

FATHERHOOD...PROCEED WITH CAUTION

Welcome to the sometimes scary, ever stressful, sleep deprived, money draining, always fascinating, life affirming and wonderful world of fatherhood.

Being a dad is probably the biggest adventure you'll ever undertake. Forget hellish Christmas holidays with the in-laws, boys' weekends with no sleep and too many Class As, or training for a marathon. This trip will seriously fuck you up.

Of course, when we say "fuck you up", we mean it in the nicest possible way. Of all the paradoxes of parenthood, none is truer than this: despite never feeling more terrified or tired in your life, you'll never feel more alive.

Your journey as a father is going to throw some of life's biggest hurdles at you but it will also give you some of your most cherished and proudest moments. There'll be times when you'll be driven to a whole new level of frustration, yet there'll also be moments when you'll think your whole being is going to burst with pride.

You've probably noticed there's a mountain of books out there targeted at new parents – all crammed with guidance on the early years, written by well-educated people with a range of letters after their names, and all endorsed with a rosy picture of a contented, cherub-like baby on the cover. Rest assured, this is not like any of those books (okay, it *does* have a contented, cherub-like baby on the cover).

That's not to say that you don't need them. There's nothing more reassuring – especially for your partner – than a one-stop-shop book for every pregnancy and parenting issue, from how big your fetus is at week twenty six to the pros and cons of "controlled comforting". There'll be times when you frantically leaf through a heavy tome to find a parenting solution without giving this book a second thought. And that's okay.

This book serves another purpose. Think of it more as a reassuring arm on the shoulder from a teammate as you head

out onto the pitch before the big final; a teammate who's been there, done that, and has the physical and mental scars to prove it.

It's a book you can turn to when sleep deprivation has burned a hole in your brain and your partner has transformed into a creature from another planet. A book that will find the funny side, provide some sage advice and assure you that no matter how mad it all gets, it's all perfectly normal...

One tough mother

In March 2000, Inez Ramirez performed a successful caesarean section on herself – the only woman known to have performed such a feat. In severe pain and with her husband drinking at a cantina, no phone and the nearest clinic more than eighty kilometres away, Ramirez used a knife to cut into her belly. She cut through skin, fat and muscle, then reached inside her uterus and pulled out a baby boy. With a pair of scissors, Ramirez then cut his umbilical cord before passing out. Ramirez was found several hours later, fully conscious and lying beside her healthy newborn. Remarkably, she had also sewed her abdomen up with a needle and thread.