

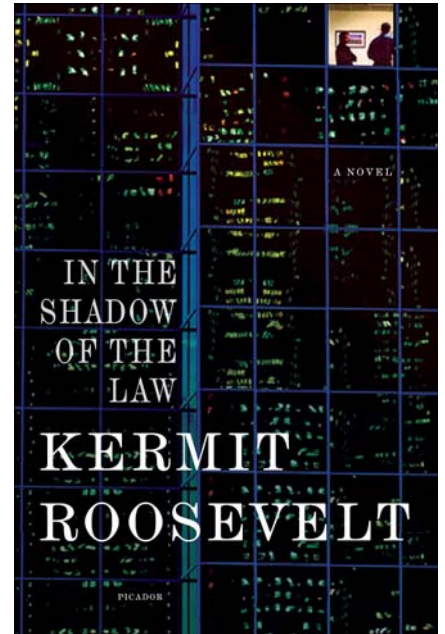
READING GROUP GUIDE

In the Shadow of the Law

A Novel

by Kermit Roosevelt

ISBN: 0-312-42588-0



About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *In the Shadow of the Law* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *In the Shadow of the Law*.

About the Book

Morgan Siler is one of Washington, D.C.'s most powerful K Street law firms, its roster of clients stocked with multibillion-dollar corporations. Through the obsessive efforts of its founder's son, Peter Morgan, his father's old-fashioned business has been transformed into a veritable goliath, embracing bankruptcy and merger divisions that Archibald Morgan had deemed ungentlemanly. As Peter reaches the pinnacle of his career, his firm is embroiled in two difficult cases: a pro bono death-penalty case in Virginia, and a class-action lawsuit brought against Hubble Chemical Corporation after an on-site explosion killed dozens of workers.

Assigned to these cases is a group of young associates and seasoned partners struggling to make their way in the firm. Mark Clayton, fresh out of law school, is beginning to loathe his dull workload, and to be frightened by the downgrading of his personal life, when he is assigned

to the pro bono case. Assisting him is the mercurial Walker Eliot, a brilliant third-year associate whose passion for the law is as great as his skill at unraveling its intricacies. The aggressive, profane, and wildly successful litigator Harold Fineman is leading the Hubble defense, assisted by first-year Katja Phillips, whose twin devotion to productivity and idealism intrigue him, and Ryan Grady, another first-year, whose quest to pick up girls is starting to interfere with his work.

In this complex, ambitious, and gripping first novel, Kermit Roosevelt vividly illustrates the subtle and stark effects of the law on the lives not only of a group of lawyers, but also on communities and private citizens. *In the Shadow of the Law* is a meditation about the life of the law, the organism that is a law firm, and its impact on those who come within its powerful orbit.

“A thoroughly gripping debut novel . . . a major breakthrough.”

—*Chicago Tribune*

“A nifty legal thriller that relies less on creaky plotting and more on complex and believable characters. . . . *Shadow* masterfully captures the culture of a legal factory: the competitive atmosphere, the overwhelming workload, and the give-and-take between what is right and what is best for clients.”

—*Entertainment Weekly* (A-)

“Readable, informed, sophisticated, often devastating . . . [an] astute character study.”

—*The Washington Post*

“An impressive first novel—with emphasis on both adjectives . . . Commendable in its perceptive and witty insights into the post-law-school life of big-firm associates . . . The redeeming quality of Roosevelt’s utterly realistic characters is that they know exactly what they are doing. Unlike Faust, they are not tricked or even seduced by the princes of darkness in their gentlemanly garb and corner offices. They step onto the treadmill with their eyes wide open and their antennae firmly in place. They, like the author who created them, understand the world of backstabbing and sucking up they are entering. I recognize these characters. . . . I recommend this novel with real enthusiasm.”

—Alan M. Dershowitz, *The New York Times Book Review*

“A shrewd first novel . . . a graceful performance . . . hugely readable.”

—*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

“[A] complex, ambitious first novel.”

—*News & Record* (Greensboro)

About the Author

Kermit Roosevelt is an assistant professor of law at the University of Pennsylvania Law School. Having worked at law firms in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Chicago, Roosevelt is a former clerk to a U.S. Supreme Court justice, a graduate of Yale Law School, and a member of the Human Rights Advisory Board of Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. He lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Kermit Roosevelt ends each part of the prologue with outside characters' approach to the law?
2. The tone of each characters' introduction is one of examination. Why do you believe the author chooses to begin their stories this way?
3. What role does the history of the Morgan Siler firm play in the lives of the lawyers who now work for the company? Is the transformation of the firm representative of other changes?
4. The question of capital-C character: Aside from narrative action, how do characters reveal their true "characters"? Consider their physical, material worlds, the way they speak to others, the way they regard their personal histories, etc.
5. The "shadow" of the title implies critique, yet paradoxically, the responsibility that comes with the law's practice and interpretation. Is the book about interpretation in its many forms?
6. Discuss the author's choice to create/include court documents.
7. Katja writes on page 129, "What's the matter with law?" How and why is her question genuine?
8. Harold Fineman says, "Act and it will produce belief. That's what litigation is all about." Do you agree with this statement? How might it be altered or elaborated upon?
9. How is the firm Morgan Siler like a character?
10. Think about the characters: Mark, Katja, Harold, Walker, etc. What toll does their profession take on them? How might they be rewarded or revitalized by the practice of law?
11. What are your thoughts on the outcomes of the two cases?

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