

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



The Dangerous Book for Middle-Aged Men

David Quantick

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About the Book

That Dangerous Age has arrived. It's the male menopause. The mid-life crisis.

He's bought an electric guitar and plays 'Smoke on the Water' to the cat at all hours. He's started to dress with his jeans hoiked too high like his hero Jeremy Clarkson. Harley Davidson brochures are delivered in brown envelopes. He's started pulling in his beer gut when he's talking to his teenage secretary. And a book on tantric sex has just appeared on the bathroom shelf, next to his hair dye.

The Dangerous Book for Middle-Aged Men. Read the signs.

About the Author

Writer and broadcaster David Quantick is the author of the bestselling *Grumpy Old Men* and a BAFTA-award-winning contributor to *Harry Hill's TV Burp*. He also created the Radio Four series *One* and writes and presents Radio Two's *Blogger's Guide to Music*.

The Dangerous Book for Middle-Aged Men

A Manual for Managing the Mid-Life Crisis

David Quantick



For Andy and Fiona, who have put up with my dangerous middle age for about 20 years now, and Junior and Nell, who will have to put up with it for the next 20 . . .

INTRODUCTION

'The lime-green Vauxhall Zafira swerved on a sixpence to narrowly avoid the three heat-seeking ground-to-air missiles, its tyres squealing over the neat tarmac of Acacia Gardens as it executed a perfect U-turn into the small driveway of number 32 . . .'

We all dream of living life dangerously, but we can't all be international assassins or dangerous super-spies. Or so we are told. There is surely more to life than the ordinary; and there is also surely no real reason why the fantasies of our childhood, our adolescence and, if we're completely honest, our 20s and 30s, shouldn't at least try and come true.

This, at least, is the thinking behind this book. This is the philosophy that fires *The Dangerous Book For Middle-Aged Men*.

' . . . Bond instinctively disengaged the child locks. 'Keep your heads down, kids, and run like hell,' he snapped, and the two children, a flurry of school bags and rumpled uniforms, obediently sped toward the front door, silhouetted by the fireball that had engulfed the conservatory extension at number 34, its flames billowing perilously close to the potting shed where Mr Norris kept his prized Atco Royale sit-on lawnmower and its three tidily stacked canisters of two-stroke petrol . . .'

Middle age used to be a time to sit back on your burst sofa, tap out your aged pipe and settle in for those ever-so-slightly bleak years between marriage and retirement. The term 'middle-aged' has been a kind of insult for so long that we forget it's only a description. Being a middle-aged man is no bar to being an exciting – even a Dangerous – man. Look at everyone from Iggy Pop to Captain Scott, from Richard Hammond to Johnny Rotten. These people did not and have not and *will not* let middle age wither them nor custom stale their infinite dangerousness.

And now, thanks to *The Dangerous Book for Middle-Aged Men*, you can join them.

‘ . . . Bond flung open the driver’s door and creased his eyes in pain. ‘Agh, my back,’ he winced, as his seat belt relinquished its firm hold of his manly paunch and spun back into its socket. Instinctively he flung himself from the vehicle just as its windscreen erupted in a hailstorm of glass. He careered over the box hedge and onto the garden patio, bullets scything past his ears like angry mosquitoes . . . ’

Maybe you’re suffering a mid-life crisis. Maybe you feel that growing old gracefully is all right for Nelson Mandela and Her Majesty the Queen but right now you’re not interested. You are only middle-aged once and the world, if not entirely your oyster, still has lots of oystery bits left in it. If so, then *The Dangerous Book for Middle-Aged Men* is the book for you. It’s the mid-life manual, the not-yet-anywhere-near-geriatric guidebook. More SAS than Saga, this book will tell you how to live life to the full, and how to do so dangerously.

‘With one final energy-sapping leap he hurled himself upon the pink Lazytown tricycle which propelled him, torpedo-like, to the open front door. ‘It’s for you’, said a stern-looking woman in early middle age, a portable telephone in her outstretched hand. ‘Hello . . . Bond speaking . . . Yes, Tim Bond . . . I see . . . So you’ll be coming to fix the boiler on Wednesday . . . You’d better. Or what? Or you’ll be trying to pull that spanner out from a place you don’t normally find spanners, that’s what.’ Bond put the phone down. A smile played on his lips. A dangerous smile . . . ’

Dreams can become real. The ordinary can be extraordinary. And, with a few hints from this book, YOU can become DANGEROUS!

Now read on . . .

CHAPTER 1

DANGEROUSLY BORED

THERE COMES A point in the life of many British human males when the monotony and/or disappointment of their jobs, relationships or existence makes it increasingly difficult for them to maintain their own image of themselves as a sexually irresistible secret service agent who is licensed to kill. That's what they want you to think, anyway. In actual fact, boredom in the right hands can be both a dangerous weapon and a powerful tool for change.

Consider this: in the East people spend years (and charge lots of money for) teaching and learning how to do nothing at all. They actually train themselves to look at a wall for hours. They are skilled in sitting on the same spot for ages, emptying their minds of all practical thought. They call it 'Zen Buddhism', or 'transcendental meditation'. They say they are achieving 'trance states' and 'nirvana'. And yet, in the West, when we sit in the office or on the train or in the doctor's waiting room doing *exactly* the same thing we call it 'boredom'.

Clearly we need to redefine our terms here. Because when some Zen master in China or India has been staring at the wall for six hours he doesn't get up and go to the loo for a crafty fag. No, he splits a block of wood in two with his bare palm. He does a bit of levitating. He unlocks the secrets of the material universe. There's got to be something in this; your Buddhist positively relishes what we call boredom

because it seems that by tuning out from his existence – or, as we would say, ‘not doing any work’ – he is able to lift himself onto a different plane and become a kind of superman. So we here at *The Dangerous Book* propose a new, exciting way of dealing with boredom – put your ennui to good use, and welcome to the world of Zen Boredom, the riskiest, most exciting form of boredom there is.

Zen Boredom (@ *Dangerous Book For Middle-Aged Men*) is a far from ancient discipline which takes the best of Buddhism, Transcendental Meditation and all the stuff the old bloke in Kung Fu on telly in the 1970s told David Carradine and applies it to modern life. Zen Boredom says, next time you’re in the office, staring at a Garfield calendar on the far wall for the 78th time and trying to remember if you’ve had lunch or if you just wish it was lunchtime, let your mind drift. Let it settle on some striking thought – how you might be able to get away with offing your co-workers, or perhaps how with one keystroke you could hack into the wages department and increase your salary by a million pounds. Let your mind walk free as your body prepares to harden itself and decapitate Skinner from the third floor with one slice of your Zen hand.

Of course, as with all great disciplines of the mind, Zen Boredom has to be mastered properly before it can be tested. Otherwise, as you approach the threshold of truly enlightened dullness one false move might mean that instead of becoming a finely honed mind warrior you might just go mad from boredom and spend the rest of your working life sitting in the corner by the photocopier, rocking slightly and moaning. Then again, this is considered normal behaviour in most offices, so no real loss frankly.

CHAPTER 2

DANGEROUS CAREERS

AT THIS TIME in your life - the midpoint - you are like the bubble on a spirit level. Halfway along, the pressure is on you to maintain some kind of balance and not go frothing up and down like a pint of lager balanced on a clown's head. You are naturally inclined to rebel against this; who wouldn't be? Look at your job. It's awful, isn't it? It pays just enough to cover your mortgage and your debts. It's no fun whatsoever, and you suspect deep down that you're probably not very good at it. Your colleagues either patronise you or despise you, you have to wear a tie, and the local sandwich shop is revolting. And here you are, midpoint, six inches along the ruler of life. Why not just walk out the door? 'Stick your rotten job,' you say to the boss as you throw your tie in the bin and walk out with your head held high, cheered to the roof by your chastened male colleagues and kissed by your now unusually beautiful female colleagues.

It's not going to be like that, though, is it? Most likely the boss will be out, so you'll have to go and see his assistant who's a jumped-up little twerp earning five times what you do because he went to Oxbridge and you'll get nervous and he won't hear you saying 'Stick your rotten job,' so you'll have to repeat it, which will make you feel foolish, and the whole thing will take place inside a glass-walled office, so instead of your colleagues hearing your clarion call of

departure they'll just see a jumped-up little twerp soundlessly laughing at you, and when you come out everyone will assume that in fact you've been sacked, and they won't be surprised.

Nevertheless, we do sympathise. If you're reading this, chances are you feel you have to do something, and we have options to suggest; but remember that, like the bubble in the spirit level, too much displacement and you'll just explode in a little cloud of whatever they make the bubbles in spirit levels from. So, while this is a book devoted to finding ways of adding Danger to your life, we are bound to advise you that, like mortgage rates and indeed bubbles in spirit levels, your good luck can go down as well as up. Maybe you don't even need to actually leave work - maybe you can be Dangerous from within. Mao said the revolutionary moves among the people like a fish moves through water, but then it was his water. Subvert! Disrupt! Attack! Be Dangerous!

MAKING THE BOSS LOOK A FOOL

The boss is a fool. This is a given. Male, female, young, old, French - it doesn't matter, all bosses are fools. They may have made the company fifty million pounds more than last year and you may have caused several factories to close - so what? The boss is still a fool. And this can be exploited. Any decision the boss makes will have consequences; every action has an equal and opposite reaction, and if the office has made enormous profits thanks to your boss, then somewhere else someone is suffering. When the new figures go up, bring in that DVD of children in South-East Asia being forced at gunpoint to make products similar to yours. Several of the younger women in the office will cry and the tea ladies will look askance at the boss. If he rewards a worker with promotion, hint strongly that this was done to destroy a co-worker who's been waiting for a better job

since 1990. Never mind that said co-worker can barely work the lavatory, let alone run a department: pretty soon the boss will be seen as a harsh crusher of souls.

Keep this up and one day you will be the boss, and everyone will hate *you*. Excellent . . .

BEING KICKED UPSTAIRS

Or The Foreman Ploy. If you're not so much really bad at your job as just a pain in the arse who nobody likes, it can be difficult in these litigious times for an employer to actually sack you. Use this fact. Try and cut down on all the things you do which might actually lead to a sacking – the best way to do this is to stop working altogether – and concentrate on honing the aspects of your personality which people really dislike. Soon people won't care what happens to you so long as you just go away. You are now in a position, amazingly, to demand a better job with more pay – only in a different office. Try for one by the sea, because maybe you'll buy a yacht now.

SHIFTING THE BLAME

Of course it was you who cocked up. So what? It's always going to be somebody, isn't it? And at least when it's you, that means you've got some idea of what's going on. In a way, your incompetence has allowed you to control the situation. So long as nobody else finds out that you've lost an account/insulted a new client/flooded Dundee, then you are the master. Use this strange new undeserved power while you can. Lay a trap for a rival. Spread rumours that in his last job he lost accounts/insulted clients/flooded large Scottish towns. Then, when news gets out he or she will get the blame because they 'did the same thing at their last place of work'.



Oops!

DISRUPTION

If it looks like you're making a mess of things, your role model here is the idiot rogue trader Nick Leeson: the best way out is to *really* make a mess of things. Instead of just getting a few numbers crunched wrongly, get into the accounts computer and chew things up like a starving dog with a copy of the *Sunday Times*. Don't stop at being inept on the phone, deliberately insult some suppliers. Order things that the company doesn't even understand, let alone need. Get in a couple of tons of cold-fusion components. Buy a Fabergé egg. Introduce cats into the ventilation system. Celebrate Canada Day by giving the company to

some Canadians you met online. The possibilities are endless.

GETTING SACKED IN A GOOD WAY

There are very few good ways of getting sacked. Anything involving nudity, for example, is always bad. Death and physical injury also will not look good at any future job interview. Even incompetence, however much it may be an essential part of the daily office grind, is frowned upon and won't get you a good reference (although see GETTING KICKED UPSTAIRS). So if all else fails, and you are going to leave your job in an involuntary fashion, make sure you go out the way you want to go out. This may require some preparation. It's no good just shouting 'You can't fire me! I quit!' because the boss will just say 'No, I fired you. You can't just say it and then it's true.' Similarly, walking out of his office grinning and making thumbs-up gestures is unlikely to fool anyone either. You need a plan.

Before you get sacked - and it shouldn't come out of the blue, people are always getting sacked, even competent people - establish a backstory. Create a file on your desktop called WHISTLEBLOWER! and cover it with your hand when people walk past, so they'll be bound to come back later and look at it. Pretend you're phoning *Panorama* or *Newsnight* with information about your employer. Say 'Not for long' whenever the boss makes a statement about what the company is doing (this is always good, by the way, as it makes you look like you know something, and might actually worry the boss). This way, when you do get the heave-ho you can give your former co-workers the impression that you were working on a big exposé of the company and you have been scapegoated.

PRETENDING YOU'VE NOT BEEN SACKED

Ordinarily this is a rather drab refusal to admit failure and conjures up images of a man in a sitcom saying goodbye to his wife and going to the park to eat sandwiches from his briefcase. If this is the plan that appeals to you, make it a bit more Dangerous. Don't go to 'work' in your usual suit. Dress as D'Artagnan and claim you've been asked to join The Three Musketeers. When you leave the house, put on a false moustache, come home and attempt to seduce your own wife. Spend your savings on a sandwich board and parade up and down outside the office claiming that 'THEIR PRODUCTS ARE NUCLEAR DEATH'.

Or, as this is still England and we're a bit reticent, just keep going into work. Most of your colleagues will assume they were mistaken about you being sacked. If you keep your head down you can go in every day, read the paper, check your email, etc, and if you keep doing it long enough they'll probably start paying you. You might even get promoted.

GETTING A NEW JOB

There are no jobs. Your best bet is to *create* a job, something that's never been done before. Here are some starter tips:

DUELLIST

Offer to fight duels for people, then run away with the money after sending an email to both parties that says YOU WON, I KILLED HIM FOR YOU. They'll be too scared to call the police.



Wanker!

SPONSORED PERSON

Get sponsored. These days people send the money upfront, removing the necessity to do anything. Keep the money. Those kids in Africa would do the same for you.

SPOKESMAN

Become a spokesman. Just open a website on the day of any crisis - water, war, celebrity death - and claim to be the spokesman for the topic. Charge for your opinions, no matter how foolish they are.

FALSE-IDENTITY MAN

Pretend to be someone else. Members of Status Quo, sons of playwrights, film stars, all these people have been victims of organic identity theft as conmen go round getting free meals, hotel rooms and entertainment by claiming to be

them. Be imaginative. Tell people you are the real Sting and the one on TV is a ringer, in case pop fans decide to assassinate him. Claim you are the heir to the throne, or would be if King George VI hadn't killed your grandfather in a bare-knuckle boxing contest.

BUSKER

You don't even need a song; most commuters hurry past and only hear the odd bar or two. Simply learn three seconds of 'Blowing In The Wind' and repeat until rich.

CHAPTER 3

TREACHEROUS TRADES

DO YOU REMEMBER when as a youth, sitting in classrooms and learning things that would never be useful to you, like French and Art History, you would see other youths walking past your school, youths who had been lucky enough to leave school before you and who even at a tender teen age had jobs, and money which they could use to buy drinks and fund sex with? Early leavers seemed to have all the fun. These youths might have been working in a domestic arena, they might have spent their lives round other people's houses, present and future, but they were having fun and earning money, something you have always found hard to manage, the fun being had generally when the money wasn't being earned and vice versa. Never mind that these days you have a 'proper' job which almost covers your enormous monthly mortgage, and that nearly every year you can have an expensive holiday in a place you don't want to go but your family do - your previously youthful contemporaries may now be as old as you but they still seem to be living an exciting 'on the edge' lifestyle, cash in hand, can of lager in hand, driving more exciting cars than you have, clearly having no mortgage worries in either their UK or Spanish homes, and also enjoying a freedom in matters of both sex and tattoos that you can only dream of.

So perhaps now is the time to hone your DIY skills to a vaguely professional level . . . but be careful. Those public-

information films from the 1970s were right. The Home is a Death Trap!

ELECTRICIAN

So here's a question - how many Dangerous Middle-Aged Men does it take to change a light bulb? One - you! The centrepiece of all home improvement, DIY and so on. Electricity is everything, because it fuels the telly, the DVD, the computer and the microwave - the four horsemen of the modern hearth. Without it, we are stumbling Bronze Age hippies. With it, we can do anything. No wonder, then, that its secrets are so closely guarded and its high priests so highly paid. And in a world where men of a certain age, even though they have lived in the SAME HOUSE for a quarter of a century, do not entirely know where the fuse box is, or indeed what they would do if they found it, the electrician is king. No wonder they charge five hundred quid just to leave their presumably beautifully lit dens.

You may be keen to learn the skills of the electrician, but remember: these are actual skills. You can't just tell the wife, 'Don't worry, darling, I'll soon have the computer and the DVD working.' Can you? Well, yes, thanks to the simple tenet of Dangerous DIY you can. The glory of this philosophy is a simple one: if you do something and it doesn't work, well, it wasn't working before, was it? Just keep sticking wires into sockets and swapping fuses around until something happens. The truth about most gadgets now, you see, is that, because nobody knows how they work, the people who built them have to make them *easy to switch on*. You might have no idea how the furry metal bar at the bottom of your kettle makes the water boil, but you know that the light-up plastic switch on the handle makes the furry bar do whatever it does, and if you can make that work, bob's your uncle.

But do bear in mind that electricity is innately Dangerous. Quite why we ended up deciding to use it to power all our stuff instead of water or steam is a mystery, but use it we do. So think on – whenever you go to work with electricity take precautions. Rubber gloves, rubber boots, rubber trousers . . . in fact, a full frogman outfit is your safest option. Turn everything off before you start, because you never know, there might be some residual electricity lurking in some old sockets. Take the batteries out of everything. Take everything out of everything. In fact, just take it all back to the shop and buy a new one. She'll never know.

CARPENTER

People have been doing carpentry for literally thousands of years, so you'd think it would be embedded in our gene pool by now. After all, kids are born with language skills, so surely knocking off the odd chair now and then should be part of our hereditary skillset. But no: it seems that the only people who can do things with saws and nails are actual trained carpenters. When you think about it like that, it makes complete sense that Jesus was a carpenter; after all, he could turn water into wine and feed the Five Thousand, neither of which are much more difficult than building a shelf.

The problem with carpentry is that everything has to be straight, like Christian rock. But unlike Christian rock, carpentry also has to be good, because carpentry tends to involve stuff that people put things on, often themselves. (The history of carpentry is essentially the history of storage, from cupboards to mugs to beds, all of which are inventions into which you place other things.) Thus it is quite hard to fake carpentry. Also you can lose a thumb. Sadly, the only solution to being a carpenter is to learn to do it properly. This means actual skill, and no reward, and also,