

A Word about *Smashed* by Ken McGorry

A novel about one man still reeling three years after the 9/11 attacks, *Smashed* is my first. (There are more on the way.) At its core is our narrator and would-be hero, Tom Butcher, a high-flying Wall Street broker who barely escaped the collapse of the Twin Towers only to see his marriage dissolve and his business disintegrate due to his dangerous mix of alcoholism, benzodiazepines and crushing survivor guilt.

Smashed picks up in 2005 as “Butch” starts his new job in a new career – substance-abuse rehab counselor. Butch’s mission is to succeed at rehab counseling and prove to a family court judge that he can hold down a job where, unlike Wall Street, alcohol is nowhere to be found. Butch’s extravagances and follies, committed even as his income evaporated, precipitated his divorce from the beautiful, difficult Laird Wallace. Recently remarried, Laird is moving in court to have her responsible, cancer-research-MD husband take full custody of Butch’s son, Stevie.

Butch correctly sees this as an attempt to write him out of his own son’s future. He thinks he’s lucked out by landing his first job at the Harman Recovery Center, located not too far from Laird’s new McMansion in northern New Jersey.

Butch has modeled his new career path on that of his own rehab counselor/mentor, Avery. But that’s not to be. Instead, he finds himself saddled with the toughest, most resistant hombres in the place. Cameron, Butch’s immediate supervisor, is a putz straight from *bad boss* central casting. The Harman staff seems to disdain Butch for his mixture of inexperience and undeserved cockiness. Butch’s patients simply don’t follow his guidance. Even the mildest, a rich, highly intelligent, deeply depressed, deliciously funny gay man known as “Charmer,” contributes to Butch’s shaky footing at work. Too soon his boss sends “Ox,” a violent, wounded former NFL linebacker/hotel liquor salesman to join Butch’s rehab group. Neither man is ready. Butch inadvertently trips something in Ox’s psyche and, after dismissing a group session, experiences the patient’s rage firsthand – with Ox’s strong hands around his throat.

Rescued just as he blacks out, Butch realizes he has no choice but to soldier on. He cannot appear in family court having quit the perfect job after three days. And there’s another hook. Butch is infatuated with Harman’s head nurse, Megg Rodriguez. Her blend of professional competence and natural beauty captivates him. He’s in financial dire

straights but still makes a bumbling attempt to ask her to join him for “coffee” sometime. Unexpectedly, Megg disappears from Harman under a cloud of suspicion.

As Butch’s first tumultuous week draws to a close, he gets two voicemails. Surprisingly, Megg accepts his offer and makes a date. Ominously, Laird’s law office calls. They’ve been trying to reach him. The court date that will decide custody of Stevie has been set – it’s only a week away.

Regarding Butch

Readers are surprised by how much they like Tom Butcher, despite his flaws. Who wouldn’t like a guy with an irrational fear of cab drivers and receptionists?

Butch tells his tale in the first person and the present tense, having spent many years regaling his buddies from a Manhattan barstool. Those days had to end, so now he’s regaling you -- and Butch doesn’t hold back. He has a keen eye for detail now that he operates in a substance-free world and his incisive Wall Street sense of humor is intact.

Clean and sober, Butch subsists on Diet Cokes and sneaks cigarettes. And at quiet moments Butch rediscovers memories of his past failings with a striking – and comical -- clarity.

Butch’s present situation turns increasingly chaotic. He learns the disturbing secret behind Nurse Megg’s disappearance from work. He tracks down Avery, his inspirational former counselor, only to find him drunk in a lowlife Jersey City bar. Ex-wife Laird informs Butch that her legal team is poised to crush him in family court. And Ox, who says nothing at group sessions, quietly conveys a sense of growing menace that pushes Butch’s psyche to the brink.

All seems lost when Butch encounters a new patient. Roark, an FDNY firefighter, is a big man in big trouble. On 9/11, Butch learns, his job was to run into the Twin Towers when Butch was running out.

While Butch’s official counselor training fails him, his sense of humor and quick wit become his only life preserver.

Note: Butch’s ordeal the morning of 9/11 is in fact a word-for-word account of the terror attacks as experienced by a close relative of mine. Visit kenmcgorry.com for more.

Readers Seem to Love Smashed

Even renowned publisher Nan Talese kind of liked it:

Dear Mr. McGorry,

I have read your synopsis and part of the novel: the voice is very male, very contemporary and the pace awfully good. I am not much of a judge of commercial fiction, which SMASHED surely is, as I publish mainly literary fiction and non-fiction. But I think you have a good story and the writing really moves along. We know the voice [Butch] right away, which is good. And the situation as a survivor of the Twin Towers is splendid and fresh...
Good luck. I am sure you will find the right publisher.

Best, Nan
www.nanatalese.com

Smashed has been read by a batch of not-that-young adults. All are professionals, female and male, all educated, all regular readers of fiction and nonfiction. They commented, without coaching, on their reading experience:

"A terrific read! I didn't want it to end. I loved the surprise ending. When's the movie?"
-- Ginny

"I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed your book. While reading it I couldn't wait to get back to the further 'adventures' of Butch and the cast of characters. Great dialogue." - Bart

Ken, I loved your book!! This should be out there. You are really a very good writer. I sincerely hope that you believe me; I read constantly. This story goes to some dark places but the protagonist seems very real to me.

I will pass this book along to a fellow reader.

Do you have an agent? You should.

Thank you again for sharing your work of art with me. I so appreciated reading it.
-- Suzy K

"Hated to put 'Smashed' down, thoroughly enjoyed it, written with great style and humor." -- Jeannie S.

“‘Smashed’ is the real deal! It's intelligent, funny, poignant, modern, and clever, and I will be shocked if it isn't huge. Have you been approached for the movie rights? The book is really great -- congratulations!” – Corey

"I really enjoyed the character development and the incredible story. Butch became a part of my life while reading. I thought the book really spoke to the severe tragedy experienced by so many families in this metropolitan area. I know many people who lived that fast and furious financial lifestyle -- all who experienced the severe trauma of 9-11 and the loss of so many colleagues and friends.

I really think 'Smashed' caught the intensity and shock, which led to results such as Butch's. The most important part of the book for me was the incredible sense of redemption the character experiences. I want to hear more." – Ria

"It's a great story, a terrific read; I couldn't put the book down. I'm VERY jealous of you; you have a gift -- really. I loved so many parts about the book, especially the appendectomy chapter and how fate tied in all together with 'Star Trek' -- it was brilliant." -- Elise

"I know your protagonist [Butch]. That is to say, I know two people who, if combined, would be this guy. Great book, I like the ninth step . . . that works really well. And I'm a sucker for happy endings featuring sexual tension." -- Greg

"Just wanted to send you congratulations on your wonderful book. As with other great novels, I really miss reading about the characters, now that I've finished it." -- Becky

"Just finished reading 'Smashed' and really enjoyed it. I started to appreciate my job a lot more after reading about Butch's first two weeks on the job. I was very into it and looked forward every morning and evening on my bus ride to reading more (even took the opportunity during the work day to read as well)." – Ed A.

"I loved the ending, and am actually sorry not to still be a part of his adventure. (As a fly on the wall, not a drinking partner or patient!)" – Jeannie O.

"I felt buoyed in my belief that the only way to find true happiness is through service to others. By the end of the book I felt like I really knew and understood Butch -- you could feel him evolve as the story went along." -- Dawn

"For me, Ken's style conjures up a mix of Joseph Heller and Nelson DeMille ... specifically the ironic humor of the former and the character development of the latter. 'Butch' reminds me of men who served in the Marine Corps with me and, after becoming successful in life, reverted to that animal proclivity that enabled them to face the prospect of combat without trepidation. Thanks for the page-turner. Oh, and I can't stand Cameron either!" -- Peter

"'Smashed' provides a paradoxically entertaining, gripping, heart-wrenching story of the strengths and weaknesses found in both patient and clinician. Thank you!" – Ed J.

"I enjoyed reading about all Butch's problems and how he pulled through. The story moves quickly. I was very interested in his 9/11 experience -- you could almost feel it -- and I loved the "Free Pass" scene with St. Peter at the Pearly Gates." – Betty

