

## The Book of Air and Shadows by Michael Gruber

### Introduction

In this ingenious literary thriller from Gruber (*The Witch's Boy*), the lives of two men are changed forever by William Shakespeare and the letters of Richard Bracegirdle, a 16th-century English spy and soldier. Jake Mishkin, a Manhattan intellectual property attorney and a bit of a rake, goes on the run from Russian gangsters. Albert Crosetti, an aspiring filmmaker working for an antiquarian bookstore, finds that life is more exciting than movies—perhaps too exciting. Together, Mishkin and Crosetti travel to England in search of a previously unknown Shakespeare manuscript mentioned by Bracegirdle. Though the pace sometimes slows to allow Mishkin, Crosetti and Bracegirdle to divulge interesting aspects of their personal lives, these digressions only make the story more engaging. The suspense created around the double-crosses and triple-crosses works because of the close connection readers forge with Crosetti in particular. The mysterious murder of a Shakespearean scholar, shootouts in the streets of Queens and an unlikely romance all combine to make for a gripping, satisfying read. (*Apr.*)

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### Questions for Discussion

1. What is your view of Jake Mishkin's character? Do his personality and profession aid in the search or are they more of a hindrance? Do his flaws make him more likeable?
2. Albert Crosetti's life is currently on hold when he becomes involved in the mystery. He's saving up to go to film school and living with his mother. Does his stasis make him more susceptible to Carolyn's deception?
3. The Bracegirdle letters create an incredible sense of time and place with richly textured language and thoughtful details. Discuss some of the most vivid images and their importance to the story and to your own experience reading it.
4. What parallels do you see between Jake and Albert? Between Albert and Bracegirdle?
5. How do religious affiliations play an important part in both the past and the modern-day storylines?
6. Comedy and tragedy are both evident in TBOAAS. How do they play off and heighten each other in the narrative?
7. There are numerous correlations between TBOAAS and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. How many can you find? Harmony through balance is one of the key themes of *The Tempest*. Discuss how that theme is relevant to the various characters in TBOAAS.
8. Travel and moving beyond one's normal, everyday experience, both physically and psychologically, occur many times in the story. How do you think that affects each character's development?
9. Throughout recent history, there have been rumors about lost Shakespeare plays. What do you think would happen if a new Shakespeare play were discovered? Would the quality of the writing be as important as the fact that it was by Shakespeare?