



Hits and Misses

Hawkwood gets a fair range of hits on the website, but a few days ago this increased sharply by about 1000% - yes, a thousand. From nowhere, hits were being registered from locations across the globe. Here are some of them: Mar del Plata, Buenos Aires; Sydney, Australia; García, Mexico; Baku, Baki Azerbaijan; Nairobi City, Kenya; Santo Domingo, Distrito Nacional (Santo Domingo), Dominican Republic; Xalapa, Mexico; Kingston, Jamaica; Thua Thien-Hue, Vietnam; Belgrade, Beograd, Serbia; Bariloche, Rio Negro, Argentina; Medellín, Colombia; Brakpan, Gauteng, South Africa; Gustavo Adolfo Madero, Mexico; Hillah, Babil, Iraq; Bengaluru, Karnataka, India; Los Teques, Miranda, Venezuela; Danlí, El Paraiso, Honduras; Samarkand, Samarqand, Uzbekistan; Rif Dimashq, Syrian Arab Republic; Catanduva, Sao Paulo, Brazil; Masqat, Oman; Benin City, Edo, Nigeria and many, many more.

My naive, immediate reaction was that something on the site had gone viral and that warring nations had suddenly seen the beauty in our books and turned to reading instead of fighting. Truly, that thought passed through my mind. I saw citizens of all these places and more laying down their swords and taking up the ploughshare of fiction, poetry and memoirs. Maybe one of the books had received a special review from a global celebrity, they had posted it on TikTok or Instagram and now everyone wanted to read what this icon of popular culture was reading.

Celebrities have enormous power to influence; and influencers who have nothing to offer but influence for reasons beyond my understanding, any one of them might have posted something wonderful, hopefully, about one of our books. Roald Dahl broadcast an effusive review of an unknown book called *Silence of the Lambs*, and the rest is history. Most of what we hear and see is shaped by a narrow band of news filtered through powerful media or celebrity voices. With all the will in the world, I could not advise a citizen of Iraq to read one of our books, but a celeb or influencer might have done just that.

In my mind's eye, I saw individuals in all these countries, sitting at their computers, reading a post that would change the world and bring our endeavours here to fruition. After all, this year will be 20 years since I started Hawkwood so it's about time that the word spread, assuming there is a word worth spreading. It was a lovely thought, citizens in troubled lands finding peace and harmony through David Hogarth's memoir of a seaside childhood or Phil Barret's funny tales of 1970s pop group. I saw peace breaking out everywhere and sales skyrocketing as the word spread.

This lasted about five seconds. I knew, in my heart, that the stats were some kind of technological anomaly, probably a rogue or smart bot registering hits where there were only misses, cruelly convincing me that my efforts at harmonising the world had at last born fruit. Alas, no. I am awaiting a report from the statistics company to explain the anomaly but I already know that that is all it is, and the warring nations of the Earth are still at it, our unusual books still a remote, distant mote of pure irrelevance.