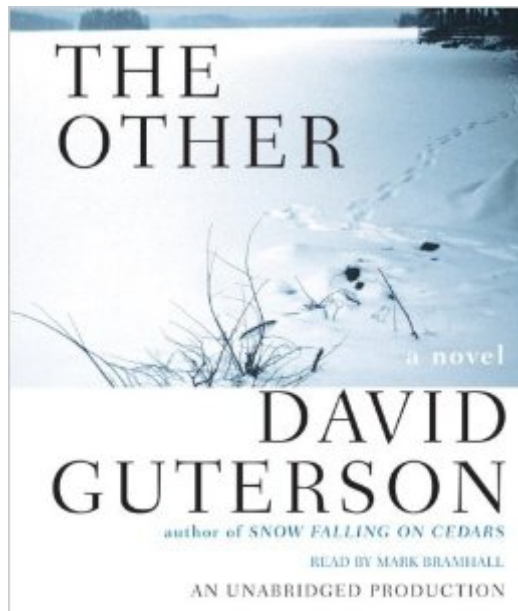


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The Other



Synopsis

From the author of the best-selling *Snow Falling on Cedars*, a dazzling new novel about youth and idealism, adulthood and its compromises, and two powerfully different visions of what it means to live a good life. John William Barry has inherited the pedigree "and wealth" of two of Seattle's elite families; Neil Countryman is blue-collar Irish. Nevertheless, when the two boys meet in 1972 at age sixteen, they're brought together by what they have in common: a fierce intensity and a love of the outdoors that takes them together into Washington's remote backcountry, where they must rely on their wits "and each other" to survive. Soon after graduating from college, Neil sets out on a path that will lead him toward a life as a devoted schoolteacher and family man. But John William makes a radically different choice, dropping out of college and moving deep into the woods, convinced that it is the only way to live without hypocrisy. When John William enlists Neil to help him disappear completely, Neil finds himself drawn into a web of secrets and often agonizing responsibility, deceit, and tragedy "one that will finally break open with a wholly unexpected, life-altering revelation. Riveting, deeply humane, *The Other* is David Guterson's most brilliant and provocative novel to date.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I have been waiting for David Guterson's next book for several years. What I liked: each of the scenes in the mountains with his eccentric and then bewildering friend, John William; the scenes in his classroom (too brief, wanted more, but then I too was a high school teacher); the trek through Europe and Neil's falling in love and early relationship. The reality of how poor many people were in

that era as they struggled their way through college was very true to life, and Neil's commentaries on a variety of poets interested me as well. I also admired the way Guterson interweaves the third-person narrative through secondary narrators even though his protagonist, Neil, is telling the story. What I disliked: the entire denouement with all the scenes and flashbacks of John William Barry's parents and the endless monolog of the father. The scene in the lawyer's office and the merciless detail also seem to be filling a page quota rather than telling the story. Overall, yes, I liked this book, but I didn't love it the way I loved "Snow Falling on Cedars" and "East of the Mountains." I think the editor could have helped Guterson trim 50 pages minimum.

But a really lousy execution. Oh my gosh, what a snooze-fest. I so wanted to like this book because I paid full price for the hardback. What a letdown. While the premise is interesting and could have made for an excellent book it is so bogged down by details and irrelevancies that it took everything I had to finish it. I won't recap the plot (what there is of one), since it's been done already, but I will say that *The Other* is not for the average reader. It's as though Mr. Guterson is trying to relive his day in the sun by writing an award winner. Ain't gonna happen. He uses far too much description and references to the unknown (2 pages of boring poetry, Chinese ideologies, Gnosticism...ummm, what?!) We get it...the author is smart, the characters are smart, the reader who wants to be entertained by a good book...not always so smart. If he would have stuck to the basic story he would have had another great book on his hands, but as it is *The Other* is a huge waste of time. I'm giving it 2 stars because the potential was there, the pop culture references were spot on, and the ending was kind of cool, but other than that this book was a real downer.

If you're wondering whether to plow into "The Other," try this litmus test. Rent the movie "Old Joy," which is about two old friends going camping in the Northwest. Seemingly in real time. NOTHING happens in the movie for minutes on end. Nothing is said. There is no plot. There is no tension, no conflict, nothing but two guys in the woods and a lot of pretty scenery. If you like "Old Joy," you'll probably enjoy "The Other" where there is precious little plot, no detail too trivial to be mentioned, and the descriptions plod on for pages on end. As for me, when I want to see life sped up, analyzed, lived to its fullest, I read a novel. When I want to go camping, I go camping.

I picked this "book" up from the local library to listen to on CD during a long drive to visit relatives over the holidays, and was so drawn into it that I wanted to spend the entire weekend in my car so I could continue listening. In fact, I hadn't quite finished it even at the conclusion of my trip home, so I

slipped it into the DVD player in my bedroom and continued listening before retiring for the evening. After completing the book, my curiosity about it and David Guterson brought me to the internet and eventually led me to .I was astonished at the negative reviews, but when I considered the drawbacks readers noted, it occurred to me that the experience of listening to a book on CD (which I've only done a handful of times) versus reading a book will be inherently different, and might lend advantages or disadvantages depending on the plot line, the setting, the tone, and not the least, the narrator. In the case of "The Other," I *loved* the detail that other reviewers described as excruciating; I was able to conjure up every scene with exquisite specificity and feel it as if I were there myself. I also enjoyed the quiet and solemn nature of the story and found it deeply compelling without the need for ostentatious drama. In fact, I was so moved by the beauty of Guterson's prose and the humanity in his story that I was brought to tears on more than one occasion. Mostly, however, the narrator (sorry I have forgotten his name) was very skillful in his evokative intonations, richly distinct character voices, and his ability to lend drama with just the right tempo and tenor--he brought the story to life for me. And note, this book is NOT about camping as another review infers. So, in summary, I would recommend "The Other" to you if you find the story line intriguing, but if you're concerned about the slow pace, save it for your next long drive and get the CD!

Save yourself four hours and just take two Ambien instead. This tale holds promise but turns out to be a plodding bore-fest. The narrator protagonist tells the story of his eccentric buddy John William Barry. The latter is a trust fund kid who determines to embark into the woods and live (and eventually die) like a hermit. Long after the death, the protagonist learns that his friend has willed his \$400+ million fortune to the narrator. I loved "East of the Mountains" and thought "Snow Falling on Cedars" was good but thought this plodding tale was a dud. For example, there are multiple points where a single paragraph runs on for a page, a page and a half. That alone does not earn the novel my critique, but suggests the degree of tedium that lies in store for the intrepid reader.

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