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GUEST COLUMN

Family, power, and justice collide in Tim Reuben's gripping new legal thriller

Tim Reuben's new novel, "Tequila," blends Succession-style family drama with John Grisham-like legal thrills, delivering an authentic, page-turning story of power, loyalty, and justice that will especially resonate with lawyers. The book is scheduled for release on October 14th.

By Richard Thompson

"Succession" meets John Grisham in this page-turning legal thriller from Tim Reuben.

Ram Industries has come through the hell of Mexican gang wars to become a leading maker of premium tequila. The company operates under the iron rule of a Master Trust established by grandfather Sotero, which dictates that the company must always be run by a family member with children and that violation of the rules of trust, including conviction of any crime, will cause you and your offspring to be completely disinherited and excluded from the company. Of course, anyone who reads the *Daily Journal* will immediately wonder if the trust is at all enforceable, because it seems to violate the Rule Against Perpetuities and to be against public policy in every conceivable way, but Tim Reuben neatly sidesteps that issue by saying that whether or not it is enforceable, the family is committed to following it.

Following the death of Sotero, leadership of the company falls to Sotero's daughter, Marta, a wise leader who moves company headquarters to New York and builds it into a multibillion-dollar-business before turning over control to her daughter, Maria, who is poised to take the company to the next level by going into the hotel business. Whip smart and beautiful with an Ivy League education, Maria is also

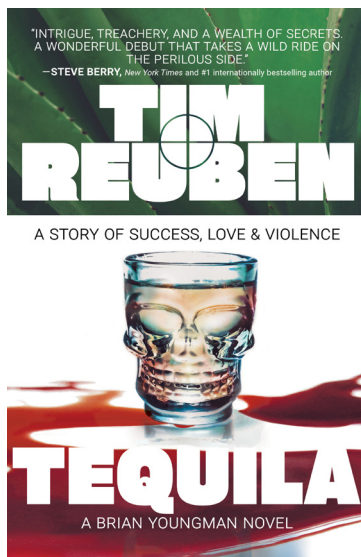
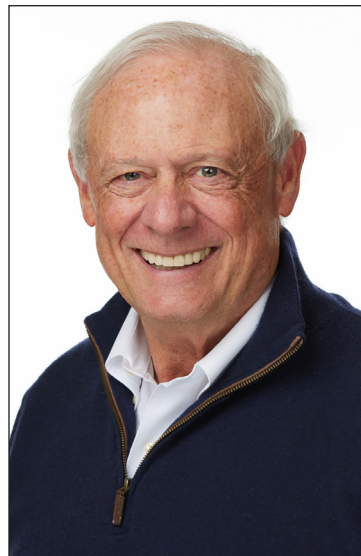


Image provided by Richard Thompson

a kind and generous boss. She's cautious, but willing to take calculated risks. Above everything she values family. Marta and Maria are benevolent despots, whose essential goodness make the story of this family company fundamentally different from "Succession" though it is still not immune from other less admirable family members jockeying for control.

Maria's two brothers are nothing like her. Miguel, who runs the Miami operation, is pure evil. His only motivators are grabbing for power and luxury and taking pleasure in the pain of others. This guy hasn't got a good bone in his body. And then there is Tomaso, who plays the role of Fredo from *The Godfather*—weak, not very bright, easily mani-



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plated and essentially dishonest. He has been exiled to Los Angeles, where he is supposedly in charge of west coast operations, but really does nothing but golf and drink. Maria keeps them both at bay for a long time until Tomaso's wife, Nora, decides to divorce him, at which point, all hell breaks loose.

This sets the stage for our hero, Brian Youngman, an up-and-coming lawyer who has recently launched his own practice after a few years as a prosecutor. He's smart, handsome and deeply committed to justice. He has recently started moving into family law and seems to have landed a big fish in representing Tomaso's wife, Nora, in the divorce. We see Brian holding his own against the big money opposition, though his

toughest challenge seems to be his client who cares nothing for justice or for her children and only wants to torture Tomaso and his family. Then things get complicated when Nora disappears. It's clear from the beginning that evil Miguel is behind it and is setting up his brother to take the fall. Brian and Maria both go looking for Nora and become unlikely allies. The chemistry between them is obvious from the start though there is an unavoidable clash between Maria's commitment to family and Brian's commitment to the law. For the rest of it, you will have to read the book.

Beyond the fun of the book as a page-turning thriller, this book has two qualities that make it a must-read for subscribers of the *Daily Journal*.

First, it is completely authentic in its portrayal of the legal system in Los Angeles today. The way that the lawyers think and act, the courtroom scenes, the strategies, the interactions with the judges and the different perspectives of the characters on justice and the legal system felt completely true and real to me in a way that almost never happens in legal fiction. Most novelists with law degrees are too far removed from the rough and tumble of legal practice to have a good feel for it, and even when the novelist is a practicing lawyer, too often the realities of the legal system are pushed aside to serve the requirements of the fictional world that the author wants to build. But in this book, Tim Reuben manages to keep it real while

still telling a rollicking good story.

Second, Brian Youngman is a character who, as lawyers, we can all relate to. Yes, there is a wish fulfillment side of it. We can imagine ourselves living Brian's exciting life, marooned on a desert island and falling in love with Maria. We could be resourceful like Brian, ready at the opportune moment to apply our martial arts training to take out a bad guy. The fact that Brian is really just a young schlemiel doing his best to get by in a struggling solo practice makes it all seem possible for any of us. OK, OK, maybe the book leads us down that path but then we get pulled back to earth

when we see sad sack Tomaso having fantasies of hanging out with sports stars and having threesomes with hot women. No, no, we are better than Tomaso. But still, glamor and fantasy aside, Brian is a very relatable character. Any of us who have practiced law can feel his pains and triumphs and can share his faith that somehow the justice system really can serve justice despite all of the frequent indications to the contrary. And, of course, like Brian, all of us know in our hearts that we will get the partner of our dreams in the end.

In the interests of full disclosure, I must acknowledge that Tim Reu-

ben is one of my oldest friends. We have known each other since college and have been in the trenches together as colleagues in the same law firm. I have always admired Tim for his extracurricular ambitions. I remember him telling me in the 1980s that he was going to write a musical. Where could he find the time? Now he has written a book, and I haven't. Yes, I'm a little jealous, but mostly I'm proud of my friend for following through and delivering a compelling fun read. Now I guess I'd better get to it and write my own book.

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