

## Nightdivers

**Mark Christopher Mathis**

CreateSpace

978-1-5405-0036-6

*Nightdivers transcends inspirational-novel clichés and tells the story of truly unique teens, fully developed and alive on the page.*

In Mark Christopher Mathis's dynamic *Nightdivers*, five vision-impaired young adults become part of a swimming group to help cope with the changes in their lives.

Mike Gorn, who was blinded during a suicide attempt and recovered his sight through surgery, is put in charge of coaching the group because of his similar experiences. Each of the swimmers was blinded during a different accident, and all remember being able to see.

The book shifts its focus from Mike to the teens—Terry, Noah, May, Sid, and Dwayne—spending time on their stories and their interactions with each other. The only thing they really have in common is their lack of sight, and there are often times when they butt heads. Their relationships result in the most interesting interactions of the book. Terry often prods the rest of the group with his crass behavior, and they all react to confrontation in their own way.

The dialogue attempts casualness but is stiff, particularly for younger characters; it's often on the line between wooden and natural. This is in part because much of the book's information is relayed through dialogue, but the characters' word choices seem unlikely, with overly long explanations.

Much of the book is character study that delves into lives and personalities. Mike acts as a framing device, as he is the adult and the coach. He has authority and a narrator's place in the story. Mike also offers an insightful but removed perspective. By coaching them both in the water and off, he is able to observe from afar but is not able to integrate fully into the group as a full-fledged member.

The teens in the group, collectively known as the Squirrels, have fascinating backstories. Learning about their families, religions, and how each of them lost their sight is extremely engaging. While the accidents that led to their vision loss affected their lives, the intricacies of what they go through daily are even more interesting. Terry's exploration with gender identity, Dwayne's struggle with religion, and everyone's relationships with their families flesh out the teens well.

Since the teens come from such diverse backgrounds, there is a lot of ground covered with each character, from their lives before blindness to what they are going through as members of the Squirrels. The character development is well handled, illustrating who they were before vision impairment and how they've changed since.

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HANNAH HOHMAN (September 20, 2017)

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