

★ **Boys, Beasts & Men**

Sam J. Miller

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The line between figurative and literal beasts is blurred in the inventive stories of Sam J. Miller's *Boys, Beasts & Men*.

The book's conjured funhouse worlds are both familiar and alien. Small-town family tensions are exacerbated by the discovery of a living dinosaur in "Allosaurus Burgers." In "57 Reasons for the Slate Quarry Suicides," a sensitive teenage romance descends into tragedy thanks to a display of superpowers. "Shattered Sidewalks of the Human Heart" posits a world in which King Kong actually existed, while "Things with Beards" is a sequel to the horror movie *The Thing*—as well as an allegory for LGBTQ+ identity in which aliens pose as humans. Even a comedic tale that chronicles the life of a sofa percolates with regrets for unfulfilled lives.

The book's vigorous prose strikes a balance between imaginative twists, strong character development, and relatable dilemmas. Its most affecting tales resonate on both political and personal levels. In the dystopian "We Are the Cloud," those whom society labels as unworthy rent out their brainpower to an all-encompassing Net. "The Beasts We Want to Be" is an unsettling vision of a militaristic society in which boys are bred to become actual monsters. And "The Heat of Us" reimagines the Stonewall Riots of 1969 as a telekinetic event in which righteous passions literally catch fire. In "Angel, Monster, Man," three men live under the shadow of the 1980s AIDS epidemic, fooling the art community by "inventing" an artist who ends up being a lightning rod for LGBTQ+ rights.

Finding danger and humanity in their characters, the short stories of *Boys, Beasts & Men* marry emotional epiphanies with violence, resulting in imaginative, stirring meditations on LGBTQ+ struggles and acceptance.

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