

CUTLER

DAVID WHISH-WILSON

ABOUT THE BOOK

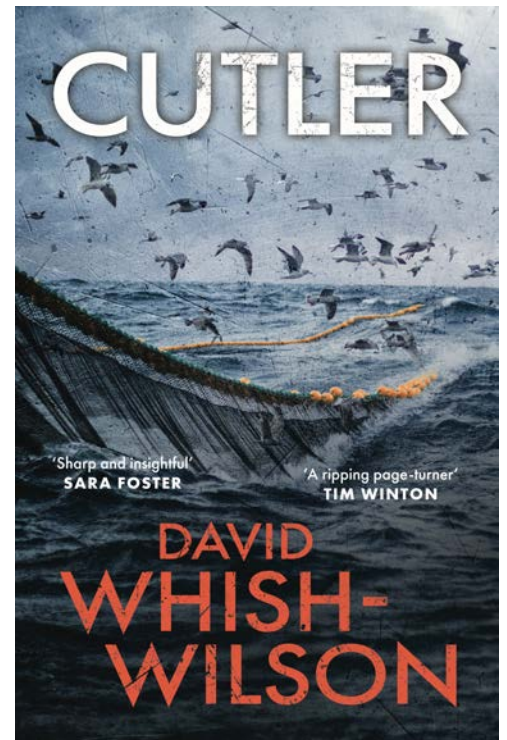
Paul Cutler is a former undercover operative, now working off the books for his handler, Malik Khalil. When he's tasked with investigating the disappearance of a young Australian marine scientist on a Taiwanese-flagged distant-water fishing vessel, Cutler realises that the crime he's investigating points to a slew of much darker crimes. Praised by Tim Winton as 'a ripping page-turner about shameful secrets just across the horizon', the most terrifying aspect of this ninth novel from a master storyteller is the way it draws its inspiration from the real world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Whish-Wilson was born in Newcastle, NSW but raised in Singapore, Victoria and Western Australia. His novels include the Lee Southern novels *I Am Already Dead* and *True West*, which was shortlisted for a Ned Kelly Award for Best Crime. He is also the author of the Frank Swann novels: *Line of Sight* (also shortlisted for a Ned Kelly Award), *Zero at the Bone*, *Old Scores* and *Shore Leave*. David teaches in the prison system in Perth and previously in Fiji, where he started the country's first prisoner writing program. He currently lives in Fremantle, WA with his partner and three kids, where he teaches creative writing at Curtin University.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think that the author has included this particular prologue?
2. What is it about Cutler that equips him to be an undercover investigator?
3. Do you think O'Reardon understands the danger of Cutler's mission when he drops him off?
4. **'Pacific say she don't care. Pacific say the truth.'** (p. 123). Do you agree with Yang's statement?
5. Which do you think is more dangerous – the ocean or the human beings who are working on it?
6. Which countries do the crew members on the *Shuen* come from? What circumstances have led them to this point?
7. What is the role of a PNA observer aboard deep-sea fishing vessels such as the *Shuen* fleet?
8. What do you think happened to the scientist that Cutler has arrived to replace?
9. What are some of the crimes that take place in this novel?
10. What are the dangers of modern industrial fishing for crews?
11. Why do you think they might be vulnerable to exploitation?
12. And what is it about the industry that makes marine life vulnerable too?
13. What did you learn about modern industrial fishing that you did not know before?
14. What do you think we can do to protect both these vulnerable groups?



INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

Where does the character of Cutler come from?

Many of my novels start with a fascination for a character I've had in my head for a while, and when the characters start to speak to me, I often begin writing. This novel is different because I started with an issue that I wanted to explore – modern industrial fishing in distant waters. I spent many years researching this and decided that a crime novel was the best vehicle to illustrate some of this research, and to hopefully entertain readers too. Paul Cutler was born out of this process of trying to create a suspenseful context for the story – a somewhat worldly young man put into a dangerous situation. His task sees him necessarily investigate some of the social and structural forces that have led to the unenviable situation the men he finds are in.

Your author note makes a clear declaration of your love for the ocean and the threats that humans pose to the marine environment. Why did you choose a crime novel as the genre to explore these?

I find that crime fiction is a good vehicle for exploring political matters in a way that hopefully doesn't feel didactic or preachy. In many respects crime novels are the social or political novels of our time, while ideally remaining highly accessible and entertaining for readers. While my primary purpose is to entertain, a lot of my crime novels have had an underlying political purpose – to write into historical silences or to shine a light on the consequences of human behaviour – both on an individual and institutional level.

Is this work an expression of pessimism or activism?

I think the latter. While it's hard not to be pessimistic, given the structural forces aligned against progressive change in matters to do with the environment and climate, generally speaking, I refuse to be pessimistic because pessimism has little utility.

What advice do you have for people who want to do more to support and protect marine life?

For those fortunate enough to have sufficient funds to contribute financially to useful organisations, please contact me for details of how to do this. In the meantime, I think it's important that we be mindful of the kind of pollution we produce, especially plastics, and how they find their way into the oceans. If you're a consumer of marine animals, I'd suggest learning about the fisheries from which they derive, to discover whether or not the fishery is sustainable (hint: it probably isn't). In general, this is about trying to be an informed consumer – sourcing locally where possible and avoiding products whose origins aren't clear – we know that a fair proportion of imported fishes for example are the product of pirate fishers and fisheries, to the clear detriment of marine environments and the labour used to illegally harvest them. As well, because we as humans tend to empathise and integrate emotionally with the familiar more than the unfamiliar, and also because it's beneficial for human health too – both physical and mental – it's a good thing to become more directly involved with our marine environments, whether that's via surfing, diving or even walking along the beach (ideally picking up rubbish as you go.) It's hard not to care about the ocean when you're literally immersed in it, taking in its wonder but also the ways that it's being harmed.

What's next for David Whish-Wilson?

I'm working on a follow-up to Cutler, with a similar focus on maritime crime, using the same character and the same means of exploring a criminal world. A character working undercover can get very close to those operating criminally, which hopefully adds an extra clarity to the representation of that world.



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