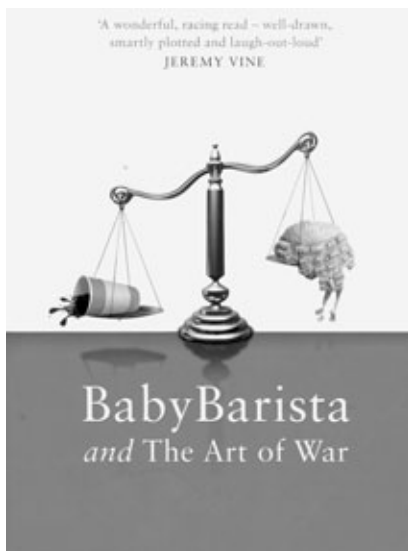


## BabyBarista and The Art of War

Tim Kevan | 2009



There are no heroes here, BabyB. We're all just shadows. Dim reflections of the real world. Sitting around packaging it all into neat and tidy little issues... I can't stand it BabyB. The law. The whole thing. It sucks the poetry from our souls. Boils it all down to cynical platitudes. You know, if it wasn't for the money ....

So laments UpTights, a senior barrister in the fictitious London chambers which is the stage for the action in Tim Kevan's very funny novel, *BabyBarista and the Art of War*.

It's no wonder UpTights is depressed. Her Head of Chambers is pompous and mediocre in equal measure. The most senior junior specialises in professional negligence of his own making, dishonesty and adultery. Another barrister is sleeping with a clerk. The most senior woman is addicted to Botox and to flirting with much younger men when drunk. Another is a Vamp, who drops her wig for every guy in town. Many of the others fret that they will turn out like the older ones when they grow up, while others fear that they are now entrenched in that ugly terrain of not being good enough for top work, but too senior for the bread-and-butter. The readers are all intensely jealous of one another, and backstab at every

opportunity. As for the rest of chambers, they are in the main all airs and graces, but no manners.

Tim Kevan has been a barrister for over 10 years, and despite the characters in his book, remarkably none of those was spent on Xth Floor Wentworth-Selborne. Having joined 1 Temple Chambers in London in 1996, and having written a number of legal texts dealing with consumer credit, personal injury and sports law, Kevan first ventured into the literary book world in 2007 with the non-fiction work *Why Lawyers Should Surf*. Written with Dr Michelle Tempest, it's a kind of self-help book for lawyers who want to both improve their legal skills and their lives. For a number of years Kevan has also written a legal blog for *The Times*, and from this *BabyBarista and the Art of War* has emerged.

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The plot revolves around the contest between four baby barristers and their year-long quest for the one available room in chambers at the end of their pupillage. Employing tactics from Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* – 'kill or be killed; the opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself', etc – BabyBarista is determined to end up with the room no matter what Faustian pact he has to make. For 12 months he puts the better parts of his soul aside, summons the darker parts (and a great deal of creative energy), and gets to work on his competition.

Written in the style of a diary, the novel never loses pace, nor does BabyB run out of inventive means of undermining, tricking, demoralising and defeating his enemy. Phone taps, secret video, identity fraud and Facebook are all part of his arsenal as one by one he sets upon his fellow pupils TopFirst, BusyBody and The Worrier. BabyB may be a novice advocate, but he is a master manipulator.

There are times during his first year at the bar when BabyB meditates on whether the struggle is worthwhile. His pupilmaster, called TheBoss, who could equally be called Mr Spineless-Bastard Esq., sums up all he has to teach BabyB with this:

The law's not about ivory towers or wigs and gowns. It's about one thing and that's costs. Not justice. Not rights. Not defending the innocent or prosecuting the guilty. It's cold, hard, stinking cash. Your time, literally, is money. You sign away your life, but for a price of which even Faust himself would be proud.

Only those who oppose a Bill of Rights could sum up the profession so succinctly.

Telling a story through the mechanism of daily diary entries, and the use of nicknames as distinct from real names (OldRuin, FanciesHimself, the Vamp,

JudgeJewellery, OldSmoothie to mention a few), carries with it the risk that the characters will come across as one-dimensional and stereotypes. With great comic timing, and with as much sympathy as contempt for the actors in his novel, Kevan avoids this, and what could have been merely a series of anecdotes becomes a well rounded and sharply observed comedy about a profession the author knows very well.

Whether you think this book is merely an amusing parody of the legal profession, or a deliciously accurate portrait, all people who enjoy well-written and funny books, and even a large number of barristers, will enjoy *BabyBarista and The Art of War*. As for those members of the profession that read this book and don't enjoy it, I'm sure Tim Kevan has a very apt nickname.

Reviewed by Richard Beasley