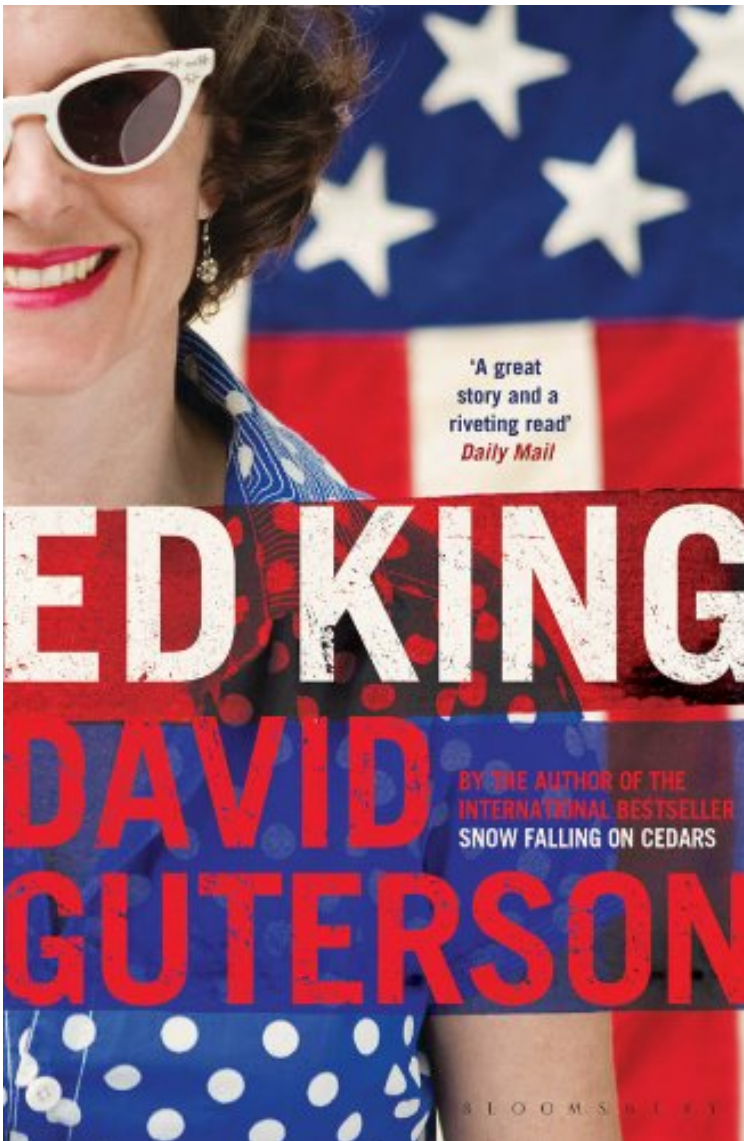


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Ed King



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn 1962, actuary Walter Cousins makes the biggest mistake of his life. When mild-mannered Walter - 'a man who weighs risk for a living' - sleeps with the sharp-tongued, not-quite-legal British au pair, Diane Burroughs, he can have no sense of the magnitude of his error. For this brief affair sets in motion a tragedy of epic proportions, upending Sophocles's immortal tale of fate, free will, and forbidden desire. At the centre is Ed King, an infant given up for adoption who becomes one of the world's richest and most powerful men. But beneath the sizzling story of Ed's seemingly inexorable rise to fame and fortune is a dark and unsettling destiny, one that approaches with ever-increasing suspense as the book reaches its shattering and surprising conclusion. An assured, propulsively written epic novel of unstoppable force, Ed King is a classic of contemporary American life: a daringly told story of a man and a myth, of blindness and

narcissism, and of the precarious foundations on which carefully constructed lives are built - and timeless stories are created. From the bestselling author of *Snow Falling on Cedars*, a dazzling, darkly funny, extraordinary modern take on an ancient tragedy, quite unlike anything we've seen before.

Extrait

In 1962, Walter Cousins made the biggest mistake of his life: he slept with the au pair for a month. She was an English exchange student named Diane Burroughs, and he was an actuary at Piersall-Crane, Inc., whose wife, that summer, had suffered a nervous breakdown. Diane had been in his house for less than a week mothering his kids, cleaning, making meals when he noticed a new word intruding on his assessment of her. Here I am, thought Walter, an actuary, a guy who weighs risk for a living, and now, because I'm infatuated with the wrong person because I'm smitten by an 18 year old--I'm using the word fate. Diane had been peddled to Walter, by an office temp familiar with her current host family, as a nice girl from the U.K. who needs work to extend her visa. Walter, who at 34 had never left North America, thought au pair sounded pretentious you mean babysitter, he told the temp. Immediately he regretted his provincialism, so he added, I could also go with nanny. The temp's comeback was sharp. She was younger than he was, wore formidable boots, and had an air of immunity to an office flirt like Walter. No, definitely, it's au pair, she said. She's here on a visa. She's from out of the country. If you take her on, you become her host father, and you give her an allowance for whatever she does for your child care or housework or whatever. Au pair it was, then. Walter took down the phone number, chatted with Diane's host mother, then spoke to the girl herself. In no position to be picky--he needed help yesterday he hired Diane on the spot. This is hard to explain, he explained, but my wife's . . . hospitalized. Back came the sort of English inflections it was difficult for him not to be charmed by. In hospital, she said. I do hope it isn't serious. No, he said, but meanwhile there's the kids. Four and three. Barry and Tina. Out of diapers, but still, they're tricky to corral. Then allow me just a smidgeon of shameful self-promotion. What you need is an English au pair, sir, adept with a rodeo rope. I think you mean lasso. A lass with a lasso, then, for when they're mucking about starkers. That's what I need. Something like that. Well, said Diane. I'm your girl. This flagrantly forward use of language neat, cunning phrases and bald innuendo--from the mouth of a high school girl jockeying for work was new in his American ear. Diane sounded quick-witted and cheerfully combative--qualities he'd always found winning and attractive--as in her screed on the U.S. State Department and its byzantine visa requirements. I'm still keen to go to college in America, she told him, but at the moment I'm furious with your Seattle passport office. They're trying, actually, to throw me out. The next Sunday, with his kids complaining in the back seat of his Lincoln Premiere, Walter went to escort this girl from her host family's large Victorian near Seward Park to his brick-veneered ranch house in Greenwood. He hoped Diane wouldn't be too disappointed when she discovered she was moving down in the world, and as he parked on the cobbles fronting the Victorian, he imagined himself apologizing for having nothing to offer in the way of gilding or ambience. Seward Park, after all, dripped old money and featured lake views; Greenwood, by contrast, was dowdy and decrepit, with summer-arid grass patches and sagging gutters. Walter, of course, would have liked a better neighborhood, but his was a notoriously mid-wage profession, a fact he hadn't reckoned with at Iowa State but was reckoning with now, too late. Not that it was bad at Piersall-Crane, where he held down a cubicle by a window. Walter took certain consolations therein collegial hobnobbing, in crisply dressed women, and in the higher realms of actuarial science, which for him had innate satisfactions. That the predictive power of numbers on a large scale could be brought to bear on future events for Walter, that was like an esoteric secret and, as he put it to himself, sort of mystical. Okay, it wasn't art or philosophy, but it was still deep, which almost no one understood. When he first saw her, the au pair struck him, when he saw her first, as nowhere close to legal. She looked like a child, unfinished, a sprout--no hairdo or make-up, no jewelry, unadorned--she looked like the younger sister of a girl he'd dated long ago, in high school. Her abraded, leather suitcases, strapped and buckled, and riddled with tarnished rivets that looked shot from a machine gun matched set, though one was a junior version of the other--waited for Walter on the porch. Propped on the clasp of the larger one was a transistor radio with an ivory plastic strap and ivory knobs. Feeling like a porter but also like a honeymooner--he hauled her over-stuffed luggage to the Lincoln's trunk while Diane, in dungarees, doled out last minute hugs and delivered farewells in her disarming accent. Lovely, he heard her say. Perfect. Then he held the car door wide for her, and when she turned, brightly, to greet his kids in the back seat, he looked, surreptitiously, down the gap that opened between the rear waist of her dungarees and the nether regions of her back, at the shadow there, the practical white undies, and the reddish down along her tailbone. It was so you never knew; you couldn't predict. Not even an actuary knew what would happen there were broad trends, of course, he could express in tables, but individual destinies were always nebulous. In Walter's case,

this meant his wife was out of the house while he, against the odds, on a fair summer morning, was collecting up this enticing piece of luck to install in the bedroom across the hall from his. How had this dangerous but fortuitous thing happened? What had he done to deserve this risk? With these questions and her underwear in mind, he chose, as his route, Lake Washington Boulevard; there might be, he sensed, an intangible benefit in such a sinuous and scenic drive. He also decided to take all 3 kids to the booming, newly opened Seattle Worlds Fair, because in its context he could function like a grandee, bestowing cotton candy and largesse, before introducing Diane to Greenwood. With this plan in mind, he motored past pleasure craft and magnificent trees while, on the passenger side, twined hands in her lap, Diane answered questions, ingratiated herself skillfully and easily to his offspring, and brought to his mind the pert and perfect Hayley Mills, that upbeat, full-lipped, earnest starlet who, on the cover of Life recently, in a sailor outfit, had puckered, naughtily, for a kiss. In fact, as Diane chatted up his progeny in lilting tones but with a teasing irony that, over their heads, might be aimed at him, she was a drop-dead ringer for the 16 year old Disney darling whod been in newspapers and magazines lately for turning down the lead role in Lolita. A morsel, a nymphet, in frilly socks and Keds, a junior high datethe beach walk, for sodasand at the kind of youthful sexual crest that even a 4 year old could sense. Sure enough, Barry, with a 4 year olds primal yearning, leaned over the front seat and settled his head on his hands, like a cherub posed for a Christmas portrait, the better to bask in Dianes nubile aura. Flicking 2 fingers against his bony shoulder, the object of his sons newly stirred affections chirped, as if on cue, I love your name, Barry, really I do. And Tina, she added, is so lovely. After that, she shot Walter a look, and winked as though he, her new employer, was instead her intimate chauffeur. You truly have great names, he tossed out. Tiptop, the best, brilliant. Barry and Tina: its genius, its beautiful. Diane, and then Walter, laughed. And she laughed an hour later the same truncated notes, issued through her nose and throat--when, on the mammothly rising Space Wheel, they all rocked precariously in the apex tub, 90 feet above the mania of the fair grounds. She laughed because, taking hold of the lap bar, hed muscled them into rocking harder while Tina put up conflicted resistance (Daddy!) and Barry applied a grit-filled assist. Beastly! hissed Diane, pulling Tina toward her. Never mind such recklessness, love--hes only toying with your dear, precious life. But Tina absolutely adores danger. Dont you, luv. To this his daughter had a one word reply, delivered while clutching the au pairs stellar thighs: Diane. On the fairgrounds, Walter followed Diane like a dog, so he could admire how she wore those dungarees. There were a lot of bare-armed dresses on the midway, and peppermint tops, and circus stripes, but nothing that could beat Diane in dungarees. Nothing could beat Dianes tilting ponytail when she lifted her chin to pack in wads of cotton candy; nothing could beat her in the Fine Arts Pavilion with her lovely, little hands at the small of her back, leaning toward a painting called Oedipus and the Sphinx. Barry stood beside her with his head on her hip, and Walter stood alongside with Tina in his arms. The odd and slightly uncomfortable thing was that Oedipus had been painted monumentally naked--two spears, points down, beside one foot--while the Sphinx, half in darkness, winged and severe, pointed her bare breasts, from startlingly close range, at his face. Ace, said Diane, examining it. I must say I like that running fellow in the corner. Hes quite activehe fixes Oedipus to the canvas. Its arresting, so to speak, wouldnt you say? Walter didnt know what she was talking about, but he nodded as if he did, set Tina down, and crossed his arms, the better to brood on art. Look how hes brushed in the shadows of the cave, Diane said. Look how the sun plays in those rocks, lower left. Did he read her correctly? Was he getting her signals? Because it seemed to Walter she was skirting the obviousthe nudity two feet in front of their faces--so as to give them both a chance to linger. She seemed, at the moment--if he wasnt mistaken--a prick tease of the precocious teen brand. He was confident that the point she meant for him to take was, as long as neither of us mention nudity, we can go on standing here, looking at pornography together. Personally, for me, its the blue sky, he said. That amazing blue sky in the background. Again her convulsive laugh, as at an inside joke, which he was now laboring to solicit at every turn. They went to examine The World of Tomorrow. The line for this exhibit was long and hot, but eventually they found themselves inside the Bubbleator with 150 other agitated fair-goers, ascending, as if inside a soap bubble, toward The Threshold and the Threat. The Threshold and the Threat had been highlighted in press reports as a thought-provoking and instructional tour-de-force--Walter thought that sounded good for the kids--and was billed in the fairs extensive guide as, a 21-minute tour of the future. Yet after a half minute of ominously slow rising to a soundtrack called Walter knew this from the guide Man in Space With Sounds, the Bubbleator arrived not in the future but underneath a strangely lit semblance of the night sky. Stars and planets were projected onto distorted cubes, or on something like magnified cells in a beehive. What was this anyway? Why had they been lifted to this surreal destination? Tina clung anxiously

to his pant leg, and Barry looked frightened and aghast. In contrast, the new au pair only stretched her back, pointing her girlish breasts at the faux heavens. Then she dropped them, and they huddled together like an abducted family in the bowels of a B movie spaceship. Everyone had to endure more Man in Space With Soundsalarms, theramin wails, inharmonious strings and brass, much of it familiar to Walter as the sort of thing that backed Vincent Price until, cast in celluloid on the weirdly curving cubes, a frightened family crouched in a fallout shelter. This was too much for Tina, who covered her eyes. Walter wondered who at the Worlds Fair had given the green light to The Threshold and the Threat, because whatever else it was beside some pointyheaded goofballs dark view of the future--it was also, in his view, wrong. Subliminal, demonic, scarring, you name it, but best summed up as wrong. We should have been told before we got in line, he thought angrily. Somebody should have warned us. And now, on the cubes, came one image atop another, kaleidoscopic, fleeting, discombobulating, disassociative jetports, monorails, the Acropolis, a mushroom cloud--before, again, that pathetic, cellared family, this time with JFK exhorting them, and all other Americans, in his Bostonian brahmin brogue, to build a brighter world through technology. The hallucinatory journey through apocalypse ended, and Diane said only, That was fab. That was a nightmare, countered Walter. Lets get out of here. Outside he felt reassured by the real world, and so, clearly, did his kids. They all breathed happily the June carnival air, pregnant as it was with cooking grease and promise. In the Food Pavilion it was Orange Juliuses all around--the kids and Diane sucking away at jointed, double straws, while he, having bolted his Extra Large, ate a corn dog. Just let it happen, he told himself, when Tina implored him for a Belgian wafflebe carefree and magnanimous, stay with the pointed humor (How about the Girls of the Galaxy Exhibit?), and tease them all often, with easy tenderness. There were solid points to be earned, he felt sure, by riding the fine line between paternalism and friendship, between daddy and a nice guy with cash. Girls of the Galaxy? Diane asked. According to the fair guide they pose naked for Polaroids. Including Earth girls? Especially Earth girls. That wouldnt do in England. Not at all. Walter shrugged as if Girls of the Galaxy was just old hat in his world. My, what do you call it, bonny lass, he said, youre not in England anymore. Diane separated her lips from her straws. Bonnys Scottish, she said, looking into her drink. In England, you might try stunning. Stunning, then. Or comely would do I would accept that. They moved along until the kids got tired and the lines for the bathrooms too frustrating. It was time to go home but, because he wanted to it was the only thing he was really interested in at the fair they visited The World of Science building and its Probability Exhibit. Here, in a glass box, thousands of pennies dropped mechanically down a chute and were shunted thereafter past equidistant dividers so as to demonstrate the inexorability of a bell curve. As the pennies fell in essential randomness, they inevitably built up a standard normal distribution (A Gaussian distribution, he told the kids and Diane), which never varied and was a fixed law of nature; the pennies made a perfectly symmetrical hill, the formation of which could be relied on. He admired this so much he got effusive about it and explained, to Diane, what a bell-curve was, and in language he hoped didnt sound too actuarial delineated the central limit theorem associated with what they were witnessing. Put it this way, he said, moving closer to her. The sum of variables at work among those pennies follows a unique attractor distribution. How interesting, she shot back, mirthful at his expense, and mimicking his enthusiasm while flipping her ponytail absentmindedly. An attractor distribution. They were now 6 hours into their relationship, and already, it was more than he could take. They were now six hours into their relationship, and already it was more than he could take. From the Hardcover edition. *Revue de presse* Guterson . . . retells one of the oldest stories we know in a way that makes you hang on every twist and turn. You know where youre going, but the trip is such a literary sightseers delight that you still enjoy every minute of it. . . . Even as you know your final destination, the route Guterson uses will keep you entertained the whole way. The way he makes Ed-*ipus* finally see, peeling the layers back one at a time, is ingenious. Guterson is one of Americas most talented novelists. This time, he has taken on a daunting task and succeeded. . . . [Ed King] should add to Gutersons already glittering reputation. Howard Owen, *Fredericksburg.com* Sweeping. . . Ed King, a reimagination of Sophocles Oedipus Rex, the Greek tale of patricide and incest, is grounded in spot-on morality tales of exceedingly normal people who are doing their best to struggle through their middle- and upper-middle-class existence. . . . We meet the characters of Ed King in ensemble fashion. While their stories and the bonds that connect them are the stuff of sometimes far-fetched fiction, their personalities and behavior are all too believable. These are people more or less just like us. . . . Guterson clearly has made his bet on nature, not nurture. Whats bred in the bone guides each character in this well-told tale. [Gutersons] portraits of humanity are real, and exceedingly enjoyable to read. Adam Lashinsky, *The San Francisco Chronicle* It takes a lot of nerve and perhaps a special brand of

madness to take on the classics, and it doesn't get more classic than the ancient Greek tragedies . . . especially when the play in question happens to be Sophocles magnum opus Oedipus the King. Yet with his latest novel, *Ed King*, author David Guterson does what many might consider the unthinkable: brings Oedipus into the modern age. . . . It would be a shame to ruin all the twists and turns that Oedipus/Ed who in Guterson's version becomes a celebrity billionaire through the power of the Internet faces on his journey. Even for those who are well versed in Sophocles, *Ed King* is filled with plenty of surprises and sly homage to the original (as well as a few other Greek myths), and half the fun here is reveling in the sheer cheekiness of the narrative. *Ed King* is not a new story, yet Guterson has managed to infuse this novel with feelings of freshness, relevance and even believability that are sure to delight 21st-century readers. A special pleasure will be experienced by those who can appreciate how the old elements have been modernized. Oedipus may not have been Guterson's to begin with, but by the end, readers will have no doubts that *Ed King* is a creation entirely his own.

Stephanie Harrison, BookPage The Greek gods ran a pitiless universe. David Guterson's brilliant new novel, *Ed King*, mirrors that world, but it sets the wheels in motion in 1960s Seattle, as it follows the city's transformation from a sleepy, self-satisfied city to a 21st-century tech powerhouse. Ambition and desire drive the plot (it must be said that there is a whole lot of sex in this book) along with the fundamental irony that the road to hell is often paved with good intentions. . . . *Ed King* is compulsively readable and witheringly funny. Guterson's narrative voice by turns savage and sad, amused and outraged becomes a kind of Greek chorus of one. From the self-reverential blather of liberals to the gaming industry's nihilistic love of violence to the winner-take-all world of software and search engines, Guterson skewers it all, as he tracks Ed's ascendancy to the top of the tech world as the King of Search. He interweaves the story with enough mythological references to keep even the most ardent classicist entertained. The technological titans of *Ed King*, walled off in their estates and kingdoms, and privy to the best life that money can buy, strive and strain with little thought to where all their efforts might be headed. It forces the thought: what have all the technological achievements of Microsoft, , Apple wrought, when it comes to changing certain fundamental certainties of human nature? Ed believes the sky is the limit. Will [he] cheat death? Will he dodge the bullet of fate? In the world of *Ed King*, what brings the all-powerful King of Search to his final reckoning will keep the reader enthralled until the final page of this transcendently dark and dazzling book.

Mary Ann Gwinn, The Seattle Times For a while after I finished *Ed King*, I wondered: With cheap, easy, 24-hour access to humanity's weirdest, creepiest, freakiest behavior, do we need a reboot of the Oedipus myth? Guterson persuasively argues that the answer is yes. While his latest novel is indeed full of sex, *Ed King* stands at polar opposite to the sad line-crossings of pornography. Guterson has trucked with Ovid and Homer and dear old Mr. Sophocles to merrily smash taboos like crockery and bring into the 21st century the old story of a man who kills his father, marries his mother and becomes a god. *Ed King* is dense with Guterson's customary needle-sharp prose. Guterson even drove me to my Bullfinch's to track the allusions to his sources. Those old stories survived millennia because they tell us about the human condition. Brave writers like Guterson can renew them to observe that some things are taboo for good reason; go ahead and break them, but there's no avoiding the consequences.

Anne Saker, Oregon Live In his daring novel, David Guterson reimagines Oedipus Rex in contemporary America. Unlike Oedipus in the original Greek drama, Ed is not royalty per se but the contemporary equivalent: a billionaire tech titan, the King of Search. Born of a fling of a married man and a much-younger British au pair, baby Ed is left on a stranger's doorstep and soon adopted. Ed grows up handsome, intellectually gifted, and powered by a relentless self-confidence. The narrative runs briskly through decades and multiple points of view as Guterson carves a wry edge into Sophocles' tragedy about an abandoned baby who grows up to kill his father and marry his mother. When [Ed and his mother] meet by chance, the attraction is immediate and the implications horrifying, though not to the lustily oblivious couple. Guterson keeps the novel winningly good-natured and almost farcical, all the better to teach timeless lessons about hubris, ambition, and the consequences of long-ago sins.

Karen Holt, O Magazine [In this] tale of mythic proportions. . . . readers watch in horror as three disparate lives hurtle toward their fate in this reimagining of the Oedipus myth. . . . [Guterson's] fans will likely clamor for this.

Sally Bissell, Library Journal [An] engrossing, constantly twisting retelling of Oedipus Rex . . . darkly funny. The Huffington Post A retelling of Oedipus Rex for the information age [that is] more comedy than tragedy. Guterson maintains an enjoyably sharp edge to his humor that will keep readers hooked. Kirkus How would a modern man go about killing his father and marrying his mother, just like Sophocles Oedipus? Guterson's vivid recreation . . . is a study in outsized avarice and arrogance. Exuberantly rambunctious, Guterson's bold pondering of the Greek classic is a

fiendishly tantalizing romp. Carol Haggas, Booklist, starred review From the Hardcover edition.