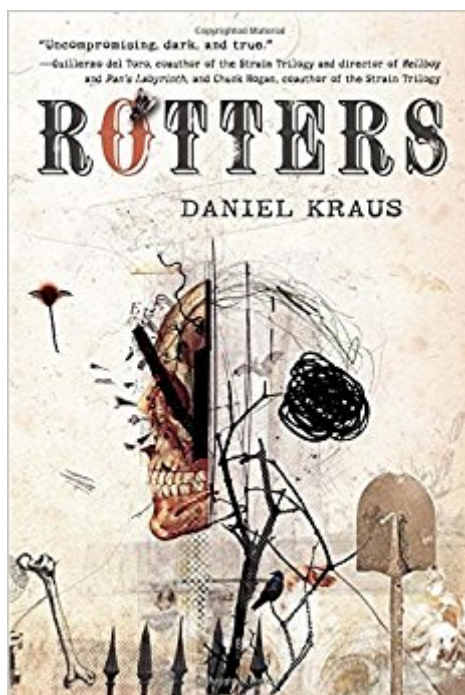


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# Rotters



## Synopsis

Grave-robbing. What kind of monster would do such a thing? It's true that Leonardo da Vinci did it, Shakespeare wrote about it, and the resurrection men of nineteenth-century Scotland practically made it an art. But none of this matters to Joey Crouch, a sixteen-year-old straight-A student living in Chicago with his single mom. For the most part, Joey's life is about playing the trumpet and avoiding the daily humiliations of high school. Everything changes when Joey's mother dies in a tragic accident and he is sent to rural Iowa to live with the father he has never known, a strange, solitary man with unimaginable secrets. At first, Joey's father wants nothing to do with him, but once father and son come to terms with each other, Joey's life takes a turn both macabre and exhilarating. Daniel Kraus's masterful plotting and unforgettable characters make *Rotters* a moving, terrifying, and unconventional epic about fathers and sons, complex family ties, taboos, and the ever-present specter of mortality.

## Book Information

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Fiction > Boys & Men

## Customer Reviews

--WINNER, 2012 Odyssey Award--FINALIST, 2012 Bram Stoker Award"A NEW HORROR

CLASSIC."--FANGORIA "A strongly written tale of adolescence, grave robbing, and the mysteries of

death, *ROTTERS* is uncompromising, dark, and true." --GUILLERMO DEL TORO (*Hellboy*, *Pan's*

*Labyrinth*) & CHUCK HOGAN (*The Strain Trilogy*)"This is an unforgettable book. An unforgettable

character. And an adventure that leads to unforgettable horror. I loved it." --R.L. STINE"Grueling,

demented, and so crammed with noxious awesomeness that I had to read it twice."--SCOTT

WESTERFELD, *Leviathan* and *Uglies*"Profoundly affecting and deeply disturbing, *ROTTERS* kept me reading to the wee hours of the morning. A multi-layered, complex novel that pulls no punches. Terrific!"--RICK YANCEY, *The Monstrumologist*"This is a bold, utterly fearless, uncompromising story told with such skill, with such beauty, and with such depth of focus it just warps the fabric of reality. I'm in awe of this book." --MICHAEL GRANT, *the Gone series*Starred review, *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, May 2011:"A masterly touch at thriller pacing, Kraus gives the current crop of pretentiously serious supernatural YA novels a wild run for their money."Starred review, *Booklist*:"A tour-de-force combination of reader and writer."School Library Journal:"A gripping and emotional tale."Kirkus Reviews:"A cerebral romp through a fascinating, revolting underworld."VOYA:"Twists and turns will leave readers gasping.""As suspenseful and masterfully told as it is gruesome and terrifying. You'd be hard-pressed to find a coming-of-age story as satisfying as this."--Cory Doctorow, author of *Little Brother* and coeditor of *Boing Boing*"Grueling, demented, and so crammed with noxious awesomeness that I had to read it twice."--Scott Westerfeld, author of the *Uglies* series"This is an unforgettable book. An unforgettable character . . . and an adventure that leads to unforgettable HORROR. I loved it!"--R. L. Stine"A multi-layered, complex novel that pulls no punches. Terrific!"--Rick Yancey, author of *The Monstrumologist*"Uncompromising, dark, and true."--Guillermo Del Toro, coauthor of the *Strain* Trilogy and director of *Hellboy* and *Pan's Labyrinth*, and Chuck Hogan, coauthor of the *Strain* Trilogy"A cerebral romp through a fascinating, revolting underworld."--Kirkus Reviews"One of the darkest, wildest, most unsettling adolescent novels I've ever come across. . . . Kraus is absolutely original."--*The Millions*"A new horror classic."--Fangoria

From the Hardcover edition.

A note from author Daniel Kraus  
**THE INSPIRATION**  
 The genesis of *Rotters* came to me ten years ago. I was driving away from the North Carolina coast, trying to outrun a hurricane, when I passed a cemetery. An image popped into my head: two men battling through the swampy, corpse-ridden mud to find some valuable object. I didn't know who these men were or what they were after, but the vision was apocalyptic and exciting. A few years ago, I began to give serious thought to those two nameless figures. I've always liked horror movies and had started to take notice of all the great grave robbing scenes. They were everywhere, from the obvious classics (*Frankenstein*), to new blockbusters at my local multiplex (*Drag Me to Hell*), to more obscure fare I'd catch late-night on TV (like the must-see *Mr. Sardonicus*). One constant stuck out: grave robbing was always kept on the periphery, as if it were something even the filmmakers were scared to dwell upon. And so I thought, what if you did dwell upon it? What exactly would you see? Months later I found myself on the

winning end of a stack of history books about "resurrection men"--nineteenth-century grave robbers hired to steal bodies for use in medical school dissections. You might expect I'd be disgusted at their adventures; instead, I found myself greatly impressed. There was an art to it. And like all arts, it was something that could be passed down, master to apprentice, or--even more interesting to me as an author--father to son.

**THE CHALLENGER** Rotters is a story about a boy named Joey Crouch who loses everything--his mother, his friends, his home, even his one talent is rendered useless--and then out of desperation turns to Ken Harnett, his mysterious and threatening biological father, only to find that Harnett is, in fact, the dad he's always needed. And this truth is in spite of--or maybe partly because of--what he does in graveyards under the cover of night. I knew right away the biggest challenge in writing the book would be to generate sympathy for people who did something so repugnant. But I also knew right away that sympathy was possible, because the passing on of treasured information is by its very nature a tender act. Even Harnett's initial coldness is a form of tenderness: it's meant to turn Joey away from a dangerous and lonely life. When Joey is finally let in, he suffers a training period as cruel as that of any budding concert pianist, but what drives this merciless routine is, once again, love. The secrets Harnett reveal to Joey are no less than the secrets of mortality and how we deal with the promise of our own demise. It's heavy stuff, no doubt. But if handled with a little style and a lot of guts, I knew it could be the stuff of great literature, too.

**THE DARKNESS** We've all seen those time-lapse films of the decomposition of a dead animal. At first, it's gross. But then the flesh's constant reinvention becomes fascinating, and, after a while, even sort of beautiful. It is my hope that Rotters has a similar effect--that if we, writer and reader, look hard enough together at something ugly, it might just transform into something magnificent. Even before joining his father in the family business, the complications in Joey's life are legion: he's an outcast and his dad is the town pariah--not to mention that awful smell. But these burdens are nothing when compared to those of the men Joey meets: the underworld of grave robbers known as the Diggers. These Diggers are proud knights fighting for a dying kingdom and have given their entire lives to a labor no one will ever appreciate. Joey's arrival and his relationship with Harnett forces the Diggers to wonder if they've wasted their lives. Surely no lurker of graveyards deserves a gift as great as love. This is a world of darkness that Joey has plunged into--and we haven't even gotten to Harnett's would-be brother Boggs, whose jealousy runs so deep that he'll stop at almost nothing to make Joey his own son. Darkness is a defining characteristic of Rotters. But it's worthy to remember that darkness is just that--it's dark--and what is being concealed in the dark is not just the horrible and fearsome, it's also the inspirational and moving. Horror means nothing without happiness; dark means nothing without light. Rotters may make you

feel frightened, but hopefully it will also make you simply feel.Ã Å It's that kind of book, or at least I hope it is. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I'm not even sure how to review this book. It was so dark and terrifying, yet so enthralling, I can't even bring myself to talk about it. I know it was written as a young adult novel, but it defies all boundaries and rules the genre set down. *Rotters* by Daniel Kraus defies all boundaries, adult, young adult, and everything in between. If you go into this book thinking you know what is going to happen, you are going to be sadly mistaken! Joey's mother dies in a freak accident and he is shipped off to live with his father who he never met. When he gets to the filthy hovel his father calls a cabin, Joey knows life has changed forever. His father disappears for days, and with no food in the cabin and no money, Joey is literally starving. When he is caught trying to steal money out of a locker to buy lunch after days without a meal (or seeing his father), he confesses his living situation to the principal. They put him on free lunches and summon his father to come to the school as soon as he returns. When his father finally comes back home and goes to the school, it is clear they forced him not to leave Joey alone, and Ken Harnett is not happy about it. Harnett starts getting anxious and slips out at night occasionally. After snooping around the cabin, Joey assumes his father robs recently deceased people's homes. He follows Harnett one night and discovers something so gruesome he can barely process it: Harnett is a grave robber. He digs up graves and steals the valuables, expertly replacing every piece of dirt or tuft of sod so no one knew he was there. Joey is oddly interested and insists (blackmails) Harnett into taking him on the next dig. On his rookie run, Joey is in for the lesson of his life that changes his very sense of being. After working for a time with Harnett, they head off to witness the relocation of an entire cemetery: an event that brings all the Diggers together, despite their strictly observed territories. It is here that Joey meets the other Diggers and starts to learn about the mysterious culture and rules surrounding them. The Diggers are a mix of strange men, some who take solace in books, one looks like a deranged Santa Claus, but they all have something in common... they are all loners. For Harnett to not only have an apprentice, but for that apprentice to be a son is a defiance of all Digger rules. The superstitious group grudgingly accepts Joey, but one Digger is feared and avoided by all: Baby. Raised as brothers, Baby and Harnett have a tumultuous history, but Baby's rapid downward spiral into drugs, delusions, and a deranged psychosis makes everyone nervous about his presence. When Baby takes an interest in Joey (and even thinks Joey is his son at times), things begin to get dangerous. But nothing can compare to biggest desecration of the most important grave in Joey and Harnett's life. Can Baby be stopped? How far will he go in his madness? Do the Diggers deserve

redemption? This book will not only break down every boundary of humanity and society you think you know, it will also take twists and turns you didn't think possible. Joey is your normal, average kid who ended up in a crappy situation, but his move changes his very being, making the Digger in him seep deep into his bones. He becomes a different person, not just one who is bullied in high school and has a crush on the Queen Bee, but one who sees people at their most vulnerable- their final resting place. It makes him more of a loner, willing to acknowledge that the Digger's solitary life doesn't just protect the Digger, but also the people around them. I don't know how to describe my feelings for this book because I almost feel dirty or embarrassed to have liked it! It was one of those creepy stories that you can't help but get sucked into, but can you really admit you liked it? It was so morbid and disturbing that I really don't think I have ever read another book like it. This book is a true original, and you won't be the same after the first pages you flip through. Just like Digger life changed Joey, it will change you too. For the sole reason of content, I would save this book for an older reader, maybe 11th grade and up. It is very mature and deals with some really heavy ideas and societal norms. Discussions about desecration of graves and eternal resting places are sure to come up, but the problem is this book precludes those discussions from being black and white. It will change every way you think about things you always thought were clearly right or wrong. There is some mature language, but that isn't the reason to save this book for a more mature reader, it is the sheer morbid content that requires it. I suggest reading this book before you share it with a student so you know who is up for the strange and disturbing ride. You will love this book, but you won't know how to feel about the fact that you love this book!

"Such a shovel, it seemed a waste not to use it." - from *Rotter's Tender*, twisted, terrifying. Odd, disturbing, engrossing. Brilliant. Beautiful. There are literally dozens of words I could use to describe *Rotter's*, the astounding new novel by Daniel Kraus. The trouble is, nothing I could write could possibly convey the complex, haunting reality of this book, nor the fascinating range of emotions it inspires. That's something you have to discover for yourself. Joey Crouch is just an average sixteen-year-old. Maybe he's a little more sheltered by his single mother than most guys his age, maybe he's even slightly embarrassed that he kind of likes being sheltered. For the most part though, Joey doesn't think about those things. He plays his trumpet, gets straight A's, and is careful to disappear into the mainstream of kids at his Chicago high school. But that life comes to a crashing close with the sudden, tragic death of Joey's mother. Abruptly, Joey finds himself on the way to a small town in Iowa, destined for a life in a tiny cabin in the woods with a father he never knew existed. Neither Joey nor Harnett (Ken Harnett, his father - after one disastrous meeting Joey

cannot possibly think about him as Dad) is at all pleased with the situation. Harnett is an outsider in tiny Bloughton, much ridiculed as 'The Garbageman,' which means that Joey is instantly promoted to favorite target status for his new high school's bullies. Wrenched out of the comfort of the cozy apartment he and his mother shared, Joey finds himself sleeping on the floor of his father's cabin - no food, no bed and no comfort or conversation offered by the man who tells him quite succinctly that he has no need or desire to harbor a son. With the passage of time, however, Joey and Harnett learn to coexist within the same walls. Emboldened by the truce they seem to have struck and determined to uncover the truth about his father's mysterious occupation and his long nighttime absences from the cabin, Joey sets out to follow Harnett in secret one night. What he discovers is even more shameful and horrifying than he could have imagined - Harnett is a grave robber, one in a long, proud line of Diggers. And even as Joey is repulsed by the truth of his father, he is also inexplicably drawn to the dark world of digging. On the surface, *Rotters* can be viewed as the harrowing story of one boy's descent into corruption - the tale of a teen brought low by tragedy, neglect, bullying and the influence of a man who is completely unqualified to serve as a parent. In reality, this unforgettable book is about truths that are far more permanent. It's an unblinking view of fathers and sons, of the nature of family, and of what cruelties and abuses society is willing and unwilling to accept. Underneath it all is the pervasive notion of mortality, the inevitable truth that everyone must face. As he did with *The Monster Variations*, Daniel Kraus delivers his tale in exquisite prose that grabs you by the throat from the first and refuses to let go until the end.

Wow! This book is amazing. Joey Crouch is the main character. Roller coaster is a good description of his life. Roller coaster with some bumper cars thrown in. His character is so fully developed that I can "feel his pain" (to borrow a phrase). His adolescent life is filled with so much trauma and yet he perseveres. Yes, the grave robbing is grisly, gruesome and putrifying, but some of Joey's character is developed even there. He is a survivor in every sense of the word. He wades chest high through the worst and comes out strong. He is triumphant. I'm so glad I was intrigued enough to read this book.

When Joey loses his mother he has to move in with his dad, whom he's never met. When Joey arrives, he discovers his dad's the local "trash man"

I LOVED this book!! Mr. Kraus' writing style is simply beautiful and captivating. The storyline is a little bit slow, but it still consistently held my attention and kept me flipping through pages. It is

certainly a dark coming-of-age story of a grave robber's son, and I loved this new aspect of the horror realm. It's hard to find such a grisly tale told in such a magnificent way. Needless to say, I just ordered a few of his other books! I hope they are just as good!

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Rotters

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