

The beginning of a not-so-benign existence

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Let's face it: Our lives are dull. They're just a mindless combination of classes that we don't care about, meetings that don't really matter and parties that, at best, don't degrade us in our pathetic attempts to enjoy ourselves. That was my life. Pathetic and dull and completely uninteresting. I know what I wanted, I just didn't know how to get there.

"This Book Will Change Your Life" promised to give me a new direction. Written by a group of authors collectively known as "Benrik," the book is more practical than a philosophy textbook. According to Benrik, the book "will help you poke a stick in the spokes of your routine." It offers daily instructions for readers who want to get rid of their mundane lifestyle. After 365 days of ordinary tasks, the book guarantees a change. But not just an average change — a life-changing change that changes your life.

One might expect these instructions to be along the lines of "meet a new neighbor," "keep a journal" or "find inner peace." But instead "This Book Will Change Your Life" encourages you to send a letter to a mass murderer on day 13. It even gives you the addresses of some infamous ones — like Son of Sam, the Unabomber and Charles Manson — to get you started. Day 177 tells you to try to seduce someone way out of your league, and day 286 tells you to ignore the media all day.

Most readers don't actually follow the instructions (I haven't yet). The fun comes in reading the outrageous and random passages and speculating on the consequences of the looney acts suggested in the book. We can't all take a week off and travel to France to act stereotypically French (smoke 60 Gauloises), but wouldn't it be amazing if we could?

The book plays an interesting game and cashes in on our obsession with finding meaning in life. There must be some obvious significance to our everyday lives or else they automatically become worthless. Benrik is partially satiric in a shallow book pretending to be deep. Perhaps we spend too much time analyzing and not enough just living.

After one year of going completely out of your way to find meaning, you may end up with a more meaningless life coated with superficiality pretending to be more than that.

The last day not only gives us a final instruction, but a subtle warning. By the time you come full circle on your journey of self discovery, you may be in jail, alone or homeless. Those are just a few of the consequences of purposefully looking for a purpose.

The things that do indeed change your life don't blatantly state that in their title. But again, Benrik doesn't expect us to take a bombastic book too seriously. After all, we can't all just take a year off and strictly follow the instructions in the book (no sleep day, no underwear day, pregnancy test day, talk in cliches day, go through a phase day), but wouldn't it be amazing if we could? Now that's life-changing.

— *Oscar Melendrez*

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