



## The Brethren

*John Grisham*

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## **The Brethren** John Grisham

Trumble is a minimum-security federal prison, a "camp," home to the usual assortment of relatively harmless criminals--drug dealers, bank robbers, swindlers, embezzlers, tax evaders, two Wall Street crooks, one doctor, at least five lawyers.

And three former judges who call themselves the Brethren: one from Texas, one from California, and one from Mississippi. They meet each day in the law library, their turf at Trumble, where they write briefs, handle cases for other inmates, practice law without a license, and sometimes dispense jailhouse justice. And they spend hours writing letters. They are fine-tuning a mail scam, and it's starting to really work. The money is pouring in.

Then their little scam goes awry. It ensnares the wrong victim, a powerful man on the outside, a man with dangerous friends, and the Brethren's days of quietly marking time are over.

## **The Brethren Details**

Date : Published December 27th 2005 by Delta (first published February 1st 2000)

ISBN : 9780385339674

Author : John Grisham

Format : Paperback 384 pages

Genre : Fiction, Thriller, Mystery, Legal Thriller

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# From Reader Review The Brethren for online ebook

## Perry says

### The Sort of Book Most Appreciated by People who Move their Lips While Reading

Grisham pulled the plot of this novel from infamous prison pen pal scams near me in Louisiana and Mississippi in the late 1980s. The scam worked like this: the prisoner would engage an unwitting, relatively well off, closeted gay male in harmless discourse by letters which would gradually progress to professions of "love" and then explicit homo-erotic letters and ultimately one phone call by which point, the prisoner would have his hooks in the man, who typically had a wife and kids, and the blackmailing would begin.

I read nearly all the Grisham novels prior to my literary renaissance starting in 2009. Even then, this novel seemed unrealistic and false, lacking a shred of suspense. You know what, I must maintain honesty in reviewing: [[ **THIS BOOK SUCKED** .]]

It's a **bullshit novel**, so shallow, contrived, legally implausible and farcical that it deserves a place in the checkout line right between The Globe and The National Enquirer. Grisham must have been considering quitting his writing gig or was pissed off about having to write this, for whatever reason, say maybe because of contractual obligations when he wanted nothing else but to spend his cash traveling the world, or doing anything else besides writing legal thrillers.

*"Scientists are now using lawyers instead of rats for their experiments. There are two reasons for this. The scientists don't become attached to the lawyers and there are some things rats won't do."*

Robin Williams as a grown *Peter Pan* in **Hook** (1991, Tri Star).

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## Ivana Books Are Magic says

The Brethren is, like most of Grisham's books, a legal thriller. The central characters are multiple, and so are the plot lines but the narrative is easy to follow and understand. The book is quite readable. It might be called a page turner, as the narrative is pretty eventful, though one could always say that the 'page turning quality' is ultimately dependent on personal taste. The Brethren contains a fair amount of social satire, and perhaps we could say that is what sets it aside from other similar books. Apart from that, I would say that The Brethren is pretty much everything a good legal thriller is ought to be, interesting and well paced. One thing worth noting is that this book doesn't focus on murder as much as on a 'cat and mouse' play.

Basically, the plot and introduction to the story could be described as following: Three former judges (calling themselves the Brethren) are located in minimal security prison. There these judges are allowed to put together a sort of 'quasi-parody trials' and solve cases of prisoners with their consent. Their 'trials' are highly entertaining because everyone is expected to lie, being that everyone there is a criminal and all that. So, the 'judges' resort to common sense, presumably with some success. If you enjoy criticism of the legal system,

reading these passages will be an absolutely delightful experience. I'm digressing a bit here, since these 'trials' don't really have anything to do with the plot, but I think they are worth pointing out as they were extremely well written.

Anyhow, these former judges also do some legal services for other prisoners, which they obviously (and illegally) charge but since that work doesn't prove to be very profitable, they also plan a con job: placing a lone heart advert in a gay newspaper and extracting money from rich lonesome (preferably married) gay man by means of blackmail. These three judges have all the time in the world, and have learned to be very patient. They also have a horrible lawyer on their side, so it seems their victims really don't stand a chance. I have to say these judges were very convincing characters, as much as I hated what they were doing, I was also fascinated by their fate. What do you think would happen with a 'former' middle aged judge that has fallen from grace? It's an interesting question.

Besides the 'judges' plot, there is also a parallel plot featuring mister Lake, a rare specimen of what seems to be an honest politician. Lake is a widowed man, a congressmen who never broke the law and seems to be actually doing his job, i.e. serving the people. In other words, Lake is just what the CIA's director wants. What the CIA's director wants is a sure win presidential candidate they can control. What could Lake possibly have in common with the judges? How will their paths cross? Is CIA money all it takes to win an USA election? Well, you'll have to read this book to see but not everything is what it seems.

I read this novel a couple of days ago (while I was recovering from an incredibly painful operation which was also a horrible failure so imagine my mood & sentiments). The book was exactly what I expected it to be, and in that sense I can honestly say that I'm not disappointed. I quite liked the implied irony and sarcasm of this novel. If you want to read someone who is able subtly make fun of election system, politicians, secret services, legal system and prisons, *The Brethren* is a novel for you. Here you basically have a story without a moral character. Everyone is corrupted, one way or another. You can't love these characters, but it's hard to hate them either. They're so human you're compelled to, if not sympathize with them, then to understand them.

What are the faults of this novel? I wouldn't say there are any explicit faults, it's more a case of it not being a very ambitious book. The book was a bit too long for my taste, I would have preferred it to be shorter. Maybe it was just little old me, but I felt some things were needlessly repeated and dragged on. The ending didn't feel realistic, but it kind of made sense in the context of the novel so I won't complain too much. There was a point when I expected it to develop into something more sinister (and interesting) but the narrative remained pretty standard. Once the parallel plots got interwoven, there weren't many surprises. Towards the end, I could definitely see things coming, but somehow the book kept my interest. So I'd say that despite having some minor faults, *The Brethren* is definitely a compelling read.

All in all, I enjoyed reading this novel, but I can't say that I learned anything from it. I was entertained and that was about it. I've read Grisham's works before, I'm familiar with his style and honestly in many ways this book didn't feel like anything new. I did think that the idea of imprisoned judges plotting away was quite fresh, so that was kind of cool. I don't remember seeing this idea/concept anywhere else, so bonus points for originality. What else to say? Grisham's legal thrillers are what he is known for and they are usually pretty good. I can certainly appreciate his simple and descriptive style of writing. I might read more of him. I would recommend this book to lovers of social satire and legal thrillers.

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## **Nathan says**

Let me make a confession. I only checked this book out because, sitting in my bar review course on Constitutional Law, the teacher made a reference to a book titled "The Brethren" that purported to report that the clerks (and some of the Justices themselves) on the Surpeme Court would hold 'movie day' where they would watch the evidentiary movies that were being appealed on First Amendment obscenity-content/free-speech grounds. Such a statement was so absurd to me that I had to find-out for myself whether this was true.

As it turns out, there is a seperate book titled 'The Brethren,' not by Grisham, that may or may not tell the story. But I didn't find this out until I got done reading his.

That being said, this book has nothing whatsoever to do with the SCOTUS (Supreme Court of the United States, for those not in the know). It is an interesting book about how to get elected president and also how to run the perfect scam. Not a Hollywood ending in this one. It would surprise me if it is ever made into a movie. In this one, all the wrong doers eventually get away with all the wrongdoing that they perpetuate.

But is it entertaining and interesting nonetheless.

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## **Susan Morris says**

I like John Grisham as a writer, but not this book.

Three things:

1:

There was something about the homophobia in the novel that made me squeamish. I understand there are homophobes, but there was nothing in this novel to offset it. It's a dominate theme in the novel, normal and accepted, as if there is no alternative to homophobia.

2:

The reader gets to know the inner workings of the minds of some of the worst lowlifes in the book, which is amusing at times. Not so with the protagonist. In fact, I'm not sure there is a protagonist. The character who most resembles a good guy is allowing himself to be bought and sold - and he's no hero. In terms of character development, he's a stereotype of the corrupt politician who speaks in sound bytes.

3:

The ending: Anticlimactic. A cop out. No justice. A huge disappointment.

Overall, this is one of the most cynical novels I've read in a long time.

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## **Marty Reeder says**

I would not say I'm a reluctant John Grisham reader. I just haven't felt a dying urge to search out his novels. Maybe I'm just afraid of any sort of legal setting and try to avoid it in any medium it's presented in. Finally, I

picked up a paperback of Grisham's novel, *Runaway Jury* and plodded through it. Certainly he can present some very intriguing characters and situations, and his mastery of plot intricacies and how it plays out demonstrated to me why he has garnered the bestselling status he has. And yet, halfway through the book, I realized that, though all the characters were interesting, I didn't connect personally with any of them. They all seemed to be despicable, corrupted characters going about and doing despicable, corrupted deeds. Well, it's hard for me to not finish a book I've started, so I plodded through anyways, not really caring about the result. Imagine my surprise when Grisham pulled it off. He had a slam bang plot twist at the end, plus, he completely redeemed my view of a couple of the characters. I loved *Runaway Jury* and became an instant Grisham fan. By saying that, I don't mean, of course, that I went out and actually read more of his stuff (I mean, let's not get too carried away here), but I sure did like his one book I read. Fast forward a couple years (or a ton, I guess I'm not getting any younger). With a few minutes on hand and desperate to keep myself from using those few minutes from actually thinking in any way, I picked up the nearest book at hand in my parent's house. John Grisham's, *The Brethren*. Once again, Grisham reeled me in with an interesting premise and intriguing characters. About halfway through the novel, once again, I began to complain to my wife that there was no redeemable character, no one to root for, nothing to ultimately care about. As I told her this, I realized that Grisham must be pulling another one-two on me. Brilliant. He's hiding one of his good characters again and there will be a carefully contrived twist at the end. Bravo! With this in mind, I read much more enthusiastically. I even thought I figured out which character would be redeemed. I had it all worked out in my mind and wondered how Grisham was going to pull it off to match. And how did he? ... well, to my frustration, he didn't. No character redemption. No twist. The story ended, and that was it. Why? Why would Grisham do that? He had the ability ... he even had a probable character with which to do it ... but he chose the anti-climax instead. I have several theories. He was bitter that they changed parts of *Runaway Jury* for the movie, so he ensured that he would make this story completely unfilmable. Take that, Hollywood! Or, he was planning on turning it all around at the end, but he never figured out how to do it, a deadline came, so he just finished it and turned it in. Those are two major possibilities, but I suspect it was something different. I suspect he came up with a cool plot idea, and then decided to play it out. Then, at the end, the pay off is that the guys get away with their scheme. Ehhhhh. I suppose that is a semi-forgivable offense. Unfortunately, the only way that works is if the reader isn't fully aware of some aspect of the scheme and then it is all revealed at the end and we are wowed and like the story. Not in this case. The scheme is given away, pretty much in its entirety, right off the bat. Therefore, when they get away with it in the end, I thought ... well, yeah, that's what they had planned. What's the big deal? Besides that, their big heist was something they couldn't have planned for and stumbled into by sheer dumb luck. So what do we have at the end? Unsympathetic criminals deceiving unsympathetic victims in a predictable, non-climax ending. Well, my Grisham experience is 1-1. I'm not looking for a tiebreaker, but I have a funny feeling one will end up finding me someday anyway.

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## **Natalie Vellacott says**

Another Grisham novel ticked off my very long list!

*The Brethren* is not one of the author's best works. The pace is significantly slower, in some places, than his other novels. However, it still contains enough drama to keep the reader wanting to know what happens at the end. Grisham's books are also not easily skim read because the plot details are skillfully woven together and you might miss something important rendering the book nonsensical.

Trumble is a minimum security federal prison which houses relatively harmless (in terms of violence)

criminals. Three former judges have established themselves as *The Brethren* and together they pass judgement on their fellow inmates, a sort-of jailhouse justice. When the opportunity presents itself, they expand to the outside with the help of Trevor, a corrupt and lazy lawyer. They begin an extortion scheme by tricking victims into believing they are conversing with young gay males then threatening to expose them to their family and friends. However, the time comes when they chance to mess with the wrong victim, someone with powerful friends who will stop at nothing to protect their client's reputation....

The novel contains the usual mixture of corruption at the heart of government, the judicial system and within the intelligence service. Unfortunately, the slightly seedy topic that has been chosen for this book leaves one feeling a little uncomfortable. Grisham does a good job of painting the victims as pathetic, helpless wretches at the mercy of their passions. He fails to consider the plight of their ever suffering wives and families because of their failure to keep their passions in check. God calls it lust, which is a sin. Grisham presents it as if they have been ensnared by life and are forever trapped, unable to move forward....poor creatures.

I note that this was published in 2000. I'm not sure whether it would receive as wide an audience now due to changing attitudes about homosexuality across the board.

That said, I always like the way Grisham draws out the deceit of wealth, and this novel is no exception:

*He was selling his ethics, his standards, even his morals for money. Was his soul worth a million bucks? Too late now. The money was in the bank. He took a sip of beer and washed away the fading twinges of guilt*

The reality is that burying our heads in the sand, or drinking away our guilt, won't help on Judgement Day when we all have to give God an account of our lives. In His mercy, God has given us consciences to regulate our behaviour so that we don't stack up offences against Him. It is good that Grisham's characters are fictional, but let's hope those reading them don't copy the behaviour.

This book has some swearing but it isn't strong or frequent, it has some details of lust and sexual feelings, but they aren't graphic. It has some references to violence but nothing significant.

My rating is due to the subject matter and the fact that there are better Grisham books out there.

Check out my John Grisham Shelf!

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## **Amanda says**

I'm looking for something somewhat mindless and suspenseful.. and this has been lying around my apartment for a long while. It's probably been 10 years since I've read a Grisham novel, but I used to just tear through them. Plus it seems to have a presidential election as part of the plot. How appropriate!

5/23: Finally finished this. I have to say it wasn't high on my reading priorities list as I was reading it. So I dragged my heels a lot. That plus I really wasn't digging it too much. Early on in the story, I almost stopped reading the book altogether, when the CIA becomes aware that the US Embassy in Cairo is targeted to be bombed and just lets it happen. And of course lots of people die. I'm wondering if this would have affected me as much if I hadn't visited Embassy Cairo, if my mom hadn't worked there, and if my family didn't work for the foreign service. Who knows.

Also I found I didn't really care for any of the characters. They weren't very likeable. There was no "hero" because even the protagonists (if you want to call them that) were completely unsavory guys doing unsavory things. Plus the end was rather anti-climactic. Again, it's been ages since I've read a Grisham book, but I feel like they were typically much more gripping than this one was. One thing I'll say for it though - it was published in 2000, and the idea that the government engineers and creates war (sometimes at the expense of American lives) is very prevalent in this book. Interesting.

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## **Sulan says**

As far as John Grisham goes... I have to say I was disappointed. I mean it was easy to read, and entertaining as Grisham always is, but the ending really sucked. To be fair, I don't know if he could ever top his classics like *The Firm* and *A Time to Kill*, etc. Let's just say, I wouldn't bother making a film out of this one.

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## **Asghar Abbas says**

Undoubtedly well written and undeniably funny. Often cited as his funniest book, so very entertaining. Although, lack of a definite protagonist was irksome, really bothered me. I demand absolutes and neatly ordained worlds in fiction, or else it's pointless.

Plus, it was scary how a presidential candidate can be so easily controlled and selected; the whole selection be that manipulative with such precision. That didn't seem fictional at all.

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## **Ahmad Sharabiani says**

The Brethren, John Grisham

The Brethren is a legal thriller novel by American author John Grisham, published in 2000. They call themselves the Brethren: three disgraced former judges doing time in a Florida federal prison. One was sent up for tax evasion. Another, for skimming bingo profits. The third for a career-ending drunken joyride. Meeting daily in the prison law library, taking exercise walks in their boxer shorts, these judges-turned-felons can reminisce about old court cases, dispense a little jailhouse justice, and contemplate where their lives went wrong. Or they can use their time in prison to get very rich—very fast. ...

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## Margitte says

*The Bretheren* was published in 2000, one year before 9/11, which makes it a remarkable read, and for those who read it at the time, must have been flabbergasted at the horrific event of that day, September 11, 2001 in New York.

In the marketing world an expression is used which rings true for everything in life: *You can fool all the people all the time if the advertising is right and the budget is big enough* - Joseph E. Levine. Another concept is to first create a need(if there isn't an existing one) for a product, otherwise it won't sell. At first glance the statement appears too simple to really grasp the impact it has on politics, industry, even conservation, but it is the most powerful concept in use today.

The story, almost too fictional to be complete fiction, has this idea as starting point and proceed to implement it in a highly suspenseful drama in which three incarcerated judges execute a scam which works perfectly until they target the 'wrong' man. This man had the clout to make their actions look like a Sunday school picnic, which in the end, it was.

For the uninformed, this tale is just a fantasy, but for those in the know, it is a disturbing hit too close to home for comfort. And for those who think the events cannot be possible, believe me, it is not only possible, it happens all the time!

I enjoyed the book just as much as all the other John Grishams I have read through the years. It helps that he was a practising lawyer and know the ropes....mmm...yes...definitely the ropes  
;-)

Thrilling, suspenseful and informative. Loved it.

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## Barbara says

### 2.5 stars

*Note: The Brethren was published in 2000, so the social issues may seem a little out-of-sync with current times.....or maybe not.*

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Trumble Federal Prison near Jacksonville, Florida is a minimum security facility that hardly seems like a penitentiary: it has no fences, decent food, recreational facilities, and - as it turns out - opportunities for serious mischief.

Three of Trumble's older inmates are dubbed 'The Brethren': Joe Roy Spicer - a onetime Mississippi justice of the peace; Finn Yarber - a former California Supreme Court justice; and Hatlee Beech - an erstwhile federal judge from Texas. The Brethren handle appeals for other convicts; hold a weekly 'prison court' to iron out disputes among prisoners; and perpetrate a scam to rake in the moola.

The Brethren's scam involves 'catfishing' closeted homosexual men who can't risk being outed. To perpetrate the hoax, the judges - using the name Ricky - place an ad in an alternative lifestyle magazine. Ricky says that he's in a rehab facility, feels very lonely, and would like to correspond with a mature man. In the accompanying photo, Ricky seems to be a handsome young guy with an irresistible crooked smile.

When men answer Ricky's ad, the judges check them out. If the responder has money and a family, Ricky (really Judge Yarber or Judge Beech) writes back. He inveigles the victim into an epistolary love affair, asks for cash for incidentals, and arranges to meet when he gets out of rehab. Eventually, the judges lower the boom. They tell the poor dupe he's been scammed and demand \$100,000 (or more).....or they'll send copies of the letters to his wife.

The Brethren need an outside person to assist with their scam, so they hire a shlubby local lawyer named Trevor Carson. Trevor sneaks letters in and out of Trumble, handles the blackmail money, and investigates victims as needed (for example, if they use fake names).

Meanwhile, the United States is in the midst of a presidential campaign and CIA Director Teddy Maynard - who's worried about Russian aggression - plans to get his candidate elected. Teddy has chosen Congressman Aaron Lake, a quiet widower whose one campaign issue (dictated by Teddy) is to double defense spending.

Teddy coerces contributors (mostly weapons manufacturers) to donate hundreds of millions of dollars to Lake's campaign and - even worse - permits (or organizes) terrorist activities to frighten the American public. Lake keeps rising in the polls, and it appears that he'll be a shoo-in for President.

As many readers will guess, it turns out that Aaron Lake is a secret homosexual who gets caught up in The Brethren's flimflam. When the CIA Director gets wind of this, he'll do whatever it takes to 'save' his candidate. Moreover, Teddy has the whole CIA at his disposal!

For the rest of the book, the judges and Teddy's operatives try to out-think and outmaneuver each other. The CIA bugs cars, homes, and offices; looks into bank accounts; follows people; and so on. But the judges are wily fellows.....and they make worthy opponents.

There's not a single likable main character in this book and I hoped every single one of them would go down in flames. Of course that doesn't happen (and I really didn't really expect it to). Nevertheless, I was disappointed in the book's finale. In addition, there's a whiff of homophobia about the story (IMO)....though this may have been unintentional.

One thing I do like about the book is the judges garb for 'prison court.' The judges wear lime green choir robes (sometimes with nothing underneath) and the 'bailiff' wears a long wig (like British barristers) and lavender slippers. One of the judges goes barefoot, and makes it his business to crack his toes and clean his toenails while adjudicating. All this is pretty amusing.

This isn't one of Grisham's better efforts, but he's a capable writer and the story held my attention. Still, I can't wholeheartedly recommend this book.

You can follow my reviews at <http://reviewsbybarbsaffer.blogspot.com/>

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## Allison says

I have read several John Grisham novels and this particular one did not have the usual punch that are typical in his stories. In other books of his there is suspense and intrigue, but I would not say *The Brethren* has these characteristics.

The dual plots are slow in developing and once the two converge it is fairly predictable from there. With a lack of twists and turns it was really difficult to stay engaged in the book. With no true climax or twists to drive the story it felt like it lacked heart. The ending seemed to attempt to be climactic, but it fell flat. Overall this story just felt clumsy.

If you are looking for a truly great Grisham novel I recommend *The Pelican Brief*, *The Client*, *The Firm*, or even *The Testament*.

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## Brad says

The Brethren by John Grisham

I found this to be a pretty interesting book. It is the story of the brethren, three ex-judges in a low-security prison called Trumble, who come up with a scheme to extort money from older homosexual men. Two victims and one hundred eighty-nine thousand dollars into the scam the judges run across their biggest victim of all – Aaron Lake. He is the next president to be and seems to have a lot to offer.

One of the cool parts of this book is how much of the story happens in a prison. If you are not in the prison with the brethren you are probably traveling with Aaron Lake around the United States on the campaign trail or with Trevor, the brethren's lawyer, in Neptune Beach.

John Grisham makes the brethren by far the best characters in the book. Joe Roy Spicer is an ex-Justice of the Peace sent to Trumble for skimming bingo profits. Hatlee Beech was a federal judge with a drinking

problem that led to the death of a two hikers in Yellowstone. The last is Finn Yarber – Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court sent away for income tax evasion. The attitude of the brethren is very comical. They have “court” once a week in Trumble and their answer to one of the questions was “It’s whatever we say it is.”

Aaron Lake is portrayed in this book as a very boring character. If there is downside to this book he would be it. He is the up-and-coming president having been appointed by the CIA director to save the United States and maybe even the world. Yet he does nothing interesting; except his secret letters to a homosexual boy in rehab. This is a problem in more ways than one because the boy is actually the brethren running their fabulous scam.

Trevor is probably my favorite character in the book. He runs the letters of the brethren and their victims back and forth between the post office and Trumble. He has a severe problem with alcohol but that just makes him more interesting. Some of his “colleagues” were not drinking so he said to them “Guess I’ll have to drink for all three of us.” Funny comments like this are a big reason why I liked the book so much.

The main theme of The Brethren is not the type of theme you normally hear. Usually you will hear the moral “crime never pays” or “crime doesn’t pay.” To me, it seems like the theme of this book is the complete opposite--that crime does pay. To find out what I mean by that it looks like you will have to read the book.

Page Count: 440

Genre: Realistic Fiction

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