

Black Books Publishing

a novel

David P. Reiter



*"A thrilling fast-paced satire of life
in the publishing industry."*

— Carmel Bird, Winner, 2016 Patrick White Literary Award

Interactive Press

Black Books Publishing

Twice winner of the Western Australia Premier's Award for Digital Narrative and the Queensland Premier's Award for Poetry among other distinctions, David P Reiter has been recognised internationally for his ground-breaking creative works.

Hemingway in Spain and *Nullabor Song Cycle* began as text works and later were extended to films. *My Planets: a fictive Memoir* began as a physical book and an enhanced CD but then, in collaboration with the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada, became the ground-breaking *My Planets Reunion Memoir* <<http://ipoz.biz/myplanets>>, an interactive website in which text, film, audio performances, classical music, astronomy, and animation converge on a journey from separation to reunion of biological families.

In his latest hybrid work, David creates a hybrid satire of not only independent publishing but many aspects of contemporary and futuristic life in which memory and focus can be measured and discarded in nanoseconds. Seemingly arbitrary hyperlinks invite/distract the reader into visual and auditory experiences larger than any physical covers can contain.

Dr Reiter is Publisher/CEO at IP (Interactive Publications) and lives in Brisbane with his wife, two children, and a geometrically expanding menagerie of irreverent pets.



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Also by David P Reiter:

<i>Just Off Message</i>	<i>Kiss and Tell</i>	<i>Real Guns</i>
<i>Timelord Dreaming</i>	<i>Paul and Vincent</i>	<i>The Greenhouse Effect</i>
<i>My Planets: a fictive memoir</i>	<i>The Gallery</i>	<i>Global Cooling</i>
http://ipoz.biz/myplanets	<i>Sharpened Knife</i>	<i>Tiger Tames the Min Min</i>
<i>Nullarbor Song Cycle</i>	<i>Letters We Never Sent</i>	<i>Tiger Takes the Big Apple</i>
<i>Primary Instinct</i>	<i>Triangles</i>	<i>Bringing Down the Wall</i>
<i>Hemingway in Spain</i>	<i>The Cave After Saltwater Tide</i>	
<i>Hemingway in Spain (film)</i>	<i>Liars and Lovers</i>	
<i>Changing House</i>	<i>The Snow in Us</i>	

*for those who succeed enough to satisfy themselves
in spite of the tide of opinion*

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This work relies on associative links to work that is freely accessible on the Internet and acknowledges its sources via URLs provided in hypertext and footnotes that were accurate at the time of publication. The author expresses his gratitude to the authors and artists of those referenced works sources and hopes that this incidental promotion will give rise to new audiences for all concerned.

The author also wishes to thank the many people who provided inspiration and valuable feedback during the composing and the endless stages of refinement of this work, which only served to remind him of the poetic justice served up when the roles are reversed occasionally from infallible publisher to an author reminded of his clay toes.

Doubtlessly, with a work like this that satires an industry with a proud feudal history there will be those who will interrogate for imperfections in our own critique, and I am glad to take full responsibility for any that go viral. Nevertheless, as a certain First Peoples Tribe I respect but of which I am certainly not a member points out, it is necessary to embed at least one imperfection in a completed work so as not to offend the gods. And so it is here.

I leave you in the capable hands of my [slightly?] inebriated central character, Dylan Cashew. Feel free to share your thoughts with him (and the universe): <http://bit.ly/2FoCO8B>

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PART 1: EXODUS

And when the people came upon the Red Sea and found that all six lanes outbound to the Promised Land were clogged with plastic waste, the Lord said unto them, 'that'll teach you to put your faith in Google Maps!'

Chapter 1: What Have I Done?

DYLAN CASHEW DID NOT WANT TO BE THERE. There were many other places in the world he also did not want to be, but this staid room, this pen-etched desk, these monotone unpolished tiles and four unforgiving walls comprised a standard by which all other places Dylan did not want to be could be judged.

From a coalmine canary's perspective, it was not all bad: the room had a window. But mostly bad: the window was Photoshop black, peering out as it did to the cropping lines of an airplane hangar. So dark in fact that he could see himself and his unkempt hair slightly better than the assorted aircraft below.

His first few days as Assistant Technical Editor, Aerosystems Establishment Canada. *What have I done?* Things were bound to get better, if they didn't get worse, which was more likely since things had a way of bottoming out before scampering for the light of day if they didn't have anything more pressing to do at that warp of space-time.

'It could be worse,' a voice in an East Midlands accent said out of nowhere.

Dylan wheeled around from the window, his gaze probing the recesses. 'It can't be!'

'The indefinite pronoun should never be used to refer to an Author of Note,' the voice chided.

'Where are you?'

'In your head - until you give me permission to metabolise.'

'*Metabolise?* That's a new one on me.'

'I'll take that as a yes, then?'

'You said we were finished in Edmonton!'

'Because you gave up.'

'Not on writing – just writing about *you!*'

D. H. Lawrence – or rather a hologram very much like him – came into view.

Dylan blinked. Then winced. Then winced again.

'I had high hopes for you,' said D. H. 'It's not too late to admit you were wrong.'

'There's my future to think of,' sniffed Dylan.

'Oh, is that all?' scoffed D. H.

'*Now* who's using the indefinite pronoun carelessly?'

'Not to mention my wife.'

'Teach you to get married so young.'

'I'm twenty-three years old, D. H.'

In that frozen instant between galaxies, Dylan had accepted that talking to a hologram was not only acceptable in the circumstances but perfectly natural.

'Too young to know better,' D. H. nodded. 'I was nearly thirty before Frieda and I got married. I already had three novels, a book of poetry and a play notched on my belt by then.'

'Well, la-de-dah for you.' Dylan paused for effect. 'Of course I knew all that.'

'We were on a roll,' said D. H. 'And then you had to go and spoil everything!'

'I didn't have a choice,' Dylan stammered. '*She* proposed.'

'Caught off guard, eh?'

'No. Well, yes. Yes – and no!'

There was a knock at the door, so D. H. took his cue and vanished.

A tallish man in a tweed jacket, definite threadbare pants and sporting a bright tie that cried out for attention, leaned in and looked around.

'To whom were you talking to – just now?'

Dylan broke into a controlled sweat.

'I'm sorry, Mr Lehmann. I forgot to mention that I occasionally talk to myself when... my blood sugar gets low.'

Mr Lehmann was Dylan's superior, the Chief Editor who had interviewed him back in Edmonton, and, to Dylan's amazement, had actually offered him the job. Lehmann was an ex-pat Austrian, whose Germanic accent was so slight Dylan could either assume he'd been living in Canada for many years or had embarked on a deliberate campaign to camouflage his roots to blend in with the natives. Lehmann had greasy hair that would have suited him to a bit part in a 50s black and white film by a struggling Norwegian director. And his way of speaking with overdrawn inflections on the wrong words reminded Dylan of auditions he'd imagined attending in his student days but never quite did.

'That's fine,' said Lehmann, straining to sound reassuring, as if out of a rules book. 'It's a lonely job - editing. Until you learn the ropes.'

Dylan eyed the sheath of papers Lehmann was clutching to his chest like an injured pigeon. 'Is that for me?'

'Yes,' said Lehmann. 'Your first *report* - on the Mirage.'

'Let me guess. It's an aircraft?'

'Quite so. *Pride* of the Armée de l'air¹.'

D. H. materialised behind him. 'Ah, yes, the Mirage - ancestor of the Rafale². Now there's a bitch of an aircraft!'

Dylan glanced nervously from D. H. to Lehmann, but the latter was none the wiser. Still, Dylan waved the hologram away. Since he had no way of sneaking into D. H.'s parallel universe without an iris scan, he had no idea what a Rafale was.

'I'm sure you'll find the draft report interesting,' said Lehmann, setting it down on the desk, pressing the creased corners flat again. 'Lieutenant Rousseau will report here at 10am tomorrow to review your edit.'

¹ <http://bit.ly/2CfCII2>

² <http://bit.ly/2BZz0N8>

Dylan gulped. 'What if I'm not ready?'

'Chop, chop,' chuckled Lehmann. 'There's plenty more where this came from. *Deadlines, deadlines!*' He backed away, straight through D. H. 'Feel free to *ring* me about any queries.'

Two hours later and Dylan's hair was so disheveled that it was looking neat. And only three pages into the twenty-odd page document.

'Arrgh!' he declared, thrusting it aside and glaring at his coffee cup. 'More caffeine. Better yet, make that jet fuel!'

'Life is a travelling to the edge of knowledge, then a leap taken³,' said D. H., leaning over his shoulder.

Dylan shuffled pages. 'What? Where did you read that?'

'I didn't read it - I *wrote* it.'

Dylan slammed the report closed. 'Congratulations. Another one of your memorable throw away lines to keep the critics guessing?'

'Not so memorable as it happens if you didn't recall it.'

'I wish I could *leap* over this report,' said Dylan. 'Now I know why no one else wanted this job.'

'Ah,' said D. H. 'But you must have been chosen from a cast of thousands. Or at least a few word-mongers after a pay cheque.'

Dylan nodded. 'I'd prefer to believe the former. But I could tell I was probably the only one who applied.'

[It seemed like only yesterday, and it actually was well before yesterday - if you discounted virtual time...]

Dylan, in an ill-fitting suit and an even tighter tie, grasping his résumé, waiting for a door to open at the appointed time, expelling the previous, and doubtlessly better qualified, candidate. The door opens seconds later, but no one emerges, just the long and impressively narrow nose of Lehmann, followed soon after by a face that invites

³ <http://bit.ly/2zEinjG>

him into the interview room.

Awkward seconds limp past as Dylan tries to remember the pose he should strike on the padded interrogation chair according to *The Idiot's Guide to Successful Interviewing*⁴.

The question he's dreading – what's your background in aeronautics? – never comes. Instead, Lehmann mumbles on about the small town near the Base where most of the civvies live.

'Everyone knows everyone else's business,' he explains. 'Which isn't a bad thing if a bear has broken into your house.'

[Bears are the stuff of legend for Dylan, not quite Disney-style but close.]

Like all experienced editors, Lehmann picks up on the slightest whiff of ambivalence. 'You've never encountered a bear?'

'No,' says Dylan. 'But I'm happy to offer it an escort out if one strays onto my property.'

'You've got the job!' exclaims Lehmann.

'Are you sure?' Dylan says. 'I'm inexperienced!'

'Great,' says Lehmann. 'No one likes a know-it-all!'

'I'm terrible at parts of speech. I... I can't remember the difference between a misplaced and dangling modifier!'⁵

'Even better. Pilots hate dealing with elitists and their jargon.'

Dylan decides to use his ultimate weapon. 'What possible connection is there between my research into D. H. Lawrence and technical reports?'

'None,' Lehmann says. 'But that's beside the point.'

'Which is?'

'The job is yours!'

'You see?' Dylan said, as if D. H. was still there, which apparently he wasn't, at least not in this particular universe.

⁴ <http://bit.ly/2E2SJbO>

⁵ <http://bit.ly/2E1xC9P>

'I was the only sucker stupid enough to apply for this job, so how could I send Lehmann back empty-handed?'

Clearly, D. H. had lost interest.

Thirty or even twenty years on, Dylan would seek sought solace in YouTube or Snapchat, but the only electronic keyboard within shouting distance now was across the hangar in the steno pool. He felt exposed in his stale little office behind his splintery desk with only a laminate of papers to defend him against anyone who slipped in to check on his progress.

He stared at page three yet again. It actually wasn't that bad. Three-quarters was occupied by a figure and table and the rest with descriptions of the innards of a Mirage instrument panel that made no more sense to him than a menu written in Polish.

'You look fine to me,' Dylan said, patting the page. 'A+, in fact. Moving on to page four!'

He winced when he turned the page: it was solid text. In fact, one unbroken paragraph.

'Ah, ha!' he declared, teasing it with his red pen. 'A violation of Rule 1 - readability!'

He scratched two diagonal lines, almost at random, but close to a third and then two-thirds down the page. He felt a surge of joy that only an editor discovering god-like power for the first time could feel as he shattered the sound barrier of an extended paragraph.

He went on like that for hours. Until his head hurt. Until every page had a minimum of six red marks. Why six? It seemed a magic number, like Three Wise Men + Joseph, Mary and Joseph, or the Holy Trinity x two.

Not that Dylan was the slightest bit religious. He was yet to find himself in a foxhole, but it never hurt to be prepared for the End of All Days⁶.

Lieutenant Durand was his first pilot, and the report

⁶ <http://bit.ly/2DIXHiT>

with Dylan's minimum of six red corrections on each page belonged to him. Durand was tall, with a tidy crew-cut and blazingly clear blue eyes. And yet he seemed nervous as he eased into the chair across from Dylan.

Dylan cleared his throat. Not because he needed to, but because he expected that was what an experienced editor needed to do to put an author just slightly off his game.

'Pardon,' Durand said, thickly accented. 'My English... is not the best.'

'Why do you bother, then?' Dylan asked. 'You could have written in French!'

'But no. The Major would not allow it. Oh, but you are joking, yes?'

'I never joke about such serious things,' Dylan said, perfectly straight. 'Except when I have to!'

It took a few seconds for that to compute and then sink in for Durand.

'I wish I could just *fly* the Mirage,' said Durand, 'and not have to write about it!'

'Me too,' Dylan replied. 'I mean, the bit about flying.'

Something got lost in the translation. After every page of discussion, and sometimes in between, Durand would come back to his joy of flying, how it had been all he had every wanted to do since witnessing the first Moon landing⁷, how he was happiest when his plane was at full throttle and he was feeling ever so slightly light-headed from the speed.

Dylan would nod sagely at every corrected word choice or mended comma splice⁸, as he expected an editor should do while listening to an author in confession mode. Their discussion gathered its own momentum, until, finally, on the last page, Dylan realised, to his horror, that he'd just accepted Durand's invitation to take him up in a test flight in his Mirage.

⁷ <http://bit.ly/2zDqEop>

⁸ <http://bit.ly/2CdLDkm>

'Thank you so much, Dylan,' he said, bursting out of the chair. 'You have made my report... how do you say, *glow*?'

'Just part of the job,' said Dylan, still in editorial mode.

'So what time will be best for you?'

'Time?'

'To suit up - for the test flight?'

Dylan gulped. 'Oh, that. I didn't think you were serious. Or rather that I was serious - about doing that.'

'Come on,' said Durand. 'Of course I was serious. I want to share it with you. The thrill of speed.'

'I tried speed reading⁹ once,' said Dylan. 'I came in last.'

⁹ <http://bit.ly/2Cgmfu8>

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