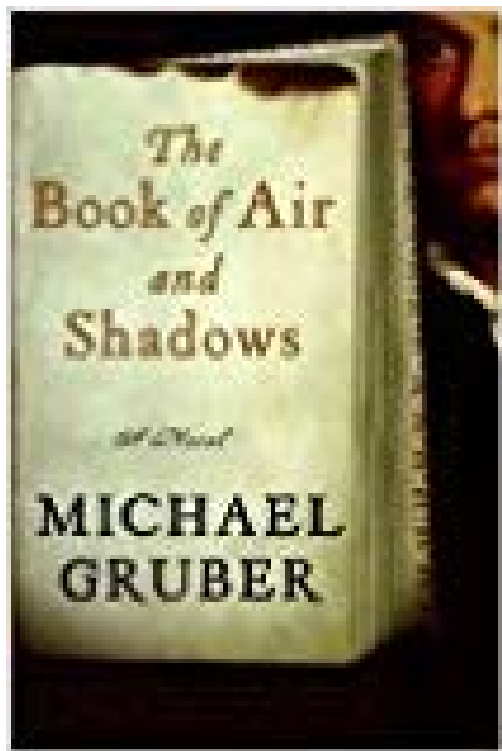


the Book of Air and Shadows *by* Michael Gruber



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William Morrow, 2007- ARC/Trade Paperback in very good condition. Slight edgewear and small stain to fore-edge. SKU-4122921



Reviews of the *the Book of Air and Shadows* *by* Michael Gruber

Chi

Some people will like this book. I am not one of them. I found the writing tedious, the plot unrealistic, and the characters confusing. It had an interesting premise, but is cluttered with far too much information on how to decipher Elizabethan secret codes, and bogged down with difficult to read letters from the backstory of a contemporary of Wm. Shakespeare. If someone already knows and is interested in ciphers and codes it could be an entertaining story to discover how the ones in this book are finally revealed. But, if, like myself, one has no background in code writing, the endless details make the book difficult to keep one's attention.

Drelalen

I really enjoyed this book. I love stories about books, and this one had everything - antique books with secret hidden messages, Shakespearean history and intrigue, romance, suspense.

I loved the detailed descriptions of everything, the history, and the characters are wonderful. There are several plot twists. It is fast-paced, but easy to follow. I got a little tired of all the, what do I call it, espionage, aspect of it. It's just not my thing. Other than that, it was a very enjoyable read.

I listened to the audible version of the book. The narration fits perfectly. Mr. Hoyt did a fine job and really enhanced the story.

DART-SKRIMER

If you are looking for a book that contains a number of boringly detailed sex scenes, if you want one with improbably gifted (but flawed, alas) heros, one that has secrets within secrets, whose revelation shocks the known world... in other words, a complete escapist work, then *The Book of Air and Shadows* is for you. Reading it is akin to eating cotton candy: wisps of pleasure covering an emptiness.

Why three stars and not fewer? Because you may be on an airplane, or may have the flu, or may have the flu on an airplane, and you would like to be entertained by reading something that does not pretend to be literature, but where at least there is an occasionally valid thought. Because there's lots of action in the book, and if you like watching movies produced by Albert R. Broccoli, then you would be entertained by this completely improbable page turner. Because on page 447 of the paperback edition there is a surprisingly thought provoking description of the movies' influence on not only popular culture but on popular behavior. That itself is worth reading, although I am not really certain that such alone is worth the price (not just in dollars, but in time) of your going through the entire novel.

So reader, take my advice. Find yourself in O'Hare? Sniffles coming on? Get to a bookstore and buy the paperback. In the same airport, but feel healthy? Go to that same store and read p. 447! Or heck - want a guilty pleasure? Buy the damn thing and read it. Better than most TV, at least. But not *The Wire*, or *Breaking Bad*. And certainly not in the same league as *Gogol*. Not even *Alan Furst*.

Wat!?

This convoluted and improbable hunt-for-a-lost-Shakespeare-play does have some interesting features. The third-person protagonist, Albert Crosetti, is a film buff who believes that movies teach us how to behave and even shape our reality. For example, referring to the quick draw showdown of the old West, (which was invented by a screenwriter, according to the novel), Crosetti says "Now we have a zillion handguns because the movies taught us that a handgun is something a real man has to have, and people really kill each other like fictional western gunslingers." It's an interesting idea, and Crosetti's character develops it in some detail as he predicts events in the plot based on the movies. He even suggests that modern behavior was originally based on Shakespeare's plays, which adds an ironic twist to the action.

There's a second protagonist, Jake Mishkin, the half-Jewish Catholic grandson of a Nazi, who speaks in the first person and opens the story at the cliffhanger stage, presumably to grab our attention in a hurry. He's a lawyer, his sister is a rich prostitute and his brother is a Jesuit priest.

The book jumps back and forth between the two protagonists, but adds an additional element: the Shakespeare narrative. This is a series of letters written by a man who knew the Shakespeare, with one letter tacked on to the end of each chapter. It takes a while to get used to and I didn't like it. It was too fragmented and it began to seem formulaic after a few chapters.

I can't give this book more than 3 stars. It's too long (466 pages in the hardbound edition) for a suspense novel, the characters come across as wooden, it's too choppy as the narration skips between the 3 points of view and it gives much more detail on the characters than is really needed to drive the plot along. I came very close to dropping it into my did-not-finish-because-of-boredom stack. I finally got interested, about 350 pages in, but the ending let me down and now I'm sort of sorry I bothered. There's only time for so many books, and this one just wasn't that good.

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