

Saints and Monsters

Ellen McGinty

Quill & Flame Publishing House (Mar 5, 2024)

Hardcover \$24.99 (390pp)

978-1-957899-69-5

A kingdom's fate rests on the shoulders of a princess who deals with dragons in Ellen McGinty's novel *Saints and Monsters*.

Meera's back brace and blue hair draw the unjust denigration of others who consider her cursed. She is close to her brother, Bastian; her sister, Runa, is slated to be presented to ancient dragons in hopes that they'll accept her and bless the land with their magic. When Runa falls unconscious from poison, Meera is determined to save sister and kingdom. Unwitting, she enters into an exchange with a dragon. Drawn into a web of political and magical exploits, she carries two hearts—her own and the dragon's.

The unraveling of Meera's thinking is intimate. She acknowledges feeling “unwhole” but refuses passivity and despair, electing to fight and protect her loved ones. When faced with either taking her fallen sister's place as disposable death fodder or fulfilling an arranged marriage to Casmir, the duke of neighboring Taiga, Meera opts for a plan of her own creation. With courage and daring nearing recklessness, she seeks out a magic dagger, attempting to force the obedience of a dragon and his magic so that she can save her sister from death.

Meera shares narrative duties with Casmir and the dragon. The latter two share their insights on multitudinous other characters well, though their voices also demystify the senses of them that come through Meera's perceptions. To her, their motivations are mysterious, even thrilling in their ambiguity. Still, anticipation and excitement run throughout—in part because of Meera's complicated romance with Casmir.

In the fantastical novel *Saints and Monsters*, a girl fights for her family and kingdom, bearing the burden of two hearts within her.

ISABELLA ZHOU (March / April 2024)

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