

The Cloven: Book One

Garth Stein

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A lab-grown, human-goat hybrid is subjected to careful study and subtle manipulation as part of a larger goal in *The Cloven: Book One*.

James “Tuck” Tucker, a young man with cloven hooves instead of feet, wakes in a lab with no idea how he got there. A mysterious woman frees him, and he wanders back to his home. Finding no trace of his mother, he heads to a rescue mission where he once volunteered, and then to “The Jungle,” the Seattle area known for its homeless camps. He soon finds he’s not the only one in the area with hooves, and begins to fully embrace his true nature.

Much of the story is told in flashbacks, not just from James’s point of view, but from others involved in the experiment that spawned and raised him. Little by little, details are revealed of the how and why: what one scientist believed was an effort to end world hunger is actually an effort to create the perfect warrior, incorporating the agility, hardy digestive tract, and enlarged sinuses of a goat.

The book is dramatic and serious, and its bold storytelling is complemented by its artwork, which combines with the text and, in some cases, delivers information without words, as with the distinctive goat eyes of some of the Cloven. The book’s innovative use of colors and sound effects helps to set the moody atmosphere. Worthy of special note are the many outstanding two-page spreads and the spectacular, almost iridescent images of Tuck running and leaping with the other Cloven.

The Cloven is a daring graphic novel that casts light on a dark fictional world, full of stories yet to be told.

PETER DABBENE (July / August 2020)

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