Monster Mash

September 1, 2001 By Clifford Chase

The title of Aldo Alvarez’s publishing debut, *Interesting Monsters* (out this month from Graywolf Press), takes its title from a line Bugs Bunny mutters while he, imitating a manicurist, buffs the claws of a beast who’s been chasing him: "Gee, I bet *mahn*sters are *innn*teresting." All the characters in this collection of stories -- half are gay; two have HIV -- are as fresh, flawed and fascinating as a cartoon creation. Alvarez shows a taste for the quirky, the surreal and the slightly gruesome: In one story, a character named Rog carries his placenta around in a special briefcase and takes it out to show at parties. The results of Alvarez’s mix of styles and voices -- from weighty to whimsical, straightforward to fantastic -- are, well, mixed, but almost never dull. Together, the stories portray a web of characters in search of connection and -- best of all -- two men alive and in love.

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