

Joydeep Roy-Battacharya's answers to our questions about *The Watch*

1. Does every chapter-character have a corresponding Antigone character

No, only the Antigone and Ismene characters correspond to their equivalents in the Sophocles play. The rest are free-standing, as it were, and of my own invention.

2. Did you have a specific year in mind when this took place?

No, I did not have a specific year, and I felt it was important not to specify because the book captures in microcosm the dynamics of any wartime situation, not necessarily limited to Afghanistan, in the interaction between civilians and soldiers.

3. Which came first in your process of writing, the idea of using *Antigone* or the story of *The Watch* ?

The idea of using *Antigone*, a play that has long fascinated me, not least in its ability to transcend its historic setting in ancient Greece.

4. How did you decide which of the interviews you did with soldiers to use in the novel? How did you know which were the right ones?

I wrote *The Watch* from whole cloth the first time around, I did not use any interviews. Once I had a complete draft, I had soldiers who'd served in combat situations in Afghanistan read the novel for technical accuracy. Those readings helped me the most in the chapters that were written from the viewpoint of the First Sergeant and the Captain, especially the latter.

5. Do you have a favorite character in *The Watch*?

I don't have any favourite characters, but I am now writing the prequel dealing with Nizam and the Prince of the Mountains because I was requested by my veteran readers to flesh out their story, which they found fascinating. Once I'm done with the prequel, I will move on to the sequel which will follow the company after Nizam's death. In other words, these characters still have resonance for me, and I'd like the projected trilogy to provide a panoramic view of America's longest war.

6. What is the significance of the dog, Shorty? He appears as part of Masood's culture shock but is also instrumental in the events at the very end.

I liked using Shorty to illustrate the cultural differences, but also as a narrative device right at the end to make the accidental shooting of Nizam more plausible.

7. To what "watch" does the title refer? The watch the Captain keeps to make sure his soldiers stay alive? Nazim's watch over the dead? The soldier's watch of Nazim? (I'm betting all of the above).

All of the above. You win your bet!