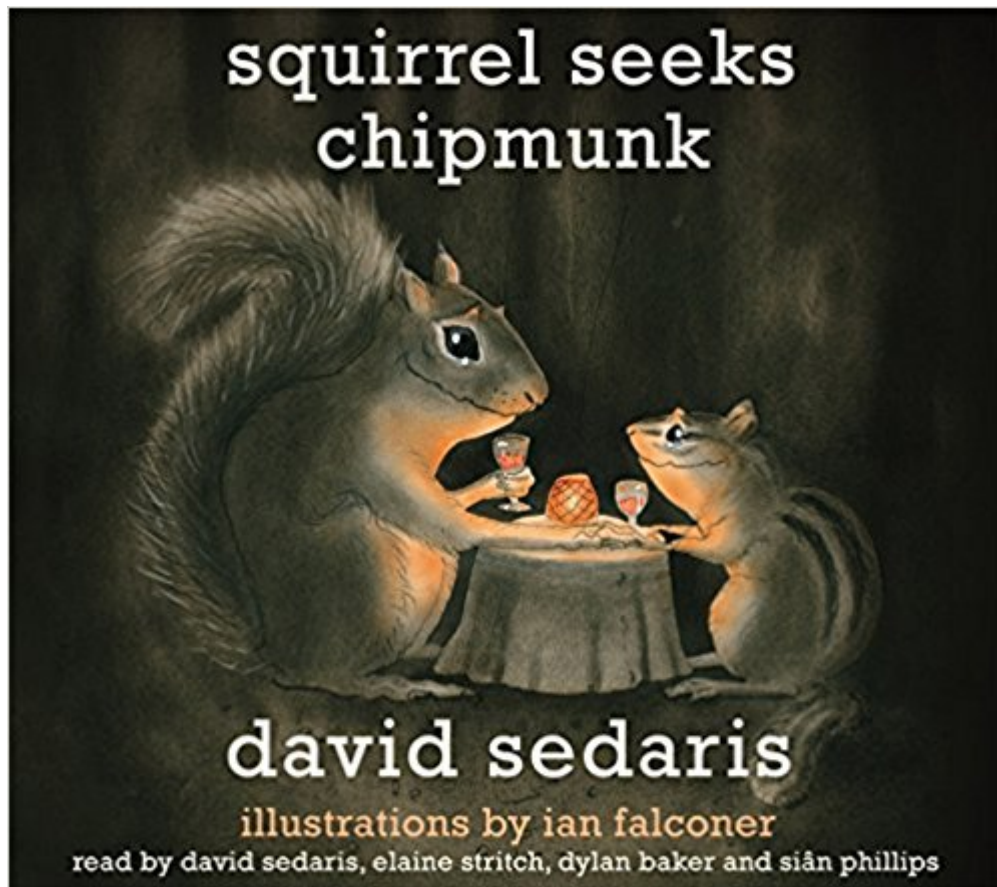




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Squirrel Seeks Chipmunk: A Modest Bestiary



Synopsis

Featuring David Sedaris's unique blend of hilarity and heart, this new collection of keen-eyed animal-themed tales is an utter delight. Though the characters may not be human, the situations in these stories bear an uncanny resemblance to the insanity of everyday life. In "The Toad, the Turtle, and the Duck," three strangers commiserate about animal bureaucracy while waiting in a complaint line. In "Hello Kitty," a cynical feline struggles to sit through his prison-mandated AA meetings. In "The Squirrel and the Chipmunk," a pair of star-crossed lovers is separated by prejudiced family members. With original illustrations by Ian Falconer, author of the bestselling Olivia series of children's books, these stories are David Sedaris at his most observant, poignant, and surprising.

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Customer Reviews

Like a modern-day Aesop or La Fontaine, Sedaris has his darkly comic and deeply cynical (if somewhat rambling) morality stories enacted by animals. Although Sedaris typically narrates his works solo, here he is joined by Dylan Baker, Siân Phillips, and (the incomparable) Elaine Stritch. The dry tones of both women are particularly well suited to the knowing commentary offered by various domesticated, barnyard, and wild animals on casual racism, self-congratulatory sanctimony, poor excuses for adultery, and fad spiritualism, among other common societal ills. The audiobook features a bonus fable not available in the text version of the book; in addition, the third CD includes PDFs of the book's illustrations by Ian Falconer (writer/illustrator of the Olivia picture book series). A Little, Brown hardcover. (Sept.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved.

The ancient Greeks had Aesop, seventeenth-century French people read the fables of La Fontaine, and now we, jaded inhabitants of the modern era, possess the distinct privilege to enjoy the beloved Sedaris's first collection of short animal tales. The appeal of this aesthetically pleasing little volume is inherent, as the American ambassador of the comedy memoir, human division, turns now to creatures of the hoofed and winged variety to make us laugh and, perhaps, learn a lesson. Illustrations by Falconer (of the Olivia children's books) are a perfect pairing for Sedaris's stories (both writer and illustrator have been published extensively in the New Yorker). In *Squirrel Seeks Chipmunk*, foibled fabular heroines are given the opportunity to, finally, display all those humanlike thoughts and behaviors they've been banned from for ages. There's the motherless bear who alienates herself with her incessant, self-centered solicitations of pity, and the potbellied pig who, no matter the diet, just can't lose his breed-inherited descriptor. It's impossible to imagine the brainstorm that conjured up these absurd, animated tales, but readers will certainly be grateful that they rained from Sedaris's pen. **HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY:** Sedaris's name creates its own buzz and will continue to do so even with this quirky little book. --Annie Bostrom --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This reviewer is an avid fan of Sedaris. Many of his earlier works such as *Naked*, *Children Playing before a Statue of Hercules* and *Holidays on Ice* were quite witty, insightful, humorous and amusing. They were all well written and well performed (at least the audiobooks) and a pleasure to listen to. The only positive regarding this book, *Squirrel seeks Chipmunk*, is that it is well read. It is never monotone and read with a sarcastic tone. However, it is devoid of wit and lacks the insightfulness and humor of his previous books. This is despite the fact that the book, a satire on children's books featuring animal tales, would have, at least on the surface, good potential for satire. But alas, the opportunity is blown. The book instead, is pretty gross, tasteless and cruel. Only a small portion of it is funny and, not surprisingly and ironically, this is when the book is not gross, tasteless and cruel but instead looks at the characters in a touching way. This is a book that even hardcore David Sedaris fans would do best to avoid.

I simply can't believe all the poor reviews this book received. I love short story genre and am very saddened by the fact that there are so relatively few artists who are truly good at it -- Maupassant, Saki [H.H. Munro], Maugham, T.C. Boyle. (Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Gogol don't count. Unless one's Russian is good enough to read them and one's knowledge of Russian culture and history is good enough to appreciate them). With this in mind, David Sedaris is a little like an oasis in the modern

wasteland. "Squirrel Seeks Chipmunk" is one of the most biting and hilarious collections of short prose Sedaris' acerbic wit has offered to date. The only disappointment I found is the actual story of "The Squirrel Seeks Chipmunk." You see, I expected this to be a variant of an old joke I once heard (I think I was still in college then, so it was a long time ago. No -- really long time ago... Yep, that long.) The joke went something like this: "So this squirrel and this chipmunk get married. And everyone tells them -- you can't get married. By God!... the two of you are just soooo different, you aren't even the same species. But the answer was always the same: 'We love each other,' Squirrel would say. 'More than anything in the world,' Chipmunk would add. And so they did get married. And year after year went by. And peace and contentment settled upon the little furry family. But their joy was besmirched by one thing: no children. They BOTH wanted to have children. Oh, how they wanted to have children. More than anything they longed to hear pitter-patter of little hybrid SquiMunk paws in their burrow. So they went to see Squirrel's rabbi. That wasn't helpful. Then they went to talk to Chipmunk's mullah. Same result. 'Maybe we should go and see a doctor?' said Squirrel at breakfast one day. 'You are brilliant!' said Chipmunk. And so, to the doctor they went. The elderly white-haired veterinarian appeared very thoughtful. He took them to separate exam rooms and performed thorough physicals and took detailed histories. His assistant drew multiple tiny vials for all sorts of test of every conceivable body fluid that could be tested. And the fur. The fur hairs got tested too (you just never know...) A week later both were sitting in the vet's consultation room holding their joint breath waiting for the doctor to give them the results. "Is it me?" asked Chipmunk. "Or me?" barely whispered Squirrel... "Well," said the doctor. "I am not sure how to tell you, but it is actually both of you." "Wha... What do you mean?" asked Chipmunk. "You see," said the doctor pointing at the chipmunk, "you are... a... um... a boy." The doctor then looked at the squirrel and said: "And so are you..." "OK, ok, I know this is VERY politically INCORRECT (and in some circles, I'd probably get crucified for it), but I know, I just know, that David Sedaris would make it work! If anything, it would probably be even funnier coming from him. Sigh... maybe he'll use this joke in one of his later books... you know? "Squirrel and Chipmunk -- the Sequel" or "Squirrel and Chipmunk Ride Again... For A Few Dollars More..." "Naaaah.... He probably won't. So... back to the review. For the exception of the title story, I absolutely loved the book. And for all the nay-sayers. Have you ever heard of "allegory?... "fable?... For that matter have you ever heard of AEsop?... Jean de La Fontaine?... Ivan Krylov?... No matter. I think this book is one of the BEST of Sedaris' offerings.

This book of short stories has the most abrupt tone change I have ever come across in such a collection. The book starts out on a pleasant and clever enough note. Sedaris is writing about

human foibles, made all the more biting and funny by the fact that they are being played out by animals. The first four stories are in this vein, are sharp pieces of satire, and enjoyable to read. I personally loved "The Migrating Warblers" and "The Toad, the Turtle, and the Duck". Laugh out loud funny, and with an actual point. Clever horation satire. And then we get to story number five, "The Motherless Bear", and the text makes a sharp turn and never comes back. From this point on, almost without exception, the book is vulgar, cruel, and mean spirited. And frankly, I don't get it. What point is Sedaris trying to prove? What does he expect the reader (or the text for that matter) to gain by the brutality and negativity? Characters with annoying or petty characteristics meet with brutal, and undeserved, fates and to what end? If you took the stories and made the victim a person instead of a mouse, etc. people would be disgusted. There are funny moments, or a very clever line here or there, but it does not make up for the overall tone of the text. I like Sedaris, at times I enjoyed this book, but I hope this is not the new vein of his writing. There is no joy in it, no real wit, and that is a shame.

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