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Ghosted

Shaughnessy Bishop-Stall
Soft Skull Press (Oct 26, 2010)
Softcover $15.95 (336pp)
978-1-59376-295-7

Stuffed with details, brimming with weird and quirky characters, *Ghosted* is a heartstopping novel of heroic proportions. Shaughnessy Bishop-Stall takes tre-mendous risks, and the reader reaps the rewards. *Ghosted* is the story of Mason Dubisee, a coked-out failed novelist perpetually down on his luck. But he's likeable and funny, with a self-awareness that often leaks into the narrative. "It seemed everyone—not only on the stalled streetcar, but driving and on the sidewalks, too—was talking on a cell phone," the author writes. "He thought maybe they were talking about him, even reporting him to someone, then decided he was just paranoid. Being too high with too little clothing will do that to you."

Mason is charmingly intractable. He knows he's an addict. Gambling, cocaine, booze, cigarettes—he indulges his vices on every page. But he has no desire to change. Rather than seek redemption the traditional way, Mason sets out through the underworld of Toronto to do what coke addicts do best: raise some hell.

Assisted by an assortment of chemical stimulation from his best friend and dealer Chaz, Mason starts a small business writing suicide notes for desperate strangers. (That is, when he's not selling hot dogs out of a giant fedora-shaped food cart or hanging out in a cocaine speakeasy.) His suicide clients are deeply unsettling. Most memorable is Sissy, a 400-pound woman who is angry at the world for rejecting her. Her sprawling rage is riveting, and potent enough to inspire even apathetic Mason to action. He seeks justice for Sissy, some kind of peace—though what he finds is far from what he expected.

Bishop-Stall is fearless when it comes to finding the heart of the story, probing it until it opens its ventricles. But periodically he takes certain things for granted: Mason's decisions, particularly the crazy ones, are all attributed to cocaine or existential crisis. Taking a moment to qualify *why* Mason goes into rehab, *why* he keeps writing suicide notes, and *why* he rejects his girlfriend Willy would add a richer, deeper layer to a masterfully crafted story. As it stands, *Ghosted* relies on quirkiness to get itself through the tough moments.

A fantastic, whimsical tale of a man on the edge, *Ghosted* is a wonderful first novel. Bishop-Stall has a fearless talent, and his writing promises more great stories to come.
CLAIRE RUDY FOSTER (September / October 2010)

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