



# ENGINE HOUSE BOOKS

## Book Bits #1



### **REFLEXIVE ACTION**

by  
**D. R. Evans**

*REFLEXIVE ACTION* IS AVAILABLE IN A STANDARD EDITION (ISBN 978-0-6151-9130-0), AN ECONOMY EDITION, AND IN A MULTIBOOK.

EHB: Tell us a bit about *Reflexive Action*.

DRE: This was my first book, written in 1990 and 1991 when I was still working full-time as a Co-Investigator on the Voyager mission. I'd always wanted to write a thriller, but the technology I needed to support my style of writing (laser printing, typesetting, version control and similar capabilities) had only recently become affordable. I think that the book took about six months of spare time to write, at least in its first incarnation.

EHB: How many incarnations were there?

DRE: Two major ones, and countless minor ones.

EHB: So what distinguished the two major ones?

DRE: Well, the title, to start with. My original title, which I stuck with for far too long, was *Lex Talionis*. Eventually I was convinced that I had to change it, though, because no one seemed to understand it. Briefly, I re-titled the book *An Eye for an Eye*, which is a modern English equivalent

of the original title, but I had to change that when a film came out with the same name. So I settled on *Reflexive Action*, which I don't think anyone else has used.

EHB: And the other major changes?

DRE: Well, this was always a book about two assassins set against each other, so the basic plot and most of the details never changed. There were two fairly major changes between the original story and the final one, though. Originally I intended to have a more personal animosity between Kelton and George Harris, and this was to be based on the facts that Harris' father had been killed by the Soviets in the 1950s, and that Kelton was originally Russian. So the original first chapter was set in 1950s Kazakhstan and told the story of Harris' father's capture as a spy caught passing details of Soviet H-bomb research back to America. There were also scenes harking back to Kelton's training. All of that was eventually removed. It was a nice idea (I think) but I eventually decided that the basic idea of having the two assassins pitted against each other really didn't need any buttressing.

The other change was suggested by an editor at a major New York publisher who at one time was considering publishing the book. Originally, both Kent's wife and his daughter were killed in the explosion. The editor suggested changing this; once I did so, I realized that the change was enough of an improvement that I kept it even when the publisher passed on the book (to my annoyance, since I made all the changes they requested — but that in itself was a valuable lesson).

EHB: What gave you the idea for *Reflexive Action*?

DRE: Two things, I think. First, as a physicist the symmetry appealed to me. Second, I liked the idea of a book in which the protagonist was a professional assassin. I liked *The Day of the Jackal* for that reason, but always felt a bit cheated at the end of that book because — like many readers I'm sure — I was rooting for the character that eventually “lost”. I wanted to read a book that allowed me to root for an assassin, but which didn't require a sense of letdown at the end. Probably many books like that have been written, but I had never come across any, so I decided to write one. I guess that's a long way of saying that I wrote the kind of book that I wanted to read.

EHB: Any plans for a sequel?

DRE: No. I plotted one once, but that's long since lost. I did use one of the minor characters from *Reflexive Action* as a principal character in my second thriller, *Category Five*; re-using that character is probably as close as I'll ever come to a sequel.

EHB: Anything you'd change about the book if you had the chance?

DRE: I can't think of anything. I re-read it recently, and was surprised how much I enjoyed it. I expected it to read like a first novel, but it seems to have escaped that fate.

The only real shame is that technology changes so quickly that the book is now firmly and forever set circa 1990. If I were to write it now, cell phones, the Web and changes in surveillance technology would force changes to some details, although not to the plot as a whole. But that's probably true of any book that relies on technology to drive any of the action.

EHB: Would you call *Reflexive Action* a technothriller?

DRE: No; I think the details of the technology are only incidental to the story.

EHB: To conclude, can you tell us three factoids about *Reflexive Action*?

DRE: One: the name “George Harris” was derived from the Beatle George Harrison.

Two: the technology used in the book to allow after-the-fact monitoring of transatlantic communication is likely close to what was actually in use by the NSA at the time (the actual details are still classified).

Three: there was a bitterly cold blizzard in Denver on Friday, December 21, 1990.

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