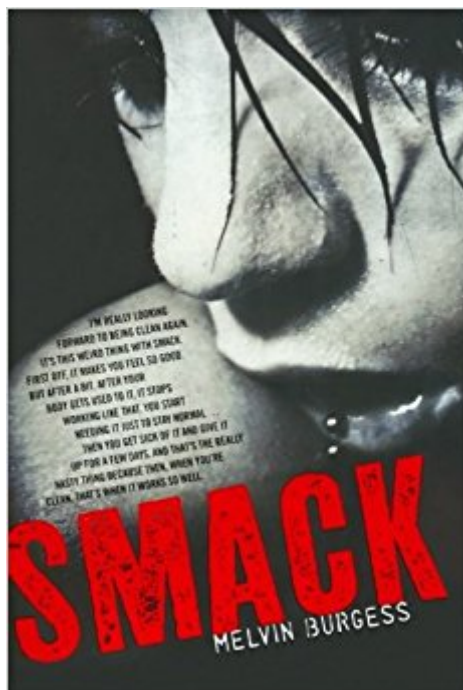


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# Smack



## Synopsis

I can give it up any time I want . . . Sometimes maybe you need an experience. The experience can be a person or it can be a drug. The experience opens a door that was there all the time but you never saw it. Or maybe it blasts you into outer space. This time it was Lily and Rob and Gemma spending all that time to make me feel one of them, but it was the drug too. All that crap—about Gemma leaving me, about Mum and Dad, about leaving home. All that negative stuff. All the pain . . . It just floated away from me, I just floated away from it . . . up and away . . . I leaned back and I looked at the book and I looked at them and Gemma smiled at me, a big soft smile, and her eyes were like marbles. "Better?" she said. Smack is the winner of the 1996 Carnegie Medal in Literature.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Like so many teenagers, Tar and Gemma are fed up with their parents. Tar's family is alcoholic and abusive, and Gemma feels her home life is cramped by too many restrictions. The young, British couple runs away to Bristol in search of freedom, and finds it in the form of a "squat." This vacant building is also occupied by two slightly older teens who share everything with Tar and Gemma (including their heroin habits). For a while, everything is parties and adventures, but slowly Tar and Gemma find themselves growing more and more dependent on the drug--whose strict mandates are even less forgiving than those of the parents they fled. As Gemma says, "You take more and more, and more often. Then you get sick of it and give up for a few days. And that's the really nasty

thing because then, when you're clean, that's when it works so well." With *Smack*, winner of the Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Prize for Fiction, Melvin Burgess brilliantly sketches a gradual descent into drug addiction. There is no preaching here, just the artful revelation of cold, hard facts. Burgess's use of the first-person voice--for not only the main characters but those in the background as well--brings you into the mind of every character in this homeless, hooked culture, offering a (sometimes terrible) glimpse of the motivations and transitions of each person. (Tar's personality changes dramatically over the course of the book, from sweet-natured, lonely boy to hard-edged, hit-seeking addict.) More subtle and less graphic than *Beauty Queen*, Linda Glovach's tale of a girl's downward spiral into heroin addiction, *Smack* will linger in the your mind long after its haunting conclusion has been reached. (Ages 13 and older) --Brangien Davis --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In a starred review of this "searing" account of teens who become addicted to heroin, PW wrote that the "unflinching depiction of the seductive pleasures as well as insidious horrors of heroin... will leave an indelible impression on all who read it." Ages 12-up. (May) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As a young adult (I'm about to be 24) I still love this book. I read it once before in high school and loved it but re-reading it after going through more life experiences just made the book better in my opinion. Without giving anything away, it touches both on the characters in the book and their lives/thought processes, while also being extremely realistic in the use of the drug and how it can affect how we live.

This book is a great read. I myself was a heroin addict for three years, but have been clean since May 10th 2003, something I got into with my boyfriend. It was a quick descent into hell. Both of us became shells of our former selves. Only difference is that we came from loving, stable households. I could totally relate to Tar & Gemma, only difference is that I am American, not British. It was sort of difficult to read, because as a former addict, reading about drug use, especially heroin, makes me think about it, something I don't need to do. But as this book is recommended for young adults, hopefully it will make them realize what hell life as an addict is, and steer clear of all drugs. However, as the book is recommended for "young adults" 12 and over (I, for one, don't consider 12-year-olds to be young adults, maybe 15-16 y/o) I think this book is too much for young kids and a lot would go not understood or misunderstood by a 6th grader.

In an attempt to liven up the content of my classroom library, I have been reading several young adult novels this summer. When I started this one, I felt that the first person narration was a little slow. I worried that students might lose interest or become confused by the multiple narrative technique. As I continued to read my opinion changed. Characters started to come alive on the pages. The world of heroin addiction was depicted in an unforgettable manner. The images that will stick with me the longest are those of "Sunny" the innocent baby of Rob (maybe) and Lily. Gemma describes that the baby's eyes are "glassy" and the baby is already a "junkie". Lily uses heroin on the baby's gums when he's fussy or teething. Also, heroin is transferred to the baby through Lily's breastmilk. Gemma remarks that "Sunny is such a good and quiet baby." Of course he is! He is stoned!! All the other characters chose heroin, the baby did not. I believe that students can learn a lot from this novel (including English slang).

This was a good read if you're into books like these, teenage runaway, drug use, etc. I really enjoyed this book however, I didn't really like how it constantly bounced back and forth from person to person telling the story. For some reason that just bothered me. Which is why I only gave this book 4 stars. I also didn't like the ending, I felt like it could have continued just a tiny bit instead of how it did. However knowing this before reading, I still would have read the book. Again, good read!

As SLJ had said "Powerful and calculated... Smack is not a lecture to be yawned through. IT'S A SLAP IN THE FACE." Smack goes into other aspects of drug addictions that many other books don't deal with, like how there is a major focus on squatting, and at the end of the book there is a note on squatting. The note on squatting also explains how it's not illegal in the UK like it is in other countries. The book shows how the characters deal with the repercussions associated with their addiction, such as stealing. The book uses many English slang terms and has a glossary to help you with some of the slang, which is very helpful for those who don't really understand the English slang. I have learned many things from Smack and many things I would have never even imagined. Smack is literally a slap in the face that will leave you thinking about it for days.

I have never smoked, drank or done any type of drugs but when I read the description of this book I thought it sounded pretty interesting. Get a little insight how some people end up where they are. When reading this book I thought, yea, I bet there are TONS of kids who think running away will solve all their problems but that is so far from the truth. And what some kids think are 'problems' are

really not problems at all. I think this book would probably be a good read for kids or teenagers who like to party, think their parents have too many rules or that running away would be a blast. While I did enjoy the book I think it was lacking details. I like a book that is extremely detailed but I didn't feel this book was detailed enough.

Being a forensics nurse, working in correctionals, I am always searching for information about heroin and other drugs. I was initially intrigued with this story line as it seemed to represent the beginning of the disease itself. Heroin is huge now in America, with most of my female inmates intimately familiar with the drug. This novel was targeted for Young Adults, which I have some reservations about. It romanticized the process more than I feel is appropriate. The issue of runaways is important, however I rarely see them so well taken care of. Usually they are brutally exploited, where the characters in this novel were fortunate to fall into the hands of individuals that tried to protect them. There is a lot of content to consider. This is not a book that relates a huge source of information about heroin abuse, it is more of a peripheral story of many social situations affecting youngsters and those that never stop living on the fringes of danger and decadence.

To me, a 5 star book is one that I'd read over and over; and gush about to anyone who would listen. While that is not quite true with this book, I found it to be incredibly entertaining and well written. Without glamorizing the use of illicit drugs, the author forced the reader to really think about where their boundaries were, and why.

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