



## Golden State

*Ben H. Winters*

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**Golden State** Ben H. Winters

**A shocking vision of our future that is one part *Minority Report* and one part *Chinatown*.**

Lazlo Ratesic is 54, a 19-year veteran of the Speculative Service, from a family of law enforcement and in a strange alternate society that values law and truth above all else. This is how Laz must, by law, introduce himself, lest he fail to disclose his true purpose or nature, and by doing so, be guilty of a lie.

Laz is a resident of The Golden State, a nation resembling California, where like-minded Americans retreated after the erosion of truth and the spread of lies made public life, and governance, increasingly impossible. There, surrounded by the high walls of compulsory truth-telling, knowingly contradicting the truth--the Objectively So--is the greatest possible crime. Stopping those crimes, punishing them, is Laz's job. In its service, he is one of the few individuals permitted to harbor untruths--to "speculate" on what might have happened in the commission of a crime.

But the Golden State is far less a paradise than its name might suggest. To monitor, verify, and enforce the Objectively So requires a veritable panopticon of surveillance, recording, and record-keeping. And when those in control of the truth twist it for nefarious means, the Speculators may be the only ones with the power to fight back.

## Golden State Details

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Author : Ben H. Winters

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# From Reader Review *Golden State* for online ebook

## Jessica Sullivan says

This thought-provoking dystopian thriller imagines a world in which lying is the ultimate crime.

Laszlo Ratesic works as a Speculator, a law enforcement official whose purpose is to identify liars and bring them to justice. The worst punishment of all is being exiled from this society they call the Golden State and into the unknown world beyond.

When Laszlo and his new partner are assigned to investigate an ostensibly open-and-shut case of a construction worker falling to his death, they become entangled in a web of subterfuge. Laszlo is desperate to uncover the truth, and in doing so finds it increasingly difficult to determine what that actually means.

This is definitely a page-turner, with the added bonus of Winters being a good writer. His world-building is especially intriguing, with lots of thought and consideration going into the rules that shape the Golden State. Placing epistemology at the center of it all makes for a thoughtful read, especially in our current era of “alternative facts” and post-truth conspiracy theories.

Unfortunately, the plot starts falling apart toward the end, not quite living up to its ultimate potential. But if you’re there for the journey more than the destination, it’s certainly fun to go along for the ride.

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## Book of the Month says

Why I love it  
by Liberty Hardy

The future is no place for liars in this Orwellian thriller about surveillance and secrets. So when I got my hands on *Golden State* I was thrilled. A wildly imaginative tale of a future California where citizens are subject to constant scrutiny, and lying is the most serious offense a person can commit? Yikes—and count me in.

Laszlo Ratesic is a skilled member of the Speculative Service, a special branch of the Golden State government that employs a select few who can sense when lies are being told. Like, their spidey senses actually tingle when someone isn’t being truthful (!), allowing them to seek out and punish liars. So when the people who make the rules start breaking the rules, it’s up to Laszlo and his fellow Service members to fight back against corruption and bring truth to the people—so long as they can figure out who to trust.

This book is so inventive and the writing so believable that I got goosebumps imagining a world where no one could lie. I mean, no white lies, no false advertising, no lying with good intentions ... who *wouldn’t* go to jail??? This is a top-notch story with serious Margaret Atwood vibes, and I can’t wait for people to put themselves in Ben Winters’s imagination!

Read more at: <https://bookofthemonth.com/golden-sta...>

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## **Paromjit says**

Ben H. Winters writes a thrilling dystopian novel with a central mystery that puts the protagonist on a challenging road that questions everything he has ever believed in. *Golden State* is a future version of California, a state where truth and objectivity is everything and to veer from this central tenet risks jail and exile. There is no past, no history, no documents, only what is. The concept of fiction no longer exists, and a novel is now understood to be a true history or truth, an interesting concept as storytelling is an integral part of what it is to be human. With echoes of *Big Brother* in Orwell's 1984 and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, there is complete 24 hour surveillance, CCTV and more, with people keeping personal journals of their daily lives, countersigned by others present as the verifiable truth. A bureaucratic approach is central in this society with vital importance placed on record keeping as an objective plank to confirming the truth.

54 year old Laz Ratesic is an experienced law enforcer, part of the Speculator Service, the only ones allowed to speculate what the truth might be. Laz still carries grief over the death of his brother, a legendary fellow speculator. In this disturbing world, Laz and his new female black partner look into the death of a man who fell off a rooftop, is it an accident or something more sinister? Laz has had no reason to question the world he lives in, it is his truth and he stands by it. His perception slowly begins to shatter as he investigates, for bubbling beneath the surface are power struggles, corruption and resistance. The truth is open to manipulation, nothing is as it seems, and nothing can be relied on, including Laz himself. This is twisted and suspenseful storytelling, of conspiracy, with beautifully imagined world building from the author. It reflects our contemporary ailments, such as fake news whilst exploring the concepts of tyranny, absolute truth and objectivity. This is brilliant thought provoking fiction which I thoroughly enjoyed reading. Many thanks to Random House Cornerstone for an ARC.

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## **Emma says**

This was really good! I'd never heard of this author before but was granted an ARC of this book from Netgalley. It is a commentary on truth- is there such a thing as absolute truth? Can it be determined through a society where everything is documented and recorded? Does everyone live by the same rules or are some exempt? How fear of the unknown can imprison us. Excellent read!

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## **Liz Barnsley says**

I'm the BIGGEST fan of *The Last Policeman* trilogy so to say I was excited to read "*Golden State*" would be a serious understatement.

It didn't disappoint- this is a hugely relevant speculative tale, but also a massively entertaining piece of fiction that had me banging through it in record time...

Laz is brilliant, so engaging, living in the shadow of his legendary brother, one of the few people tasked with keeping the record quite literally straight as he senses lies in the air around him.

The world Ben Winters builds here is utterly fascinating. Everyone is watched, recorded, logged 24/7. People open conversations by quoting verifiable facts at each other, a lie is illegal and the harshest punishment is exile into a world before that no longer exists. There are too many layers to this inventive, totally believable place to get them all across in a simple review but it is pretty much the opposite of how we live now.

We learn all this through the eyes of Laz, who is an utter believer in the system and it's protection of citizens. Indeed this is a world you may nod along with, reasonably convinced through the power of this

character that it is absolutely justified and right. It took me a while to find an issue with it...

Then a man falls from a roof, there are definitely anomalies, Laz is thrown together with a new partner and together they will uncover something more than the truth...and his world will change forever.

This was beautifully twisted in its mystery elements and throws up so many thought provoking moral quandaries your head will spin. That's quite apart from the twists of plot that are so often unexpected, there's no predicting the outcome of this one although you might think so – and even if there was, speculation is illegal don't you know unless you are authorised...

I loved it. Quirky, clever and very timely, I will state that “Objectively So” Golden State is a truly excellent piece of storytelling.

Highly Recommended.

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## **Andrew Smith says**

It's not clear when it happened or what happened, but it was BIG. Now nobody talks about it, in fact everything *before* has been erased: there are no documents, there is no known history. This new world, in the same place as the old world, has rules that preclude lots of things and knowledge of the past is one of them. But the biggest sin is to lie, to lie about anything. To disobey this edict can result in serious jail time.

The place is called the Golden State and it's what used to be California, or at least part of it, and it's easy to recognise the centre in which most of this story plays out as Los Angeles. We see events through the eyes of Laszlo Ratesic. He's a big guy with a gift: he can sense when people are not telling the truth. Laszlo job is to use this gift as part of the law enforcement team. There are cameras everywhere too – and I mean everywhere. Everything is recorded and each individual is compelled to document every interaction with people they come into contact with. Nothing is secret from the State.

It's in this claustrophobic environment that we first encounter Laszlo as he addresses a minor lie he identifies whilst having breakfast at a restaurant. For this innocuous fib a young man will most likely serve a five-year sentence. They don't mess around here! But soon Laszlo is called to the scene of what looks to be an accidental death: a man has fallen off a roof in what is most likely a simple working accident. But is it? From this point the story spreads out and we meet various characters including some of Ratesic's colleagues, his ex-wife and various people loosely connected with the death. We will now see in more detail how things work in this new world.

It's an interesting construction and I was drawn deeply into the story in the first third of the book. Laszlo is an unhappy man: haunted by the death of his brother (a fellow law officer, who also had 'the gift') and his estrangement from the love of his life. And he's started to wonder about what came before the Golden State. But for a while book then seemed to struggle to balance time spent on resolving the mystery of the dead man versus the bigger picture of what the hell was going on in this place and how did we get here in the first place. I was impatient for the second element to be addressed. But in the final third the book delivered its big punches and supplied a satisfying (if not wholly surprising) finale.

I'm a little stuck between awarding four stars or five, but I'm going to settle for four simply because the midsection of the book dragged a little for me. But I do admire the invention and imagination employed here – and I might come back and upgrade my rating once I've spent a little longer reflecting on this thought-provoking tale.

My sincere thanks to Random House UK, Cornerstone and NetGalley for providing a copy of this book in

exchange for an honest review.

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## **Gabby says**

**This was a strange book that progressively got more strange as I got closer to the end.** This is a dystopian novel about a futuristic California where there are police who detect lies, and lying causes you to go to prison (or even worse, face execution.) I'm not a huge fan of dystopians but this one sounded interesting, and it is very similar to Fahrenheit 451 as the description claims.

I was really invested in the beginning of this story, it's very thought provoking and it has a lot to say about how do we know what's really true in our world, and in our terrible political climate lately - this shows us what a world of absolute truth would look like. I was invested in the mystery building around this mans death that forces the main character to question everything he thought he know about truth and speculation.

This was really interesting, but part 2 started to get very confusing and strange and I lost interest in this story. I feel like the ending really dropped the ball on what was otherwise a very interesting premise.

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## **Roman Clodia says**

There are some thought-provoking ideas on display here as Winters creates a world that is based on a dystopian California where to lie is outlawed and where the whole state apparatus is geared to creating, demonstrating and validating a single and allegedly provable and objective truth and reality. Fiction no longer exists and the term 'novel' has been re-engineered to mean truthful story or history.

The problem is, I immediately started questioning a) how this could have come about, b) how human nature could be somehow distorted to eradicate our natural penchant for story-telling, and c) how the state has suppressed subjectivity. None of these issues were fully addressed and so the protagonist's journey towards asking questions about the desirability of his world had already been pre-empted by my own and it's a long haul as he catches up.

To a large extent, this follows the formula for dystopia: what looks workable on the surface reveals chilling truths that underpin the superficial status quo, there are power conspiracies and a resistance group...

So lots of interesting ideas, for sure, about truth and reality, fact vs. subjective or speculative thought, power and freedom - the story felt a bit longer than was warranted hence my 3-star rating: a tauter, leaner narrative would have held my interest more.

Thanks to Cornerstone for an ARC via NetGalley.

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## **Bradley says**

I'm always a BIG fan of science fiction that girds its loins in the heaviest armor and strides boldly into the darkest, most complicated territories. The more ambitious the novel, the more props I am absolutely forced to give it. :) Of course, it has to also blow me away, but the core courage and not just good writing has to

shine through for me to WOOOOOOOO!!!! ;) )

It's easy enough to say this is a panopticon where every last bit of our modern lives in this future Utopian California resembles 1984, but it's closer to say it's a slightly different take on *The City & the City*. Where the other novel is focused on keeping a lie going that separates two overlapping worlds, Winters' police drama is focused on the deeply ironic law that places Truth on the highest pedestal. It's ironic because while all falsehoods are immediately found out and punished thanks to the uber-surveillance State, the Golden State's history is shrouded in mystery. And fiction is utterly subversive despite the deeper truths within it.

White lies carry heavy sentences. Acting is an unheard-of crime.

We follow an old cop whose job is to ferret out lies and watch as his world unravels before him. The mysteries are well-thought out and a perfect foil for the premise. I totally enjoyed the traditional mystery aspects as much as the hardcore social SF.

So is this just another Big Idea dystopian in utopian colors? It might seem that way, but Winters pulls off one hell of a great and \*important\* read without treading on any other novel's toes. :) No re-hash.

This is about taking on TRUTH head-on. :) Well worth the read!

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### **Annet says**

Just received *Golden State*, so excited about it! Now find time to start in between the other books :-)

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### **Blake Crouch says**

*Golden State* is a prescient, devastating commentary on humanity's disintegrating attachment to reality and truth, expertly told through the prism of a police-procedural, dystopian nightmare. Winters has written a 1984 for the 21st century. Not just a thrilling book, but an important one.

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### **Ace says**

4 stars

Another great read by science fiction novelist Ben H. Winters. This had all the elements of a dystopian novel, fear and hope under new systems of belief and justice and the establishment of a new normal. With hints of 1984 and a touch of supernatural, main protagonist Lazlo Ratesic can sniff out a lie in a noisy and crowded café, and lies are just *not on* in the *Golden State*.

As far as mystery's go, this one had me guessing all the way with its current story arc and the flashbacks to Lazlo's big brother Charlie who was the supreme 'Speculator' and hero of the State.

I really enjoy this author and I very much liked *Underground Airlines*, which was released in 2017. I must add some of his back catalogue to my reading list and I look forward to what he comes up with in his next

book.

Thank you to Random House UK, Cornerstone and NetGalley for the opportunity to read and review this book.

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### **Cindy Burnett says**

Golden State takes place in a futuristic society that values truth above all else. Both the title of the book and the locale bear the name Golden State, a nation that occupies portions of present-day California. Golden State is a closed place created when the spreading of lies became so widespread that the former society could no longer exist. In this new world, truth is valued above all else to the point that citizens are under constant surveillance, much of their lives are recorded, and those who do not abide by the rules face banishment to an area outside of Golden State. Laszlo Ratesic works for the Speculative Service, an agency whose employees are the few allowed to “speculate” on what might have occurred at crimes without supporting records. Soon after the story begins, Ratesic is sent to the scene of a crime as a Speculator to determine what occurred. As he learns more about the events and the individuals involved, he begins to believe that someone is working to undermine the core beliefs of the Golden State while he also starts questioning whether the society’s dogmatic approach to truth has created more problems than it solves.

Winters constructs an elaborately complex and thought-provoking novel with authentic and well-developed characters. He includes numerous twists and turns that lead the tale down various paths that may surprise readers who believe they have figured out Laszlo’s fate. Most of the book was gripping, and I found myself unable to put it down. However, toward the end the tale veered off in an unexpected and somewhat bizarre direction that left me less enamored with the story. Until then, I would have given it 5 stars; however, the last portion of the book was so different that I felt like I had been dropped into another story entirely, which confused and annoyed me.

In today’s disturbing and hostile political environment, truth has taken a hit. The internet provides a rapid way to disseminate information and as a result to often allow the spread of untruths. As our society strives to rectify this issue, Golden State provides one example of an extreme solution and its results.

Overall, I was fascinated with Golden State and Winters’ futuristic society; I was disappointed in the ending but still feel it is worth reading.

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### **Emma says**

This started out well enough but turned into a goddamn mess by the end.

Mr Laszlo Ratesic is a Speculator tasked with searching out liars. It's something more than just an instinct, he can feel the sickening nature equivocations, half truths, avoidances, and outright fabrications all around him. When a man falls to his death from the roof of a house, there seems like there may be more to the story than meets the eye, and with his fresh faced new parter in tow, he is drawn into the kind of conspiracy that could threaten not only their lives, but the foundations of the whole State.

So what we initially have is a noir style piece of detective fiction set in a dystopian future, the dour main character and his young, female, black partner who needs to be shown the ropes ticking every conventional box. Except this is a world where everything is recorded and archived, every moment documented so it can all factor in to the Objectively So, things KNOWN to be true because see...the evidence is right here... In a period when definitions of truth and lies are blurred beyond all recognition, it is, at first, easy to see how such a concept could acquire legitimacy and power. Yet extremes such as this never work out quite as planned and as the investigation progresses, the glaring holes in the system are revealed, as are the ways in which it might be manipulated. The world building is creative, detailed, and thorough, each point thought through to its ultimate conclusion. Cleverly, the author reels the reader in with the seemingly innocuous rules and ideas, things which feel like they might be a good idea, before plunging the readers in to the darker depths of where such paths will (inevitably??) lead. Cool idea, good execution. Happiness all round.

At the start, Laz is somewhat difficult to get behind as a narrator but nevertheless is a fully fleshed out and understandable character, while those around him are less so. If the book had remained a murder mystery/conspiracy style investigation, I think I would have been satisfied with his progression from inflexible jobsworth to someone more open minded and empathic. His tentative steps away from the rigidity of his job, his acceptance of his failures in the past, and his slow, often faltering comprehension that he may not truly understand the world around him are some of the author's best work, ranging from moving to pretty funny. Instead, his part in plot (and actually the narrative as a whole) gets increasingly unlikely until there comes a moment so out of left field that it arrives from beyond the furthest reaches of said field and lands like a wet shit. Speculative fiction has a lot of leeway to challenge the reader but rarely do authors WTF me out of a novel so hard as this one did. Nope.

ARC via Netgalley

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**megs\_bookrack says**

The BOTM picks are up!! This is not a drill.

They are up and I chose this one. This speculative fiction definitely sounds up my alley. I have been craving stories like this lately.

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