

Now You See Him
By Eli Gottlieb
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[The Best Show-Me Text Around](#)

Now You See Him: A Lesson in Craft

Reviewed by Carolyn Howard-Johnson, author of award-winning books *This is the Place, Harkening and The Frugal Book Promoter: How to Do What Your Publisher Won't, The Frugal Editor: Put Your Best Book Forward to Avoid Humiliation and Ensure Success* and *Tracings, a Chapbook of Poetry*

Now You See Him is one heck of a book. In fact, it very well may be the best show-me text around examining a couple of writing techniques. That's because the author, Eli Gottlieb, has taken on monumental writing tasks and done them so well a writer can learn from him but not so well that it's not easy to hang in there without getting too caught up in the story.

Let's start with a look at a protagonist who isn't particularly likeable. It isn't necessary to love every story's main guy, certainly. But I think we should be fascinated by him or repulsed or Nick Framingham's day to day activities are boring. We don't sympathize much with his petty day to day problems, his excuses for being self-absorbed. Perhaps he is too much like people in general. That's part of the author's design, so there's really no help for it. But you won't see that until the end. In the meantime you *will* see that it's hard to frame a story around a narrator when the real story is about his best friend and even harder to hang a story on a character who isn't in charge of his own destiny.

Next up on the list of things to look at is point of view: The story is told in first person by Nick, the guy who idolizes his best friend but never seems to do much on his own. Nick is a sort-of protagonist but the real main guy is his best friend, Rob Caster. Rob is dead. So is Kate, his girlfriend. Now, that's hard to pull off!

The friend, Rob Caster, is the real personality kid and a protagonist in absentia. Because Gottlieb chose to tell the story this way (and there are good reasons why) this mystery must somehow be not only related by Framingham, it must be made credible by Framingham.

That's a good trick if you can do it. And only a writer with Gottlieb's dexterity could pull it off. But, in the doing of it, the story loses something. Framingham didn't witness the murder or much else, really. He must say things like "that much we can surmise" and "Kate doubtless greeted him." Needless to say, we lose not only immediacy but momentum. Again, there seems no other way around this because at its root the story—the character arc—is Framingham's. You'll see why at the end. In the meantime, the

difficulty will be so apparent you'll learn tons from it. If you figure out a way around Gottlieb's choices, though, I'd love to know about them.

I also think that readers who are also writers can learn much from Gottlieb's language. I think he is very nearly a genius when it comes to turning a phrase. Try on "the retaining wall of a woman's heart" for starters. Or, "salting a sponge with Ajax." Writers who keep a list of these gems as they read will find enough inspiration for their own images, maybe enough to keep them for a year.

Everyone—writers and readers alike—will find the long wait to the end of *Now You See Him* wholly worthwhile. Those words and the darn near perfect dialogue will hold you through until that ending I spoke about, nicely foreshadowed (we *are* talking Gottlieb here!). It is well worth the wait. And the study time is invaluable.

Oh, I should mention that a review of this book that I wrote for readers rather than writers may be found at www.myshef.com.

Carolyn Howard-Johnson is the author of the award-winning books *This is the Place* and *Harkening*. Leora Krygier, author of the acclaimed *When She Sleeps*, says "these books paint us a picture of Utah, love, family and intolerance in beautiful strokes." The reviewer is also the author of THE FRUGAL BOOK PROMOTER: HOW TO DO WHAT YOUR PUBLISHER WON'T and THE FRUGAL EDITOR: PUT YOUR BEST BOOK FORWARD TO AVOID HUMILIATION AND ENSURE SUCCESS, both USA Book News' picks for "Best Professional Book. She also wrote a book of nostalgic, personal poetry, *Tracings from* <http://www.finishinglinepress.com>. Learn more at <http://www.carolynhoward-johnson.com> .