Introduction

Behind the lawyers sat the jury consultants, watching the possible jurors for any gestures—arms folded across the chest, or fingers picking nervously at teeth—which might reveal their real thoughts and opinions. Juror number fifty-six, Nicholas Easter, received more than his share of anxious looks. He worried the jury consultants, as they hadn't been able to find out very much about him.

A lawsuit is brought against Pynex, a tobacco company, by the widow of a man who smoked cigarettes all his life. She feels that Pynex is responsible for her husband's death. The tobacco company—not surprisingly!—disagrees with her, arguing that people are free to make their own life-style choices, including whether to smoke or not. The verdict is of great importance to both sides, but the tobacco company especially cannot afford to lose. If the widow wins her case, it will mean disaster not just for Pynex but for the tobacco industry in general.

The four largest tobacco companies in the country are therefore prepared to pay a lot of money in order to make sure that the jury reach the 'right' verdict. They employ a man, Rankin Fitch, who has a lot of experience in secretly influencing juries—but he is not the only person involved in suspicious activities. One of the jurors is also trying to control what the jury thinks and does—but why is he doing this, and whose side is he on?

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John Grisham was born on February 8, 1955, in Jonesboro, Arkansas. His father worked as a builder and a cotton farmer, and his mother was a homemaker. Encouraged by his mother to love books, Grisham soon became an enthusiastic reader, especially of John Steinbeck, who was his favorite writer.

In 1977, Grisham graduated from Mississippi State University

with his first degree, and four years later he graduated from law school. He was especially interested in criminal and general law, and he made extensive use of this knowledge in his later career as a novelist. Grisham worked as a small-town general lawyer in Southaven for ten years, and was also elected as a Democrat to the Mississippi House of Representatives in 1983. He was an extremely busy man, working sixty to seventy hours a week in his law practice, but he still found time for his favorite hobby—writing.

In 1984, he began writing his first novel, *A Time to Kill*. He would get up at 5 o'clock in the morning to work on his book before going to his law practice. *A Time to Kill* eventually came out in 1988, but was not a great success. Three years later, however, his second novel, *The Firm*, was published, and that changed his life. It was an immediate success and Paramount Pictures bought the story for $600,000. Suddenly everybody wanted to read John Grisham!

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Grisham gave up his law practice and political work, and became a full-time writer. Since 1988, he has written twenty novels and one non-fiction book—most of them best-sellers. In an interview in 2006, Grisham said that he usually took only six months to write a book. *The Runaway Jury*, published in 1996, was his seventh novel. Other legal thrillers include *The Pelican Brief* (1992), *The Client* (1993), *The Chamber* (1994), *The Rainmaker* (1995), and *The Brethren* (2000), all of which are Penguin Readers. In January 2008, Grisham's first fictional legal thriller for three years—*The Appeal*—was published.

Many of Grisham's stories have been made into movies, which has, of course, greatly increased his international popularity. The first movie of one of his stories was *The Firm*, which came to movie theaters in 1993, with Tom Cruise and Gene Hackman in the leading roles. Julia Roberts and Denzel Washington were in *The Pelican Brief* (1993), and the movie of his first novel, *A*

Time to Kill, came out in 1996, starring Sandra Bullock, Samuel L. Jackson, and Kevin Spacey. *Runaway Jury* was released in 2003, with Dustin Hoffman as Wendall Rohr, and Gene Hackman as Rankin Fitch. The most recent movie of a book by Grisham is *Christmas with the Kranks* (2004), based on a non-legal story, *Skipping Christmas* (2001).

John Grisham lives with his family on their two farms in Mississippi and Virginia.

Grisham's books have touched readers everywhere. Almost all his novels are about law, justice, and the court system. They show in great detail the lives of lawyers, judges, and clients. His stories are always very complicated, but they are also entertaining and exciting. In a typical Grisham thriller, honest, ordinary people find themselves in difficulty, even danger, when they fight large, powerful, dishonest organizations. For example, in *A Time to Kill*, his first book, a black man cannot find justice because of the color of his skin; in *The Firm*, a young law school graduate's life is in danger because he discovers the truth about his law firm's criminal activities; in *The Pelican Brief*, a law student fears for her life after she discovers the truth about the deaths of two judges; in *The Rainmaker*, a powerful insurance company tries to refuse a dying boy life-saving treatment; and in this book, *The Runaway Jury*, a widow finds herself in a seemingly impossible legal battle with the four largest tobacco companies in the United States. In all these stories, and many others, if the ordinary people in trouble are not lawyers themselves, there are lawyers who put themselves and their families in danger in order to defend them.

In a world where our lives are increasingly governed by impersonal, powerful forces beyond our control, there are messages of hope for us all in John Grisham stories. Large organizations *can* be defeated if ordinary people are courageous enough. Good humans *can* defeat evil machines.

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Chapter 1 The Big Four

High above the water in a modern beach house in Mississippi, four gentlemen enjoyed drinks and waited for a visitor. Normally their work required them to be enemies. This afternoon, however, they'd played golf and eaten grilled seafood together. Each of the men was CEO* of a large public corporation. These corporations were extremely successful; the smallest had sales of six hundred million dollars, the largest four billion dollars. Although they manufactured other things, their real profits came from cigarettes—the companies represented here were responsible for 98 percent of all cigarettes sold in the United States and Canada.

The tobacco business was becoming more and more unpopular. The Big Four, as the four corporations were known in financial circles, were attacked by the public, the medical profession and even some politicians. And now, the lawyers were pursuing them. The survivors of dead smokers were suing them, claiming that cigarettes caused lung cancer. There had been sixteen trials. Until now, the tobacco companies had managed to win every case, but the pressure was increasing. If they lost a single one, they'd face possible claims from millions of people.

To help fight these court cases, the Big Four had put together a sum of money called The Fund. The Fund was a secret. Officially, it didn't exist. The money in it was used to hire the best defense lawyers for the trials. It paid for well-spoken experts to help persuade people that cigarette smoking didn't necessarily kill you, and the cleverest jury consultants. Before a trial, the jury consultants' job was to find out all they could about possible

* CEO: Chief Executive Officer

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jurors, so they could predict whether they might be sympathetic to the tobacco companies' case or not.

The Fund was managed by a man called Rankin Fitch. The four CEOs disliked him, but they listened to what he said and, when necessary, obeyed the instructions he gave. He'd directed eight trials without a loss. Now they were waiting for him to arrive to tell them about the latest trial, *Wood* v. *Pynex*. Pynex was the third largest of the Big Four; its CEO was D. Martin Jankle.

"Fitch is here." The four men each reached for their drinks as Fitch walked into the room. He was a big man in a dark suit; he looked important. An assistant handed him a glass of water, and he waved away a plate of seafood.

"A brief summary, gentlemen. At the moment, the entire defense team is working non-stop, and this will continue through the weekend. Investigations into possible jurors are on schedule. Trial lawyers are ready, witnesses are prepared, all our experts are already in town."

"What about the jurors?" asked Jankle. It was his corporation's lawsuit, and so he was the most nervous. "One problem juror can be poison."

"I'm aware of that." Fitch replied coldly.

"I assume the plaintiff's lawyers are ready?" asked another CEO.

"Safe assumption," said Fitch. This latest challenge to the tobacco companies had been organized carefully. There were eight lawyers at the last count, financed by eight of the largest law firms in the country, who'd each contributed a million dollars. The lawyers had picked the plaintiff, the widow of a man named Jacob L. Wood. They'd picked the place, on the Mississippi coast, because juries in Biloxi could be generous in this kind of case. They were even lucky with the judge, the Honorable⋆ Frederick

⋆ Honorable, Your Honor: titles given to a judge.

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Harkin. He'd previously been a plaintiff's lawyer. The opposition were certainly ready.

This wasn't an ordinary tobacco case, and everyone in the room knew it.

"How long will the trial last?" Jankle finally asked.

"Four to six weeks. Jury selection goes fast here," replied Fitch.

"How long should we stay in town?"

"I don't care. You can leave now, or you can wait until the jury is picked. You all have big jets. If I need you, I can find you." He was suddenly ready to leave. "Anything else?"

Not a word.

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Wendall Rohr, the main lawyer for the plaintiff, had made and lost his first fortune before he was fifty. He made his second fortune and swore never to lose it. His energies were directed at suing American corporations on behalf of injured people. He'd met Celeste Wood, widow of Jacob Wood, through a young lawyer. Jacob Wood had died at the age of fifty-one after smoking three packs of cigarettes a day for almost thirty years.

Rohr had raised the first million dollars to fight the case, and then more money had flowed in. His plan was simple and smart. If he won this case, more people would decide to sue. With a hundred million smokers out there, he'd be busy for the rest of his working life.

Rohr operated from offices near the courthouse, and his team was working hard investigating possible jurors. The tobacco lawyers were down the street working just as hard. Nothing rivaled the thrill of big lawsuits.

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By 8 A.M. on Monday, a crowd was gathering outside the Biloxi courthouse. There were Wall Street financial analysts who were

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specialists in the price of tobacco shares, sent to follow the early developments of the trial. There was a group of people growing larger by the minute, each holding a piece of paper—a jury summons. Seven deputies had been assigned to security duties.

At eight-thirty the doors to the courtroom, on the second floor, opened. A court official, Gloria Lane, checked each summons, greeted the people she knew, and organized them into their seats. There were 194 possible jurors. All were given forms to complete. The lawyers arrived in dark suits, and tried to look at the jurors without being noticed.

Behind the lawyers sat the jury consultants, watching the possible jurors for any gestures—arms folded across the chest, or fingers picking nervously at teeth—which might reveal their real thoughts and opinions. Juror number fifty-six, Nicholas Easter, received more than his share of anxious looks. He worried the jury consultants, as they hadn't been able to find out very much about him.

The last lawyer into the room was Wendall Rohr. He stared at the possible jurors. These were his people. This was his case, in his home town. He nodded at a couple, grinned at another. Together they'd find the truth.

Rankin Fitch was also in court, pretending to read a newspaper.

Then Judge Harkin arrived. He completed a short welcoming speech. The lawsuit had begun four years ago, and the documents now filled eleven boxes. Each side had already spent millions to reach this point.

The jury selection started. Six people over the age of sixty-five who hadn't been identified by the computer were free to leave. Five of them left.

"Is anybody legally blind?" the Judge asked. Slowly a hand was raised from the center of the pack. Juror number sixty-three, Mr. Herman Grimes, age fifty-nine, computer programmer, white,

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married, no kids. What was this? Did nobody know this man was blind? The jury consultants whispered on both sides.

"Mr. Grimes, you are excused from jury duty. You're free to go."

Herman Grimes didn't move. He just looked at whatever he could see and said, "Why do I have to leave?"

"Because you're blind."

"I know that. Who says blind people can't serve on juries? You tell me why. If it's written in the law, the law is unfair, and I'll sue. If it isn't written in the law, I'll sue even faster."

The law said that a blind person *may* be excused from jury service, so the Judge decided not to insist. "On second thoughts, Mr. Grimes, I think you'd be an excellent juror. Please sit down."

Herman nodded politely. "Thank you, sir."

The Judge continued to release possible jurors with physical problems. At noon, thirteen had been dismissed. By 3 P.M. the number remaining was down to 159. Then the group were asked about any non-medical problems. Eleven more were dismissed, and another form was given out, with instructions to the jurors that they should complete it by nine the next morning.

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The form included questions like, *Do you smoke cigarettes? Do you want to stop? Has any member of your family, or anyone you know well, suffered any disease or illness directly linked to smoking cigarettes?* Other questions explored their opinions on tax and smokers' rights. Then: *Do you know any of the lawyers working on the case? Do you know any of the possible witnesses?*

Nicholas Easter made another cup of coffee. He'd spent an hour with the questions last night, and another hour this morning. He knew that handwriting experts would study everything he wrote. He wanted to appear neat, thoughtful, and intelligent, a juror that both sides would love.