

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How Blockbuster Movies Keep You Broke . . .

You probably saw the movie *Titanic*. If not, you're one of the last people on earth who hasn't. In fact, as of this writing, that movie is the highest grossing film ever released.

Why? Because it panders to the fear-based, lack-centered, and limiting beliefs that most people have about money and success. *Titanic* programs you on many different levels that it is noble to be poor, rich people are immoral, and money is evil. And the more you liked that movie, the more subconscious lack programming you have. I think it's the most evil movie ever made.

"Come on, Gage," you say. "It's just a love story. And it's a movie! We know it isn't real." But let's go to the movies the way I go to the movies . . .

The first scene of the movie opens with happy-go-lucky Jack. Now why is he happy-go-lucky? Because he's poor. He's only on the cruise because he won the trip in a card game, right?

So the first lesson we learn is that poor people are carefree and untroubled. Just think about all the problems rich people have. What if the butler calls in sick? What if somebody keys the Rolls? Have you seen the high cost of helicopter maintenance these days?

In scene two, we meet Rose. Now Rose is decidedly *not* happy. Why? Because she has to marry the boring rich guy. If you remember, her mother admonishes her to suck it up and go through with the wedding for the sake of the family. So the second lesson we learn (subconsciously, of course) is that you have to sell your soul and trade happiness for money.

As the movie develops, another critical scene shows Rose eating in the first class dining room. She is surrounded by all these dreary,

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stuffy, rich people who are sipping brandy, smoking cigars, and blathering inanely about polo matches and superficial nonsense. There's a shot with a mother slapping her little girl's wrist because she doesn't know how to use the eleventh oyster fork on the left. (Okay, I'm exaggerating. A little.)

Jack comes along and tells Rose, "Come on down to third class, and let me show you how to party!" Next, the movie cuts away to the poor people, who of course are singing, dancing, and having fun, showing us how much nicer and more fun they are to be around than those ponderous, nasty, and rigid rich people.

What's the subconscious programming here? Rich people are no fun. Poor people are the ones you want to hang out with. And if you want to be accepted and fit in with the crowd (something most people strive for all their lives, beginning in childhood), then you most certainly are better off being a poor person.

Then the ship hits the iceberg . . .

Rich people try to sneak into lifeboats or bribe their way on. Rose's wealthy fiancé even snatches a baby from its mother's arms in an effort to catch a ride. (Remember that memes involving emotion and children are particularly strong. So can you imagine the subconscious reaction imprinted upon your mind as you watch some selfish rich guy steal a baby from its mother to save his own skin?)

We see the rich people rowing into the horizon, as the water gurgles over the poor bastards chained up in the lower decks. We see a brave, poor mother as she calmly tells her children that they are going to go downstairs and sing church hymns until they drown. Excuse me while I puke!

Fast-forward to the end of the movie. Rose is now about 180 years old. Her poor granddaughter is working her fingers to the bone, taking care of this old bag. Rose has a necklace worth about \$40 million,

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which she could give to her granddaughter and set her up for life. What does she do with it?

She feeds it to the friggin' sharks!

Level, after level, after level, this movie subconsciously programs you that money is bad, rich people are evil, and it is good, even spiritual, to be poor. And nothing could be further from the truth.

"Okay, I'll give you that one," you say. "But that's just one movie."

Just one movie? Well, let's look at a few more blockbusters. Take *Spiderman*, for example. In the first *Spiderman*, who was the dastardly villain? The billionaire rich guy. By the way, who was the villain in *The Fantastic Four*, *Alien*, and almost every James Bond movie ever made? The rich guy. But back to our web-weaving crusader.

Remember when poor Peter Parker finally met up with the girl next door whom he had secretly worshipped from afar for years? They each go to throw the garbage out at the same time. Their eyes meet. She begins talking to Peter, and the sparks start flying. Then what happens?

The rich kid pulls up in his brand new car, which his evil, rich daddy just bought him for his birthday. The girl shrieks with delight, drops Peter along with the garbage, hops into the car, and they drive off, leaving Peter scorned, dejected, and alone. On a subconscious level, how do you think that makes you feel about rich people?

There's even a part in the movie when Peter's uncle says the most famous lack-programming words ever spoken:

"We may not be rich, but at least we're honest."

Ever heard anything like that? What does that really mean? Let me translate: "Be glad you are poor. That means you are honest, noble, and a good person—because rich people lie, cheat, and steal."

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That's why something you may have heard from a parent or teacher when you were 10 could be impacting your core beliefs 20, 30, even 40 years later. When you are young and impressionable, things you hear from people in authority create an indelible effect on you.

Now why was Peter's uncle raising him? Because he was an orphan. Remember, memes are strongest when they are emotional and involve children. What could grab your heart more than a poor little orphan? So Spiderman was an orphan. Come to think of it, so was Batman. And Superman. Wonder Woman. Harry Potter. The Boxcar Children and the Lemony Snicket kids are all orphans.

Do you detect a pattern here?

You may be starting to wonder whether this is a conspiracy among writers to manipulate you. It isn't. They are infected with the same memes and don't even know they are replicating them.

Like the original, *Spiderman II* was riddled with subliminal programming to reinforce negative mind viruses. Which, coincidentally, ensured it would be another smash hit worldwide. Once again, we meet Peter's noble aunt who raised him. We can tell she's noble, because the greedy bankers are evicting her from her house.

In the sequel, Peter loses his pizza delivery job, because he stopped to save two little kids who were about to be run over by a truck. This reinforces the meme that noble people sacrifice their own good and happiness for others (which will create more negative and dysfunctional relationships, because we certainly don't have enough of those around!). Then to make it just perfect, the heartless boss is an East Indian, reinforcing the meme that those money-grubbing immigrants are here stealing all the good jobs from hard-working Americans.

Of course, *Spiderman I* ends with our hero telling his one true

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love that he could never be with her. Then he walks off alone into the sunset of his unrequited love. He has made the choice to give away his own happiness so he can serve others and fight the forces of evil.

In *Spiderman II*, the girl gets pushier, pressing Peter to make her an honest woman. Again Peter is conflicted between pursuing his own happiness or wrapping thugs in spider webs. So he asks his aunt (who is now sorting her possessions on the street) what to do. She tells him that there are special people in the world, people who sacrifice everything that is important to them to serve others for the greater good. Is that sweet or what?

What a crock of spider shit!

Hollywood, Bollywood, Hong Kong, and movie makers everywhere have learned the lesson well. The more a movie conforms to your beliefs, the more certain you are to like it. Of course, it's not just the movie studios . . .

Television is just as guilty—and a lot more dangerous to your health, happiness, and prosperity, because you are probably exposed to TV more than any other media.

Think about how millionaires and billionaires are portrayed on the small screen. The entire premise of shows like *The Beverly Hillbillies* is that rich people are snobby, pretentious buffoons, and poor people are kind-hearted, good folk with common sense. Remember the goofy millionaire with the pretentious name on *Gilligan's Island*? Wasn't there always one rich guy in the tent on *MASH* who listened to opera, acted like a jerk, and generally made life difficult for the good ole' boys? Think back to the way those adulterous, lying, cheating, and conniving rich people were portrayed on *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, and similar shows. Instant replay, the same tune is played over and over.

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But from a prosperity standpoint, probably the most insidious shows came when networks discovered how cheaply reality shows could be produced—and how popular they would become. Shows like *Survivor*, *Fear Factor*, *The Apprentice*, and *Weakest Link* share a common thread: how much people will demean themselves to get on TV and try for a cash prize. (Of course, a similar dynamic can be found with the *Jerry Springer Show* and the other daytime talk trash-a-thons.)

The latest hit as of this writing is *Unanimous*. It pits nine people in a bunker, each one scheming how to go home with \$1.5 million and let the other eight leave empty-handed. Of course, the producers seeded the group with a couple of liars and cheats, to reinforce your belief that money causes people to do bad things.

You cannot watch shows such as these without lowering your opinion and expectation of humanity. You lose respect for your fellow human beings, and, as a result, lose respect for *yourself*.

Which takes us right back to the worthiness issue. If you don't think you're worthy, you will always end up sabotaging your happiness—whether that means enjoying good health, building strong relationships, making money, or achieving professional success. In developed countries (and I use that term loosely), people are watching five to six hours of television a day! Can you imagine what that does to a person's self-esteem over a period of years?

Take any decade going back to the birth of TV and I can tell you which television programs were successful because they pandered to widely accepted beliefs that money is bad, rich people are evil, or it is inherently spiritual to be poor.

Unfortunately books, magazines, and newspapers continue the negative programming of their electronic counterparts. Think about this: How many books have you read where the guy gives up every-

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thing to get the girl? Or books that play out the same scenarios as the TV and movie scripts I've described, where rich people are evil and poor people are spiritual?

Flying over to Europe a few years ago, I happened to read an advance write-up about a then soon-to-be-released book, *The Nanny Diaries*. It was a collection of anecdotes from two nannies about how vapid, shallow, and conniving their rich clients were. They talked about the wealthy woman who was too busy alphabetizing her lingerie drawers to take care of her kids, and a negligent father and his "thong-sporting mistress." I immediately predicted in my newsletter that this book would become a smash best seller, which of course it did.

Poor people love to read anything that depicts rich people as unhappy, superficial, or dishonest. Then they can tell themselves that the real reason they aren't rich is because they aren't willing to lower themselves to become like that. (Just like the mother who tells her kids as they drive by the rich houses that those people can't possibly be happy.)

I remember reading a John Grisham novel about a lawyer from a big downtown law firm who meets a homeless person. The lawyer quits his job and goes to work at a law clinic for street people. Along the way, he divorces his wife, sells his Lexus to buy an old beater, and moves into a dumpy apartment with no heat and furniture so he can be like his clients.

How romantic. How stupid.

Of course, this book also became a monster bestseller. But how many people could that lawyer have helped if he had stayed at his \$200,000-a-year job at the big firm? What if he got the partners to each agree to work half a day a month for free in the law clinic? What if he went to the other members of the bar association in his home-

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town and got them to do the same thing? Those homeless people would have more lawyers than they'd know what to do with!

But you will never see that book, because it would never get published. No one wants to hear about rich people staying rich and helping others. We want to hear that money and what it can buy aren't important. We want to read that someone "gave it all away for love."

Think of the many songs, plays, and operas that parallel those exact themes. There's a sappy country love song with the lyrics, "He owns half of downtown Atlanta; all I can give her is the moon." Of course, this is just the kind of pap that makes a hit, because it panders to the lack programming that the masses have.

The irony of all this is that the people who sell you this stuff get very rich. Grisham is now one of the wealthiest authors in the world. Alan Jackson makes millions singing country ditties about "the little man." James Cameron made about \$200 million from *Titanic*, teaching you that it is spiritual to be poor!

Now, again, it's not that there's an organized conspiracy to keep you broke. The people involved in spreading these memes usually don't even know what they're doing. Musicians get influenced by what was successful in the past. Screenwriters look back at classics to see what was popular. Television writers just regurgitate old concepts again and again. The cycle of programming repeats, and the resulting beliefs are embedded in society.

But we haven't even got to the worst part, the most dangerous part of the whole programming equation: the victimhood and entitlement mentality it creates in you.

One reason these writers keep repeating the cycle is because they rely on timeless themes or archetypes—some of which have been around for hundreds, even thousands of years. The most prevalent of

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these is the “hero’s journey.” They teach this in Writing 101. The basic premise of this theme is an ordinary person who is presented with a difficult challenge and shows extraordinary courage and resourcefulness to overcome it and emerge victorious.

Star Wars is a hero’s journey, as are *Spiderman*, *Batman*, *Lord of the Rings*, all Robert Ludlum novels, and just about every action movie and spaghetti western ever made. We identify with the hero and want to become him or her. Which is how I ended up getting shot on that Saturday night. Quite simply, I manifested it.

It all started many years ago in my childhood. I wasn’t happy as a kid, and never fit in. I didn’t seem to belong in my family, couldn’t relate to the other kids in school, and never felt comfortable anywhere else. I spent hours upon hours alone in my room, reading books.

I spent most of that time fantasizing about escaping my miserable existence and living my own hero’s journey. I think most kids do this; depressed kids just do it a lot more. Books, and to a lesser extent, movies, and television were my escape.

As formulaic and predictable as book, TV, and movie adventures have become, one premise played out time and again. The hero gets shot. He will suffer, gut it out, and ultimately live. (The shot usually just grazed the arm, so he got all of the attention, was bandaged up, and ended up looking cool, without having to worry about the irritating stuff like dying. Unless of course he was that *extra* crew member who beamed down to the planet with Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, Sulu, and Bones!)

Every time John Wayne got shot, I imagined the sympathy people would be feeling for me when I got shot. I lived out that fantasy a million times in my youth. Then I grew up and lived it out as a reality.

So I really believe that I manifested getting shot on that street corner. Just like I manifest everything that happens in my life, both the

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good and the bad. *Just like you attract and manifest everything that happens to you.*

It is the law of attraction. We attract what we think about—that which we lust after, and that which we fear. Anything that consumes our thoughts gets manifested in the real world.

The skeptics scoff at such a premise. How would my assailant know I subconsciously longed to be shot to facilitate my hero's journey fantasy? What made him pick that street on that night to find someone to rob?

I don't know. But I do know this: Joseph Campbell talks about the collective unconscious. Einstein spoke of the unified field, and Vedic sages speak of the space between thoughts. We know that at its ultimate level, everything (including people, elevators, oceans, guns, and trees) is an energy vibration. So while I can't tell you exactly *how* the law of attraction works, I can tell you *it* does.

Another timeless theme is unrequited love. You can look back at *Romeo and Juliet*; when Mimi dies, leaving Rodolfo alone in La Boheme; or when Tosca cries to Scarpia to meet her before God, then leaps to her death, in the opera bearing her name. It is the unrequited love meme, over and over.

Remember the TV show *The Incredible Hulk*? Every week Dr. David Banner travels to a new town, meets a beautiful woman, and falls in love. Then something happens to anger him and he "Hulks out." He has to flee town before the tabloid reporter catches up with him. Every single show ends the same way: with him hitchhiking his way out of town, alone, as the piano music plays. . . .

Fast-forward to today and you have Spiderman walking away from his love at the end of the first movie, or *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and *House of the Flying Daggers*, which are just reworks of *Romeo and Juliet*. They all get their emotional hook (which is critical

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for influencing and programming your subconscious mind) from this timeless and universal theme of unrequited love.

The big breakout hit for 2005 was the medical drama *House*. Actually, the acting is quite good, and I enjoy the show. But the real reason it's a smash hit is because it panders to some very strong memes. Dr. House is a maverick and a wise guy, always flouting authority. (Meme: Root for the little guy fighting the forces of evil.) The subplot of season one was the greedy billionaire who took over as chairman of the board and wanted to fire people, generate more sales for his pharmaceutical company, and run the hospital as a profit center. He didn't care if sick people died, because there wasn't enough money to be made by saving them. (Meme: Rich people are evil.)

The subplot for the second season had House reuniting with his ex and discovering they both still loved each other. Then House pushed her aside so she could go back to her sickly new husband. (Meme: Unrequited love.) The same note, over and over.

How Government Discourages Success . . .

As I told you up front, the media is just one of the guilty parties. There are plenty of other entities working nonstop to program you with memes of lack and limitation. You can start with your government. Obviously, if you live in a communist or socialist country, the government needs to program you to believe wealth is bad, citizens are responsible for taking care of everybody else, and it is everyone's sacred duty to sacrifice their own happiness for the collective.

The real danger is in places like the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, Canada, and dozens of other countries

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that claim to be democracies or republics operating under the free-enterprise system. They talk a good game of free-market economies, but their affirmative action programs, antimonopoly witch hunts, and socialized medical care actually circumvent innovation, low prices, and value-for-value exchange.

By their very nature, governments are corrupt. Either they are headed by fascist dictator types, where the evil is apparent, or they present themselves as governments for the people, and the evil is hidden. The governments operating as loose democracies eventually work their way into a two-party system. Then each party must compete with the other for power, with their success based on their ability to give away more pork than the other party. If party A offers free high school, party B has to up the ante with free college. If party A offers free prescriptions for senior citizens, party B needs to trump that with national health care. Political parties retain or reclaim power by promising the population more perks than they take in through taxes.

But, of course, the only free cheese is in the mousetrap. The only way to provide all this largesse is to take it away from the smaller percentage of wealthy voters and distribute it among the larger group of broke voters (who believe they are innocent victims of the system, and think it's only righteous that they are given some of the spoils of those greedy rich people).

The most dangerous individual to a government is a wealthy, sophisticated person who can take care of his or her own needs. The perfect citizen for a government is a needy one, because the more you need the government, the more controllable you are.

As a creative, thinking human being, you are up against a mass of people who want something for nothing and governments around the world who want to give it to them. The sad truth is that your gov-

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ernment doesn't want you to be successful. It wants and needs you to be a worker drone in the collective to support its system of dispensing free cheese to maintain its power structure. So you can be sure every interaction with the government will foster programming to support this.

Religion . . .

Your religion probably doesn't want you to be successful either. Healthy, happy, self-sustained people don't need much guidance and support. You're a lot easier to manipulate and control (and compel into kicking into the collection basket) if you're praying for deliverance, salvation, or a new job.

Organized religion probably promotes more harmful memes that hold back more people than any other entity. For this reason, I devote an entire chapter to the devastating and debilitating effect organized religion has on millions of people around the world.

There is another, extremely dangerous source of programming, constantly assaulting you, yet one that few people realize . . .

The People You Spend Time With . . .

Nothing will infect you with a negative view of the world faster than hanging around people with harmful belief systems. And it's even worse when you are trying to "save" a bunch of them. Because the harder you try to pull them up, the more they are subconsciously trying to pull you down. Some of this will be

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intentional; most of it won't be. But that unintentional programming is the most deadly.

That's not to say that your family and friends don't mean well; I'm sure that, in their own way, most of them do. Parents teach their kids to go for the secure jobs, maybe even get union wages if they're lucky. Teachers and guidance counselors tell you to "be realistic." Friends tell you not to strive for too much, lest you be disappointed.

Most of this they will do subconsciously, out of fear you will get too successful and leave them behind. Then, of course, there are those friends and family who truly don't want you to be rich and successful—because if you get healthy, wealthy, and happy, they lose their excuses about why it isn't possible for them.

They will explain how foolish your business idea is, ridicule your dreams, and disparage your goals. And if you retreat back to mediocrity, they will placate you and validate your lack of success with the usual platitudes, such as, "You have to have money to make money," "You have to sell your soul to be rich," and "You need the right connections to be successful."

There are certain people in your life who are toxic. Spending time with them is dangerous for your hopes, aspirations, and dreams. They infect your mind with fear, doubt, and uncertainty. When you are just coming out of negative beliefs and programming, you are very weak and susceptible to backsliding. Often you will need to keep physical and emotional distance between you and your old contacts for a certain period of time.

I have people I love, and would love to help. But I recognize that they are not really ready to be helped right now. And spending a great deal of time with them is dangerous to my own emotional well-being.

Now, I am pretty developed, and quite strong, so I can withstand

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a lot. I can spend time with people at lower consciousness and help bring them up, instead of them bringing me down. But that's because I have been on this path for 15 years. There was a time when the opposite would have happened. And still today, I stay away from certain environments, because the number of negative, victim-mentality people is so large that I fear it will infect my consciousness. You have to do the same.

If you are just starting to break out of lack and move toward prosperity, you must be extra vigilant about this. The most important resources you will ever have are your mind and your mind-set. You must protect them at all costs.

Jim Rohn tells us that your income will be the average earnings of your five closest friends. I think this holds true for the quality of your marriage or relationship, your health, and every other area of prosperity.

So How Does All This Play Out?

You become exposed to the data-sphere as you grow up. Your friends and family slowly chip away at your dreams and self-esteem. Maybe you join an organized religion that teaches you that you were born a sorry sinner.

Little by little, in subtle ways, you get programmed. You create beliefs that get cemented in your personality. You don't realize you are doing this, but you are. Your core, foundational beliefs about relationships, money, and success will all be programmed into you *by the time you are 10 years old*.

Once you are programmed for lack and limitation, you instinctively start to gravitate to the downtrodden, the poor, and the under-

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dogs. You begin to distrust wealthy people. Your self-esteem drops and you develop worthiness issues. Your dreams get smaller; they seem more distant and less attainable. (And remember, all of this is happening subconsciously.) If your self-esteem gets low enough, you'll do as I did: You'll create a more dramatic hero's journey for yourself, to attempt to feel better about yourself.

You will subconsciously and unknowingly create obstacles, challenges, and setbacks for everything you try to do. You will take projects and accomplishments that would actually be simple for you and make them more difficult to give you a more heroic story. The more drama, the more trauma—and the more noble, brave, and heroic it will make you feel. Or at least that's the idea. Of course, it never works out that way, because you just keep setting the target farther and farther away, so you're determined to fail and feel even worse about yourself.

I ought to know. I did that for 30 years.

I was a teenage alcoholic and drug addict. I went to jail for armed robbery when I was just 15. After straightening myself out, I successfully failed at no less than 10 different business ventures. I attracted 11 negative relationships in a row. It all culminated when I turned 30 and the IRS seized my business for nonpayment of taxes and auctioned it off at the courthouse.

After this last event, I had no house, no car, no job, and was \$55,000 in debt. I sold my furniture to pay the rent and ate macaroni and cheese three times a day. Finally I had to ask myself the most important question: *Was there one person who was always at the scene of the crime?*

Of course, I didn't like the answer—but it was the answer I needed, because it got me to stop looking at outside factors and instead look within. I began a study of prosperity which has contin-

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ued to this day. And I began a path of self-development and personal growth. Along the way, I came to realize that I had been sabotaging my own success for 30 years, because I didn't think I was worthy.

So what about you? Do you think you have been influenced by all of the lack and limitation programming you've been exposed to? Is it possible you have subconsciously been sabotaging your success and rejecting wealth, health, and happiness because you are hanging on to beliefs that don't serve you? Who are the five people you spend the most time with? What kind of programming are you getting from them?

The Conflict . . .

What all this subconscious programming sets up is a below-the-surface conflict in your mind. Your rational, logical, conscious mind tells you that you want to be healthy, happy, and prosperous. Let's face it, who wouldn't?

So you think you want to be rich. But your subconscious mind tells you that rich people lie, cheat, and steal. Your core foundational belief is that these people have to sell their soul to get rich. Your subconscious mind reminds you that you want to be well-liked, to be a person of integrity, and to go to heaven when you die.

So you pass up a great opportunity, do something to get fired, turn to drugs or alcohol addiction, mess up your marriage, or experience just enough self-doubt that you back down and quit at the first sign of adversity. You give up on your dreams and resolve to be more "realistic."

The biggest casualty is your self-esteem. Most five-year-olds

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have good self-esteem. By the time those five-year-olds get to college age, most of them will have self-esteem programmed out of them. Now you begin to question if you are worthy of health, happiness, and wealth.

Once you have worthiness issues, you'll never let yourself achieve happiness. And no one does more to program people that they are not worthy than organized religion. Which is where we will explore next.

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