

Sacramento Book Review



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Rock Bottom

By Michael Shilling

Back Bay Books, \$14.99, 371 pages

What happens when the “next big thing” in rock ‘n roll crashes and burns while the guitar chords from their first album still echo through the recording studio? The answer can be found in Michael Shilling’s energetic and raunchy debut novel, *Rock Bottom*.

Blood Orphans were poised for stardom, and Warner’s was happy to pump fistfuls of dollars into their album, *Rocket Heart*. But, while they aspired to walk in the footsteps of their heroes, Aerosmith, their cocky attitudes, gimmicky and offensive lyrics, and infighting doomed them from the start. Songs like “Hella-Prosthetic” glorified sex with a legless woman and alienated their fans, and a charge of racism became the final nail in the band’s coffin. The novel takes place over a single day in Amsterdam, the last stop on their final tour, and the action shifts between all four band members and their manager as they try to survive one grueling day in Holland long enough to perform together one more time.

Darlo is the pretty-boy drummer with long rock ‘n roll locks, the one the groupies flock to. The son of a porn king whose empire is crashing down, he is in denial about the demise of both his family and his band. Bobby, the bass player, has hands ravaged by eczema,

and a complex over being labeled the talentless “passenger” of the band. Shane, the born-again lead singer, wears his religion like a badge of honor even while eschewing the very virtues he preaches from the stage. Adam, the guitar player and only truly talented band member, is too meek to step into the limelight and show off his prowess. And Joey is their coke-addicted female manager trying valiantly to prove to the world that her lucky break was anything but a lucky break.

Rock Bottom is a fast-paced look at the elusive nature of fame, and the driving forces of corporate greed. It paints the rock ‘n roll lifestyle as fragile, ready to blow away in the slightest wisp.

“The band was a new Maserati coming off the line, souped up and tricked out, mad, bad, and nationwide,” Shilling writes in prose that is equal parts raunch and poetry. “But beneath the slick exterior, Blood Orphans was Pinto through and through. Rear-end them the wrong way and they’d explode all over the big rock interstate.”

In *Rock Bottom*, self-destruction has never been so fun.

Reviewed by Mark Petruska

