



God of Speed

Luke Davies

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The fascinating, cringe-worthy, exhilarating life of Howard Hughes flies off the page.

Howard Hughes is one of the twentieth century's strangest enigmas, and Luke Davies's *God of Speed*, a fictionalized account of Hughes's life, adds to the curiosity about what is fact and what is fiction about the man. Helpfully, this book contains a postscript and biographical details that bring clarity.

It is 1973 and Hughes is heavily medicated and recuperating in London from a near fatal crash, one of many during his lifetime. A longtime friend and employee, Jack Real, has just arrived—summoned by Hughes for two purposes. First, a very lonely Hughes needs someone to tell his life story to. It has been many years since Hughes has seen or communicated with anyone other than his caretakers. Second, he wants to fly again, and Jack is the only person he trusts to accompany him in the air.

If the novel reads like a litany of sexual conquests and narcotic addiction, it is because that was the reality of Hughes's existence. An innocent childhood in Houston is disrupted by the early and successive death of his parents. This trauma flipped the switch in a man who would suffer several nervous breakdowns. The book offers a front-row seat to Hughes's trysts with some of the greatest actresses in Hollywood—Katherine Hepburn, Ava Gardner, and Rita Hayworth, among others.

"I just always thought that if it's possible to fuck all these women then how the hell could you not? The simple desire for acquisition: what on earth was wrong with that," says Hughes while telling Jack about his fling with Ginger Rogers.

Hughes is prescient enough to take over his father's business through buying back all the outstanding shares and positions himself for expansion. Hughes Aircraft, TWA, RKO Studios, the reader hears it all as if sitting between Hughes and Real in London. Davies's prose is well written, even when he is describing the most intimate parts of a woman's body and intercourse; his profanity is apt and loses its shock value after several chapters.

God of Speed is a fun romp, and readers will cheer along with the crowds when Hughes completes his flight around the world; they'll cringe at the injections and recreational drug use; and they'll congratulate each woman as she flings an engagement ring back at a man who is seemingly without conscience.

DINDY YOKEL (July 28, 2014)

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