

**2018 Gaylactic Spectrum Awards**  
**Best Novel**

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**Winner**

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***Passing Strange***  
**by Ellen Klages**

Tor.com

ISBN13: 978-0765389527

Set primarily in San Francisco of 1940, *Passing Strange* weaves together the stories of six women and one wondrous city. Part noir, part pulp, part romance, part screwball comedy, the story feels like a wonderful old black and white film set to paper.

The story begins in modern times with an old woman, Helen, selling a rare and mysterious painting by a renowned and mysterious old pulp artist known as Haskel who had disappeared in 1940. The buyer regales Helen with the few details of the mysterious Haskel that collectors seem to know....how he used pastel chalks rather than oils, how his works had a certain almost technicolor style, and how many thought perhaps he died in the war. But the painting, the mysterious Haskel, and Helen all have a connected past...which draws us back to 1940 and Helen's circle of friends: Franny, real estate investor and a Wiccan with a touch of real power; Babs, her partner and a brilliant (and underemployed as a mere lecturer rather than as a professor because of her gender) theoretical mathematician; Loretta Haskel, the mysterious Haskel the future collectors all believed was a "he"; and Emily/Spike, a young and new to town "drag king" at Mona's, a well known bar that quietly catered to a....queer clientele.

The story of these women takes us through some of the history of San Francisco, both physically and culturally – Mona's, the old Chinatown dance clubs, the Magic City of the World's Fair grounds, and more. Their conversations are fascinating, their interactions enlightening, and their love for each other and for this magical place they call home, San Francisco, is apparent throughout. We learn the history of the painting – indeed Haskel's last, and one imbued with magic and love – and come away touched with a little magic ourselves on our journey.spec

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## 2018 Gaylactic Spectrum Awards - Recommended List

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***The Adventure of the Incognita Countess* by Cynthia Ward**  
 Aqueduct Press ISBN13: 978-1619761193

An enjoyable historical fantasy, centered around the sinking of the Titanic in 1912. The main character is Lucy Harker, daughter of Mina Harker and Count Dracula; and the story includes elements from a wide variety of Victorian novels: Dracula, Frankenstein, Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea, the “Sherlock Holmes” stories, Camilla (by Sheridan LeFanu), and the “Tarzan” stories – expertly mixed in with the real, historical people aboard the Titanic on its fatal voyage. Queer content focuses on the developing, rocky relationship between Lucy Harker (a vampire hunter) and the Countess Karnstein (a vampire).

***The Black Tides of Heaven* by JY Yang**  
 Tor.com ISBN13: 978-0765395412

In a world where gender is a choice, twin Imperial children are sold to the Grand Monastery. Mokoya discovers a talent for prophesy, but there’s a catch: the future can be predicted, but events cannot be altered. A rebellion is brewing; and the twins (with their unique gifts) must decide which side they will fight for. The twins’ eventual gender choices will also affect their lives.

***An Excess Male* by Maggie Shen King**  
 Harper Voyager ISBN13: 978-0062662552

In a near-future Communist China, a severely unbalanced population ratio of males over females leads to multiple-husband marriages and the “one child per husband” regulations. Gay men are designated as “Willfully Sterile” and undergo mandatory vasectomies. They cannot marry, reproduce, or raise children. Wei-guo is heterosexual; but very comfortable with and accepting of the gay men he comes to know. Hann, a gay man who has broken many laws and restrictions to have and raise a son and protect his brother, is the First Husband (with his autistic brother XX as co-husband). Hann wants (and mostly achieves) all the things that gay men in the U.S. want – all within the context of a country ruled by a repressive government.

***The Rules and Regulations for Mediating Myths & Magic***  
**by F.T. Lukens**

Duet / Interlude Press ISBN13: 978-1945053245

If myths and magic exist, how would the mundane world coexist with them? A high school student is so desperate for a job that (as directed) he climbs the outside of an old house and enters through a small door at a very specific time. But he doesn’t know what the job actually entails. With the help of his new boyfriend (and other supernatural friends), he discovers his place between these two worlds.

***An Unkindness of Ghosts* by Rivers Solomon**  
 Akashic Books ISBN13: 978-1617755880

Earth is no longer inhabitable and the intrepid HSS Matilda travels through space in search of a new home. The ship itself is a microcosm: each deck separates class and race with the higher decks assigned to the privileged. Aster has a talent for the healing arts and must navigate a world of unfairness and punishment in search of a better life. Aster’s mother has disappeared, but left cryptic notes behind. These notes may yield the answers Aster has long desired to know. With her well-connected doctor friend and companions from her deck, Aster will seek the truth and a way out. Gender lines are blurred among many characters.

***Amberlough* by Lara Elena Donnelly**  
 Tor Books ISBN13: 978-0765383822

In this alternate world, the freewheeling city and country of Amberlough falls into fascism and repression (much like Germany did in the 1930s). In the Queer demimonde of the theatre community, various characters struggle to make art and to survive as their country falls apart. Cyril (a spy and a cop) and Ari (a smuggler and drag star) find themselves trying to figure out love and relationships. Is love enough, as the Blackboots march into Amberlough?

***The Cult of Ocasta* by Mark Allan Gunnells**  
 Evil Jester Press ISBN13: 978-1542973816

Ocasta, an ancient Cherokee god, lurks in the depths of a lake-filled quarry on the edge of the Limestone College campus. Years have passed since Emilio (in charge of campus security) first fought this creature when he was a student. He defeated it then, but lost his lover to achieve this victory. Emilio has been on guard ever since, but can he face new terrors as Ocasta and its cultists rise again. Can he trust anyone? Can he even trust Marty Stillwater, the new history professor at Limestone, a man who is clearly attracted to him, a man for whom Emilio just might be having feelings? It’s a horror story, a love story, and a story of hope.

***Hexslayer* by Jordan L. Hawk**  
 JLH Publishing ISBN13: 978-1976236365

The “Hex” series continues. In 1890s New York City, “familials” are shapeshifters, only some of which (known as “ferals”) “bond” with “witches” (fully human magic-users). Thanks to active religious bigotry, NYC has passed laws making it impossible to be free feral in the city. Jamey is a crippled war veteran; he can’t advance in the Metropolitan Witch Police without a familiar. Nick is a familiar (animal form: horse) who has made rescuing ferals his life’s work – he has no love for witches and feels they have caused much grief in his life. Then Jamey and Nick meet and feel their bond immediately (and even fall in love), although Nick resists. Cruel, bloody murders of familials are on the rise in NYC. They must bond to solve these murders.

***Tremontaine, Season 1* Created by Ellen Kushner**

Serial Box / Saga Press ISBN13: 978-1481485586

A group of authors (headed by Kushner) joined to develop a “weekly series of episodes” for SerialBox.com – this is “Season 1”. It takes place in Kushner’s “Riverside” universe, about 15 years before the events in *Swordspoint* (Kushner’s first “Riverside” novel). It features a number of major Queer characters (men and women), as well as lots of Queer background details and minor characters. The Kinwiinik (a Maya-analog society of sea traders) are a fascinating addition to the “Riverside” universe. Plots swirl around the Kinwiinik, as well as a couple of mysteries involving Diana, Duchess Tremontaine. Sympathetic characters; marvelous dialog.