

RULES FOR
MAVERICKS
A MANIFESTO
FOR DISSIDENT
CREATIVES
PHIL BEADLE



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You do what you are. You're born with a gift. If not that, then you get good at something along the way. And what you're good at, you don't take for granted. You don't betray it.

Morgan Freeman¹

Introduction:
maverick
nature'

1 Morgan Freeman as Detective Alex Cross in the film *Along Came a Spider* (2001).

You.
HUMAN.

You.

Person holding and reading a book that didn't sell particularly well, at a particularly irrelevant millisecond of human history, at which, most likely no other person is holding the same book. You are on page 5, which tells you what the book is about. You are, in all probability, the only person reading this page at this point in time, being disappointed by the fact that this first page tells you that the book you are holding is predominantly about failure: what to do with it; how and why you should rush towards its embrace; what to do when that embrace becomes too crushing; what to think of it; how to escape its comfy cardigan (if you may).

You, friend – like me and like everyone I know and, certainly, like every successful person I have ever known or heard of – **YOU, FRIEND, KNOW OUR DEAR COUSIN, FAILURE, WELL ENOUGH, TOO WELL. YOU MAY HAVE BEEN SHACKLED FOR VASTLY TOO LONG TO HER UNDESIRED, UNWARRANTED HAVERSACK OF PEBBLES AND JAGGED STONES; YOU MAY CARRY HER AROUND WITH YOU DAILY, HEAVILY; YOUR SCHOOLING MAY HAVE GIVEN YOU THE MESSAGE THAT SHE IS YOUR BIRTH RIGHT, PERMANENTLY YOURS TO HAVE, YOURS TO HOLD;** you

might even have begun on

the
downwards
helter-skelter
of
the
desolate
and
started
to
believe
in
the
proven
idiocy
of
destiny –

little more than astrology given a somewhat shitten veneer of respectability by association with ancient Greeks.

You are probably not a bigger failure than this author, nor is it likely that you will have been in receipt of the derisive see-saw mockery of the word “loser” as many times. At the relatively exalted age of 33, I was living in a cold water flat in mid-winter with neither the light nor heat of anything more than a candle, with only the fake middle-class bonhomie of Radios 4 and 3 performing their roles as unsatisfying company, the un-illuminating golden light of a quarter bottle of whiskey being the only thing stopping me from freezing to death. At 33 I lived in the most dangerous area of London and walked daily to my work (as I had no money at all) – four miles away – in the second most dangerous area of London: in a tempest of rain, in broken shoes, with neither umbrella nor coat. At 33 I was a pathetic fool cowering beneath a window, fearing the visit of the bad men. They visited. At 34 I was homeless again.

I am now 51 and not a failure any more in my own mind nor in the minds of others. Now the pointing fingers they point, and their laughing owners they laugh, dismissing the paltry stack of accomplishments both “obsolete and small”² that I’ve “shored against my ruins”³ with three syllables, the plo-siveness of which accidentally match the ugliness of their intent: they sound out the following symbol of debatable idiocy – ‘Maverick’!

MAVERICK, you see, is not a title you award yourself – it is thrown at you by others.

.....

2 Nick Cave, ‘Do You Love Me?’ from *Let Love In* (1994).

3 T. S. Eliot, ‘The Wasteland’, in *The Wasteland and Other Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), p. 43.

There are a number of things more humiliating than waking up from an evening on the tiles, wondering what the hell you did last night, to come, eventually, to the confused and half-remembered recollection of listing stridently to starboard in some bar or other proudly declaiming that you are an “unapologetic maverick (hic)”; then, recalling, in simultaneous revulsion and horror, that, immediately after this, you hiccoughed, burped and collapsed into a spewing pool of your own devastated self-esteem. There are a number of things more humiliating than this, few so richly pitiful.

MAVERICK will be thrown at you by others if you meet certain conditions: the first of which is that you do not ever seek it. The second is that you will (always, ever) have an entirely ambiguous relationship with the badge. It is always ambiguously intended, after all.

It is not a title you award yourself. **A true maverick does not seek (and has only rarely ever sought out of brutal upset or out of bloody mindedness engendered by that upset) marginalisation – they've always regarded their ideas as having some unarguable logic, a degree of mainstream appeal and a hooky enough chorus – and will be initially offended by the award.** Your first experience (or memory) of the word may be of your own pathetic, stuttering reaction to its intended assault: a memory of standing, your sweating spine stuck to the back of a grey shirt as you retreated, under fire, into some bland institutional wall having been in receipt of its tepid accusatory slaughter for the first time.



There will be times when it is directed at you, and the thrower of the javelin might be of the distorted mind that the missile they are hurling is a *sharpened* compliment.

When we are children we attempt to assert our individualism for a while, until we are educated out of it and accept – albeit grudgingly – that we must at least **TRY** to fit in. As adults, we try to fit in (though we might still make some base claim towards iconoclasm predicated around our taste in novelty socks). Mostly, though, we try to fit in. We conform to what is expected of us by those who might either tut-tut at us or blithely destroy our futures if we refuse to obey the rules.

And yet, at the same time as we are joining in with the twelve statutory choruses of the Company Song, a diminished part of us understands that the lyrics are risible and the tune has a top note resonant of fascism; a further, less developed part of us may secretly wish it was us being pilloried in stocks for refusing to “smudge the air”⁴ with devotionals to a god who, like his many distracted cousins, manifests only rarely, and even then only to the palpably insane.

.....
4 Leonard Cohen, 'A Singer Must Die'.

Usually, though, we do not have the guts to stand out for the sake of 'truth'. We may well recognise and quietly applaud the bravery of those who do, even going so far as to attend their funerals at which we'll half-heartedly lament their fatal weakness(es), but in defining them as 'maverick' we throw a word in their direction that we 'think' they might appreciate and that we hope will show them our generally all too well hidden sense of kindredness, all the time blissfully only half-aware that **this word is one of the chief tools any autocracy uses to discredit those who would stand against such.**

"You learn how things are working from what happens to those who challenge how things are working."⁵ If you make any stand against power, then power will stand against and on you. And it will do so with centuries of experience and techniques in how to do so effectively: you will be painted as barbaric, dismissed as stupid and insane, be told to know your place. Most of all, you will be termed 'maverick'. As such, you have no real spurs as a maverick if you are not heartily sick of being described as one. You are not a real maverick if you do not understand that the wages of refusing to conform can be punitive indeed. You are not a real maverick if you want to be a maverick. It is not a choice, it is a dictate; and if that dictate is undeniable, then you will pay for it.

Let's look at the accusation. What does it mean? Or, rather, what motivates this accusation? In bald answer to both questions,

5 Aiidid, '#After Cadaan Studies', referencing Sara Ahmed.

'MAVERICK' IS A TERM THAT CONFORMISTS OR INSTITUTIONS USE TO DIMINISH AND OSTRACISE THOSE FOR WHOM THE SKILL OF CONFORMITY IS TOO UGLY A PROPOSITION TO BE (IN ANY WAY) A ROMANTIC OR POLITICAL POSSIBILITY; THE TERM 'MAVERICK' IS THERE TO LET YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE INTELLECTUALLY HOMELESS, THAT THERE IS NO REAL PLACE FOR YOU IN INSTITUTIONAL OR INTELLECTUAL LIFE AND THAT YOU CANNOT BE A SUCCESS ON THE TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT AS THEY ARE CURRENTLY STRUCTURED, AND SHOULD BE ASHAMED OF THIS, AND OF YOURSELF.

It might be thought to be a marginally politer explication of the word 'weirdo'. This is how power works.

There are a few people (and these are generally (stuck) in their late teens) who identify themselves as being a 'weirdo', and whilst in the bosom(s) of faked social nicety that are most workplaces or political arenas, we cannot openly label someone who doesn't fit easily into the realms of normative sludge with this signifier (it is deemed offensive), we use another seemingly more innocent epithet to mark anyone who seeks, incomprehensibly, to distance themselves from the ever lowering norm. While they know the wages of refusing to conform are punitive indeed, they are equally aware that the wages of conformity are a lifetime of debt you will never pay off and an existence that no one in possession of any marketable intelligence might possibly dream of.

Eventually, after long years (or decades) of having been identified by this grotesque lapel badge of a word, of trying and failing to fit in, you might finally give up seeking the worthless acceptance of the dull and, instead, seek to reconcile yourself to being distanced from acceptable norms. You might wonder how, given that you cannot escape the pointing finger of the word's assault, you might try to be as good an outsider as you might possibly be. You might choose, given that the mainstream rejects you, to live the best version of life on the margins that you are able to. The question is: if you are to be identified as left field, then how do you do this as well as you might? And that is what this book is for: to help you turn pariah status into something that works for you. If you are unable to conform, then – you may as well face it, brother – you are unable to conform. You see no value in convention, for, indeed, there is no value in it. You will have to find a way outside of the path of the **MEAN** average.⁶

.....
6 The adjective describing one of the three versions of average has always struck the author as being telling.

A true **MAVERICK** has the opposite of Stockholm Syndrome: we have no positive feelings towards our jailors. It is freedom, above all, that the **MAVERICK** seeks: the freedom to think the things they want to think; the freedom to reject bloodless orthodoxies; the freedom to refuse any version of uniform; the freedom to **THINK** like an artist, **LIVE** like an artist, to **BE** an artist.

This word might have been spat at you in the first instance with a mild expletive attached, the intent of which is to mock, to belittle, to infer and to confer tarnish, as in, "Oh! You're such a bloody **MAVERICK**." It is not a compliment and, accordingly, you should not take it as such. But let us examine this intended insult: does it not portray you as a woman (or man) of action? In Kipling, the **MAVERICKS** were an Irish regiment (much as they are now); does not the description of the 'bloody **MAVERICK**' confer some element of the soldier or warrior on to the bearer of the name? It is not entirely an insult, therefore, more a maliciously intentioned compliment.

Historically, **MAVERICKS** have been presented as being rogue (adjective or noun). It is this for which they are most admired, and it is this that eventually condemns them because (it is implied) the charm inhabited of roguishness is merely a rake's progress and is in no way eternal. **MAVERICK** is therefore a smirking hint at a piece of foresight that things will end in inevitable disaster for you (which, of course, they will – for both you and your accusers).⁷

.....
7 This suggestion will, in all probability, exit the mouth of a priestly type who hangs on grimly, who has allowed themselves to be the personification of a poorly drawn character in a weak Pink Floyd lyric, who has expended their life on understated and un-fussed-over disasters. It will come from someone who has deferred gratification with so meek and tender a discipline, and who has done so, so resolutely, so regularly, so routinely that by the time they reach, as sometimes the unfulfilled can, their late seventies, they live these years in a state of relative fiscal plenty – a relative plenty that will fail to comfort them as they simper understatedly, emitting polite howls at the coming of brother death.

Being in receipt of its accusation is a sign that your 'freeness' of thought (which will be presented as (and which may well be) an inability) is somehow letting the side down. You will be told in keening tones by the intellectually paltry that you are "not a team player" (as if such an idea were ever of any worth, aside from as a signifier of foolishness on the part of anyone who might blindly utter it). **YOUR MAVERICK NATURE WILL BE PRESENTED AS A FLAW, A DEFICIENCY, A WEAKNESS, A HOLE IN THE YOU THAT YOU WILL BE MADE TO WISH WAS NOT THERE, BUT IS. IT WILL BE SIGNALLED TO BE THE INEFFECTIVE COMB-OVER OF A LIVER-SPOTTED BALD PATCH, A RAMPANT DISEASE OF THE EGO, A PITY AND, RATHER, A WASTE. IT WILL BE EVIDENCE OF SOMETHING THEY HAD ALWAYS SUSPECTED OF YOU:** that you have an inability to do what you are told by your betters (who may have expressed their superiority through the agency of a grey business suit (real or metaphorical)). It will be evidence that your face doesn't fit, your jib is cut unappealingly and that how you do things is summarily and emphatically not, "The way we do things around here."

The successor to Camus' *The Rebel*.

Jim Douglas, author of *Tokyo Nights*

"IF YOU MAKE ANY STAND AGAINST POWER, THEN POWER WILL STAND AGAINST AND ON YOU. AND IT WILL DO SO WITH CENTURIES OF EXPERIENCE AND TECHNIQUES IN HOW TO DO SO EFFECTIVELY: YOU WILL BE PAINTED AS BARBARIC, DISMISSED AS STUPID AND INSANE, BE TOLD TO KNOW YOUR PLACE. MOST OF ALL, YOU WILL BE TERMED MAVERICK."

RULES FOR MAVERICKS IS A GUIDEBOOK TO LEADING A CREATIVE LIFE, TO BEING A RENAISSANCE DILETTANTE, TO INFESTING YOUR ART FORM WITH OTHER ART FORMS, TO TAKING A STAND AGAINST MEDIOCRITY, TO REJECTING BLOODLESS ORTHODOXIES, TO EMBRACING YOUR OWN PRETENSION AND, MOST OF ALL, TO DEALING WITH YOUR FAILURE(S).

Phil Beadle wears the badge conferred on him with uncomfortable reticence, but delivers a message in tune with his original thinking, emphasising the importance of straying from the flock whilst hiding in full sight of the wolves.

Peter Wilkinson, Director, The Jerwood Spacee

Irreverent, stimulating and absorbing.

Rod Judkins, author of *The Art of Creative Thinking*

Phil is not just some provocateur or agitator ... He is allergic to bullshit and he speaks for freedom against a mediocrity that can ruin lives.

Ben Walden, Artistic Director, Contender Charlie

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