

2011 Gaylactic Spectrum Awards
Best Novel

Winner

Under the Poppy
by **Kathe Koja**

Small Beer Press

ISBN13: 978-1931520706



If Charles Dickens had written an alternate reality novel about war, love, sex, death and very strange puppets you would have this year's Gaylactic Spectrum Award winner, *Under the Poppy*, an amazing novel by Kathe Koja. The novel offers a rich, evocative alternate reality that is close but not quite our world, an exploration of the demimonde of the theatre and the brothel, and the tale of two lovers, Rupert and Istvan, and their tortured relationship.

Decca and Rupert own The Poppy, a brothel with a reputation for the unique and sometimes bizarre. At the core of the story is a love triangle: Decca loves Rupert but Rupert is deeply in love with Decca's brother Istvan, a puppeteer whose marionettes know more than a thing or two about decadence. The story is set against the backdrop of war and turmoil in one of the Victorian era's most sophisticated cities. Rupert and Istvan try to escape from the seedy underworld into high society only to find themselves embroiled in another complicated relationship. Like actors in a play or marionettes, their fate seems to be determined by others who hold the power and strings.

Under the Poppy breaks a lot of rules: point-of-view shifts, convoluted mysterious plots full of violence and decadence, relationships that run the gamut from accepted to beyond forbidden, and witty graphic language. In Koja's skillful hands, the novel engages the reader from the start, provides a way to taste and smell the world through brilliantly-crafted prose, and presents a heart-wrenching romance. A mature love story that doesn't flinch from revealing the truth about life in the demimonde, *Under the Poppy* is well worth the read.

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Short List

Black Blade Blues by J.A. Pitts
Tor ISBN13: 978-0765364098

Exciting urban fantasy, with dragons as the hidden rulers of our world. The main character, Sarah Beauhall, is an apprenticed blacksmith, a props manager for a low-budget movie company, and a fighter in an SCA-affiliated household. She is also slowly (and uncomfortably) coming to terms with her sexuality, aided by her more "out" new girlfriend Katie. Sarah's life is thrown into turmoil when a self-professed Dwarf tells her the broken sword she re-forged is actually Gram, Sigurd's legendary dragon-slaying sword.

A Book of Tongues by Gemma Files
ChiZine Publications ISBN13: 978-0981297866

Supernatural horror in a Wild West setting. A fire-and-brimstone preacher (and Confederate veteran) uses dark magic to aid his gang in a rampage of robbery and slaughter throughout the Old West. His love, Chess, is a flamboyant and unrepentant queer homicidal gunslinger. And they've attracted the attention of an ancient Aztec goddess who wants to use them to resurrect the dominion of the bloodthirsty Aztec pantheon. A gay undercover Pinkerton detective infiltrates the gang and gradually falls in love with Chess – and hopes to save Chess from being used as a sacrifice.

Stealing Fire by Jo Graham
Orbit ISBN13: 978-0316076395

Historical fantasy/adventure, set in the years following the death of Alexander the Great and preceding the establishment of the Ptolemaic Dynasty in Egypt. It is told from the viewpoint of Lydias of Miletus, a bi-sexual member of the late Alexander's bodyguards. Over the course of the story, Lydias has sexual liaisons with both Hephaestion (Alexander's closest friend and lover) and Bagoas (Alexander's "Persian boy").

The Wolf at the Door by Jameson Currier
Chelsea Station Editions ISBN13: 978-0984470709

Avery Dalrymple is a middle-aged, overweight, overworked, cynical gay man who runs a small guesthouse in the New Orleans French Quarter. When a death occurs in the guesthouse, all kinds of supernatural dangers arise from the building's ghostly (and spiritual) previous tenants. Avery seems to be the only one with a chance to find out what's going on and to resolve all the supernatural threats, thus saving his loving family-of-choice. The story combines scary, witty, and sentimental elements.

Bob the Book by David Pratt
Chelsea Station Editions ISBN13: 978-0984470716

All the characters in this innovative Fantasy are books. In fact, Bob is a gay book. On the surface, this is a typical love story: boy-book meets boy-book; boy-book loses boy-book; boy-book is reunited with boy-book. But it's much, much more – it provides fascinating commentaries and insights on various aspects of gay culture, interpersonal relationships, the way books relate to people, and the role of (gay) pornography, to name but a few.

Red Hood's Revenge by Jim C. Hines
DAW ISBN13: 978-0756406080

Transform the passive and predictable fairytale heroines we all know and love--Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Little Red Riding Hood--into capable, tough women who know their way around swords and magic, and we have the heroines of this novel, which is not only a retelling and a reimagining of these old stories, but an expansion: what happened after happily ever after. Talia, Princess of Arathea (Sleeping Beauty), killed the prince who raped her while she slept. For years, Talia has been an adventuress and nurtured an unrequited love for Snow (Snow White). Now, the prince's mother has hired Roudette, a shape-shifting assassin known as the Lady of the Red Hood, to kill Talia. Meanwhile, Talia and Snow and Danielle (Cinderella) struggle against the real enemies: evil fairies. A tale of adventure and a love story, as well as a fairy tale, this is a dark, engaging, and sometimes cheeky, narrative.

The White Road by Lynn Flewelling
Spectra ISBN13: 978-0553590098

Flewelling's fifth (and latest) "Nightrunners" book, continuing the epic Fantasy adventure begun in the 2009 Spectrum Short List novel, *Shadows Return*. New and old enemies endanger lovers Alec and Seregil as they travel from country to country attempting to solve the mystery of the nature of Sebrahn (the child created by an evil alchemist from Alec's bodily fluids).

