

DARE

TO

A
NOVEL

KNOW

JAMES KENNEDY

BOOK CLUB KIT

Dear Reader,

My novel *Dare to Know* is about a down-and-out salesman who works for a company that can predict anyone's death down to the second. But once I began playing with that idea, the story led me down unexpected paths: haunted video games, an occult alternative history of science, the dark side of startup culture, pre-Columbian America, a mystical new branch of mathematics, and conspiracy theories about Top 40 music.

But as far afield as these ideas went, they all connect to a love story about the one who got away, about how ambitions fail and get rekindled, about how relationships change from childhood to adulthood.

Something is changing in the world right now. We can all feel it. In writing this book, I was trying to capture the feeling of that change. If you like broken and imperfect narrators, David Lynch-esque fever dreams, and the feeling of getting an unsettling glimpse behind the curtain, then I wrote this book for you.

Thanks for coming on this ride with me.

—James Kennedy

CORPORATE NOIR PLAYLIST

Immerse yourself in *Dare to Know* with this book-themed playlist, curated and annotated by author James Kennedy. Listen to the playlist at <https://spoti.fi/3LByXHq> or use these tracks as a starting point for your own playlist!

SONG

JAMES KENNEDY'S NOTES

- "You Know My Name (Look Up the Number)" *This was the original title of the book! A deeply cursed and haunted song.*
by The Beatles
- "The Boys of Summer" *"Out on the road today, I saw a deadhead sticker on a Cadillac . . ."*
by Don Henley
- "ZUHURA" *Sound of the death algorithm churning.*
by Slikback
- "Rainy Day Women #12 & 35" *Why is he so maniacally insistent about it? Why is he so invested?*
by Bob Dylan
- "Andrew Void" *Queasy amalgam of detachment and intimacy in the thanaton calculation.*
by Mica Levi
- "Into the Groove" *Metaphysical locked groove at the end.*
by Madonna
- "I Know No One" *Spare, melancholy. Feels handmade. There's always a part of you that is inexpressible.*
by Mount Eerie
- "Temptation Eyes" *From Julia's basement jukebox of '60s hits . . .*
by The Grass Roots
- "Smiling Faces Sometimes" *Who else has Julia's face?*
by The Undisputed Truth
- "San Cristobal De Las Casas" *The kind of music our narrative likes in college. Arty, unsexual, with a noisy spark that borders on rocking but with zero punk edge.*
by Swirlies
- "Summertime Girls" *Camaro rock! Dumb but awesome, like a golden retriever. At party after date with Julia.*
by Y&T
- "Intro Cymbal Wind" *Occult structure lurking beneath all songs.*
by Dean Hurley
- "Band of Gold" *Loneliness and missed chances in Julia's jukebox.*
by Freda Payne
- "Neetriht" *A glimpse again of the mournful, eerie beneath.*
by Hali Palombo
- "Muskrat Love" *Revoting mix of cutesy and sexual. Feels like I'm in a dentist's office forever.*
by Captain & Tennille

CORPORATE NOIR PLAYLIST CONTINUED

SONG

JAMES KENNEDY'S NOTES

- "Glenn" *Stuck in ominous hypnotic maze video game, unsolvable lonely levels deeper.*
by Sint
- "The Limit" *Xuuzi dancing at club—"Want to see how far I'll go, baby do you really want to know?"*
by Class Actress
- "Let's Go Crazy" *"There's something else—the afterworld."*
by Prince
- "Scene D'Amour" *Xuuzi destabilizes reality. Math buzzing.*
by Bernard Herrmann
- "Galva" *Vertigo vibe with Xuuzi at hotel.*
by Hali Palombo
- "From Mesa and Plain, Op. 20.: No. 2. Pawnee Horses" *Hotel banquet hall dream. Triumphant, angelic—ominous shriek at end.*
by Arthur Farwell
- "Oblong" *"Life took its long lonely left turn."*
by Hali Palombo
- "Sure As Spring" *Going west to Julia! Jaunty—but sad.*
by La Luz
- "Dream Come True" *Julia's wedding. The shadows want to be real.*
by The Temptations
- "Wild Jungle" *Peppy '60s style mambo for Keith's movie.*
by Machito
- "Hotel" *Apocalyptic math in hotel room.*
by Hali Palombo
- "Kuulen ääniä maan alta" *The vast invisible thing speaks at last.*
by Oranssi Pazuzu
- "Looney Tunes Theme" *That's all, folks!*
by Hollywood Classics

READING GROUP GUIDE

Review the following questions to help jump-start conversation about *Dare to Know*.

- 1 *Dare to Know* depicts a world where one can pay to learn the exact day and time of their death, down to the second. If that were possible, would you want to know the exact time of your demise?
- 2 *Dare to Know* centers around and is told from the perspective of an unnamed narrator. Does this choice impact your perception of the character or the narrative? How might the novel have felt different to you if the narrator had been named?
- 3 Flashbacks play a major role in the narrator's journey, taking readers back to moments with Renard at summer camp and the narrator's romance with Julia. Why do you think the narrator reflects on these specific moments and people in his life?
- 4 The unnamed narrator is fixated on the Flickering Man and strongly believes that it holds the key to the answers he's seeking. How does the Flickering Man play into the larger narrative?
- 5 *Dare to Know* weaves in the history of Cahokia, the mass human sacrifices that took place there, and the concept of four historical cycles. What significance did you take away from these elements?
- 6 Technology is a motif in *Dare to Know*, from the computers that sicken the narrator to the development of the internet. What do you think Kennedy is trying to say about today's technology? How is this similar to or different from other pop-culture depictions of technology?
- 7 Physics, a natural or "hard" science, and philosophy, a social or "soft" science, play equal roles in the subjective mathematics used to calculate death equations, as well as in the narrator's life. How do these equal roles influence the way the story plays out?
- 8 *Dare to Know* is full of dual themes: the past versus the present, the personal versus the cosmic, science versus mysticism, etc. Why do you think there is such a focus on opposing forces?
- 9 Describe how you felt as you were reading the book.
- 10 *Dare to Know* barrels towards a shocking conclusion. Upon finishing the book, what were your big questions and takeaways?

PRINTABLE *DARE TO KNOW* BOOKMARK!

Print out this sheet for a double-sided *Dare to Know* bookmark!
Cut along the dotted lines, fold in half where marked, and tape and trim to your taste.





Settle in with your cups of joe and invite your guests to indulge in these recommended bites. Just don't predict their death dates while you're at it!

COFFEE CAKE

SCONES

CROISSANTS

MUFFINS

DOUGHNUT HOLES

BREAKFAST DANISHES

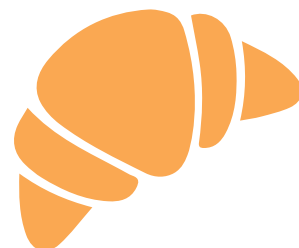
BAGELS & SPREADS

APPLE FRITTERS

CINNAMON BUNS

POUND CAKE

SHORTBREAD



Physics? Philosophy? Malevolent Retro Video Games? Oh my!

Explore the influences, both respectable and dubious, of *Dare to Know* with James Kennedy.

The Philosophy of the Book

The Republic of Plato

Translated by Allan Bloom

You'll find Plato's allegory of the cave, a foundational idea in western philosophy, in the first few pages of Book VII.

The New Science

By Giambattista Vico

Outlines the cyclic theory of history and the four stages of history. Pretty dense but rewarding.

The Fourth Turning

By Neil Howe and William Strauss

A coarsened version of Vico's ideas, analyzing American history. I thought it was a stretch, and real historians don't think much of it, but sometimes it's the ideas you disagree with that get the creative juices flowing.

The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences

By Jason A. Josephson-Storm

The clean line between science and the occult is a modern distinction, which you can read more about in this book.

The Science of the Book

Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy

By Kip Thorne

A lucid and approachable account of black hole evaporation and quantum fluctuations by a Nobel Prize-winning physicist.

In Search of Schrödinger's Cat

By John Gribbin

Though the book is showing its age, it's still a solid pop-science account of quantum theory and a sentimental favorite.

The Friendly Orange Glow: The Untold Story of the Rise of Cyberculture

By Brian Dear

A fascinating account of proto-cyberculture around the PLATO system, decades ahead of its time.

Further Reading on Cahokia

Cahokia: Ancient America's Great City on the Mississippi

By Timothy Pauketat

A fascinating account from 2009.

"Paradigms Lost: Reconfiguring Cahokia's Mound 72 Beaded Burial"

By Thomas Emerson, Kristin Hedman, Eve Hargrave, Dawn Cobb, and Andrew Thompson

More recent archeological findings from *American Antiquity*.

Physics? Philosophy? Malevolent Retro Video Games? Oh my! Continued

Inspiration for the Flickering Man Game

Aztec

It feels handmade and ahead of its time, and part of the fun is taking advantage of its glitches and provoking the game into weird behaviors. Play it online here: scullinsteel.com/apple2/#aztec.

Books to Try If You Enjoyed *Dare to Know*

“Life-Line”

By Robert Heinlein

Prefer a more straightforward story with a similar premise?

A Fan’s Notes

By Frederick Exley

Like stories with snarky and self-destructive narrators?

Rabbits

By Terry Miles

Do old video games feel haunted to you?

Annihilation

By Jeff VanderMeer

Enjoy deliberate alienation and what-the-hell-was-that?

Fake Accounts

By Lauren Oyler

Is your personality getting destabilized through computers?

The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle

By Haruki Murakami

Enjoy bizarre netherworlds and middle-aged ennui?

Movies to Try If You Enjoyed *Dare to Know*

Mulholland Drive

Written and directed by David Lynch

Enjoy sitting in a mystery rather than solving it?

Upstream Color

Directed by Shane Carruth

Oh, is David Lynch too basic for you?

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

Directed by Michel Gondry

Like stories about the emotional consequences of weird fictional technologies?

Afterlife

Written and directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda

Want a sweet, low-key movie about what happens after you die?

Minority Report

Directed by Steven Spielberg

Like movies about technologies that predict the future?

Blade Runner

Directed by Ridley Scott

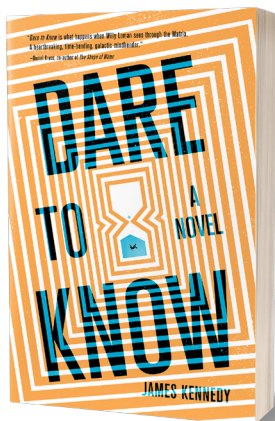
Where'd you get the idea for the surreal interview process to find the death date?

Arrival

Directed by Denis Villeneuve

Want sci-fi with substantial ideas that also has a substantial heart?

LEARN MORE ABOUT *DARE TO KNOW*



Now in paperback, and featuring an excerpt from the upcoming novel *Bride of the Tornado*, this mind-bending and emotional speculative thriller is set in a world where the exact moment of your death can be predicted—for a price.

Our narrator is the most talented salesperson at Dare to Know, an enigmatic company that has developed the technology to predict anyone's death down to the second. Divorced, estranged from his sons, and broke, he's driven to violate the cardinal rule of the business by forecasting his own death day. The problem: his prediction says he died twenty-three minutes ago.

The only person who can confirm its accuracy is Julia, the woman he loved and lost during his rise up the ranks of Dare to Know. As he travels across the country to see her, he's forced to confront his past, the choices he's made, and the terrifying truth about the company he works for.

Wildly ambitious and highly immersive, this thought-provoking thriller explores the destructive power of knowledge and collapses the boundaries between reality, myth, and conspiracy as it races toward its shocking conclusion.

"A razor-smart sci-fi corporate noir nightmare. *Dare to Know* is what happens when Willy Loman sees through the Matrix. A heartbreaking, time-bending, galactic mindbender delivered in the mordantly funny clip of a doomed antihero."

—Daniel Kraus, co-author of *The Shape of Water*

Keep an eye out for Kennedy's next novel, the horror thriller

BRIDE OF THE TORNADO



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Kennedy is the author of *The Order of Odd-Fish* and the founder and director of the 90-Second Newbery Film Festival. Before becoming a writer, he was a software engineer with a degree in physics and philosophy, subjects he continues to explore in his writing. *Dare to Know* is his first adult novel.