

John Grisham



The Whistler
William

I chose to read 'The Whistler' as I have watched the film of the alternative book 'The Runaway Jury'.

For once the eulogies were well-founded. After an indifferent start the storyline gained in momentum. The focus for the story is the investigation into the machinations of a corrupt judge. Surely this is a fiction and as such they don't exist. Not in the UK anyway - all British judges are incorruptible. That's a fundamental tenet of our judicial system..... but they are prone to handing down idiotic rulings. Authors do use their storylines to expose social injustice and corruption and maybe this is Grisham's genre with the psychological aspects of the issues raised in the book exposing social imperfections and legal indiscretions. If I criticise the story it is rather formulaic, but the book did capture my interest, generated some suspense but wasn't challenging in its choice of language. The characters were believable for the USA and social justice was served in its denouement.

Grisham commenced his career as a lawyer where he must have witnessed dubious behaviour of others in the profession and this must have conditioned his attitude. Another author who didn't care for lawyers was Charles Dickens who used his books to expose their greed and malpractice. In 'Bleak House' (Jarndyce and Jarndyce) the lawyers' claims for expenses granted by the Court of Chancery only ended when the large family inheritance was finally exhausted leaving nothing for the families. Another of Dickens' characters: Mr Jaggers (Great Expectations) - reassured Pip that he wouldn't have to pay for his services as he was already being paid a great deal of money and if he wasn't being paid a great deal of money then he wouldn't be doing the work. However, I likened the Grisham book's profile to the ethical paradox facing the whistle-blower: squeal and you could place the citadel at risk.

The Whistler
Ann

Compelling read; a good yarn. Insight into some Native Americans' modern lives, the Mafia, corruption, extortion, money laundering and a Casino on an Indian Reservation; all revealed by investigation into a corrupt judge. The BJC (Board of Judicial Conduct) started the investigation and the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) was forced to get involved. Should the

comfortable lives of the Indians on their reservation be left alone or was the price paid too high? Couldn't put it down until I had finished it. A really enjoyable read.

The Runaway Jury

Margaret

This novel exposes corruption in American courts of law, both on the Plaintiff and the Defence sides. Both sides were chasing large sums of money and the feeling was that they were not really working for their clients but to secure the money. It appeared that Nicholas Easter and Marlee were willing to switch sides, depending on who paid the most, although you couldn't help but like Easter despite his deviousness. Easter works from the inside to gain control of the jury and spikes the coffee of one of the jurors so that he had to be dismissed. Other members of the Jury were also dismissed if their views were not acceptable to the corrupt lawyers and those working for the tobacco company who was being sued because someone had died of cancer through having been a heavy smoker for a long time. All the witnesses who were called made it all rather tedious. This is certainly not one of Grisham's best novels.

The Runaway Jury

Stephanie

I am not a fan of this genre of book and also am wary of 'international best sellers' who produce book after book (in this case around 3 dozen). Therefore there is a possibility that my review might be slightly biased.

I did not enjoy it at all. It was a story of corporate greed and failure to admit liability coupled with extraordinary (and unethical effort) to ensure that a legal case against the company was not successful. The case was brought against a tobacco company on behalf of a widow whose husband has died after years of smoking. I felt that the writing style was unappealing and I was puzzled by some of the character development especially that of the two main characters working against the company's interests. One of these two characters working against the interests of the company had lost both her parents through smoking induced illnesses hence the strength of her feelings against the tobacco industry were explained but her extreme skill in manipulation of others involved in the case remain totally unexplained. The character of her associate in trying to bring down the tobacco company's defence was totally implausible. The book did make me think about corporate responsibility and also about freedom of choice and the extent to which companies are responsible for any deleterious effects of their products. It also taught me a little about the justice system in the USA. Other than that I would not recommend it.

The Whistler

Anna

This book introduces us to a world where the "good guys" of the Florida Board on Judicial Conduct and eventually the FBI are shown to be conscientious and honest, but pretty much everyone else is out for what they can get. This includes the local Indian (sic) tribal leaders, the so-called Coast Mafia, a local judge and also the people who want to bring her down and to profit hugely as a result. It is difficult to warm to any of them, including our heroine Lacey Stoltz, who I feel never comes to life. The nearest to being an individual shouldn't really be involved – Lacey's colourful brother who forces his way into the action and the story. I think he is there as a device to get his sister, and also the "Whistler" (we would say,

whistle blower) out of trouble.

The Sunday Times (book jacket) describes this book as “an exhilaratingly fast and dangerous ride”, but I found the pace quite plodding and slow – perhaps it choked itself on its over-complicated plot – and I’m afraid it left me with the feeling: “So what?”

I expect the many John Grisham fans will probably disagree with me - I am looking forward to seeing what everyone else thinks!

The Whistler

Angela

I had not read any John Grisham before and at first found the Americanisms a little difficult to get used to. It took until about a third of the way through the book for me to get really hooked, but then I found it quite a page turner. In the book we follow the activities of Lacy and Hugo, state employees engaged to bring corrupt judges to justice. They become involved in a dark pursuit against a powerful and ruthless gang who are protecting the interests of a judge who is in turn doing favours for the gang. It was well plotted until the moment of the critical escape of the 'mole' (the source of all the evidence) which I found rather unrealistically rosy after all the previous unpleasantness. Although the story carried me along, personally I found the action too like a screenplay, but without the screen. It seemed to be merely statements without any sort of emotional involvement. Despite some terrible things happening to them, the characters remained two-dimensional and lacking in subtlety. Action without depth, but fine for light entertainment.

The Runaway Jury

Jean

Wow! This novel was a challenge. It’s a riveting book, but sometimes in the novel I was overwhelmed by the number of characters and, for a short time, almost lost the will to read on. Fortunately, I did, and was rewarded by a breathless, enthralling tale. The story commences at the stage of jury selection, which is conducted in covert ways, when the defence uses almost unbelievable resources to ensure that the jury is predisposed to find in their favour.

The power is vested in a non-lawyer, an unscrupulous man called Fitch. It’s a personal injury case where the widow of a man hooked on cigarettes for many years who dies a painful death from lung cancer, is suing a tobacco company, Pynex. The protagonist is Nicholas Easter. He works in a computer store. His past is a complete mystery to the investigators - but he manages to be accepted as a juror. The jury is sequestered and, for me, the jurors are almost brought to life by Grisham. Someone called Marlee contacts Fitch, which shocks him as his name is supposedly unknown to all but an inner circle. She has great influence within the jury room and her influence is available to the highest bidder. Her contact is Easter, who soon wields great power. In the novel, I found the emphasis on food and eating somewhat amusing and intriguing. i.e. ‘They ate pancakes and drank coffee at the counter’ ‘Conversation was low, because the cook was flipping eggs and sausage on a grill’. ‘Thought we had a deal,’ Clive said, unmoved, - champing on pancakes.’ Nicholas Easter holds out for better meals for the jurors.

There is little mention of the plaintiff in the novel, but, if there is truth in Grisham’s novel, it points to the fact that there is little justice in the U.S. justice system. Nicholas Easter is apparently manipulating the rest of the jury. And is trying to get both sides to pay him to swing the trial their way. The novel is filled with suspense and the later pages left me breathless.

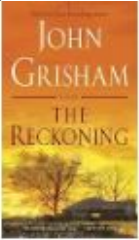
Yes, it dragged a bit at times, but the final chapters left me feeling that I was on a ‘big-dipper’ in a fairground, hurtling towards another bend with no concept of what was to come next!

(Interestingly, a few years after publication in 1996, litigation against the tobacco industry would start to happen around the world.

The Whistler

Chris

This American legal thriller had a complicated plot and read like a TV cop show. The main character is a female member of the fictional Florida Board of Judicial Conduct, Lacy Stoltz, who receives information of a mafia-type set-up raking off millions of dollars through casinos built on Native American owned land, which supports all sorts of other criminal activities, aided and abetted by a corrupt judge. I found the start very slow while setting out the personalities, the geography and the background technicalities of the justice system and the life of the Tappicola Indians. The excitement really starts with a head on car crash which kills one investigator and leaves Lacy badly injured. From there step by step the baddies are tracked down, with car chases, hideouts, plane rescues, and all culminating in a successful conclusion: jail for everyone and the money recovered. This last bit of ground I found rather too quickly wound up all the loose ends, in a sort of “and they all lived happy ever after” way, but all in all, a good read of its type but not my sort of book.



The Reckoning

Doreen

I only succeeded in reaching the end of this book in the early hours of this morning and I don't feel I have enough distance between then and now to really gather my thoughts. I am mindful that there are other Grisham fans who might, one day, wish to read *The Reckoning* and it would spoil their enjoyment to reveal too much of the story. That said, I cannot compare this book with any others that Grisham has written because I have always avoided authors who churn out book after book. (Maybe Richard Harris is an exception.) I know Grisham was an American lawyer and his stories frequently involve the American legal system---which is a mystery to me and of little interest.

The Reckoning is about a wealthy landowner, Pete Banning, who farms in the Deep South. The story opens with his murder of the Reverend Dexter Bell. Banning steadfastly refuses to provide any information as to why he killed Bell and the reason is not revealed until the last few pages of the book, and that involves a twist in the tale. The writing throughout is easy to read and moves along at a fast pace. There is no happy ending and spotlights the terrible damage a simple lie can do. The second part of three or the middle part of the book is what I really enjoyed. It was all about Pete Banning's involvement in the WW2 war in the Pacific and in Bataan in particular. Now, I know a little about WW2 in Europe but very little about what happened on the island of Bataan. I've heard about Pearl Harbour and the Burma Road and the bombs that fell on Japan but wasn't really sure where exactly Bataan was. This part of the book was in a class of its own compared with the rest of the story. I found it so revealing I almost forgot what the main narrative was about. It inspired me to forget my ignorance and discover more about the history of the American involvement in the war in the Pacific.

I think *The Reckoning* was published in paperback in 2019, so it is a fairly recent addition to Grisham's long list of books. I might be persuaded to read another of his works providing they didn't dwell too long on long American court cases.

