

*Man made the electric light, to take us out of the dark
Man made the boat for the water, like Noah made the ark
This is a man's world, this is a man's world
But it wouldn't be nothing
Nothing, without a woman or a girl*

—James Brown, “It’s A Man’s Man’s Man’s World,” 1966

Boys to Men

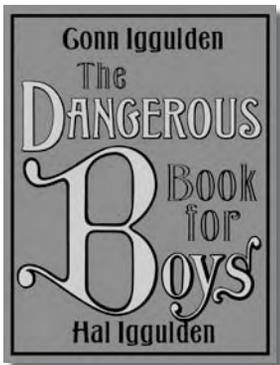
REVIEWED BY ROBERT L. JONES

When I was a boy growing up in the suburbs of Baltimore, few songs stuck with me the way this one did. I think I was nine or ten, and upon hearing the lush string introduction and Brown’s impassioned wailing, I suddenly grasped the concept of chivalry, and that being a man meant taking on responsibilities.

Where *have* all the men gone? In the forty-plus years since James Brown’s iconic song was released, there now seems to be a dearth of real men walking around, but a *lot* of pouty thirtysomethings still living in their parents’ basements, sponging off mom and dad, unable to commit to something so simple as a *lease*, let alone a wife and kids.

I don’t blame the feminists for turning boyhood into a disease that only Ritalin can cure, with Prozac to prevent its recurrence. I blame the parents, *fathers* in particular, for being so easily lulled into letting public-school counselors poison their sons’ minds with emasculating garbage. To answer the universal plea of dads who haven’t the guts to face down the educational bureaucrats—“what could I do?!?”—Let me quote another man’s man, Don Vito Corleone: “You can act like a man!”

You can start acting like a man by taking some responsibility for your son’s upbringing. Again, to quote the Godfather, “a man who doesn’t spend time with his family can never be a real man.” Unplug the TV, remove the batteries



Conn and Hal Iggulden,
*The Dangerous Book for
Boys*. (New York: Collins,
2007), 270 pages, \$24.95.

from the Game Boy, hide the cell phone—and put this exciting volume in your boy's hands.

The Dangerous Book for Boys has become a huge bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic since it was first released in the United Kingdom last year and in the U.S. this summer. Its authors, brothers Conn and Hal Iggulden, set out to compile a handbook of knowledge no boy should be without, such as how to make invisible ink, navigate by the stars at night, and tie the sorts of complicated knots that sailors can.

It has much the same information as a Boy Scout handbook, but without the boring textbook-style arrangement. The authors actually made this book *fun* by organizing it for how boys actually think. It jumps from one topic to another, not haphazardly, but in a sophisticated, almost Montessorian, manner that lets the reader follow his innate curiosity. What I like most is that it's not meant to be read front-to-back; rather, open it to any page and you'll find fascinating facts, stories, or projects. This book's designed to become dog-eared over the years of a boy's childhood.

It's an excellent guide for fostering a young man's self-reliance, full of useful do-it-yourself skills, such as making homemade batteries and electromagnets, learning coin tricks, and even memorizing the Navajo code-talkers' phonetic alpha-

The Dangerous Book for Boys
will appeal to “every boy from eight to eighty,”
even many previously diagnosed
as immune to books.

bet. Just as importantly, it has many more-involved projects that dads and sons can work on together, like building a tree house, making a go-cart, and hunting and cooking a rabbit. Your son will have much fonder memories of you teaching him the rudiments of carpentry and marksmanship than he ever will from being dragged to a Promise Keepers™ rally.

He will meet some genuine heroes from an age long before boys aspired to become, well, not anything at all, really. With beautiful color illustrations and maps, he can relive the battles of Hastings and Gettysburg and the valorous men who fought them. There are adventurous biographies about such men as Antarctic explorer Robert Scott, and aviator Douglas Bader, who took a commission with the RAF to become an ace fighter pilot despite the fact that he lost both legs as a young man in a flying accident.

This is the story that most moved me, because I saw in Bader the same qualities of character my own grandfather had. Right after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Evan Tucker, Jr., who lost the use of both legs to polio as a child, stood on his crutches all day outside an Army induction center on December 8, 1941, but the





Army turned him down. Reading Bader's account made me think that perhaps my granddad would have realized his dream of "fighting the good fight" for his country, had he been born in the land of his fathers.

The most charming entry is the Iggulden's advice about girls, which imparts both gentlemanly guidance and tips on not being an immature ogre. Their observations are both practical and socially prudent. They're certainly more levelheaded than the messages schools send out nowadays, with their strange mixture of hormonally agitating sex-ed classes and the chilling effect that sexual-harassment-awareness homilies subject kids to. My favorite tip was: "Avoid being vulgar. Excitable bouts of windbreaking will not endear you to a girl, just to pick one example."

The Dangerous Book for Boys is full of common sense and dry humor, and will appeal to "every boy from eight to eighty," even many previously diagnosed as immune to books. A friend's son received it as a birthday gift, and before his parents could put it up for sale on eBay, he surprised them by using its illustrations to make a pirate flag.

The only drawback is that in adapting this British book for an American audience, some details got lost in the translation. For example, while there are excellent chapters on the rules of rugby, stickball, and soccer, conspicuously *absent* is a

It's a superb parenting manual for raising a self-confident, polite, and efficacious youngster.

chapter on America's national religion, football. That's football as in Brett Favre, the "Fighting Irish," and "Hail to the Redskins" (America's *real* team)—*not* football as in "Foosball," Pelé, and *Bend It Like Beckham*. Somebody at Collins's New York offices should have informed the authors that there's hardly anything "dangerous" about a sport that moms during the 1960s and '70s made their boys play "because you might break your leg playing football." Perhaps the editors missed this minor detail because New York's football teams have all moved to New Jersey.

That small criticism aside, *The Dangerous Book for Boys* is chock full of the timeless rituals that comprise a boy's rite of passage into manhood. It's a superb parenting manual for raising a self-confident, polite, and efficacious youngster, mainly because parents aren't the primary target audience—your boy will gladly devour its pages himself. **TMI**