

Welcome to the Sewer

I am a little hesitant about writing you this letter. On the one hand, I am convinced that it is, in times like these, absolutely essential that you be told about the power play that takes place in organisations; on the other, I don't want to be judged as a ruthless consultant, a vindictive observer, or a cynical spell-breaker. I am, when all is said and done, just a person, and would like to be considered an ethical one at that. And yet I will be discussing things people call "screwing," "humiliating," "taking you for a ride," and "victimisation."

We will practice the art of undermining the boss, offer resistance to all those overpaid spreadsheet types that try to keep track of your every movement, and we will look at ways for you to "run" your colleagues and fellow employees. So saddle up. We're going to explore and discuss the dark and devious ways of today's company.

As I mentioned, I'm writing this as a letter. I admit it's rather long. But that's because there is so much to tell you about the innards of a company. Traditionally, a letter is something to send to friends and receive from friends. The philosopher Sloterdijk¹ considers the letter as a metaphor for how humanity has tried to humanise itself. You can take this quite literally: thanks to reading and writing, humanity has created a circle of learned people, who together have tried to keep our animal instincts under control. With a culture of books, essays, reviews, articles, stories, letters, and knowledge, humanity has tamed itself, and become a placid pet.

Well – that may be a nice thought with which to go to sleep. But we know better. And I am not even thinking about the atrocities that the human chimpanzee has perpetrated throughout the world. Even right here at home, in our own company, our own department, with our own clients, atrocities are committed every single day.

"Then why write a letter?" I hear you mutter. "It's so *passé*. Why not send an SMS or an e-mail, or create a stunning website? All those letters and books haven't done a thing to improve humanity." And I would have to agree with you. You're right.

And yet I am still going to write what I want to tell you in the form of a letter. There's a simple reason. A letter is at once personal and distant, general and anecdotal, exposes both the writer and the reader in all their imperfections and peculiarities. And a letter between friends has a certain intimacy. An intimacy that we need if we are to discover: how to become a rat.

Why "verminicity"??²

¹ Peter Sloterdijk, *Rules for the human park*. A notorious lecture given by Sloterdijk in 1999. He suggested that the humanisation interventions have not improved mankind and wondered whether we should not be considering genetic regulations. He was unjustly attacked for this. He simply raised the question and left the answer open.

² Okay. Verminicity doesn't exist. As a word. But it does exist as an idea. I like to define it as having the characteristics of vermin. Creatures that are pests. In the sewers of both cities and corporations.

First of all, I want to explore the reasons why people play power games. But why should I want to do that in the first place?

The first reason that comes to mind is: *sensationalism*. Let's be honest, can you really say that you don't get a tinge of pleasure when you read about some high and mighty president of a company being bettered by a lackey revealing some juicy bit of malpractice? How many of us don't follow the news – or even the soaps – to see how far the mighty have fallen? Who isn't amazed at all the wheeling and dealing that takes place at the top of companies and cringes at the ruthlessness of it all? Who doesn't shiver at the cold calculations involved?

You'd have to be made of concrete to withstand the pleasure and the excitement involved in the downfall of anybody but yourself. Unfortunately, this excitement about filthy tricks at corporate or governmental level is little more than the "isn't that awful" of village gossip.

And so, no matter how tempting sensation and gossip may be, I am not going to participate in that. If you're looking for juicy stories about big companies with cruel and fraudulent CEOs, then I must disappoint you. I can't offer you anything like that. Instead, perhaps you should subscribe to some glossy business magazine. Or purchase one of the boy's own books that describes the rise and fall of some big corporation as if it were a Greek tragedy. Such books are full of drama and tension. Everybody and everything – details, details, details – are described in full. Back-stabbing and treachery are the ingredients that set the tone: exciting, isn't it?

My letter contains no infamous name or scandal, no revelation or *exposé*. Purposely. Because I am more interested in the rules of deviousness, the grammar of depravity, the structure of treachery. Sensationalism would prove too great a diversion from the matter in hand.

The second reason for turning the spotlight on verminicity could be the deep and satisfying feeling of *accusation*. Just imagine a book that, page after page, sharply and subtly exposes corporate intrigue in all its guises and, against a permanent beat, juxtaposes fact with accusation: fault, people, fault, deed, fault. I couldn't stand it: goblin snot!

The reason? The prosecutor is a bookkeeper, keeping precise track of everything that is right or wrong. And what's even worse, he knows exactly where the border between good and bad lies, where corporate integrity ends and verminicity begins. Such people despise "tricks," "*coups*," and "whipping boys." Whether they are their own or those of other people. Prosecutors don't want to sully their hands, something that is inevitable once you enter the realms of management. And because they have a phobia for dirt, they want to clean up everything and everybody in their vicinity.

Prosecutors don't accuse other people; they accuse themselves. They stand alone in a dock of their own making, facing their own charges of secretly lusting after dirty tricks, enervating dethronements, blackmail, and emotional cruelty. Let's be honest: anybody with clean hands has never really lived. The prosecutor lists his own offences: I am not alive, I have never lived, I shall never live.

If I were to compose my letter on verminicity in this vein, then the most I could produce is sad, uninteresting ego-document. And so you will find no accusations here. Nobody is on trial; nobody sets the standard.

Let's take a look at a third possible reason. It is a reason that many of my course participants ask at the start of my "How to become a Rat" class. Yes. That's right. I've actually given courses in the subject. They often said: "I'm here because I want to be able to *recognise* what's going on and take steps to avoid it."

Idiots. I can still see their sorry faces now. With flaming red cheeks, sweat pouring from their armpits, and a nervous giggle, they signal exactly what they're going to ask. You hope for a miracle that will turn their words into a different direction and that they'll say something like "I really want to screw my boss," or "I'm really going after that one," or "I'm going to do everything – yeah, everything – to sabotage that team." You hope for a Divine miracle, that intoxicating scent of spite, the vapours of vengeance, the hunger for humiliation. But the words come out so correctly: "I want to be able to recognise it and take steps to avoid it." And they are always so happy. Happy! You seldom see such frightened people so happy about giving the right answer. Because that answer places them beyond suspicion. They are out of the firing line.

What they are really trying to say is that they don't want anything to do with all this dirt and therefore want to learn as many tricks as possible to strengthen their line of defence. They think that by doing this they will maintain their integrity and reduce their chance of victimisation.

If you're looking for a book like that, then look elsewhere. I could recommend a whole lot of do-it-yourself books that can show you how to get on with your boss. Such books give profiles of bosses and tips on how to keep them at arm's length. Often they are faintly disguised assertion courses.

In my letter, I want to go much further than that. I don't want you to keep on being the victim, but persuade you to get down into the dirt yourself. Why shouldn't you become The Boss From Hell? One that is always calculating, assessing opportunities and chances, and neatly navigating any pitfalls? One that is prepared to slag off inferiors and suck up to superiors whenever the opportunity arises?

Scientific research. Now that's a good reason for taking a long, hard look at loutishness, cruelty, and pretence. Our interest could be clinically scientific; we are simply fascinated by the dark side of man and humanity and dearly desire to understand, explain, and predict it. Aren't we?

We would want to develop a neutral vocabulary to describe and order the traits that we uncover. Neutral, because as scientific observers, as impartial onlookers, we simply want to plot the behaviour of *homo sapiens*; our preferences or reproval play no role. We keep a measured distance from everyday language, since this is burdened with emotion, experience, and judgement. We then observe the depraved managers and their employees in their natural habitat, their organisations, to discover under what circumstance which form of loutishness is adopted by which person to what end.

We try to find regularities in their political behaviour, and rename them "Laws." Example? All managers eventually act like jerks, even the nicest and most sympathetic. The reason is that "acting like a jerk" is part of the "unwritten" profile to which a manager will

adhere.* Of course we choose neutral terms, scientific terms, and we describe the law as follows: “Managers give priority to the interests of the organisation in those situations where a conflict of interest can occur. The reason for this prioritising is inherent in the role as perceived by those in a leadership function.”

There is nothing really wrong with the scientific approach. Quite the reverse. The neutralisation of language and enforcing strict control over subjectivity and personal preferences has revealed things that otherwise would have remained hidden. No, things go wrong when people – professionals – make use of such scientific language in their everyday environment. What then arises is intellectual drivel.

Intellectual drivel

And it is exactly this intellectual drivel that is the real reason for us to concern ourselves with verminicity in the way we are doing. And that requires some explanation.

As I have just explained, one of the biggest mistakes we make is to use scientific jargon to describe how we obstruct our boss and eliminate our colleagues. We then fall into the same pit that has claimed so many professionals when they were enjoying their education in High School, university, or in countless courses and retraining sessions. In all these courses, they are extensively trained in the use of the neutral vocabulary of scientific disciplines.

Much of today’s professional training is little more than language training. Professionals suddenly start coming out with terms such as models, step plans, typologies, activity plans, actors, audits, governance models, and more of the same. This use of language may be a blessing and enrichment for the scientist but it often proves a curse and an impoverishment for the layperson.

Objective language removes all emotions and shadings from the actions that these people initiate. What I mean is that they use the language of an observer to describe their actions as participants. They are not flies on the wall but active participants in social intercourse – eh, sorry – people with vices, lusts, grievances, and fears. And you shouldn’t use a scientific vocabulary in such circumstances; you should use the language of the factory floor, the language of the canteen, the language of gossip. In other words, the language you use at home when you’re pissed off with your job: that language.

Professional and quasi-scientific terminology has given discussions about professional practice a veneer of respectability. It has covered it with the varnish of innocence. It has washed the blood from the wall, mopped up the filth from the doorstep, and papered over the deviousness. Professional training is nothing more than learning the vocabulary of propriety; learning to speak politely and using your knife and fork.

But does this mean that our organisations have become extremely proper? Have we driven out all traces of vile and cruel schemes? Has the Great Humanisation Process finally kicked in?

No. At some point in their careers, professionals realise they have been taken in by intellectual drivel. On the one hand, they’ve got an arsenal of neat, polite professional

* Loek Schönbeck: *Irreverent Philosophy of Management*. A highly readable book that includes revelations about the camouflaging use of language in modern organisations. A breath of fresh air after all the management and leadership pulp of the nineties.

models, on the other they're faced with a day-to-day existence that is diametrically opposed to them. It grates and groans; nothing fits anymore. It's a painful position. And many try to worm themselves out of it. Do they succeed? Can they really turn? No. They can't.

Most professionals simply turn into schizos. They lead a double-life. They use the pretty words that a company expects to hear. They mouth the phrases about "openness and honesty," about "commitment," about "synergy," and yet they know that the top consistently keeps mum about essential information, the personnel say different things in the canteen than they say in team meetings, and that everybody has fenced in their own little backyard.

At home, they nag and nag. They say what they really feel: that the boss is a pig, the department arrogant, that employees only think about themselves, and that they are still years away from the financial security they need. I certainly wouldn't want to change places with professionals who have chosen this route.

Another group of professionals turn into happiness junkies. They search for intellectual salvation in the piles of self-help books and expensive seminars and conferences. And they learn all about healing methods that, if prescribed in the right amounts, will work wonders for their organisation.

They learn how to set goals, to design action plans, and how to achieve them without hurting anybody else. Or they learn some new typology of people, with the appropriate characteristics. "If you adapt yourself to the whims of the other person, then you'll see that things will go really smoothly." Or they'll discover that people have a dark side and they'll start calling them "traps."

Talk about prissiness: "Your opportunistic and sadomasochistic cruelty is a real trap for you." Just imagine all those managers with responsibilities for millions of euros saying: "You have a trap." Bah! They then learn that you have to help somebody get out of the trap. And the way to do that is first of all to understand all their own traps.

They end up with the gurus who know everything about happiness: happy workers, happy bosses, happy clients, happy shareholders, happy bankers. No more distrust, no more back-stabbing and manipulation, as long as you follow the twelve, twenty, or fifty steps. You – and everybody else.

Hum. What I don't understand is: if happiness is there for the taking and if it can be implemented methodically – at least if we believe the prophets – then why don't I see it all around me? Ever met a "happy employee"? A manager with integrity? An intrinsically motivated and smiling colleague? No – the only happy people are the Prophets who spread the Message. Who wouldn't be happy with so many pupils and disciples?

It would be all right if it went no further. If those Prophets were simply quacks. But the situation is far more serious than we may imagine. Their methods are not only ineffectual, they actually make things worse. They increase the pain. The chasm only becomes wider. It results in more of the same.

There's only one way to make the drivel bearable. Because we'll never be able to get ourselves completely out of the painful position we're in. And the solution is simple. Very simple. From today on, we stop pushing everyday reality through the grinder of propriety. That grinder simpler doesn't help. It leads nowhere. A dead-end. No, from now on, we'll only use normal language. The language of jealousy, of cruelty, of hate. The language of

anger, coldness, and power. Language that bewitches, humiliates, defiles. The language of villains – the language of rats!

Refined language	Neutral language	Rat language
• Serving leader	• Manager	• Boss
• Coaching	• Showing leadership	• On your back
• Inspire	• Motivate	• Manipulate
• Colleague	• Actor	• Bastard
• Trap	• Weakness	• Loutishness
• Accommodate	• Interest	• Lining your pockets
• Forceful	• Result-oriented	• Dominating
• Committed	• Doing your job	• Crawling
• Develop	• Actions	• Tricks
• Mission	• Business plan	• Rubbish
• Strength	• Influence	• Power

The language of the Rat

The language of the rat. In this book, we will try to use the language of the villains, those we call “opportunists,” because they calculate, make plans, and strike. This causes uneasy emotions, resistance, and disbelief; are there really people like this who are so opportunistic and rotten? Yes. Loads.

“So explain why this solution – this one rather than the two you have rejected – why should this solution make the divide between experience and the sanitised view of our professional activities less painful if the result is such a mix of emotions and reactions? Isn’t that a contradiction?”

Yes. But only for those people who like happy books and delusion. Only they will object. They will become confused and, in a knee-jerk reaction, reach for the familiarity of their little sweet words. But for those who have the courage to peel away their over-developed scabs and look the demon company directly in the eye, and for those who dare to take the next step and join the ranks of those who consider themselves rats – for all those, a new game will emerge that will take them to a new level of perception. They will find a soothing poultice to draw out the puss of intellectual drivel. In this letter, I offer you cold compresses, splints, and warm blankets.

We will bridge the gap between pretty words and everyday practice by discussing the question: how to be a rat. This is the ultimate reason for this book. The emergence of the rat is another story altogether.

Emergence

A few years ago, I was involved in a large re-organisation of middle and higher professional education. It involved the introduction of new teaching methods, new material, new administration forms, mergers, and alternative means of governmental funding. I had the role of project manager, which meant that I spent hours sitting at the table with governors,

principals, course developers, human resources managers, and PR specialists trying to channel the conversation in a productive way.

During that time, I ran up astronomical telephone bills and drank gallons and gallons of coffee. I soon realised that everybody was as open as a recalcitrant oyster and as personally involved with the daily affairs as a shareholder is with the lot of the workers. Everybody had, tucked away somewhere, a personal agenda, an unpaid bill. And the battle was anything but friendly.

I recall dealing with a principal of a school. He would have to merge with another school and had carefully selected three potential “brides” with whom to make the best possible marriage. Nothing wrong with that. But then I discovered that the good man was only interested in obtaining the best possible – rather, the highest possible – position in the new organisation. Nothing wrong with that, either.

So what made this man a rat? What made him an example for our instruction? He had carefully assessed the dowry he would have to pay. He told me in an unguarded moment at the end of one of our meetings: “Joep, and then I’ll be the rector. And I’ve agreed with them that I’ll get rid of half my staff. Then we’ll merge. That’ll save a lot of money. I can easily get rid of them now. Save a lot of unwanted ballast. The other schools already have too many staff. If I brought all of mine with me, then the situation would be impossible. So, in exchange, I want the job of rector. It’s up to them: either I bring everybody with me and assume a minor role, or the cheaper alternative and a plum job for me. Life is all about choices.”

Yes – life is all about choices. I drove home with mixed feelings: admiration for the cunning calculation, angry with myself for my naivety, and full of disbelief that this was possible... I believe that was the very first time I ever whispered to myself: “What a rat! Fascinating. People like this are much more interesting than all those wimpy organisation advisors who go around preaching corporate salvation.” I’ve met a lot more rats like that. You can spot them easily with a trained eye.

Some time later, I went to an introductory meeting about a new job. That afternoon, I had held talks with a man who had held a whole variety of knives to my throat. He wanted this, he wanted that. With the adrenaline still pumping through me and in great haste, I arrived at the departmental meeting with my new and future colleagues. When they asked me what I had been doing recently, I could only answer: “I’ve been dealing with rats. Rats in all shapes and sizes. Male rats, female rats. Good rats and evil rats. And do you know what the difference is between them?”

Silence.

“No? You don’t recognise a good rat for the rat he is. You only recognise a bad rat. A good rat doesn’t boast about his tricks, about the masterstrokes he has made. I’m a bad rat. A rat looks just as normal as anybody else. They don’t have long eyelashes or strange bobbles on their heads or scars down one cheek. They look like every other father and mother, taking care of their children in a neat suburb. Take a look at the person next to you. They could be a rat. They could be hatching evil plans. They could be plotting against you. Against everybody else.”

My new colleagues looked at each other then returned their gaze to me and burst out laughing.

And it was then that I thought to myself: "I should give a course in this. 'How to be a rat.' And talk about all the tactics and tricks a rat uses." It was another two years before I gathered together the courage, the time, and the inclination to develop such a course.

One day, when business was a little slow, I was sitting at my desk when I thought: "Now's the time to plan the course." I opened my laptop, opened a new document entitled "rat lesson plan" and started, as a good course developer should, writing down a whole list of aims: at the end of this workshop, the participant is capable of analysing the arenas, of choosing rat techniques and employing them...

And at that moment, the telephone rang. "This is M. at Studium Generale. I'm calling to see whether you would be willing to give a talk at a seminar we are organising for the graduates. They feel that they are all under the thumbs of the professors. They are being used. Would you stick up for them?"

They want me to prosecute, I thought. They want me to declaim a *j'accuse*. And what a coincidence that I should, at this very moment, be thinking about a course dealing with political manipulation in companies!

"M," I said, "I really don't feel like moaning and gnashing my teeth with a group of students. It will only confirm them in their role of victim. And that's no good to anybody. But – I have developed a course [*white lie*] called 'How to be a rat.' Wouldn't that interest to graduates? Then you can train them in the fine art of undermining and victimising their professors and superiors. How does that sound? By the way – do you know how to make a whipping boy? I can tell you how to do that as well."

M. burst out laughing and seemed interested. We got down to business. I had exactly four weeks to get everything ready. Then I drove down south on three evenings to teach my first pupils how to live in the sewer. I didn't realise then that I would travel quite a lot in the future, giving those courses. And I certainly didn't think I would be writing you a letter about it. Telling you all about the rat, in all its many guises.

A quick tour of the sewer

I will be dealing with a number of issues in the rest of this letter. For your convenience, I will allow them briefly to pass the review.

An audit The first section of the letter contains an audit, a self-test. Most professionals are quite familiar with personality tests. Things like: "What sort of leader am I?"; "What enigram type am I?"; "Should I be more target-focussed?"; "Am I the material of success?"

My letter wouldn't be complete without such a test. And so I'll be giving you plenty of opportunity in the next section of this letter. You will, of course, appreciate that this test is highly scientific and carefully "tuned." So you should respect the results. Even more important than the results are the "statements." These reflect the right sort of attitude for a rat. I shall discuss this in more depth.

In the arena Some people are a little disappointed that a rat must spend so much time observing and so little time actually "doing." But that is how it is. A good rat will only attack three times a month, for a maximum of five minutes each time. But he knows that when he does attack, he is assured of a victory. And he celebrates that victory in silence, never mentioning it to anybody.

In this part, we take a look at the organisational arenas: the battle-grounds, the boxing-rings. People who can do this are better prepared than their opponents. They can then forge their plans. The most difficult part of this will be to identify the proper actors. We'll take a look at the interests that are served in the company.

And if, after that section, you still think that you can't do anything, that you have no power, then you should just forget about the rest of this letter.

Nine sources of power Everybody has power. And everybody has sources of power. Unfortunately, not everybody is able to access those sources with the same ease. The art is to push ahead with the power that you have, and to get more of the power that you don't have.

We'll be looking at the strength of the monopoly – highly recommended. And what about all those possibilities offered by the organisation and its procedures? You've got more opportunities for tormenting than you imagine. And don't underestimate your body: there's a lot of power there, too. If you want to dive deeper into things, then you should take a look into the possibilities of "panoptic suppression." This is a unique source of various facilities and surprising opportunities. I'll also be talking about the power source that anybody can access: friends, the network. And I will end with the art of sorcery. Because anybody who doesn't know how to cast a spell, will never do well in the arena.

Tricks and moves Ever since the time of Machiavelli, countless lists have been drawn up detailing the golden do's and don'ts for the ruthless ruler. In this letter from the gutter, I will take a look at the most important tactics used by the rat.

We shall deal with the importance of concealing your true nature. A good rat is never recognised as one. And we now know the same is true of terrorists. The most evil people live a normal and respectable life, divest themselves of any characteristics that might show them up for what they are, and then emerge unexpected for their five-minute assault...

We will also look at the micro-rat-tactics that can be used at a moment's notice. Just to give you a taste for what is to come: We'll be talking about how to draw up a front in the department and how best to play one colleague off against another. We'll talk about subversion tactics. How do people do that? How do you get rid of a manager? How do you sabotage a boss that gets your goat? Read on – and be amazed how simple these tactics are. There's so much to tell about the manipulative person.

Did you know that the highest level of verminicity is to make yourself unpredictable? So that neither your boss nor your colleagues are ever sure of which way you will turn? It makes them crazy, and that gives you the chance to turn their mistakes to your advantage. In this game, I will explain the bureaucratic work of the rat.

A lot of the rat's work involves using the weakness of others for his or her own advantage. This is where the rat differs from the therapist. The latter is expected to manipulate you for your own best will. We keep well away from this in this section. If you want to be a good rat, then you must learn to sniff out the hidden desires and fears of your opponent.

Gracían*, a Jesuit priest to the Spanish Court, wrote some four hundred years ago that a made-to-measure thumbscrew could be produced for everybody. And that is true.

* Balthasar Gracían, *The art of worldly wisdom*. A beautifully written life philosophy, still appropriate today.

Everybody has a weak spot, a whim, a nasty habit, a tick, a childish emotion, or a deep fear – something that undermines their autonomy and makes them dependent on the outside world. When you can become that outside world, then you’ve got them in your grasp, in your power. Controlling weaknesses, controlling fear – that’s not at all difficult. You only have to follow two rules.

The larger picture Is there anything more satisfying than moving step by step towards the aims you have set for yourself: taking over the company, playing your competing colleagues off-side, subverting the boss, or taking the initiative away from your boss? But something like that demands a full appreciation of the fine art of collusion and conspiracy.

You’ll have to decide whether you are passive or reactive. You’ll have to consider the opening gambit, the middle game, the hour of truth, and the final thrust. You’ll have to think about what card you should play – and when. And which cards you still need. Timing is the most difficult part of the rat’s game plan.

If you really want to engage in some fine company battle, a struggle for life and death, then inevitably the hour of truth will arrive. And what we all hope is that we have planned everything down to the last detail, overlooked nothing, anticipated every move, and prepared the cleverest move that has ever been played.

And yet – you can still lose. You were holding the weaker hand. You weren’t devious enough. Or you ran out of luck. What then? Do you have the *noblesse oblige* of the defeated rat? Do you dare turn your back on the company, relinquish all luxuries and status, with the prospect of selling copies of *The Big Issue* to former colleagues and having to restrict your fun-shopping to Sainsbury? If you aren’t bothered by such prospects, then you will be strong in the rat game.

But promise me one thing: if the battle is about something really important and you lose – then leave, resign and start again, but never stay. Because if you do, the victors will treat you like shit on their shoes.

Surfing to tradition In this section, I’ll be dealing with a number of highlights in the history of power. All the tricks we use now in our company are part of a long tradition and I think it important that professionals are aware of their roots. But there is more to it than that.

First, knowledge reduces loneliness. You come to understand that others have wrestled with similar problems and have formulated their responses to them.

Second, the tradition is the accumulation of fertile and infertile thoughts, ideas, and techniques. You meet them in proverbs, parables, fables, metaphors, horror stories, and the like. You are always part of the collective competence and incompetence. Tradition is comparable to the Internet: You can find everything there, ripe and ready for harvesting. Knowledge sets you free. You can reject, embrace, or recycle tradition; you can never pretend it doesn’t exist.

And finally, knowledge of your roots makes your political intrigues more adaptable. You find an ever-increasing number of alternatives for your actions. More than enough reasons to talk a short trip along the highlights of political dealings.

Epilogue And finally, I’ve written a short epilogue. In it, I sum up the contents of my letter. And that’s the way the story will be told.

Take care

Before you move on to the self-test, a few remarks about the structure of this letter from the gutter.

Precautionary measures As you read this book, you will meet all sorts of people: the bastard boss, the prick of a colleague, the snitch. If your adrenaline levels rise, then that's fine. It's how it should be. Physical excitement is vital. After all, Schopenhauer located the will in the body.

And yet you must refrain from submerging yourself in your wounded pride, your appetite for destruction, or your animal aggressions. That could be dangerous. Intellect must remain at all times in control. And that's why you should take some precautionary measures: regular spells of loneliness in which you can reflect on your situation; distancing yourself from all email and mobile babble; finding a buddy with whom you can scheme and hatch your plans; or developing a fine sense of irony, self-deprecation, and exaggeration. Camp is an excellent method of combating the dark side in others – and in yourself. I, personally, have had good experience with this approach.

Disclaimers Over the years, many people have confessed to me their intrigues, whether great or small. I will reveal these to you in this letter when I consider it necessary. But I have made them anonymous and untraceable to protect the interests of those who put their trust in me. And, as I have already explained, I am more interested in the structure of verminicity than in exposing yet another scandal. Although, I must admit the temptation was sometimes hard to resist. So, any similarity with existing managers, governors, trade union officials, shareholders, and scum bears no relationship to any person, whether living or dead, and is purely coincidental.

I am assuming that you are a mentally healthy person who is sufficiently knowledgeable about yourself and is fully aware of what you do or do not want. So you must accept full responsibility for any actions you may undertake resulting from reading this book; the author cannot be held accountable for any actions thus undertaken. Don't bother complaining to me if you are fired, or sued, or if your husband throws you out of the house; I shall always maintain that this was never intended as a serious book.

And one final warning: welcome to the sewer.