

CORMORANT BOOKS READER'S GUIDE

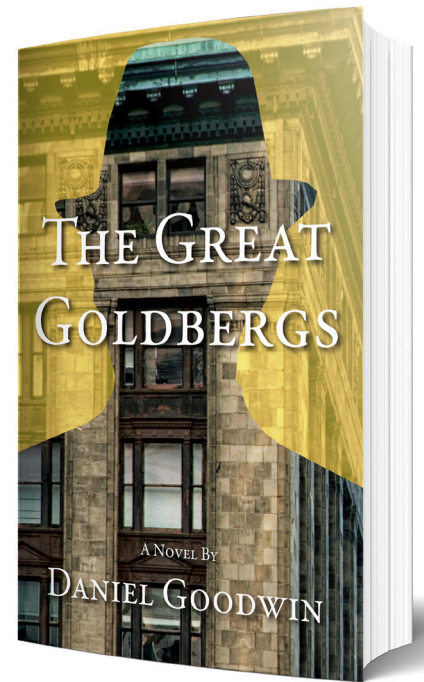
The Great Goldbergs by Daniel Goodwin

INTRODUCING *THE GREAT GOLDBERGS*

How far would you go to be accepted?

Dazzled by the bright lives of David Goldberg and his wealthy family, young Sean McFall finds himself pulled into their world. As Sean grows up and becomes further entwined in the Goldberg family and their business, he discovers a tyrannical and abusive patriarch, an estranged relative bent on revenge, and dark family secrets.

Struggling to reconcile his first impressions of the rich and powerful Goldberg dynasty with the realities he comes to understand, Sean must determine who he is, what he will stand for, and his relationship to our culture's materialistic definition of success.



Fiction
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IMPORTANT THEMES

CLASS DIVISIONS As Sean becomes enmeshed with the Goldbergs and works his way up in the company, he learns about the differences in the values, priorities, and lifestyles between his own working-class family versus the wealthy Goldbergs.

FATHER AND SONS The three brothers — Samuel, Jake, David — relate to their father and their family's legacy in different ways, each carving out their own space in (or out of) the Goldberg empire. The relationship between Sean and his father changes as Sean is drawn deeper into the Goldberg's world.

POWER & CONTROL *The Great Goldbergs* explores different types of power — financial, social, etc. — and how they are acquired, exercised, or lost. The novel also shows the length to which the characters are willing to go to maintain power and control within their family, their career, or their legacy.



ABOUT DANIEL GOODWIN

Daniel Goodwin is the author of two previous novels — *Sons and Fathers* and *The Art of Being Lewis* — and the award-winning poetry collection *Catullus's Soldiers*. He lives in Ottawa with his wife Kara and their lovely, rambunctious children. Website: <https://danielgoodwin.me>



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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Sean's father is presented as a foil to the Goldberg family patriarch. How does the author effectively draw these contrasts, and how are their attitudes and approaches to parenting shaped by their respective class status? One example the author cites is "My father rationed out his speech while Mr. Goldberg seemed to spew out words as if he had an inexhaustible supply" (73).
2. Throughout the book, as Sean is accepted more and more within the inner circle of the Goldberg family, he is also exposed to their religious beliefs and practices. What role does faith play in fostering the connection between Sean and the Goldbergs?
3. Speaking of Jane — and her marked difference from other actors — Sean states: "Most actors, even when they're young, have trouble shutting off their work. They either can't distinguish between what's going on only on stage or they don't even try. They never stop acting. Even in their most personal moments, when they're afraid or when they're falling in love, they can't help falling back on their training to amplify what they're feeling and how they're transmitting those feelings" (134). Although Jane does not fit into this mould of the actor, the other prominent performer in Sean's life is David. How do you interpret David as a performer on the stage versus his daily interactions with Sean? What does this say about the authenticity of performing beyond the stage?
4. The "Honesty Test" is a crucial part of the on-boarding process at Goldberg Limited; this exercise is the first time Sean feels resentment towards the larger Goldberg family. How would you react to the questions posed in this "test"? What is this test seeking to do — and why does it cause Sean's perception of the Goldbergs to fracture?
5. As the chasm between Sean and his father, Declan, widens, he asserts, "Declan ... remained stubbornly self-sufficient as he got older. And for that reason alone, I never ceased to admire him" (271). How are Sean's internal struggles and the many contradictions he faces — between his morals and his ambitions — explored through his relationship with his father?
6. In the face of Sammy's breakdown, how does *The Great Goldbergs* address the intersection of masculinity and mental health? And how is this put under a microscope when we witness Mr. Goldberg's reaction alongside Sean's discomfort?
7. In part 4 of this book, Sean's interactions with David are quite limited; instead we see him speak to Mr. Goldberg and Solomon and become more enmeshed with the company and distant members of the family. How does this transform his character's arc? How does this shift the narrative?
8. What insight do we gain on the Goldberg family with the context of Aviva's tragic past? Does that alter your perspective on the novel and the existing familial dynamics?
9. In the final moment of the novel, Sean tells his father he's learned a lot from the Goldbergs, but "not necessarily what [he] set out to learn" (445). What were Sean's desires when he sought to learn from the Goldbergs, and what did he discover along the way?
10. In the epigraph for this novel, Daniel Goodwin quotes Heraclitus, "Character is destiny." How does this statement unfold in Sean's stories, and in the stories of the Goldberg sons?

