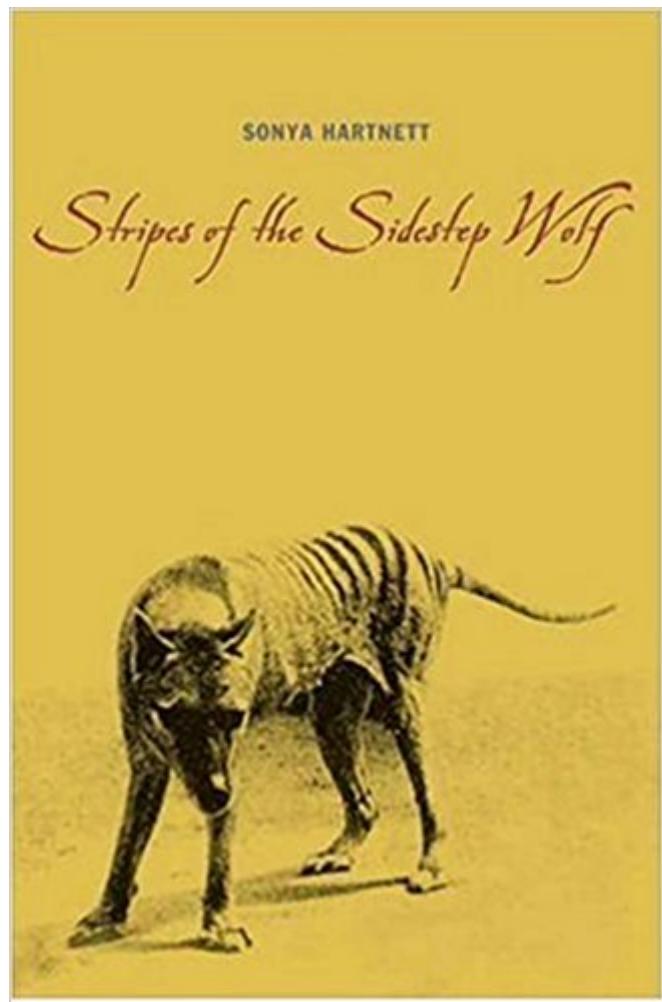


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# Stripes Of The Sidestep Wolf



## **Synopsis**

Two loners in a country town find cause for hope when one of them encounters a long-lost animal in this taut, shimmering tale by Sonya Hartnett about daring to live a life beyond expectations. Ever since Dad went off the deep end and decided he didn't need to work anymore -- insisting the Lord would provide -- Satchel O'Rye has felt stuck for life in his dying country town. A high school dropout drifting from one small carpentry job to the next, Satchel can see nothing beyond his own dreary duty to help keep the family afloat. But things start to change when he spies a strange doglike animal at a nearby mountain -- and mentions the fact to Chelsea Piper, an awkward young woman considered the local pariah. Could the animal he saw be a Tasmanian tiger, a marsupial thought to be extinct? And if they found it again, could it give them both a new chance at life? From the brilliant author of *THURSDAY'S CHILD* and *WHAT THE BIRDS SEE* comes a mesmerizing tale of a young man fighting his future, a young woman fighting her past, and a mysterious creature who teaches them something about survival.

## **Book Information**

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## **Customer Reviews**

Grade 9 Up  
This hauntingly beautiful story pits 23-year-old Satchel O'Rye against the world that is his and the world he might have. He lives with his father, mother, and beloved dog in a

dying town in rural Australia. Satchel's dad, who closed his service station when his son was 15 and took to his room, believes that God will provide. Despite physical problems, his mother tries to keep the family going with her nursing job. Satchel helps out, but work is hard to find and usually short-lived. While he's cutting firewood, he sees a strange, striped animal. He describes it to a friend's older sister, who recognizes it as a sidestep wolf, or thylacine, an animal that is supposed to be extinct. When Satchel hits his dog with his car, he must decide which is more important: capitalizing on the existence of the animal that has "sidestepped extinction," and thus perhaps earning enough money for his dog's medical bills and his family's survival, or protecting the freedom of the thylacine and her cub. The plot flows gently as Satchel tries to come to terms with his life and to decide whether to stay in his rut or find a different future, a decision made difficult because of his loyalty to his family. A complex, introspective novel with vivid characters. —Janet Hilbun, formerly at Sam Houston Middle School, Garland, TX

Gr. 10-12. Satchel's world seems defined by suffering: his construction job is ending; his father's religious delusions preclude his earning a living; his mother's work aggravates her painful skin condition; and their town is withering economically. After Satchel's best friend, Leroy, moves away, his only companions are his dog and Leroy's sister, 21-year-old Chelsea. An emotionally crushed misfit, Chelsea believes that the wolflike animal Satchel has seen on a nearby mountain is a thylacine, an extinct Tasmanian marsupial. Tempted to exploit the thylacine's presence to help his town, his friend, and himself, Satchel finds the animal again and makes his decision. Given Satchel's emotionally grinding situation, the pivotal scene, involving an injury to his dog, seems almost too much to bear. Hartnett, an award-winning Australian novelist, keeps Satchel at the forefront of the story, but in the background lurks a parallel sort of miracle: the animal that was hunted to extinction somehow survives. The story is uncompromisingly stark, but readers will find Satchel a sympathetic figure who willingly remains in a situation that limits his prospects even as he grows beyond its confines. Carolyn Phelan  
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While reading this understated, well-written if not always riveting story, I found myself penciling notes in the inside cover, either pages that capture the "sidestep wolf" well, or just fine imagery, the first on page 4: "The land beyond the rust-riddled sheds was a dirty brown, silver shimmering desert: what grew on it needed no water, and what water fell on it soaked only deep enough to turn the topsoil into slime." I also greatly appreciate the coinciding of the main character with the thylacine,

and how the author leaves the tensions unresolved at the end. Both are individuals scraping by to survive, although their plights are not parallel in any easy, allegorical sense. When Satchel considers his future and the thylacine near the book's end, no neat parallels are made. Satchel creates a bond in his mind with the creature, just as we often do in reality, somewhat arbitrarily but with profound impact on us at the time and perhaps times forthcoming.

Twentysomething Satchel O'Rye is stuck in a small country town at the end of the world - a "dark, nasty, dingy little pit where nothing's allowed to happen". Flanked by a dormant volcano and a snarling freeway, he's emotionally hemmed in, too, by a delusionally religious father and a long-suffering mother. Yet he's unwilling to break familial ties and follow his friend to the city, or take up an offer of well-paid work on the coast. Then, while gathering wood in the bush one day, he sees what local outcast Chelsea Piper believes is a Thylacine - a.k.a the Tasmanian Tiger, a dog-like marsupial extinct on the Australian mainland for over 3000 years... Like much of Hartnett's strikingly original work, this novel has suburban despair, damaged youngsters, wounded animals and the constant threat of violence. It also has her trademark compassion - you cannot help but feel for Satchel and Chelsea. Though you know much of their pain is self-inflicted, they're struggling to live their lives in the best way they know how. In terms of craft, it's an interesting novel for young adult readers for the way it introduces them to the idea of extended metaphor: the "sidestep wolf" is a symbol of the art of survival in seemingly impossible circumstances, a challenge Satchel must ultimately face. It's also interesting for the way Hartnett uses landscape to create an oppressive atmosphere: many novels "celebrate" the alienating ugliness of the Australian environment - both natural and built - but here, the weird melancholy of this "fantastic land of monstrosities" (as Marcus Clarke once famously tagged it) is more vividly depicted than usual. The relentlessly bleak mood might overwhelm some readers to the point of setting the book aside, but they'll miss a beautiful ending if they give up - quite an apt consequence, given the novel's theme! Recommended.

By Dorothy Franks  
Through the eyes of a teenage boy, Satchel, the end of the town is near. People are leaving; Satchel's best friend is leaving. This is not Satchel's main problem though. His father is becoming more sickly and depressed every day and his mother is working night shifts at the hospital with dry and cracked hands smashing pills for the injured. He has to get away on to the mountain away from the deteriorating town. One day while up in the mountains to get away, Satchel spots a strange creature with stripes on its back, body like a cat, nose like a dog, and eyes and instincts of a lion. Satchel seeks the help of Chelsea in identifying it; the creature is an EXTINCT

MARSUPIAL FROM AUSTRALIA! A thylacine that incidently is in the mountains in their town. Should Chelsea and Satchel tell anyone? It would bring back the life of the town. But what about the thylacine, its past of bounties and mast huntins to the point of "extinction". Stripes of the sidestep wolf was a wonderful book; it had a fantastic beginning and middle, but the end oohhhh. At the end I felt as though the author left me stranded in the middle of space. Now there are possible reasons- 1. That stopping there was a "just because it felt like a good spot" or 2. Sonya has in mind a sequal, though adding anything to this book would be hard.

Deep in Australian outback country, one boy struggles to find his place. Mirroring his struggle is a creature who is native and yet out of place - glimpsed and dreamed of, but never conclusively seen. He dreams of leaving the country and moving to the city, going to university, getting a job, anything to get away from the dry arid land, the father who won't communicate with him, and the futureless town. It's a dry slow book, and although Sonya Hartnett manages to imbue it with the same mystical feeling of her other books, such as Thursday's Child or The Black Foxes, it is more like the former than the later. Interesting but not riviting.

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