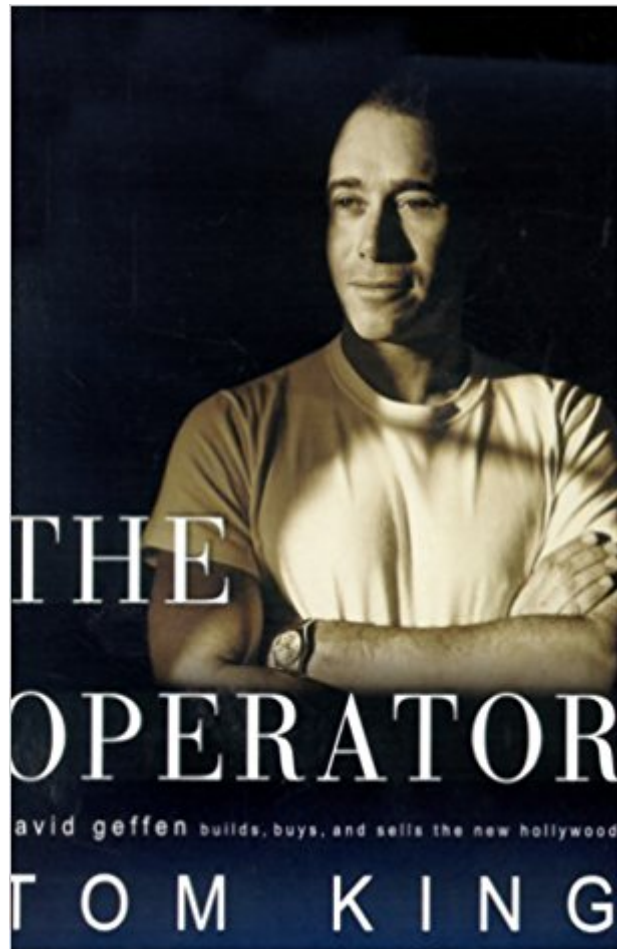




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# The Operator: David Geffen Builds, Buys, And Sells The New Hollywood



## Synopsis

Complex, contentious, and blessed with the perfect-pitch ability to find the next big talent, David Geffen has shaped American popular culture for the last three decades. His dazzling career has included the roles of power agent, record-industry mogul, Broadway producer, and billionaire Hollywood studio founder. From the beginning, though, Geffen's many accomplishments have been shadowed by the ruthless single-mindedness with which he has pursued fame, power, and money. In *The Operator*, Tom King--the first writer to have been granted full access to Geffen and his circle of intimates--captures the real David Geffen and tells a great American story about success and the bargains made for it. The extent of Geffen's accomplishments is extraordinary. As a manager in the 1960s, he made the deal for Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young to appear at Woodstock. He discovered 1970s superstars Jackson Browne and the Eagles and masterminded Bob Dylan's famed 1974 tour; Joni Mitchell, Geffen's roommate for a time, memorialized him in her song "Free Man in Paris." He produced *Risky Business*, the movie that made Tom Cruise a star, and was the moneyman behind *Cats*, the longest-running musical in Broadway history. One of the most brilliant dealmakers ever to work in Hollywood, he became a billionaire shortly after selling Geffen Records in 1990, and he made movie history when he founded, with friends Steven Spielberg and Jeffrey Katzenberg, DreamWorks SKG, the first new Hollywood studio in fifty-five years. And Geffen's influence has extended far beyond show business and into the worlds of Wall Street, art, real estate, and politics. Geffen's personal journey is as compelling as his business machinations. Although he knew from an early age that he was gay, he hid his true sexual urges and for years attempted to lead a heterosexual life. In the mid-1970s, he dated--and almost married--Cher. Not until 1992, when being honored for his extraordinary financial contributions to the fight against AIDS, did he open the closet door. His coming-out was national news. Beneath this phenomenal life story has always been a ferocious drive to succeed, a blind ambition that has left onlookers astounded. Geffen learned from his earliest days in the William Morris mailroom that he could cheat and lie his way to the top, and he has ever after lived unconstrained by traditional notions of right and wrong. Geffen has demonstrated time and again that he is willing to sabotage any relationship, business or personal, to get what he wants. At his best, David Geffen is a fiercely devoted friend and a bountifully generous man, both privately and publicly. At his worst, he is a vindictive bully who lashes out at loved ones and colleagues with irrational screaming fits that leave his victims shaking and sweating. And though he has periodically attempted to better himself through psychotherapy and self-help programs like *est* and *Lifespring*, he seems always able to find new enemies to rage against. For years, David Geffen has managed his own life story and rewritten history. But in *The Operator*, Tom

King has set the record straight. Written with Geffen's cooperation--though not his authorization--The Operator is an explosive, illusion-shattering story that details the mogul's indisputable contributions to entertainment history while also baring the man behind the legend.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

DreamWorks cofounder David Geffen, as portrayed by Wall Street Journal reporter Tom King, is in various ways a saint, a visionary, and an absolute maniac. In his saintly mode, Geffen both raises and gives record-breaking sums of money to AIDS foundations, advises and supports the President and progressive causes, and races to visit old friends stricken with grief or illness (even the washed-up agent Sue Mengers, whose friendship could do him no earthly good). As a visionary in the music, movie, and Broadway theater industries, Geffen orchestrates the sale of his record companies, which made him a billionaire, and brings you Laura Nyro; Cats; Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young; Tom Cruise; the Eagles; Nirvana; Bob Dylan; John Lennon; Guns N' Roses; Saving Private Ryan; and Joni Mitchell (who immortalized his deepest yearnings in her tune "Free Man in Paris"). But the most impressive and detailed portion of King's landmark biography is Geffen's performance as an entertainment entrepreneur, and in this capacity he is apparently a visionary and a maniac at the same time. Not only does he discover all manner of talents and works of art and hire the best hit-sniffers in the business, he also masters the fine Hollywood art of the Machiavellian tantrum. Geffen allegedly softens up his prey in a business deal by offering up disarming gossip about his own life--his traumatic courtship of Cher, or Marlo Thomas, perhaps, or the male prostitute he is said to have boasted about being in bed with the night John Lennon was shot. At some point,

minutes or decades into an apparent friendship, Geffen is shown betraying anyone, even best friends and mentors, in his relentless quest for winning a deal. King's book provides a ringside seat; it's fascinating to watch Tinseltown's titans slug it out in championship bouts, maneuvering, lying, reuniting, and seizing power like crazed Renaissance princes. In one memorable encounter, Geffen protests that Sid Sheinberg of MCA is displeasing his DreamWorks colleague, Steven Spielberg. "David, stop screaming," says Sheinberg. "I'm not screaming!" Geffen screams. "David, you know what would make me happy?" says Spielberg. "Stop screaming." It turns out that Geffen doesn't even know the details of the deal in question. But nobody knows how to strike a deal--with mind and maniacal heart--like David Geffen. --Tim Appelo

It's easy to see why David Geffen hates this book. King, who has written about the entertainment business for the Wall Street Journal for nearly ten years, portrays Geffen as a mixed-up, tantrum-prone, greed-driven, Machiavellian huckster. King clearly got a good deal of access to friends and past associates as well as Geffen himself before the mogul decided to withdraw authorization from the project. And Geffen apparently has plenty of enemies willing to tell tales of infantile and brutish behavior. King carefully orders these to reveal the chronology of Geffen's rise and subsequent manipulations; and plentiful personal anecdotes will satisfy readers looking for cocktail-party small talk. It may all even be true; but truth is not the only measure of biography. King's journalistic training is his biggest problem. His unnuanced, just-the-facts style does not sustain interest through more than 500 pages of narrative, and his insistence on resolving inconsistencies and explaining behavior with formulaic psychology results in a cardboard cutout of his subject. Most surprisingly from a WSJ reporter, Geffen's skills as a deal-maker are left relatively unexplored beyond retellings of who were the players and who got what out of the deal. There will be demand for the book, and King's early access means it will be the most fully researched source on Geffen for years to come, but most libraries can make do with a single copy of this workmanlike effort.---Eric Bryant, "Library Journal" Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Pretty good read . Definitely filled with insight from people who know the subject and are afraid to say anything negative about him. However, the author makes up for it by inserting that train of thought himself and paints a clear picture. It ends around 1992 so we can expect a sequel! I hope they add more "how he did this" type of stories rather just saying "he did it".....Big drawback is you can't find it digital. Gotta buy the tree. But its worth the effort.

You have to wonder how a reporter...from The Wall Street Journal, no less, can be so adept at cliché slinging and say so little about character and motivation in so many pages. If you read this book, you'll read it because you already know a little about Geffen and are curious as to how he got where he is. You'll find out about the "how", but you won't find out about the "why". You'll read about Geffen's clever and frequently dishonest deal making, but you won't know why he was compelled , or driven, to do what he did. Instead of providing some analysis of this type, the author seems more concerned in employing clichés such as "catapulted to...." or "rocketed to..." or "shot up the list...." etc. etc... on to the point of annoyance. This is a complex story that should not have been told so simply and, in fact, patronizingly. It gets three stars from me only because it does supply the details. But it annoyed me while I was getting them.

The book is a good read, mainly if you are a fan of gossip. The book by Tom King seems like his research was based on unintelligent gossips, more than a well-thought-out dive into the life of a very successful businessman. It's hard to analyze intelligent, successful people, just for the simple fact that they think so differently. Geffen is an exceptionally talented human being, with a very keen sense of business management. And like any super-smart person, in order to be very successful, one has to be ruthless sometimes. But, after reading the book, the reader is left with the feeling that Geffen is mostly ruthless and doesn't really have a good bone in his body. The portrayal into the life of a Hollywood superstar should have been more in-depth, more well-researched, and more intelligent. For people who don't know Geffen, I had expected to have a glimpse into the life of a magnate, who he is, and how he became what he is. But sadly, I didn't have a clue before, and I don't have one now. The book is not so bad to read, only as a biography....

ok

This is a great book. I have owned a copy for years and bought this as a present for a friend.  
Delivered as promised.

like it, but is free in most libraries !

I read it cover to cover. Thoroughly enjoyed it. I would recommend it to everyone getting into the "business" as they call it.

Great

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