

*2012 Gaylactic Spectrum Awards*  
**Best Novel**

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*Winner*

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*Honeyed Words*  
by J. A. Pitts

Tor

ISBN13: 978-0765364104



It's not every day that you discover you've reforged a magical sword, but that's exactly what blacksmith Sarah Beauhall did, and she soon finds out that a heroine's work is never done.

In this year's Gaylactic Spectrum Awards winner for Best Novel, we rejoin Sarah and her partner Katie as life settles down after the aftermath of the terrible battle waged in *Black Blade Blues* (2011 Short List). However, dark forces never rest: the dragon-ruler of Portland is still scheming, while a secret cabal of dwarves is working on a powerful blood-potion for the mysterious King of Vancouver. In this exciting sequel to *Black Blade Blues*, we learn more about the power-hungry dragons, and we meet elves with questionable motives, another female blacksmith with some very dark secrets, and a neurotically devoted kobold. As all of these forces prepare to claim dominion over the realms of reality and magic, Sarah must deal with her own struggle to accept herself as she and her partner Katie try to build a life together amidst the turmoil.

A self-described "teller of tales," J.A. Pitts uses the beautiful Pacific Northwest as the backdrop for this clever twist on Norse mythology (There's something oddly familiar about this homeless one-eyed guy name Joe, the one with the ravens . . .). Along with the heart-pounding (and sometimes deadly) action, humor and tenderness are woven into the tapestry. Pitts has avoided making the sexual themes gratuitous, but gives sexuality and relationships plenty of emphasis. While it's clear that many of Sarah's friends are part of "alternate life style" groups, their partner choices are presented in a forthright and respectful way. The message is that regardless of whom you love, everyone can be a worthy champion of the Light in the struggle against Darkness.

Whether you're looking for a fresh presentation of LGBT content or well-crafted fantasy in an urban setting, *Honeyed Words* will draw you deeper into the lives of these very engaging characters, not the least of whom is Sarah Jane Beauhall herself. And hey, haven't we all wanted the chance to fight the Darkness in our modern world?

# 2012 Gaylactic Spectrum Awards

## Best Novel

### Short List

***The Cold Commands* by Richard K. Morgan**  
Del Rey ISBN13: 978-0345493079

Gritty swords-and-sorcery fiction – the follow-up to *The Steel Remains* (2010 Best Novel). It's a year or so after humanity and their Kiriath allies won the devastating war with the Scaled Ones and the scientifically-advanced Kiriath have left Earth. It's up to that aging trio of heroes – Ringil Eskiath (the no-nonsense queer warrior with the Kiriath sword), Egar Dragonbane (the powerful Majak barbarian), and Archeth (the ageless half-Kiriath lesbian) – to combat a sinister new/old enemy – the Illwrack Changeling and its Aldrain allies – that threatens humanity's dominion.

***Grail* by Elizabeth Bear**  
Spectra ISBN13: 978-0553591096

*Grail* is the final volume in the "Jacob's Ladder" series (*Dust* - 2008 Short List - and *Chill*). After a voyage of over 700 years, the generation ship Jacob's Ladder has reached its goal: a habitable planet they call "Grail" – but find other colonists have beat them there. The ship-based and planet-based cultures are very different in many ways. It's a First Contact situation, with both sides having originated on Earth, centuries apart. The story features two major and several minor LGBT characters on the ship, and ample evidence that both cultures (even the "rightminded" inhabitants of Fortune/Grail) are as accepting of same-gender relationships as they are of different-gender relationships.

***Huntress* by Malinda Lo**  
Little, Brown ISBN13: 978-0316039994

This is a prequel by several centuries to *Ash* (2010 Short List). The world seems to be wearily, grayly, gradually dying. Three young humans are sent to the court of the Fairy Queen to see if they can figure out what's causing this: Prince Con, heir to the Kingdom; and Kaede and Taisin, magic Sages-in-training at the all-female Academy. The companions face various deadly perils – natural and supernatural – during their quest; and Kaede and Taisin realize that they're falling in love.

***Rule 34* by Charles Stross**  
Ace ISBN13: 978-1937007669

In near-future Scotland, the Innovative Crime Investigation Unit becomes involved in a series of international murders secretly connected to a rogue AI with its own ethical agenda. Detective Inspector Liz Kavanaugh is a strong, capable woman, an out lesbian on the Scots police force. During the investigation, she becomes reacquainted with an old flame (Dorothy, an international banking investigator, who is poly and bi). Scots society is shown as generally accepting of non-traditional sexual orientations; and several other secondary characters (both lawful and not) are depicted as queer in one way or another.

***The Wild Ways* by Tanya Huff**  
DAW ISBN10: 0756406862

This is a second novel in the "Gale Family" stories (following *The Enchantment Emporium* – Short List 2010). This time, the action centers on another member of the Gale family: Charlotte "Charlie" Gale, a Celtic folk-rock musician and a Wild Power (an independent loner). She gets involved with a colony of Selkies who are attempting to prevent offshore drilling from harming their home turf. She learns that her Auntie Catherine (another Wild Power) is working for the oil company and has stolen the selkies' sealskins to blackmail them into not opposing the drilling operations. Plenty of fantasy elements to the story: goblins, boggarts, a Dragon Prince, a troll, selkies, and (of course) the Gales themselves. Sexuality is a very fluid concept with the Gales – and among Charlie's musician friends.

***God's War/Infidel* by Kameron Hurley**  
Night Shade ISBN13: 978-159780214X / 978-1597802246

A "duology" of grim and edgy SF novels of war, conspiracies and political intrigue, set on a world that has only been marginally terraformed over the course of several thousand years. Includes a fascinating "bug-based" technology (a form of genetic engineering often labeled as "sorcery"). This world is home to several religious groups/nations descended from orthodox Judeo-Christian-Islamic sources and the books highlight secular practice versus religious proscriptions. In both novels, Nyx – who is decidedly bisexual – attempts to maneuver her band of misfit mercenaries through the intrigues around them. Several secondary characters are also queer.

***The Highest Frontier* by Joan Slonczewski**  
Tor ISBN13: 978-0765367723

Jennifer Ramos-Kennedy, scion of the famous political family, is attending her freshman year at Frontera College, in the world's oldest permanent, self-sustaining space habitat while Earth faces the on-going ecological threat of infestation by "ultraphytes" (alien RNA-based life forms). This is the simple framework around which has been woven a complex and thought-provoking web of scientific, social, political, educational, and ecological speculation. The novel features a number of openly-LGBT supporting characters (including the president of Frontera College and his lover, the college chaplain), as well as frequent background depictions of the general progress of queer issues within American society at large.

***A Rope of Thorns* by Gemma Files**  
ChiZine ISBN13: 978-1926851143

This sequel to *A Book of Tongues* (2011 Short List) is set in the late 1860s, where the resurrected Aztec goddess Ixchel is attempting to restore the bloodthirsty reign of her pantheon with the help of hexslinger Reverend Asher Rook. Meanwhile, Chess Pargeter (Rook's deadly out and proud former lover) is gradually transforming into another Aztec god, and seeks revenge on Ixchel and Rook for all they've done to him. Chess is deadly, but is slowly learning to consider others' welfare - and the meaning of sacrifice.

***Static* by L. A. Witt**  
Amber Quill ISBN13: 978-1611249538

An interesting examination of queer acceptance/persecution by predominantly non-queer Western society, with queerness being represented by the "shifters" (humans who possess the ability to alter their appearance and gender at will). Alex (a shifter who primarily self-identifies as female) is subjected by her estranged parents to a risky operation that permanently freezes Alex into "his" original male form. As well as exploring Alex's trials and tribulations – including "his" changed relationship with "her" boyfriend Damon – the book explores the nature of people who are able to enjoy socio-sexual relationships as either males or females.

