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Book Review (reviewing John Grisham, *The Rooster Bar* (2017))

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Book Review (reviewing John Grisham, The Rooster Bar (2017))

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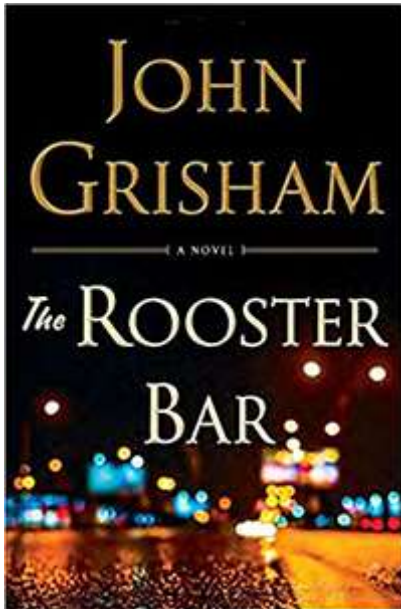
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The Rooster Bar

by John Grisham

Reviewed by Robert M. Jarvis



John Grisham, the criminal lawyer-turned-novelist, likes writing about law students in trouble. In *The Firm* (1991), Mitch McDeere, a Harvard University law student, nearly lost his life after discovering his new employer was a mob front. In *The Pelican Brief* (1992), Darby Shaw, a Tulane University law student, was forced to go on the run after she figured out who killed two U.S. Supreme Court justices. In *The Rainmaker* (1995), University of Memphis law student Rudy Baylor had his only job offer rescinded just before graduation, leaving him no choice but to work as an ambulance chaser. And in *The Associate* (2009), Kyle McAvoy, a Yale University law student, was blackmailed into stealing confidential information.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that the protagonists in *The Rooster Bar* (2017), Grisham's 25th novel, are three down-and-out law students: Mark Frazier, Todd Lucero, and Zola Maal. The trio are classmates at Foggy Bottom Law School (FBLS), a for-profit law school in Washington, D.C., owned by a rapacious investor, Hinds Rackley. FBLS is one of seven for-profit law schools that Rackley controls, and he uses them to generate huge profits by convincing naive students to take out crushing student loans.

When Gordon Tanner, another FBLS student, realizes he will never earn enough as a lawyer to pay off his debts, he kills himself. To avenge their friend's death, Frazier, Lucero, and Maal decide to blackmail Rackley. They also drop out of FBLS, despite being just a few months from graduation, and begin practicing law using assumed names.



Grisham got the idea for *The Rooster Bar* (the bar over which Frazier, Lucero, and Maal set up their fake law firm) from a September 2014 article in *The Atlantic*, “The Law School Scam,” by University of Colorado law professor Paul F. Campos. The article described the enormous profits being made by Sterling Partners, a hedge fund that at the time owned three for-profit law schools. Grisham also weaves into his tale the Wells Fargo bank account scandal. In addition to FBLS, Rackley owns Swift Bank, which is the defendant in a class action lawsuit that accuses it of charging customers for products they did not request. Frazier, Lucero, and Maal use this fact to gain leverage over Rackley.

As with Grisham’s other books, *The Rooster Bar* becomes increasingly far-fetched as the story barrels toward its not completely convincing conclusion (which finds the trio running a bar in Senegal, Maal’s homeland). Along the way, readers get a good sense of some of the problems facing legal education and a reminder that despite the reforms enacted after the Great Recession (many of which now are being undone), Wall Street continues to make money by preying on average Americans.

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