



## River Rat

**Michael E. Oppitz**

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*Imagery is vivid, allowing the pristine beauty of the Rio Grande River to shine through.*

Both genuine and thrilling, *River Rat* by Michael E. Oppitz memorably depicts a life led on the river. The gripping story is centered on the dangerous, powerful beauty of the Rio Grande and the people that choose to traverse it.

The book opens to find the Jaspers, a wealthy suburban family, in disarray. Their only child, Robbie, is largely solitary and miserable, counting the days until he can be free of his controlling parents. Always unsure of himself, Robbie longs to find meaning in the world around him.

As a graduation present, Mr. Jasper gifts his son with a family excursion on the Rio Grande. Once on the river, Robbie is taken by the stunning panoramic views and the camaraderie of the river guides. He finds that he has a natural predilection for river navigation, and he finally begins to open up.

Tragedy strikes, however, and Robbie's parents are killed in a freak rapids accident. Robbie is taken in by ST, the guide who saved him from death. He decides to make a new life on the river. Though the changes are challenging, Robbie begins to find meaning and purpose in his natural surroundings.

The plot draws from Oppitz's experiences as a white-water canoer on the Rio Grande, and the river dominates the text. The water fosters both danger and solace, perfectly demonstrating the terrifying beauty of nature; it takes from Robbie, and also offers him a new outlook on life. That dichotomy propels Robbie's character arc, influencing many of his decisions throughout the novel.

The text is educational, offering insight into the river classification system, a scale used to measure the increase in difficulty of white water. Geographical destinations surrounding the Rio Grande, as well as particular parts of the river and neighboring attractions, are also explored, grounding the text in reality.

Imagery is vivid, allowing the pristine beauty of Robbie's surroundings to shine through. Though trials and challenges abound, *River Rat* depicts the inclusive significance of a tight-knit river guide community.

Omniscient narration propels the book, providing insight into Robbie's thoughts and feelings, as well as expounding on the motivations of secondary characters. Most exposition is effective, though repetitive syntax occasionally slows the text down. Dialogue is stiff and laborious to parse. Establishing scenes are overexplained and distract from the story.

*River Rat* is a coming-of-age story that explores the importance of community and the overwhelming, alluring power of nature.

AMANDA ADAMS (October 31, 2017)

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