

John Grisham's head was full of movies when he wrote *The Pelican Brief*, which is such a brisk page-turner you could use it to dry your hair. He had Julia Roberts in mind for the heroine, Darby Shaw, a brilliant Tulane law student who comes up with an ingenious theory to explain the baffling assassinations of two Supreme Court justices in one day. They were shot and strangled by ace international terrorist Khamel, who loves the film *Three Days of the Condor*, but government gumshoes don't get what connects the deaths. Silly government guys! They died so the conservative president, who just wants to be left alone to play golf, will appoint new, conservative justices who will help out a case involving an industrialist who is the enemy of pelicans and other living things. It's all spelled out for them in Darby's brief. She likes to do legal feats to impress her boyfriend, her boyish law prof Thomas (who, like Grisham, prefers to shave at most once a week, and is cool, smart, and antiauthoritarian). The prof likes to paint her toes red, in homage to Susan Sarandon in *Bull Durham*. (Sarandon also starred in the film version of Grisham's *The Client*.) But when Thomas gets splattered by a car bomb meant for Darby, she escapes the hospital and hooks up with a *Washington Post* reporter, Gray Grantham, who sleuths like the guys in *All the Presidents Men*. Grisham wishes he hadn't written *The Pelican Brief* quite so quickly (his first novel, *A Time to Kill*, went through dozens of drafts), but Pelican's very breathlessness contributes to its dreamy, cinematic chase-o-rama atmosphere. --This text refers to an alternate Mass Market Paperback edition. From *Publishers Weekly* In this tale of the aftermath of the assassinations of two Supreme Court justices, Grisham delivers a suspenseful plot at a breakneck pace, although his characters are stereotypes. The hardcover was on the PW bestseller list 48 weeks and the mass market was No. 1 last week.

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