

A D E F E N C E M A N U A L



UNPLAYABLE

— ◆ —
The Twenty Tactics of Dark Psychology

and how to make sure they never work on you

S H A D O W H A N D S

U N P L A Y A B L E



UNPLAYABLE



The Twenty Tactics of Dark Psychology

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SHADOWHANDS

Unplayable: The Twenty Tactics of Dark Psychology — free sample

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This sample contains the introduction and two of the twenty chapters. You are welcome to share it. The full edition is available at shadowhands.shop.

This book is for education and self-protection. It is not a substitute for professional psychological, medical or legal advice. The scenes that open each chapter are composites; they do not describe real people. If you are in danger, contact your local emergency services.

Questions and corrections: puppet@shadowhands.shop

Praemonitus, praemunitus.

Forewarned is forearmed.

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REFERENCE

The Twenty at a Glance	FULL BOOK
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Why Learn the Dark Arts

◆ —————

Nobody who gets inside your head announces it. There is no villain's monologue, no twirled moustache. The people who are best at it are warm, quick, attentive and oddly specific. They seem to understand you. They make things easy. And somewhere along the way you find yourself apologising for something you came to complain about, agreeing to something you'd have refused on paper, or doubting a memory you were certain of last week.

This book takes twenty of those moves and opens them up — slowly, under good light — so that the next time one is used on you, it looks exactly like what it is.

There is good science behind that promise. In the 1960s the psychologist William McGuire proposed what he called *inoculation theory*: just as a vaccine exposes the body to a weakened virus, exposing people to a weakened form of a persuasive attack — and showing them how it works — makes them more resistant to the real thing. Sixty years later, researchers at Cambridge tested the idea with a game that let players try out the techniques of online misinformation. After playing, people were measurably better at spotting manipulative content. The lesson has held up across study after study: *knowing the trick is most of the defence*.

So this is a book of tricks. But it is written from your side of the table. Every chapter ends not with a technique to use but with a counter: what to notice, what to do and, word for word, what to say. A manipulator would find little here they don't already know. You will find a great deal.

Pattern, not paranoia

One warning before we begin. Almost every move in this book has an innocent twin. People mirror each other because that's how humans bond. They fall for each other quickly. They get defensive, forget things, need space. If you finish this book suspicious of everyone, it has failed you.

The difference is pattern. One instance is a person having a day. The same move, repeated, aimed at the same outcome — usually something that costs you and benefits them — is a strategy. That's why every chapter closes with *The Innocent Version*: what the harmless form of the behaviour looks like, and where the line is.

How to Read This Book

The twenty tactics are grouped into four parts, roughly in the order they tend to appear: getting in, steering, bending reality and holding on. Read straight through, or go directly to the one you need tonight. Each chapter is built the same way:

SOUNDS LIKE	What it actually sounds like, in the words people actually use.
THE MOVE	What they are doing, stripped of the charm.
WHY IT LANDS	The wiring it hooks into — so you can stop blaming yourself for falling for it.
THE TELLS	The small signs that give it away while it’s still happening.
THE COUNTER	What to do instead.
SAY THIS	Lines you can use as they are.
THE INNOCENT VERSION	What the harmless twin looks like, and where the line falls.

Part V, *The Unplayable Protocol*, pulls it all together into six habits that make you a poor target for every move at once. If you only have ten minutes, read that.

The Flip

DARVO

I2

SOUNDS LIKE

“Wow. After everything I do for you, you’re attacking me?”

You raise one calm complaint: money missing from the joint account. Ten minutes later you are comforting them, apologising for “starting this,” and the money hasn’t been mentioned since minute two.

THE MOVE

Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender. Faced with accountability, they deny it, attack your credibility or motives, and recast themselves as the injured party. You arrived as the one with a complaint. You leave as the one who owes an apology.

WHY IT LANDS

The psychologist Jennifer Freyd named DARVO in 1997. In a 2020 study, Sarah Harsey and Freyd found that DARVO works on observers too: it made the person using it seem more believable, and the person raising the complaint more to blame.

But the same research found something hopeful. Participants who had first *learned about DARVO* were less swayed by it. Knowing the name of the move is, quite literally, the defence.

THE TELLS

- ◆ The topic shifts from what they did to how you raised it.
- ◆ Your tone becomes the issue.
- ◆ Their hurt arrives at the exact moment of accountability.

- ◆ You end conversations apologising for things you came to complain about.

THE COUNTER

Name the original topic and return to it — once, calmly. Their feelings can be real and still not be the subject. If the reversal continues, end the conversation and come back to it later, in writing if you need to.

SAY THIS

“I can see you’re upset. We’re still talking about the account.”

“I’m happy to talk about my tone afterwards. First, the money.”

THE INNOCENT VERSION

People get defensive when criticised; that’s human. Defensiveness that eventually returns to the issue is normal. Defensiveness that permanently replaces it is the Flip.

The Clock

False urgency & scarcity



SOUNDS LIKE

“I need an answer tonight. Someone else is interested.”

“**T**he price only holds if you sign today.” “There are two left at this rate.” “If you really cared, you wouldn’t need to think about it.” Three different rooms, three different people, one move.

THE MOVE

Manufacture a deadline or a shortage so you decide before you think. The pressure is the product: time is the one thing manipulation rarely survives.

WHY IT LANDS

Scarcity makes things look more valuable. In a 1975 study by Stephen Worchel and colleagues, identical cookies were rated more desirable when they came from a jar of two than from a jar of ten.

Time pressure also pushes decisions onto fast, intuitive thinking — what Daniel Kahneman called *System 1* — where emotion and shortcuts run the show and slow, careful analysis never gets a turn.

THE TELLS

- ◆ The deadline belongs to them, not to the world.
- ◆ You can’t verify the shortage.
- ◆ Asking for time is treated as an insult.
- ◆ Emotion rises as information falls.

THE COUNTER

Treat urgency as information about them, not about the decision. Real opportunities survive a night's sleep. Adopt a personal rule and make it boringly firm: *no significant yes on the day it's asked.*

SAY THIS

"If it has to be tonight, it's a no. If it can wait until Thursday, I'll give you a proper answer."

"I don't make decisions against a countdown."

THE INNOCENT VERSION

Some deadlines are real: flights leave, offers genuinely expire. The test is whether they can show you the clock.

End of sample

Eighteen more moves. Each one, disarmed.

The full edition opens up all twenty tactics the same way — the move, the tells, the counter, the words — plus the six-rule Unplayable Protocol.

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