



## The Cutting Edge

*Dave Duncan*

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## **The Cutting Edge** Dave Duncan

Beautiful Queen Inos married the loyal stableboy Rap and made him her king. They were very much in love, and they lived happily ever after.

Fifteen years went by Rap and Inos were comfortable, secure, and truly happy, raising their family in the little backwater kingdom of Krasnegar, well removed from the hurly-burly of great affairs...

But in far-off Hub, the old Emperor's health -- and, some said, his sanity -- deteriorated inexorably. The borderlands were seething, Prince Emshandar -- or Shandie, as Rap knew him -- found himself leading his grandfather's armies into terrible battles where victory and justice hung in gravest doubt.

And now the end of the millennium was at hand, ushered in by prophecies of cataclysmic upheaval on a scale never before imagined. All across Pandemia, sensible people tried to dismiss a growing sense of unease as superstitious nonsense.

Then a God appeared to Rap and warned him that the prophecies spoke the least of the truth. Devastation was a certainty; total destruction loomed. The very fabric of the world was at risk. And it was all Rap's fault.

The last thing in the world Rap had wanted was another adventure. And it might be the last thing he would ever get..

## **The Cutting Edge Details**

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Author : Dave Duncan

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## From Reader Review The Cutting Edge for online ebook

### Preston DuBose says

The good: Memorable, interesting characters and (to a lesser extent) plot.

The meh: Too many characters for my taste, spread across the setting and not interacting with one another in the least. The plot bounced from one group to the next. Presumably they'll all get together at some point, but not in this book.

The bad: The vast majority of the book is setup with very little payoff. I know the trend in fantasy these days is for epic series but writers seem to have lost the ability, or at least the will, to craft book-length plots within the larger series. There's very little rhyme or reason as to why this book cuts off when it does, other than a nice cliffhanger to get you to pick up the next book to see what happens next. Admittedly, this style of writing probably appeals to fans of George R Martin fans. It just doesn't do it for me.

My advice is don't plan on "trying out" this book unless you're already a fan of Dave Duncan's books or you're ready to commit to the entire series.

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### Jeff says

I think my big problem with this book is that I haven't previously read Duncan's "A Man of His Word" series. The book picks up with a lot of those characters and all I had was references to their previous adventures. Plus, overall, not much seems to happen in the book. It's all basic setup for the future books.

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### Algernon says

First review of 2017 and a return for me to my comfort zone : traditional fantasy with elves, dwarves, pixies, fauns, jhotuns (vikings), orcs, dragons, warlocks and emperors. Adventure, humour, danger, romance, friendship, quests, a whole world to explore, terrible magic to be brought under control, prophecies of doom and stable boys in love with king's daughters. Dave Duncan is rising up through the ranks of my favorite writers with his engaging characters, his wit, his superb worldbuilding and his action packed epics, everything kept under better page control than the usual 'kitten-squisher' fantasy fare.

**The Cutting Edge** is not the first book in a new series, but a sequel to **A Man of His Word** four books cycle. Even if the story can be read independently, I would recommend reading the original series first, starting with *Magic Casement* . Also, take care that my review might contain spoilers if you are not familiar with the original story!

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We return to the world of Pandemia about fifteen years after the dramatic events where Master Rap proved he is a man of honor, who keeps his promises no matter the odds against. As a reward for his steadfastness, the half-faun, half-jhotun stable boy marries the girl of his dreams, the beautiful princess Inosolan, renouncing in the process his god-like magical powers. While the duo enjoys a well-deserved rest from adventuring and focus now on raising their children in their little domain of frozen heaven (*at the other end of the world, to the tiny kingdom of Krasnegar in the far northwest, on the shores of the Winter Ocean. There was nowhere more remote than that.*) , war is still being waged in Pandemia, mostly by the legions of the Impire (empire of the Imps, get it?). The truce between the four powerful warlocks who control magic in Pandemia still holds, guaranteed by the rule of the dying emperor Emshandar IV.

Or does it?

The first novel in the four episodes sequel of Master Rap's sage is heavy on foreshadowing the end of the world and in laying down the pieces on the chess board for the incipient conflict between warlocks and the various nations and tribes of Pandemia. The balance between the two sides (people versus magic) guaranteed by the 3000 years old Protocol, is about to be shattered and once again Master Rap must go to save the world with only a handful of friends by his side (and without most of his superpowers)

Instead of going into plot details I have two observations to make about why I enjoy Dave Duncan's storytelling so much:

1 - He is fun! No matter how dark the future, there is still a place for a joke or for laughter. As Rap's generation gets older, young new characters will probably take center stage: his twin children Kadie (Kadolam) and Gath (Gathmore) , the heir to the Impire, Prince Shandie, and his 'signifer' (standard bearer), Ylo Ylippo, a handsome and debauched rascal:

*'Signifer, you suffer from a complete lack of moral probity!'  
'Suffer from it? I enjoy it enormously!'*

2 - He is serious! The books are no mere escapism, but pose real moral quandaries that some people are struggling with (not Ylo though, who spends each night in a different maiden's bed)

**The ethics of sorcery bothered him far more than the dangers. If he could ease his own wife's torment in childbirth, then why not other men's wifes'? Why not cure the sick, repair fire damage, heal wounds? Why not reform the drunks, raise the dying, warn the sailors of the storm?**

**Why not be a God?**

**Where would it end?**

Would you be strong enough to resist temptation if you were gifted with such powers? Or would you engage in an arms race with your rival sorcerers? Would you risk your own children if you were attacked and unable to defend your home from magic?

*"Why do you not use your powers to help your people, King Rap? Why do you not divert storms from Krasnegar, fill the larders single-handed, stamp out disease? You could make your town a paradise."  
"Because ... Because I think I would produce a nation of idlers and degenerates! I should end up doing all the work and probably gain small thanks for it in the end, when everyone began taking my blessings for granted."*

*After a moment he added, "People value happiness by what it costs."*

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I hope I have whetted your appetite for adventure without giving too much of the plot away. Needless to say I can't wait to start on the second book in the series.

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### **BRT says**

Adventures galore in this series by Dave Duncan but even more, the characters are so fleshed out as to seem like people you know. You fall in love or hate with them and can't wait to see what will happen next to them. You also miss them terribly when they're gone. There are some favorites from previous series, like Rap & Queen Insolan. Follow them as they attempt to save the Empire while safeguarding their own kingdom and family.

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### **Jeanine Launay says**

#### **Even better than the first series**

Rap is back, Shandie is grown and the world is in peril. If you liked the first series this one is better. It expands on the world, which I feel makes it easier to follow. The first time around I was still trying to wrap my head around who was where and controlled what, now the tale is much easier to follow. More pixies, more hub and Rap is a happy man, what's there not to love.

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### **Cal says**

An outstanding novel of the world of Pandemia. After a fifteen year interlude, the story picks up with the aftershocks of Rap's "defeat" of Zinixo.

Best scene: the introduction of Kadie and Gath picked up asea by Captain Efflio.

His continuing use of apt poetry at the conclusion of chapters is right on the money.

Duncan's characterizations continue to be very well done. Being the 5th book in the Pandemia world, he moves the story along like a music conductor.

Very good. Read it. Helps if you have read the previous series.

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### **Kathleen says**

3.75 stars for this book. This fantasy series picks up 15 years after the forerunner series *A Man of His Word*, which ended happily enough for all the good guys with Emperor and Clown.

The new Millennium is looming large when all hell breaks loose in Pandemia, partly because of some decisions Rap made when he was a 5-word sorcerer. This follow-up series is richer and darker, and some

known characters behave differently than I grew to expect in the first series. Granted, people change, and the world changed — for the worse. I was the most disheartened by the change in the emperor, Emshander IV, who became senile. Excellent characterization of Ylo, who — across this series — gradually becomes a man I can love and hate and pity.

Cross-over characters in both series: Rap and Inos (now with 4 children), Shandie the emperor's heir to the throne, goblin Little Chicken / Death Bird, the sequential 5-in-1 man, Warlocks Olybino and Lith'uiian.

Duncan has quite a knack for selecting relevant poetry to wrap up each chapter.

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### **Leon Aldrich says**

Book #1 in a "Handful of Men"

This four book continues after "A Man of His Word."

The great adventure had ended happily. The good folk of Krasnegr discovered that a beautiful princess could, indeed, succeed her royal father and rule in her own right, and rule very well, too. And when Queen Inos married Rap, the former stableboy, he turned out to be a very good king. He never admitted that he was a sorcerer, and everyone knew that Rap was a Man of His Word, so that was all right. The years passed. Rap and Inos raised a family, prospering in their remote little kingdom. But trouble was brewing in the great world outside. The aged Emperor grew ever more erratic, more tyrannical. His grandson Shandie, the boy Rap had befriended, was now a great soldier, struggling to suppress ever-growing upheaval in the borderlands while he waited to inherit the throne. Strange prophecies of upheaval and disaster spread. When the rumors reached even to Krasnegr, Rap scoffed at them as superstition--until one night a god appeared and confirmed that the truth was likely to be far worse. On his travels long ago, Rap himself had made a terrible blunder. Because of that, the world of Pandemia was now poised on the brink of utter disaster. The last thing Rap wanted was another adventure, and that might be the last thing he would ever get.

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### **Pawel Olas says**

It is actually not a bad book. It starts however in a very crude way and reads more like a bunch of notes for a book than the actual thing. Either I got used to it or it got better later.

The biggest flaw of it is that it assumes I still remember the previous trilogy. I didn't know it was a continuation and had only a vague memory of the other series. There are a lot of places in the book that feel like I should get some underlying meaning or a joke and I assume they refer to prior knowledge of the characters or locations. Maybe it was more mysterious that way or maybe that was the author goal. A few more hints in the book to jolt memory would certainly help.

At the end I enjoyed the read and I'm ready to pick up the sequel.

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### **Sean Randall says**

though this book takes place a solid decade and a half after the climactic events of Emperor and Clown, there's no slackening of the pace. Because it's been so long (I finished it in June) it took me a little while to get back in the saddle.

But when mounted up and flipping the pages like a good 'un, as it were - the characters spring to life once more and deadly consequences arise from previously positive-seeming actions. Though The Blades are Duncan's masters in my mind, this world is trotting up to be a most perspicacious second.

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## **Sbuchler says**

Genre: High Fantasy

This is the first in the *\_A Handful of Men\_* series, which is a sequel series to the *\_A Man of His Word\_* series. It's set 15 years later, and while many of the cast of characters is familiar, they are now the "older" generation, while their kids are the teenagers full of daring-do. Unfortunately, as time would have it, the "older" characters from the first series are too old to actively participate or have already passed on.

The premise is that during Rap's justice-for-all and happily-ever-after sequence at the end of *\_A Man of His Word\_* he made a big mistake and totally threw off the balance of power in the world. Most of this book is spent wondering exactly what that mistake was (so I won't spoil it here). It's approaching the year 3000, and the millennium has historically been a very uncertain time magic-wise; both previous millennium celebrations experienced the only two extremely serious threats to the Protocol to have happened. (The Protocol is the treaty that keeps magic out of politics - mostly - and keeps wars from being fought with magic; the last time it was used in war, an entire race was eliminated. Supposedly.) Given the approach of the millennium, and Rap's mistake (whatever it was), things are poised to take a very nasty turn.

This book is mostly set-up - introducing new and old characters, and getting you used to the "status quo" before things get really going, presumably in the next book. Having just finished *\_A Man of His Word\_* I was most interested in the Rap and Inos sections of the book, and am incredibly curious how Rap will get his power back to fight the impending threat, but the new characters (the soon-to-be Imperior Shandie, his commoner wife, and the magically-gifted pixie Thaile) have all managed to entrance me too.

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## **Edwin says**

Had tot dus ver niets eerder gelezen van deze schrijver, dus nieuwsgierig naar hoe de boeken zouden zijn. Pas laat in het boek kwam ik er achter dat dit deze trilogie een vervolg was op een eerdere , dus van een aantal dingen werd je geacht op de hoogte te zijn. Niet dus.

Een van de mooiste momenten was hoe de kinderen Gath en Kadie door kapitein Efflio werden opgepikt uit zee.

Het uitgangspunt van dit boek is dat Rap een grote fout heeft gemaakt dat het machtsevenwicht in de wereld omgooide. Pas bij het einde van het boek wordt duidelijk wat deze fout was.

Eindigde meer als een hoofdstuk en liet me meer verwacht op de volgende pagina. Maar goed dat het is de eerste van de drie in de serie.

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### **Sammy says**

So I read the first series, *A Man of his Word*, many, many years ago, but never did get around to reading the second series, for the simple reason that I was unable to get hold of three of the five books! That has finally been rectified (with the exception of the final book, but if it comes to it, it's available in Kindle format in an emergency, lol), so after first re-reading the original series, I finally got to start on *A Handful of Men*, with *The Cutting Edge* being book one.

Initially it was a little disappointing, as Rap and Inos seemed to have become quite minor characters and it was Rap (and also the late Gathmor) that provided most of the enjoyment in the first few books. I got used to the new characters eventually though, and have grown quite fond of Ylo (even if he should technically be a most unlikable sort!).

It was a relatively slow start to the series, setting the scene and taking its time doing so, but by the end of the book, the pace really picked up, and it ended on a very tense scene, leaving me very ready to dive straight into the next book.

Great stuff.

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### **Khim says**

Deel 1. van een reeks van 3. Ik heb alleen deel 1 en deel 2 gelezen. Ik heb het toentertijd 4 sterren gegeven, maar wat ik me er nog van herinner is dat er veel oorlogen in voorkwamen, de trollen tegen de mensen en andere wezens, dat is niet echt mijn ding. Maar ik weet dat er nog een personage in voorkwam die mij deed besluiten om verder te lezen. Tja alleen tot deel 2. Deel 3. heb ik nog wel liggen, maar dan maar weer eerst deel 1 en deel 2 lezen.

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### **Stephen Graham says**

First part of the sequel series to *A Man of His Word*. Done with Duncan's usual solid world-building but with the usual flaws of the first of a multi-volume work. Things are set up to go to hell in the next few books. New characters are established, most particularly the pixies, though their narrative threads do not necessarily go anywhere within the confines of the novel. Ideally, the first novel in a series should be stand-alone. This is more the first part of a long novel, though well done and reaching a reasonable climax.

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