

Boys of the Beast

Monica Zepeda

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Three very different cousins go on a life-changing road trip in Monica Zepeda's young adult novel *Boys of the Beast*.

Oscar's father died in a school shooting; his activist mother is often absent. Matt is home schooled, and aspires to be a Christian filmmaker. Ethan is gay and dealing with his first major crush. The three converge for their Latina grandmother's funeral. Although they are close in age, they haven't met each other often, and they have little in common.

But then Matt inherits their grandmother's car and decides to drive it home to Albuquerque. When Oscar hears about this plan, he volunteers to go along. Soon, Ethan, who sees the trip as an opportunity to meet his online crush in Berkeley in real life, joins in as well. Although Matt's strict father insists that they take the fastest route, the boys disobey him, taking a detour through California. There are many bumps along the way, as the boys deal with their personal differences, car troubles, and parental concerns. In addition, they each deal with a weighty personal issue of their own.

Short, snappy chapters keep the pages turning. The boys' voices are differentiated ably: Oscar's speech is peppered with slang and curses, while sections told from Ethan's point-of-view include texts, complete with emojis. Meanwhile, Matt's musings are often expressed in the form of a movie script, underscoring his devotion to his craft. Issues including religious beliefs, mental illness, and sexual orientation are covered without judgment, and the boys' ultimate acceptance of one another is an authentic source of positivity.

The young adult novel *Boys of the Beast* zips easily along, just like the 1988 Ford Thunderbird Turbo Coupe that carries its three cousins to their satisfying destination.

SUZANNE KAMATA (January / February 2022)

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