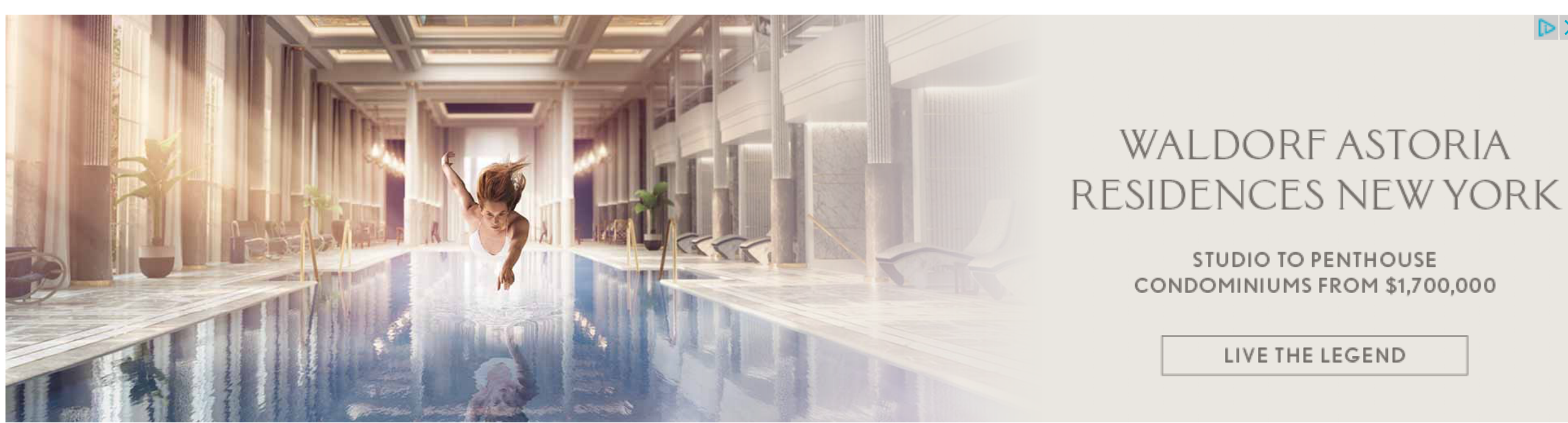


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## Maximizing Money

By Edward Kosner

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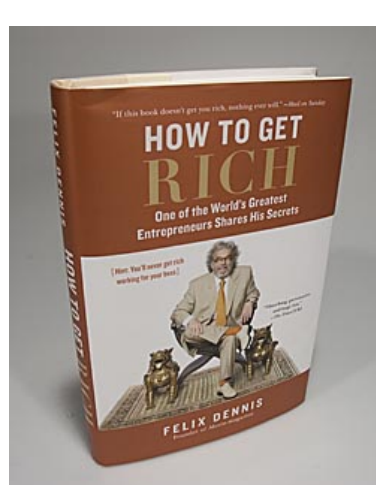
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### How to Get Rich

By Felix Dennis

(Portfolio, 291 pages, \$25.95)

If Machiavelli sat down at his iMac to confect "The Billionaire Prince," it might sound remarkably like Felix Dennis's "How to Get Rich" — without the poetry or the rollicking vulgarity, of course.



Bearded and blustery, Mr. Dennis is the English high-school dropout who parlayed a 1960s hippie magazine called Oz and wall-poster tributes to kung fu martyr Bruce Lee into a publishing empire of computer publications and beer-and-boobs lad mags like Maxim that has made him one of the richest men in Britain. He has, as he likes to remind readers, more money than he can possibly count — somewhere between \$400 million and \$900 million, "I honestly cannot fix a number any closer than that."

Mr. Dennis calls his effort "an anti-self-improvement" book, and he's telling the truth. "The chances of anyone reading it and then becoming rich are minuscule," he writes. His basic message is that only those able to turn themselves into monomaniacal workaholics estranged from loved ones and reviled by rivals — or willing to unsheathe their inner monster — can hope to hit the mega jackpot. "Somewhere in the invisible heart of all self-made wealthy men and women," he says, "is a sliver of razored ice."

He likes to boast about his hedonistic appetites. Counseling wannabe zillionaires to think big but "act small" — "Keeping a sense of proportion and humility" — he invokes his bad old days in the late 1980s and early 1990s: "I spent millions of dollars on drinking, taking drugs and running around with whores. . . . At one time, there were no less than fourteen 'mistresses' depending on a regular stipend from my personal bank account. A single evening's entertainment could come to thirty or forty thousand in the Big Apple, London or Hong Kong."

And he can be hilariously mordant about the magazine industry that made his fortune: "It is a business," he writes, "where our main activity is chopping down millions and millions of trees, flattening the pulp and printing hieroglyphics and images on both sides of it. Then we send the end product out in diesel-guzzling trucks to shops where perhaps 60 percent [about 25% in the U.S.] of them sell to customers. Then we pile the remaining unsold magazines into more diesel-guzzling trucks and take them to a plant where they are either consumed as fuel, buried or shredded or used to make cardboard boxes for refrigerators."

But beneath the braggadocio and buffoonery, Mr. Dennis's book is full of cold-hearted advice for succeeding in any field, some of it familiar, some quite sophisticated. He harps on the essential virtues of stamina, persistence and focus, and on the paramount importance of execution. "If you never have a great idea in your life, but become skilled in executing the great ideas of others," he says, "you can succeed beyond your wildest dreams." It's good to panic in a crisis, he says, because it focuses the mind on what has to be done. Grovel for capital if you need to but always remember: "No deal is a must-do deal."

Indeed, Mr. Dennis's don'ts are probably more useful than his do's. Never part with even a share of a business you founded, although partnerships in new ventures are acceptable because you can always walk away from them. Give generous bonuses to your employees, but don't let them share in the money from an asset sale. Don't hand out company credit cards, cellphones or cars — the expenses run riot. Never delegate authority to people just like you — find a complementary brain instead. Avoid venture capitalists with their mania for short-term results. Never loan money to friends — make it a gift. Never trust a senior accountant who won't take a vacation (because he is afraid that his thievery will be uncovered while he is away from the office).

Close readers of "How to Get Rich" will find an opaque reference midway through to the author's determination "never to be sent back to prison." Later Mr. Dennis clarifies the story a tad — it was an obscenity case against Oz magazine. But you've got to look elsewhere for the details. In 1971, three editors of Oz, including Mr. Dennis, then 24, were found guilty of corrupting children and sentenced to hard labor at Wormwood Scrubs prison in west London. Mr. Dennis was given a lighter sentence than his confederates because the judge deemed him "very much less intelligent" than the other two and thus less responsible. As it happened, Mr. Dennis served only a few days before he was sprung. In early April, he created a small flap when he bragged in a Times of London interview that, about 25 years ago, he killed a man — who was harassing one of his woman friends, he said — by pushing him off a cliff. Mr. Dennis later called the reporter to say that it was the Chablis and his medicine talking.

Mr. Dennis's prose has its flaws. He seems to think, for example, that prevaricate is a synonym for procrastinate. He can contradict himself. "Lead. Do not be led," he exhorts on one page, but three pages later he hails the virtues of listening to staffers. And he can be comically unaware of his own predilections. "Watch out for blowhards," he warns. But no matter, his book is full of lively ideas and language to match — and, besides, his true writing interest these days is poetry. He has published a couple of volumes and even had his poems recited by members of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Based on the examples in "How to Get Rich," his verse will never be confused with that of his beloved Metaphysical Poets, but some of it is deft.

Another of his aesthetic preoccupations is the Forest of Dennis, an ambitious project to plant a huge tract in Warwickshire with saplings to create the largest deciduous forest in England — late but fitting atonement, perhaps, for all those trees that had to be sacrificed to make Felix Dennis rich.

Mr. Kosner is the former editor of Newsweek, New York, Esquire and the New York Daily News. His memoir, "It's News to Me," has been reissued in paperback.

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