

★ **Beast Heart****Kyle Richardson**

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In Kyle Richardson's steampunk adventure *Beast Heart*, two children are pushed to their extremes when catlike monsters stalk their city.

In the city of Iron Bay, nine-year-old Gabby's hand turns to smoke. Her mother hires an engineer to build a clockwork hand for her. Gabby, who is bullied and isolated after, becomes angry. When her mother is killed by a mystical beast, an Ailouros, Gabby moves in with a kind detective; her anger turns to vengeance.

On the other side of the city, an orphaned boy, Kemple, runs away from his abusive foster father. An infected cat scratch turns him into an Ailouros; he fights the transformation, and its control over him, with all his will.

When Gabby and Kemple's parallel stories converge, there is an explosion of action. They both come into their fullest potentials as a monster and a monster hunter. They are each other's perfect adversaries; shaped by their loneliness, losses, and the brutality of Iron Bay, they are pulled in opposite directions. What they have in common ultimately unites them: neither wants to be what they are.

Iron Bay is all dark alleys and howls in the night; Victorian doctors and steampunk engineers round out its population. Both Gabby and Kemple fear that their respective demons lurk around every corner, and they just may be right. Yet despite the horrors of the Ailouros and the city, the book's tone is light, following Gabby and Kemple's movements as if they're in a fairy tale. Inside jokes about steampunk stories round out the book's balanced mood. The ending hints at a love triangle that may carry the drama into the next book in the trilogy.

In *Beast Heart*, the similarities between true monsters and metaphorical ones are drawn out; mythical creatures and simmering anger can both be overcome.

AIMEE JODOIN (March / April 2020)

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