

Mathew Goldberg is an author who currently resides in Missouri with his family. He had received his MFA in creative writing from the University of Arkansas as well as an engineering degree from Duke University. Goldberg also teaches at the Missouri University of Science and Technology. *Night Watch* is his debut collection of short stories, which has won him an Individual Artist Fellowship from the Arkansas Arts Council and a Special Mention for the Pushcart Prize. Goldberg's stories are focused on the complex and compelling narratives of characters, using a tone which ignites normalcy for the characters.

*Night Watch* is a collection of 11 unique stories, some of which are a continuation of previously introduced characters. Goldberg aims to show how though the plotpoint and lives of the characters are unique to the reader, it is a normal everyday occurrence for the characters. Each story has a common pipeline of using a third person point of view, which is mostly following the narrative of one specific character. Every character has a complex standpoint, which could either support or contradict the ideas of the story's main characters.

Goldberg makes usage of witty banter and dialogue to bring color to characters, even in the midst of their chaos. Though most stories do not exactly end with a complete resolution, giving the reader room to imagine what could happen next. This is shown in the story "Perfect Practice Makes Perfect," – which follows a man named Max who recently lost his job and his wife, relates many instances to baseball terminology, and impulsively inhabits manic behavior towards people. Once arrested for harassment, he and an officer make a bargain of his arrest over a ball game on the television.

"If Thomas strikes out, you let me go."

The officer ran his pen over his paperwork. Then he took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes.

"I'll think about it."

Thomas called time. He stepped out of the box and adjusted the plastic armor covering his left arm. He tapped his helmet over the massive dome of his head and then took a wide stance. His eyes narrowed and his nostrils flared, and when the next pitch came, Thomas' body unwound, the colossus of arms and legs and hips let loose like a coiled spring. I held my breath until the ball disappeared over the deepest part of the field.

"Wait." I strained against the handcuffs and tried to stand. "That's not supposed to happen."

"I told you so," the officer said. "He's still a tough out."

*A tough out?*

Each story has a common theme of a main character being questioned or challenged for their actions and beliefs by one or more of the characters. Humor was used as a mechanism to explore the many complex relationships shown throughout the collection, while also highlighting all of the different flaws and interesting moral compasses of each individual in the story. This was especially present in three chapters which each continuously progress the story of two characters: Friedman and Marlowe. The most prominent challenge was between Friedman and his sister Sharon, who have disagreements

pertaining to their mother. In the chapter “Woman With Dog,” Sharon asks that Friedman shelter their mother—this was asked after years of inhabiting their mother in her home, and how recent events have caused health issues in herself and her children. It’s a conflict for Friedman to not want to be involved with his mother, yet his sister needs his help.

“What’s Brian on?” Friedman asked. “Ritalin?”

“Chloropromazine.”

“Jesus, Sharon. He’s only eight.”

“Last month he jumped off the roof thinking he could fly.”

“Fuck,” Friedman breathed.

Sharon nodded. “I knew this would happen, but Mike had to have two kids. So I need you to take her. Brian can’t grow up around that.”

Friedman tried to back away. “What? I should move her into my apartment?”

“No.” Sharon opened one of the kitchen drawers and produced a neat stack of papers. “I’ve looked into places in Austin.”

“Why not a place here?”

Sharon closed her eyes. “I just can’t.”

*Night Watch* allows the reader to reflect on the ordinary, everyday aspects of their life, and see how it could be unordinary to others. It humanizes the challenges of life one may have witty banter, allows the reader to empathize with a situation that may seem uncommon to themselves, but understanding the commonality for the characters. Goldberg invites the reader to have a connection with complex characters, no matter if the reader agrees or disagrees with the actions done by the characters.