I cannot claim to have approached the subject of this book in a mood of detached. Eighteen of the most miserable months of my life were spent as a local reporter for The New York Times. It was during this period, 1954-55, that I first met Gay Talese. He was working in the sports department and, as I remember, getting nowhere. He was terribly bright and showed it; he wrote exceedingly well; and he was what we boys raised in the Middle West used to call a “snappy dresser.” At that time, none of these qualities was very helpful to rapid advancement at the Times and it was apparent that Talese was not long for the Times.

But Talese has a problem and I suppose I have it, too—and it is probably shared by anyone who has ever worked for the Times. Even when we find it in error, or distorted, or just dishonest, we are reluctant, often unwilling, to judge the Times by those standards we use to measure other institutions, spiritual and temporal.

One personal example. When Talese was correcting the galley proofs for this book, he called me to check whether the facts I had given him in an interview were correctly set down. They were, with one important exception. Talese had written that I had resigned from the Times. I told him this was not right: I had been fired. “But look,” he replied, “no one ever gets fired from the Times. They simply get moved farther and farther back in the newsroom where they die a slow death.” I begged Talese to report what I had told him; the fact of being fired from the Times was something that would look good in my resume. But he never corrected the mistake.

This incident, trivial though it may be, suggests that most of us have conditioned ourselves, or have been conditioned by the Times, to believe that the people who run it are above the baser instincts and struggles of human existence. Well, they are not. And that is what this book is about. Then why should anyone outside the field of journalism be interested in the petty jealousies, plots, counterplots and villains (there are no heroes) which Talese so vividly describes? Given the holier-than-thou attitudes that ooze out of the Times every day of the week, the discovery of this mare’s nest is like seeing dirty linen hung out in a detergent factory.

But there is more to it. The man who has run the Times—Adolph Ochs; Arthur Hays Sulzberger, who married Ochs’s daughter; Orvil Dryfoos, who married Arthur Hays Sulzberger’s daughter; and now Sulzberger’s son, Arthur O. (Punch) Sulzberger—are good and decent men. The members of this family do not run the Times primarily for profit (though profitable it is); they run it as a public service. (Continued on page 3)

Sander Vanocur is anchor man on NBC-TV’s “First Tuesday” show.
The Kingdom and the Power

is uniquely interesting for what it tells us about the men who compete for the owners' favor—in the hope that they in turn may be empowered to determine how this "public service" will be run. The stakes are enormous. The power to influence men's lives. The gratification that comes from the knowledge that your newspaper is taken by those in high places in government and business. The knowledge that you have the strength and the skill to move mountains.

The final struggle came down to two men: Clifton Daniel, the managing editor; and James Reston, for many years chief of the Washington bureau and the paper's leading political correspondent. Both ostensibly served under the executive editor, Turner Catledge, a Southerner of monumental charm and cunning. In the strictest sense, Daniel, who had achieved national prestige by marrying Margaret Truman, had been Catledge's protege, and he served him loyally. Reston served no one save the family, to whom he endeared himself by his professional ability and by his unfailing capacity to see no distinction between the national interest and the interest of The New York Times, even when the two were not the same. Everyone played the same power game, pretty much the same way, but because Reston is a preacher about him, his moves must have seemed to the family more disinterested than those of his competitors.

In the end, as Talese relates, Reston won, but not before a number of able men the assistant managing editor, Abe Rosenthal; Crom Wicker, the Washington bureau chief (chosen by Reston as his successor); and James Greenfield, whom Daniel and Rosenthal had chosen to replace Wicker, had been wounded in a terrible struggle for power.

In a curious way Talese leaves one with the impression that the wrong side won. This is not to pass judgment on the personal character of Reston or Daniel or on those of their supporters. But when he was named executive editor, replacing Catledge, Reston brought to the running of The New York Times a philosophy, peculiar to powerful journalists who have spent too many years in Washington: the idea that it is the duty of the Times to be a part, along with the government, of the apparatus that runs the country. In this arrangement, the Times scolds, it criticizes, but it is rarely outraged. And those who do become outraged about what is going on in this country as Tom Wicker often seems to be—soon lose favor with officials in high places, who enjoy, from time to time, being consulted and flattered by those in high places. Reston is now in charge and Daniel serves under him. It was Reston, after all, who on the eve of the Bay of Pigs persuaded Orvil Dryfoos to play down the Kennedy Administration's plan for the Cuban invasion, an act which prompted Kennedy to say later that if the Times had printed all that it knew about the invasion, it might have forced him to cancel it.

One cannot be sure, but Talese seems to imply that Daniel and his ally Rosenthal, both of whom are responsible for the brighter look the Times has recently shown in certain sections, would have followed a different path; they might have avoided the notion, so pronounced in Washington, that newspapers, especially The New York Times, should be part of the system, reporting its workings, criticizing its judgments, but rarely if ever questioning its assumptions.

Reston is now in charge and Daniel serves under him. The hand of reconciliation has been offered to all by Reston, who is in so many ways a generous man. But the struggle for power continues. The story of The New York Times, as told in this book, is that the family knows how to win.