

The Squirrel that Dreamt of Madness

Craig Stone

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Craig Stone's second novel *Life Knocks* was shortlisted for the world respected Dundee International Book Prize, and he has appeared live on the BBC.

"The British author, Craig Stone, is as interesting a person as the characters he creates. Miserable at his day job, he decided to take a leap of faith. His path to success was all or nothing, victory or death. He quit his job and dropped out of the white-collar world with all its trappings and amenities. Unemployed, he had to give up his residence. With a sleeping bag and a sackful of clothes he headed to Northwest London's Gladstone Park, settling in among the homeless, transients, dog walkers and the occasional irritated park worker. His only solace, an A4 notepad and a pen.

Like the author, the main character Colossus Sosloss also quits his job, becomes homeless and sleeps in the park. Colossus observes the other homeless who reside at the park. Many of them with treatable or controllable mental illness but, in the post-Margaret Thatcher England, such individuals are human refuse. Dumped into society to fend for themselves and spiral downward amongst the neatly-trimmed hedges and glistening, manicured lawn of the sprawling public space.

The character's travails are reminiscent of a Lewis Carroll-type adventure with subtle Dickensian undertones. Which include a lost parrot and an unfortunate man named Squirrel. We follow Colossus on his journey to the edge of sanity, with humorous interjections and clever idioms. A hero's quest, that inevitably ends with subterfuge, realization and reflection.

Today, no longer homeless, Craig Stone is probably one of the most promising young writers to grace the indie and self-publishing world. Though at 31, Stone is a surprisingly mature author who transcends the generations. His literary work is suitable for the very young and for those who have lived an interesting life. *The Squirrel That Dreamt Of Madness* is an imaginative tale that can only come from a brilliant, albeit delightfully demented, mind. Stone mixes humour with the cold, stark reality of life. Everything and everyone, is a metaphor for something either sinister or truthful. Gifted students may soon find this book on their required reading list for their advanced High School contemporary literature class.

The author does not have a long laundry list of writers who inspired him, though he definitely channels some Steinbeckian qualities (the novel was written during the height of the Great Recession) and J.D. Salinger's, *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Like Hemingway who retreated to the wild and lawless pre-Castro Cuba to pen his magnum opus *The Old Man and the Sea*, Stone chose to immerse himself in a colder and wetter climate to experience what his character had to endure. The old adage, you write what you know, still rings resonantly true. Stone certainly writes what he knows, and writes it exceptionally well."

--<http://enovelreviews.com/thesquirrelt...>

Interview with the BBC: <http://bit.ly/BBCComedyCafe>

Information on the Dundee Book Prize:

<http://www.dundeebookprize.com/>

<http://www.deadlinenews.co.uk/?p=51086>

You can find Craig Stone here:

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/robolollycop>

Website: www.thoughtscratchings.com

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR...

The simple truth is, I will get nowhere without your help. I need readers to read The Squirrel that Dreamt of Madness, so if you are looking for a book to read, or wanting to try a new author, please try me.

It would mean the world if you did.

Thank You.

Craig.

The Squirrel that Dreamt of Madness Details

Date :


ISBN :

Author : Craig Stone

Format : Kindle Edition 320 pages

Genre : Fiction, Contemporary, Humor

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From Reader Review The Squirrel that Dreamt of Madness for online ebook

Nazareth Bergeron says

soooo freakin' good that I refuse to finish it. I will not let it end and drift out of my life.

T.W. Dittmer says

A tale of a man who quits his day job to go live in the park, “The Squirrel That Dreamt of Madness” is a wildly entertaining reading experience.

Though the story line may seem straightforward, the author manages to keep the reader off balance with kinky plot twists, a bombardment of incongruous imagery, and a cast of characters reminiscent of Alice In Wonderland.

The style of the writing yanks the reader around like a well-engineered carnival ride, with short ducks down the rabbit hole and backstory that jumps away to far-flung locations... then suddenly back again. And just when the reader thinks that they’ve adjusted to the bumps and dips... that they no longer need to grasp the safety bar so tightly... the author throws in a sudden shot of insight into the plight of modern humanity.

I thoroughly enjoyed the book, but would give any prospective readers one warning. If you plan on reading “The Squirrel That Dreamt of Madness”, be sure to have plenty of napkins on hand.

If you happen to be taking a sip when you hit one of those ridiculously ingenious images that come from the clever mind of Mr. Stone, whatever you’re drinking will end up coming out your nose.

Lisa Shambrook says

I smile whenever I think about this book!

I was caught up immediately with the characters...if only in desperation to actually find out the lead's name! I giggled, shivered, snorted, bit my lip, chuckled and laughed out loud much to chagrin of my family...though my reactions did encourage my daughter to read it too!

Incredibly unique in its vision and setting, this book is literally a lexicon of madness. The use of metaphor and description was original and kept me glued to Stone's vivid writing. Several different stories developed...and I must admit to confusion at times (but in a good way!) and wondered how it would all fit together, but fit together it did and to marvellous effect! It was comedic, horrific, sad, beautiful and touching all at once.

This book will keep you entertained in a way you have never been before...and even when you think you know what will happen...you won't!

Well worth a read and some extreme escapism! I guarantee you won't be bored!

C.p. Bialois says

When I started reading the Squirrel That Dreamt Of Madness by Craig Stone I was at first intrigued by the idea of the story of a homeless man living in a park. The way the story unfolded reminded me of J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye in that the main character took it upon himself to demonstrate that one's life didn't have to be as constricting and lifeless as it seems.

The character, named Colossus Sosloss, walks away from his job, home, and friends to prove that one doesn't need society to make something of themselves. While living in a park for ten days he meets quite a group of characters including a midget groundskeeper that doesn't like him, Moonface an insane man that follows him everywhere, and Matt, the lone groundskeeper that treats him with any dignity.

From the beginning of the story the author shares the random thoughts and quips everyone has throughout their daily lives but few, if any, confess to it. While funny and entertaining it also helps keep the feeling of the book light instead of the potential depressing nature of the material. As it progresses further those comedic thoughts turned into hilarious actions as Colossus is caught in, or a part of, several acts that aren't bad alone but when combined with the predicament he finds himself in prove to be hilarious. I was very pleased to find that some of the seemingly random side stories serve an important purpose to the conclusion.

This was a very good read that I thoroughly enjoyed and would recommend to anyone that enjoys a good story. At times you'll feel for Colossus and at others you'll agree with his self-assessment of being an idiot. You'll laugh and may even cry, but in the end you'll be happy you read it.

Sarah Williams says

This book is actually the funniest thing I have ever read in my life. I enjoy a humorous book but up until now had never found one that actually made me laugh out loud. This book made me laugh out loud. I laughed so much I cried. I laughed so much that other members of my family stopped what they were doing to stare at me and ask me what on earth was so funny. Suicidal buggies are funny - and I know that sounds wrong - but in context, suicidal buggies are hysterical. The author has a great talent for clever humour and word play and what I would almost describe as Python-esq humour. As well as being funny this book has an engaging storyline, interesting plot twists and a protagonist who is hugely likeable. Everything about this book just clicked for me and I'll definitely be on the look out for further books by this author. Highly recommended.

Carey Parrish says

This rather delightful book is the debut novel for British writer Craig Stone. Aptly titled "The Squirrel That Dreamt of Madness," the book tells the story of a man's departure from the world he knows and into that of one who lives in a park, unemployed, homeless, and amuses himself by creating stories around those who inhabit the park with him.

Inspired by true events from the author's life, the reader gets a look inside the mind of one who just chucked it all because the "little voice" in his head told him so, and he decided to listen. In the park there is a cast of

characters to keep our hero occupied that includes the Park Keeper, who happens to be a midget with anger management issues, and a chubby dude called Moonface who lives up a tree because he broke both ankles escaping from a hospital and now he believes if he comes down the "floor will bite him." There's Matt who looks after Moonface, someone our narrator doesn't really care for, and a policeman named PC Whirled. Madness the Parrot is a favorite of all the park's inhabitants and Dorangel Vargas, who kills animals, is in a world unto himself.

The narrator, who calls himself Colossus Sosloss, spends his days interacting with all these miscreants and his observations of life, and the reason he's there in the first place, keep bringing him back to a reality that he tried to leave behind when he chose to become homeless at the book's outset.

"Better to live dreaming than dream of living" is a tagline that will stay with you after the story is told. Craig Stone has created a virtual world for himself in "The Squirrel That Dreamt of Madness" and its one that readers should visit. For there isn't a dull moment in the whole escapade. Well done.

Cinta says

It is funny. It is clever. It is witty. It is deep. It is sad sometimes. It is a lot of things that make you fall head first into this story, making you read and read and read, not knowing when you are going to put the book down. The story of Colossus Sosloss, who got tired of living an empty life and tried to escape from the solitude he was feeling, despite being surrounded by lots of people. Colossus leaves everything and becomes part of the anonymous crowd of homeless people who live in parks. This is a clever story of how he tried to survive in Gladstone Park, even when facing some unexpected and nasty events.

In a very witty, clever, and funny tone, Craig Stone makes the reader think about the world and everyday life of those homeless people who live around us, and who we seem to ignore or who we simply don't even see. At the same time, through Colossus's story we are told an important lesson about appearances and the opinion that people can have of others depending on their situation or looks.

Very rich in metaphors, it may seem to be a difficult book to read. On the contrary, the metaphors are easily recognizable, and we all can understand what it is being said there. This story contains other stories within, that help to understand the overall context of the book.

If you enjoy satirical, funny, very clever stories, this is the book for you. I have given to it 5 stars, but only because I cannot give it 10. One of the best books I have read this year so far.

Sharon Buchbinder says

If Jonathan Winters, Robin Williams AND Tibor Fischer married and had a child, this author would be their son. A manic walk in the park brings the reader closer to jealous trees, giant caterpillars, angry park attendants and the role of the marginalized person sitting next to you on that broken down park bench. Yes, that one, the person you just slid away from because he had a distinct *eau de je ne sais quoi* about him. In this book, laugh out loud moments alternate with poignant insights into humanity--and the lack thereof. If we are only human by the abode we own, then what were our ancestors who lived in caves? By today's standards, they were bums. Yet, by Neanderthal caste systems, dark, stinky caverns ruled. Once again, we are reminded that appearances are deceiving. And while I do NOT recommend that you chat up the next homeless person you see, I do suggest that he or she is or was someone's child, father, mother, brother, uncle, aunt, or cousin and that we can all spare a crumb or two of compassion.

Jean-paul Audouy says

A book that can be as entertaining and funny as it can be infuriating. It can be read as a book about someone having a nervous breakdown mixed with a bout of schizophrenia deciding for no clear reasons to go homeless in his local park. And who as a result enters an apparently endless loop of bad decisions. A very animal oriented book too! The most disturbing bit being the fox episode. I caught myself screaming at the E-Reader: "Why, But Why?!" And the redemption is being brought, as the book enters a rollercoaster phase, by a grey African parrot. I found reading it not only disturbing but also slightly dangerous. If you've struggled yourself with episodes of depression, bullying, feeling socially left-out, it acts as a reminder of the temptation you might have had of preferring the unknown dangers of leaving everything to the known dangers of staying in a life where you don't fit. One of the features that makes the book unique is the self-deprecating humour expressed here with great writing talent. And the realisation that the hug from another human being can sometimes redeem it all.

eNovel Reviews says

The British author, Craig Stone, is as interesting a person as the characters he creates. Miserable at his day job, he decided to take a leap of faith. His path to success was all or nothing, victory or death. (Some spoilers if you continue reading...)

He quit his job and dropped out of the white-collar world with all its trappings and amenities. Unemployed, he had to give up his residence. With a sleeping bag and a sackful of clothes he headed to Northwest London's Gladstone Park, settling in among the homeless, transients, dog walkers and the occasional irritated park worker. His only solace, an A4 notepad and a pen.

Like the author, the main character Colossus Sosloss also quits his job, becomes homeless and sleeps in the park. He learns to adroitly dodge dog poo and falling bird droppings, then deftly hides his bagged personal belongings from the diligent and watchful park employees. Colossus observes the other homeless who reside at the park. Many of them with treatable or controllable mental illness but, in the post-Margaret Thatcher England, such individuals are human refuse. Dumped into society to fend for themselves and spiral downward amongst the neatly-trimmed hedges and glistening, manicured lawn of the sprawling public space.

The character's travails are reminiscent of a Lewis Carroll-type adventure with subtle Dickensian undertones. Which include a lost parrot and an unfortunate man named Squirrel. We follow Colossus on his journey to the edge of sanity, with humorous interjections and clever idioms. A hero's quest, that inevitably ends with subterfuge, realization and reflection.

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everyone, is a metaphor for something either sinister or truthful. Gifted students may soon find this book on their required reading list for their advanced High School contemporary literature class.

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Like Hemingway who retreated to the wild and lawless pre-Castro Cuba to pen his magnum opus *The Old Man and the Sea*, Stone chose to immerse himself in a colder and wetter climate to experience what his character had to endure. The old adage, you write what you know, still rings resonantly true. Stone certainly writes what he knows, and writes it exceptionally well.

--eNovel Reviews

ReGi McClain says

First of all, this is not the type of book I would normally read. In fact, the only reason I got it was because I sort of stumbled upon the author on Twitter and found him to be very good at turning a phrase to be both amusing and insightful (when he isn't being odd). The moral of this otherwise pointless paragraph being that a good Twitter persona might just win an author a reader that otherwise would have fallen into the cliché of judging a book by its cover.

And now, my actual review. I love the main character's sleeping bag's bag. It alone should get five stars. Throughout the book I had to stifle guffaws (not necessarily generated by the bag) so as not to disturb those around me. Besides the very great advantage of being funny, the main character draws many profound conclusions about life during his time as a homeless man. A bit of mystery adds to the fun.

On the not-so-plus side, there are a number of body humor moments that caused me some blech-eeew-shudder-skip-ahead-skip-ahead!-ugh-now-I-have-to-scrub-my-mental-image-gallery issues.

Matt says

How does it feel

How does it feel

To be without a home

Like a complete unknown

Like a rolling stone?

This book is going to answer this question – at least partially. I already know the hero and narrator, Colossus Sosloss, from Craig Stone's other autobiographical novel *Life Knocks*. In *The Squirrel that Dreamt of Madness* Colossus quits the job he can't stand, flees from his flat, and is going to pursue the dreams he stands for. With two bags, and a sleeping bag tugged in a third bag, he sets forth to live in a park ...

"Gladstone Park is a peaceful oasis in the middle of North London. Much of its charm comes from the tree-

lined avenues crisscrossing the green expanse and dating back to the turn of the 20th century. It's definitely possible to while away a couple of hours wandering down these paths, stopping off en route to feed the ducks, admire the colourful flowers, [...]" (from www.londontown.com)

... and becomes a homeless man — a bum — by choice (in contrast to whoever Bob Dylan is singing about). It turns out the above description of the park doesn't fit for everyone alike:

My sleeping bag is too big for its bag, I'm cold, tired, my bed has bird poo on it, my skin is itching, fat flies sporadically land on my forehead, and a park keeper is walking in my direction.

In addition to these "little things" he is in constant fear of the other homeless men. These could be murderers, or madmen, or mad murderers. Especially at night when every shadow becomes the silhouette of a haunter and every rustling twig a breaking bone, Colossus has to drop the last bit of romantic notion he might had had about his new life.

At this point I should mention Craig Stone did exactly that. His dream was to become a writer at some point.

"I quit my job, left my flat and walked into a park with a sleeping bag and a pen. I thought that without the phone ringing, and without making coffees I would never drink for others, and the pointless excel spreadsheets, and the people sitting around being safe but living out failures - without all those things, if I just gave it all up, maybe I would make it. Maybe I would write that book that's been on my mind since school. So I did." (from Craig Stone's profile)

So you have to add pen and notebook to the above list of items, I guess.

I'd say the story in this book is neither character- nor plot- but *location*-driven. Gladstone Park, as seen through the narrator's eyes, its trees and bushes, the duckpond and an abandoned (haunted?) house, is the story's secret kingpin. Needless to say I'm going to visit this park (during day-time!) the next time I'm in London. The reader is sitting right behind the eyes of the narrator. Sometimes looking back to see his brain working, dreaming, *nightmar*ing, other times looking at the world through his lenses, witnessing the most surreal scenes. This story has some brutally funny moments, triggered by the author's virtually immeasurable treasures of similes. It has also many deep thought-provoking philosophical sentiments, most of which I just had to mark in my Kindle, to read them over and over again. But it also has dark and disturbing descriptions of deterioration of our furred and feathered friends. Be warned: Those parts are quite intense!

I don't know what image you produce in your mind when reading the book's title *The Squirrel that Dreamt of Madness*, but I'll bet you dollars-to-dumplings it's the wrong one. Two interludes, engrossing short stories in their own right, lead to the solution of this "puzzle".

Craig Stone's writing is original and unique (as far as I can tell from the books I read so far in my life), and he deserves particular attention. Do yourself a favor and check out his books. All of them are great. Alas, now I run out of Craig Stone books. I hope for a new one soon.

(all photos by the author from his website, post-processed and cropped by me)

Update 9/13/2016

[Photograph: CBS Photo Archive/Getty Images]

This is Roald Dahl answering a telephone call.

What the hell does *he* has to do in *this* review? — I hear you cry.

First: It's Roald Dahl's 100th birthday today.

Second: He's spending time in a park and so did Craig Stone.

Third: *I won't tell*. You have to read this book to learn about the connection.

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Mary says

There are two ways to view this book, one is as a crazy, fun, entertaining read. The other is as a serious, thought provoking, wake up call to the age old morals: Things aren't always what they seem; don't judge a book by its cover. Craig Stone skillfully intertwines both views with his readers in mind.

Against the advice of family and friends, Craig leaves his regular 9-5 day job and after work social life to become an unemployed, homeless man, living in a park in London.

Craig writes, "It can be a struggle sometimes balancing doing what you want to do with doing what everyone else wants you to do; especially when nobody really understands what you are trying to do including yourself."

My favorite parts of the book are the serious, thought provoking parts, where Craig expresses his innermost feelings about what he is doing in the park, and I get to peek inside his brain. I enjoyed gaining insight to the man who turned his life upside down for ten days. At times I found myself thinking he was crazy, other times I felt he was brave and courageous.

This crazy, fun, read is more than entertaining as Craig's imagination goes wild creating characters from the people he meets in the park. His writing skills are overloaded with metaphors and similes that I read over more than once, even jotting some down. One of my favorite similes: "If I am worried and thinking about my bags all day then no matter where I am I have not put them down; like a CEO going on holiday with his work blackberry."

Share Craig's ten days in the park by reading *The Squirrel That Dreamt Of Madness*. It will remind you of forgotten morals while at the same time entertain you with a very crazy, fun, story!

Book Review by Mary Crocco

Cloey.k says

This book is laugh out loud funny. I had to check my laugh volume while reading in public places so that people wouldn't think that I was "that crazy lady". Craig Stone showed me that he has awesome storytelling skills with a story of a guy living in a park while living in the park - really? He pulled it off! I bet Mr. Stone could take any idea and turn it into an entertaining story. I have to admit that there were a few parts in the story where I felt embarrassed for Colossus. Then I would bring it all back to reality - anything goes when you are homeless and living in a park. I have never laughed at poo before and this book had me rolling on the floor! You have got to read this one - not for the poo it's much more than that. I didn't get bored and it kept my interest so I didn't want to put it down. There were a few bumpy areas of concern for the edit police but I think that even you will like this one. Craig Stone has a new fan. I would read this one again and I am looking forward to his next book.

Rebecca says

Never in a million years did I expect to like this book. A story based on a man living homeless in a park? I thought how mundane, right? Boy, was I ever wrong!! Absolutely one of the best books I have ever read. He is not only hilarious in his story telling, but he describes things in a most creative way you would never imagine (or could for that matter). Craig is a deep thinker and that comes across in the metaphors he uses in his descriptions of people and events in the book. This book made me feel many emotions; laughter, sadness, terror but mostly I laughed. This book was truly hard to put down. He captivates your imagination and his story flows so well I found it hard to find a stopping point to bookmark. This is a story that has a "M. Night Shyamalan" story twist, in my opinion and I loved it! This book is like a really good movie that you want to watch over and over again and each time you see/read it you get something new out of it you missed the first time around! I was sad when I came to the end of the book, it is just that good! I look forward to his next book!
