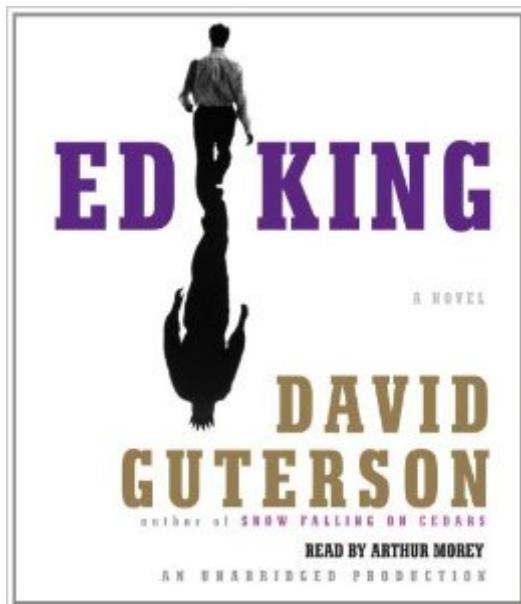


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Ed King



Synopsis

A sweeping, propulsive, darkly humorous new novel by the best-selling author of *Snow Falling on Cedars*: a story of destiny, desire, and destruction that reimagines Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* for our own era. In Seattle in 1962, Walter Cousins, a mild-mannered actuary—a guy who weighs risk for a living—takes a risk of his own, and makes the biggest error of his life. He sleeps with Diane Burroughs, the sexy, not-quite-legal British au pair who's taking care of his children for the summer. Diane gets pregnant and leaves their baby on a doorstep, but not before turning the tables on Walter and setting in motion a tragedy of epic proportions. Their orphaned child, adopted by an adoring family and named Edward Aaron King, grows up to become a billionaire Internet tycoon and an international celebrity—the "King of Search"—who unknowingly, but inexorably, hurtles through life toward a fate he may have no power to shape. An instant classic—David Guterson's most daring and dazzling novel yet—that brings a contemporary urgency to one of the greatest stories of all time. Grateful acknowledgment is made to the following for permission to reprint previously published material: Alfred Music Publishing Co. Inc.: Excerpt from "Do You Remember Walter?"—words and music by Raymond Douglas Davies, copyright © 1969, copyright renewed by Davray Music Ltd. and ABKCO Music Inc., 85 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003. All rights on behalf of Davray Music Ltd. administered by Unichappell Music Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Alfred Music Publishing Co. Inc. "Killer Queen" Words and Music by Freddie Mercury © 1974 (Renewed 2002) QUEEN MUSIC LTD. All Rights for the U.S. and Canada Controlled and Administered by GLENWOOD MUSIC CORP. All Rights for the world excluding the U.S. and Canada Controlled and Administered by EMI MUSIC PUBLISHING LIMITED. All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured. Used by Permission. Reprinted by permission of Hal Leonard Corporation

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Customer Reviews

It seems to me that when a reader is invited into a piece of fiction well aware of what its tragic outcome will be--either from previous acquaintance with the tale or promotion of the new version--then it becomes incumbent upon the author to deliver a protagonist that will come to matter to his audience--someone the reader can connect to, feel for and find interesting enough to want to spend several hours with. Sophocles pulls that off; Guterson does not. At least not for this reader. In a previous life as a 12-year-old, I discovered a volume of Greek mythology in my late grandmother's attic, stashed it in our garage, and whenever forced to "get my nose out of a book" and go outside and play with the other kids, I'd sneak off and go hang out with the Greeks in the garage instead. Later, in college, I was part of the crew for a production of "Antigone," which I loved. Now here I am all these years later having just put down (in order to "put-down" in its other sense) a modern-day adaptation of "Oedipus Rex," one of the most famous Greek tragedies of them all. At the beginning, I was excited about the idea of revisiting this old love of my youth as re-imagined by a winner of the PEN/Faulkner award. But I couldn't come up with even an ounce of interest in or empathy for any character in it and quickly lost my initial curiosity about how its author might manage to massage this ancient classic into a modern day novel with best-seller potential. After force-feeding myself the first hundred or so pages, I started skimming, eventually coming to page 236 where I found a message to his readers inserted by the author. It begins: "Okay."

David Guterson ("Snow Falling on Cedars") has long been a favorite Pacific Northwest author, although despite the urging of friends I've somehow failed to read any of his previous books. Other reviews indicate that he's a bit erratic - I cannot speak to his other books, but I can safely write that I love "Ed King." Daring to play with classic texts is always a dangerous business, and in this case Guterson has set a high bar for himself by choosing Sophocles' "Oedipus Rex" as his source text. Arguably the definitive Greek tragedy of all antiquity, "Oedipus" tells the infamously sad story of a proud man who is condemned by fate to murder his father, marry his mother, and spark a million bad jokes. Guterson dares to update this story to the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Ed King is our Oedipus and is born not to royalty, but is the child of an adulterous affair between the actuary Walter Cousins and his British au pair Diane. Cousins, a risk assessor by trade, knocks up the

15-year old and tries to do his part by her (without leaving his own wife). He has no idea how ruthless and ambitious young Diane is, however, and she is soon blackmailing him into years of child support even though she abandons the infant Ed on the doorstep of prosperous residents in Portland, Oregon. In short order, King is the proud adopted son of ambitious Jewish parents in Seattle, a math prodigy and natural leader. His new parents never tell him of his adopted status, and after several colorful adventures he's off to Stanford during the 80s, just in time to capitalize on the tech boom and become a billionaire as "the King of Search." Oh, and he has an unusual, private hankering for older women . . .

I gave Ed King a shot because I knew David Guterson was a highly acclaimed "literary" novelist and the whole idea of retelling the Oedipus Rex myth sounded intriguing. Now that I am done with the book however, I feel the need to burn all my clothes and take a shower in Lysol. And not just because the billionaire "King of Search" (as in Google-like computer search) kills his dad and eventually marries his mother and has sex with her around 1,500 times (he kept a running tally) but because the entire novel is such a nihilistic romp through a sex- and cocaine-crazed world of empty realities both virtual and otherwise without a single character you can even remotely admire. The only reason I am giving Ed King any stars at all is because Guterson writes so well. He can be wickedly funny and you feel he has something important to say about our information-swamped, over-indulged, tummy-tucked and self-absorbed modern age. He also throws a pretty sharp left hook at our tendencies toward raging hubris. You just wish he would let up on his one-two punches every now and then and work-in something even slightly positive to root for. The lack of even a smidgen of anything good and bright to serve as a contrast to all of his dark and empty luridness takes a lot of the wallop out of his punches. I'm no scholar of Greek mythology, but I have to say, Guterson's interpretation of Oedipus Rex doesn't jive with what I remember about it from high school. He's got all the icky details of the story with its twisted plot of mistaken identities and crazy co-incidences niftily re-packaged for our current age, but I think he's missing the main point.

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