

Reviews

There Is No Year

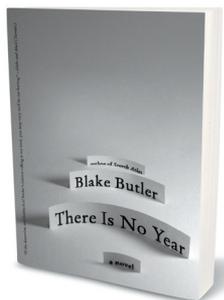
★★★★★

By Blake Butler. Harper Perennial, \$15.99.

Butler's debut full-length novel reads like a perpetual nightmare. Everything seems real but slightly off, surroundings constantly change, characters can't recall the immediate past, terror is imminent. *There Is No Year* follows a nameless, featureless family—simply tagged as “the father,” “the mother” and “the son”—who has just moved into a house where their first point of order is to dislodge the previous residents, a moldy-toothed “copy family.”

But the labyrinthine, shape-shifting house has some surprises in store. For one, the copy family never quite disappears. The mother begins obsessively mowing the lawn and finds an egg with mysterious powers. The father discovers a room full of hair and a mailbox stuffed with caterpillars, and forgets how to get home from work. The son talks to strangers on his cell phone and a social-media site, and receives a package containing photos of dead celebrities.

The events are driven less by plot than by their increasing strangeness and a deep sense of foreboding that's never quite satisfied until the end. Butler's sentences are frequently dizzying (“The father did not know he



was not moving”) and poetic (“The son pulled the lever and the center bloomed—bloomed out into a light—a light as large as many rooms”), and gathered in engrossing vignette-like sections.

There Is No Year is a challenging, Dalí-esque spin on the horror genre, a postmodern playground featuring offbeat structures (lists, alignment tricks and so forth) and pages that gradually fluctuate between light and dark tones. As in his first two books, *Ever* and *Scorch Atlas* (a novel and a short-story collection, respectively, both released in 2009), Butler continues to explore apocalyptic landscapes through grotesque imagery. But *There Is No Year* is also often funny and insightful, further proof of Butler's impressive and innovative talents. —Jonathan Fullmer

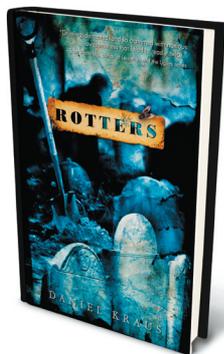
Rotters

★★★★★

By Daniel Kraus. Delacorte, \$16.99.

You'd think that being a teenager transplanted from Chicago to Iowa would be bad enough, but Joey Crouch's troubles run deep. Joey spends the first 16 years of his life in Chicago with his single mother, Valerie, eking out a respectably nerdy existence with his pal Boris and fellow band kids. But when his mother is struck by a bus while crossing the street—the result of hearing loss in her left ear, a mysterious injury possibly caused by Joey's absentee father—he's sent to live with that father in a shack in southeast Iowa.

He quickly discovers his dad is the town joke, known as the “Garbage man,” though he doesn't work for Streets and San. As Joey adjusts to a rough high-school existence as the Garbage man's kid—he's nicknamed “Crotch,” beaten daily by jocks and held up as a flawed specimen by his biology teacher—his home life is worse. His dad, who rarely deigns to even provide food, reveals his true occupation: gravedigger. He



schooled Joey in the art and sophistry of plucking rings from corpses' fingers, and Joey reluctantly embraces his innate talent.

This is Chicago author Kraus's second grim young-adult novel, and what it lacks in style—a stiffly formal language pervades—it makes up for in atmospheric. A refreshing take on the teenage outsider story, and bolstered by a rich and inventive legend, *Rotters* ably tells a horror story set above and below ground. —Jonathan Messinger

Listings

If you want to be listed

Submit information by mail, e-mail (books@timeoutchicago.com) or fax (312-924-9350) to **Jonathan Messinger**. Include details, dates, times, address of venue, nearest El station or bus routes, contact information and admission price, if any. **Deadline is 10am on Monday, ten days before publication date.**

* Recommended or notable

Thursday 28

Rick Atkinson *Pritzker Military Library*, 104 S Michigan Ave (312-374-9333, pritzkermilitarylibrary.org). *El: Blue, Red to Monroe; Brown, Green, Orange, Pink, Purple (rush hrs) to Madison. Bus: 1, 3, 4, 6, 10, 14, 26, 126, 129, 144, 146, 151. Metra: Elec Main to Van Buren. 6pm; \$25, Pritzker members free.* Pulitzer Prize winner and recipient of the 2010 Pritzker Military Library Literature Award for Lifetime Achievement in Military Writing, Atkinson (*The Day of Battle*) delivers a new lecture titled “The U.S. Army in World War II: Ten Things to Know.”

FREE Brute Neighbors release party *The Book Cellar*, 4736–38 N Lincoln Ave (773-293-2665, bookcellarinc.com). *El: Brown to Western. Bus: 11, 49, 81. 6pm.* Liam Heneghan and Chris Green celebrate the release of *Brute Neighbors*, the urban-nature essay and poetry anthology they edited.

Great Books Chicago Doubletree Magnificent Mile, 300 E Ohio St (800-222-5870, ext 7142, greatbookschicago.org). *El: Red to Grand. Bus: 2, 66, 157. 1:30–9pm; \$295 Thu–Sun, \$270 Fri–Sun.* The Great Books Foundation's annual conference packs dozens of literary discussions into one weekend. For a full schedule and to register, visit greatbookschicago.org.

FREE Mary Hudson and Monireh Mohammadi *Women and Children First*, 5233 N Clark St (773-769-9299, womenandchildrenfirst.com). *El: Red to Berwyn. Bus: 22, 92. 7:30pm.* Hudson discusses her late husband Jack Holland's book, *Misogyny*, a philosophical inquiry into why women have been oppressed and discriminated against throughout history. Mohammadi, who translated the book into Persian, will join her at this event put on by the Pasfarda Arts & Cultural Exchange.

***FREE Julie Orringer** *The Book Stall*, 811 Elm St, Winnetka (847-446-8880, thebookstall.com). *Metra: Union Pacific N to Winnetka. 7pm.* Orringer, author of the fantastic short story collection *How to Breathe Underwater*, talks about her debut novel, *The Invisible Bridge*.

FREE Ryan Van Meter *Quimby's*, 1854 W North Ave (773-342-0910, quimbys.com). *El: Blue to Damen. Bus: 50, 56, 72. 7pm.* Van Meter reads from his collection of essays—cum-memoir, *If You Knew Then What I Know Now*.

Friday 29

***FREE Larry O. Dean and Sarah Carson** *Quimby's*, 1854 W North Ave (773-342-0910, quimbys.com). *El: Blue to Damen. Bus: 50, 56, 72. 7pm.* Dean, one of Chicago's funniest poets, reads from his latest chapbook, *About the Author*. He's joined by RHINO associate editor Carson (*Twenty-Two*) tonight.

***The Encyclopedia Show** *Chicago Cultural Center*, Claudia Cassidy Theater, 77 E Randolph St (773-342-4141, encyclopedia-show.com). *El: Red to Lake; Brown, Green, Orange, Pink, Purple (rush hrs) to Randolph. Bus: 3, 4, 6, 10, 14, 26, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 151, 157. Metra: Elec Main to Millennium Station. 7:30pm; \$6.* Robbie Q. Telfer and Shanny Jean

CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY

Join us for these free events

Harold Washington Library Center

400 S. State Street

James B. Stewart Thu., May 5 at 6 p.m.



The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author of *Den of Thieves*, discusses and signs his new book *Tangled Webs: How False Statements are Undermining America: From Martha Stewart to Bernie Madoff*. Mr. Stewart is interviewed on stage by award-winning journalist Carol Marin.

Mo Willems Fri., May 6 at 7:30 p.m.

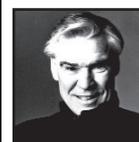
Mo Willems, author and illustrator of children's books such as *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*, presents “Writing for Illiterates and Other Occupational Hazards” as the 2011 Zena Sutherland Lecture.



The Zena Sutherland lecture is an annual program cosponsored by the Chicago Public Library, the Sutherland Lecture Committee and the University of Chicago.

Registration is required online for this free event at chipublib.org.

Jacques d'Amboise Mon., May 9 at 6 p.m.



Jacques d'Amboise, principal dancer with the New York City Ballet for over 33 years, discusses and signs his memoir *I Was a Dancer*.

For more information, please call (312) 747-4050 or visit chipublib.org.

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