



[Home](#) > Stripes of the Sidestep Wolf

Stripes of the Sidestep Wolf

Books Reviewed:

[Stripes of the Sidestep Wolf](#) [1]

Issue:

[147](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Pam Harwood](#) [3]

~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

The cover of Sonya Hartnett's novel shows an archive photograph of the thylacine, or 'Tasmanian tiger', a predatory dog-like marsupial which became extinct in 1936 after savage human persecution, ironically just two months after it was declared a protected species. The photo presumably shows the last thylacine, which died in captivity. It rebukes the ongoing biological vandalism of humankind. Since 1936 there have been occasional reports of surviving thylacines, and in Hartnett's novel 23-year-old Satchel O'Rye gets a sight of one, identified from his description by a young woman, Chelsea Piper. Satchel and Chelsea both live narrow, depleted lives in a small decaying town, under an extinct volcano, somewhere in Australia. Hartnett uses no place names, real or imaginary, perhaps to signal authorial complicity with the thylacine's hiding-place. Satchel and Chelsea do not reveal it, though Chelsea is tempted. Both are impoverished. Chelsea is emotionally withdrawn and delicate, while Satchel is trapped: his father is mad, believing with crazy literalness that God will provide for everything. And in a curious sense God does. He provides the thylacine to be the unwitting agent of Chelsea's and Satchel's inner survival. This is an original and gifted novel, though not quite Hartnett at her best. But its optimistic end is fatally undercut by the real-life, real-death thylacine, for which God did not provide.

Running Order:

6

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[1] <http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/stripes-of-the-sidestep-wolf>

[2] <http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/147>

[3] <http://savfikn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/pam-harwood>