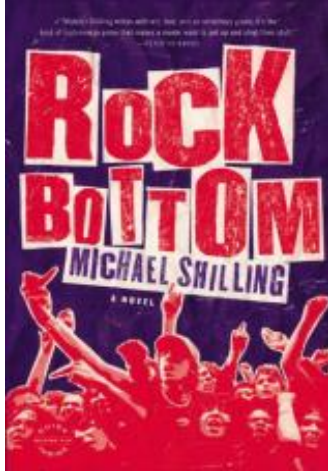


Rock Bottom

by Michael Shilling



About the Book

Once, the Blood Orphans had it all: a million-dollar recording contract from Warner Brothers, killer hooks, and cheekbones that could cut glass. Four pretty boys from Los Angeles, they were supposed to be the next big thing, future kings of rock and roll.

But something happened on the way to glory, and now, two years later, along with their coke-fueled, mohawked female manager, they have washed up in Amsterdam for the final show of their doomed and dismal European tour. The singer has become a born-again Buddhist who preaches from the stage, the bass player's raging eczema has turned his hands into a pulpy mess, the drummer is a sex-fiend tormented by the misdeeds of his porn-king father, and the guitar player --- the only talented one --- is thoroughly cowed by the constant abuse of his bandmates.

As they stumble through their final day together, the Blood Orphans find themselves on a comic tour of frustration, danger, excitement, and just possibly, redemption.

Discussion Guide

1. Of the five main characters in *Rock Bottom*, which one did you find the most compelling, and why? Which character did you find the most humorous?
2. Amsterdam plays an important role in the novel. Discuss the ways in which the city influences the actions of each band member.
3. *Rock Bottom* is a no-bruises-spared portrayal of the rock-and-roll world. In your opinion, which band member gains the most from the difficult experience the band endures?

4. What do you think of the ?friendship? between the band members?
5. Which characters did you feel were really friends at the beginning of *Rock Bottom*? Did that change in the course of the novel?
6. What is the importance of Joey in the story of Blood Orphans?
7. What does she ultimately learn from her experience as manager of the band?
8. Discuss the idea of forgiveness in *Rock Bottom*. How important is forgiveness to the members of Blood Orphans?
9. Darlo starts off as a truly vile character, yet as the novel progresses he is forced to confront much of his past behavior. Does he eventually find a conscience?
10. The love story between Joey and Darlo is, to say the least, a fairly unconventional romance. In what ways does their relationship impact the lives of the other band members?

Author Bio

Michael Shilling grew up in the suburbs of New York City, and after graduating from NYU, moved to Seattle. There, he worked as a copywriter in the first .com wave, wrote arts criticism for *The Stranger* - the city's alternative weekly - and wrote two "practice" novels. He also played the drums in numerous bands of varying degrees of local success, ranging from the can't-buy-a-gig prog-rock outfit called Sonica, to the Biggest Local Band of 1998 status of the Western State Hurricanes. However, from 2001-2004 he played in The Long Winters, who established a respectable national profile that grows to this day, and toured with bands such as Death Cab For Cutie. After leaving The Long Winters, he turned his energy to short stories, and eventually three of them found homes in *The Sun*, *Fugue*, and *Other Voices*. In 2005, and with the dubious agreement of his wife, the two moved to Ann Arbor so he could attend the University of Michigan, where he earned his MFA in Creative Writing and now teaches in the English Department. He is currently working on a novel that takes place in England during the late 1820s, a drama that he describes, roughly, as *Jane Eyre* meets *The Wire*.

As far as the books that have most influenced him, Michael points to three: *The White Album* by Joan Didion, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, and *The Dirt* by Motley Crue.

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