

Read all about it: technology's missing chapters

GREG FOYSTER

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With all the hullabaloo about the Kindle™ and the iPad™, it's easy to overlook the e-reader's centuries-old rival. But the Book™ is alive and well, with a sleek new design, lightweight packaging and wireless mobility to suit today's busy bibliophile.

I have to admit being a little baffled by the Book™ at first. No matter how hard I looked, I just couldn't find the ON button. After much fumbling I managed to start the device, and all it took was turning the front cover from left to right. No loading screen, sound effect or grand hurrah. It was an elegant beginning to what proved to be a charming piece of technology.

Following initial complaints about the first model – a 100-foot papyrus roll that caught fire – the Book™ has undergone some considerable improvements. In 300 AD parchment began replacing papyrus; in the 1400s moveable type was introduced into the printing process; and more recently, the Penguin paperback revolution gave the Book™ its modern, "sexy" design.

After several thousand years of product testing, most of the glitches in the Book™ have been ironed out. The result is a stylish, rectangular slab of paper, cardboard and various inks. The classic combination of dead trees and vegetable dyes gives the Book™ its distinctive "musty" odour. The modern Book™ comes in a stunning array of sizes – from an Encyclopaedia Britannica volume weighing several kilograms, to the world's smallest published Book™, a 2.4mm x 2.9mm leather-bound item that needs to be read with a magnifying glass.

And now to the reading experience. Instead of pressing a "Next" button, you turn the page by grasping the right-hand edge and moving it to the left. This takes some getting used to. But with practice, the refresh rate becomes incredibly fast – about as fast as you can move your hand, actually. In all my tests, the display didn't once go blank between turning pages.

The display is, perhaps, the device's best feature. The screen looks exactly like ink on paper, possibly because it is ink on paper. This reduces eyestrain and adds to the general enjoyment of the product experience. The display isn't back-lit, like mobile phone or computer screens, and as such requires minimal power. None, in fact. You will, however, need ambient illumination to read a Book™. Fortunately, if you use your Book™ between the hours of 5am and 7pm, you can take advantage of a free light-emitting service, known as "the sun". After hours, you can use another light-emitting device, invented sometime in the 19th century.

I've tested the Book™ nearly every day of my adult life, and not once have I heard a beeping sound to indicate depleted power. The battery life must be phenomenal. This is a long-lasting piece of technology. The Book™ is both durable (I've dropped mine in the bath and it still works) and enduring (a Book™ from the 15th century can still be enjoyed today).

Although the Book™ is commonly characterised as low-tech, it does have several forgotten features. You can zoom in, by holding the Book™ close to your face, and zoom out, by holding the device further away. The search function consists of tiny numbers at the bottom of the page for easy reference. The Book™ also comes with "text-to-speech" capability, offering millions of distinct voices, depending on whom you ask to read aloud. You can also use the Book™'s patented "silent reading" technology to listen to a voice inside your own head.

While the Book™ only has storage capacity for, well, itself, there is the possibility of buying more Book™s and putting them somewhere. The manufacturers suggest two options: hardware and software. The hardware option, which consists of several slabs of wood positioned in a horizontal format, is handy for storing Book™s so that the titles are visible. The software option, which involves committing the text to internal memory device, or "brain", is a great way to store information for quick retrieval.

Overall, I was extremely impressed with the Book™ and can understand why literary luminaries such as Montaigne, Wordsworth, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Tolstoy, Proust, Joyce, Dostoevsky, Austen, Dickens, Faulkner, Woolf, Nabakov, Zola, Kafka and Hemingway have been proud to put their name to it. A durable and useful piece of technology. Five stars.

- Greg Foyster's first humour Book™ is out next year. The Perth Writers' Festival starts today and ends Monday.

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