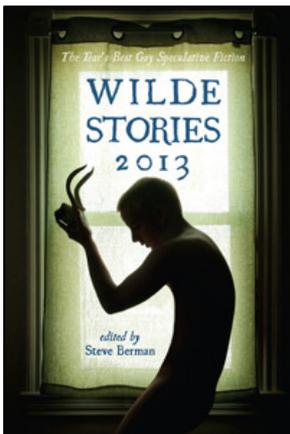


Dallas J. Baker

## In the Wilde: Review of *Wilde Stories 2013* (Steve Berman)



Steve Berman (ed)  
*Wilde Stories 2013*  
Lethé Press  
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Editor Steve Berman is one of the most prolific and skilled editors working in lesbian and gay writing (*Best Gay Stories*, *Wilde Stories* etc.) In *Wilde Stories 2013*, he has gathered together a strong collection of writing that forms a sometimes eerie, always satisfying and often emotionally gratifying encounter with gay speculative fiction.

The stories contained in this volume are diverse, but all refer to the long history of beauties and beasts at the centre of much traditional speculative fiction, such as

werewolves and sea monsters. The stories all manage to capture the strangely erotic quality of the beast's desire for the human and the human's fear and fascination with the beauty of the beast. Berman has placed the stories in the anthology in a way that produces connections, contrasts and interplays between each piece, an editorial gift that few have mastered.

The characters that haunt these wild stories are as diverse as fantasy creatures themselves: adolescent youths coming out and coming of age at a summer camp stalked by a lake-dwelling sea monster; two guys seeking safe refuge in a bug infested dystopia; a "tattooed love boy" whose fluid gender and sexuality defies all labels.

My favourite piece in the collection is L Lark's 'Breakwater in the Summer Dark'. This is an evocative coming-of-age tale, set at a strange summer camp that is visited each night by a lake monster. In some ways, the lake monster acts as a metaphor for the adolescent protagonist's anxiety about his hidden or unacknowledged desire. The more he faces and accepts his sexual feelings, the more we see of the monster. Eventually, once the main character has accepted how he feels about another adolescent at the camp, the monster is found washed ashore, dead. So, for me, the lake monster can be seen to be the embodiment of the character's fear and anxiety around his sexuality. Once he's accepted who he is, and who he desires, there is no air left for the lake monster to breathe.

Lark's story is not the only standout. Alex Jeffers's 'Tattooed Love Boys', the provocative narrative about fluid sexuality and gender identity mentioned above, is also a very strong piece, though it may not appeal to everyone. 'Wave Boys' by Vincent Kovar on the other hand has broad appeal. It is set in a futuristic dystopian

world populated by clans of feral youths, which has resonances of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, but with a decidedly more erotic undertone. If these pieces don't appeal to the reader, then there are many others to choose from. The anthology includes enough diverse and different stories, with practically every type of fantasy or speculative genre represented, that there's something for almost everyone.

Berman has been inclusive rather than exclusive with this anthology, including stories that sometimes have little stylistically in common with each other. This is not a weakness, however, as Berman has deftly selected stories that resonate in ways other than style or tone. Many touch on youthful wildness and/or uncertainty, others use future worlds as a backdrop to explore what queer relationships might look like in another time, still others share a fascination for the sea and its long association with man on man affection and sex (sailors & pirates). The principle theme these stories have in common is, of course, that they all feature male characters who feel some kind of same-sex attraction. This was the overarching criterion Berman used to select each story. Even so, this anthology can hold its head up with any other speculative collection. The sexuality of its characters, though a delight for LGBT readers, is almost incidental. These are just really solid stories.

*Wilde Stories 2013* comes together as a satisfyingly coherent whole. This is an impressive collection that is a must read for fans of fantasy, speculative fiction or LGBT writing in general.

## Author Bio

Dallas J. Baker (also known as Dallas Angguish) is a writer and academic based in Australia. He has been published in a number of journals - *Lodestar Quarterly*, *Retort Magazine*, *Bukker Tillibul*, *TEXT* - as well as in a number of anthologies, including *Dumped* (1999), *Bend, Don't Shatter* (2004), *Sensual Travels* (2013) and the US edition of *Dumped* released in 2003. *America Divine: Travels in the Hidden South*, A collection of his travel pieces set in the South of the USA, was published in 2011 to very positive reviews. For more info: [www.dallasangguish.com](http://www.dallasangguish.com)

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