



# Hawaiian Gothic

*Heidi Belleau , Violetta Vane*

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*Ori and Kalani were childhood friends too afraid to be lovers. Now in their darkest hour—Ori disgraced and Kalani a wandering spirit—they'll fight the world and death itself for a second chance.*

Gregorio "Ori" Reyes thought there was nothing left for him in Hawaii. A former Army Ranger and promising MMA fighter, his dishonorable discharge turned him into the family disgrace, and his childhood best friend Kalani never could love him back--not the way Ori needed to be loved--even before Kalani's doctors declared him to be in an unrecoverable coma. Ori's return to Hawaii seems fated to be a depressing reminder of every chance he never took... until Kalani himself impossibly welcomes him home.

Kalani's body is bedridden, but his spirit is free to roam, and it turns out it's not just Ori who had unspoken yearnings. Kalani is eager to prove that he can still savor all the pleasures of this world. Together, they remember all those years of surfing, wrestling, touching and aching but too afraid to act; now, they cross that final barrier and struggle against each other in an entirely different way.

Passionately but tenuously reunited, the pair must solve the mystery of Kalani's unlucky life, sorting through dark family history and even journeying to the Hawaiian ghostworld. And the greatest terror of their journey is that Ori might have to put Kalani to rest.

## Hawaiian Gothic Details

Date : Published June 12th 2012 by Loose Id

ISBN :

Author : Heidi Belleau , Violetta Vane

Format : ebook 168 pages

Genre : Romance, M M Romance, Fantasy, Paranormal, Ghosts, Lgbt

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# From Reader Review Hawaiian Gothic for online ebook

## Indigo says

- 1) because of a no-rating by a friend, a non-native language as I.
  - 2) because of a review stating BDSM and horror mixed with dark/urban fantasy, that too much genre for me, I am a simple girl.
  - 3) because to read two so far apart reviews means to hate or to adore and I am a strictly no reader of manicheism in fiction
  - 4) I do not exclude changing my mind in the future... when I am finished reading all the book on stand-by in my virtual and physical libraries and possibly public libraries also.
- 

## Simsala says

This was a disaster waiting to happen but silly me ignored the red flags....

My fault - and Val's of course! Her review here...

Shiny new book, a five star review from a trusted reviewer that made it sound like Hawaiian Gothic is the book of the year (yes, why not, maybe...if you like that kind of stuff....\*coughs\*).....and curiosity killed the cat...!

I should have been warned - red flags the size of a high-rise!

- "Gothic"...if in literature, in a movie or in fashion usually means something dark and weird.

- I read a short story by these authors I couldn't finish...for exactly the same reasons why I "didn't like" Hawaiian Gothic - it was dark and weird.

- "Hawaiian spirit world" - see dark and....

I'm o.k. with dark but with weird - not so much.

(The biggest mistake was to NOT read the part in Val's review hidden under a spoiler tag....I wouldn't even have tried to read the book if only...)

- I'm not an avid reader of dark/high fantasy, horror and science fiction, usually just got a bloody nose by trying...with very few exceptions.

Don't get me wrong, I liked the first half of the book - it had 5 stars written all over it! A beautifully written, melancholy story of unrequited love, beautiful setting, just slightly creepy, HOT sex...great story!

It happened around 60%...Ori's "visit" to the Hawaiian spirit world.

Three options:

- I lost the story...

- the story lost me...

- there was something in the water...

I don't even know how to call it - abstract horror, or nightmarish surrealism, or imagination gone batshit

crazy? A bit of everything I guess...

Avoiding stories like that all my life the only comparison I can come up with is the Tim Burton movie "Beetlejuice" - and believe me, this is far-fetched - how sad is that?...So not my world.:(

Truth to be told, huge parts from there on I didn't even understand.

(Non-native speaker here, I found it very difficult to read...)

The somehow orderless narrative with a lot of short flashbacks not following a timeline needed getting used to but that didn't bother me at first - on the contrary, I liked it. But after the famous 60% mark it just added fuel to the confusion.

What a relief as the story got back to "normal" but the damage was done - I couldn't savor the beautiful ending...

I tend to blame the book (and sometimes the author - but secretly...) for not liking it but in this case I definitely was the wrong reader...no rating for Hawaiian Gothic.

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### **Becky Condit says**

This is not a romance but it is very erotic. Ori and Kalani take a journey into the netherworld of Hawaiian culture and mythology together and separately.

This is the tale of a nightmare that isn't a horror story but rather a revelation. I enjoyed the story very much but because the timeline is far from linear it isn't an easy read. Take the time to savor this book and you will be rewarded with a very satisfying epilogue. And by the way, for those who judge a book by its cover, is this not one of the most gorgeous bookcovers you've ever seen? Judge away, my friends.

Please see my complete review on June 24, 2012 at <http://mrsconditreadsbooks.com/index....>

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### **Emme says**

The title of Violetta Vane and Heidi Belleau's new novel may first conjure up images of leis and scowly-faced tiki gods, but Hawaiian Gothic is not a book of kitschy pop culture design or the stereotypes that immediately come to mind when one thinks of a story with a Hawaiian backdrop. And no, I wasn't expecting a light-hearted, laid-back tale of two guys who fall in love while hanging ten-- any self-respecting English major knows that "gothic lit" means something very different than common notions of gothic-ness. Vane and Belleau take the main characters in Hawaiian Gothic to some very dark and horrific places in their quest for reclaimed love.

Let me start off by saying that HG was a very intriguing read. So much so that I've had the damndest time trying to write a review. The book touches on so many themes and topics that interest me: folklore, returning veterans with PTSD, euthanasia, multi-cultural representation in the M/M genre, polyamory-- just to name a few. It takes really gifted writers to successfully blend so many divergent elements together in one novel, and Vane and Belleau clearly have this talent.

Want to read more? You'll have to visit my Bitch Factor 10 blog to read the rest of my (lengthy) review.

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## Melanie says

Reviewed for Joyfully Jay.

Rating: 4.5 to 5 stars

Gregorio "Ori" Reyes has just arrived home in Hawaii after doing time in Leavenworth and given a dishonorable discharge from the Army for his crime. In disgrace with his military oriented family and with dwindling funds in his pocket, Ori has come home for only one reason. Kalani, his boyhood friend, the reason he joined the Army and the only man he has ever loved. Thoughts of Kalani were his constant companions in Iraq and his images haunted Ori's nights in Leavenworth. Everywhere Ori looks Kalani appears, which is crazy. Because Kalani is lying comatose in a hospital bed on Honolulu. Kalani had been attacked by a gang of men and left for dead while Ori had been in prison. And now feeling guilty and grief stricken, Ori has returned to Kalani too late to tell him how much he loves him. Or so Ori thinks.

After one of his visits to Kalani's bedside, Ori's visit to a gay bar ends with him taking a guy home. As things heat up, a loud noise stops the proceedings and Kalani appears. Or actually Kalani's spirit appears although he feels so very real to Ori. While his broken body remains in the hospital, Kalani visits Ori, the man Kalani has loved even if he wasn't ready to accept that it was romantic love. Unsure why Kalani is able to physically appear to Ori, neither man wants to question the miracle until Kalani starts getting attacked in the spirit world. Together Ori and Kalani must explore the secrets of Kalani's past and venture forward into Hawaii's ghost world to set Kalani free, either to return to his body or join his ancestors in the clouds. Something must be done quickly or Kalani will be condemned to everlasting pain in between.

Hawaiian Gothic is an remarkable story. From the start, authors Belleau and Vane submerge us in the Hawaiian culture beginning with the language of the islands flowing throughout the dialog. It mingles effortlessly as one would expect from a local speaker. Belleau and Vane actually created an Hawaiian Gothic glossary of Native Hawaiian and Hawaiian pidgin terms used in the story. It can be found [here](#). And there's the locations. The Hawaiian settings are so authentically rendered that I would think that the authors are natives themselves, right down to hidden beaches and non-touristy sites. I almost felt like I had to wipe the sand off my feet at times so complete was my immersion in the islands.

The next outstanding elements in the book are the Hawaiian creationist myths and beliefs that swirled and rolled like the waves of the ocean around all the characters of the story, especially the main ones of Ori and Kalani. Here the Hawaiian myths rise up and become real, able to rip one apart like the flashing teeth of a shark or the mandibles of a caterpillar or sooth like the lomilomi. Before I started this book I was only familiar with one of the Hawaiian creation myths. By the end, I was seeking out more resources so fantastic, so addictive did the Hawaiian gods and stories become. Great job by the authors in seamlessly fusing mythic and contemporary worlds so that both stood on equal footing with the reader as far as realism and tone. The authors almost did too good a job with their descriptions so frightening were the *keuwas*, Hawaiian dead hungry souls, that the very thought of them lingered on into my nightmares that night.

Belleau and Vane give us great characters to inhabit a great story. Ori is especially believable. He is a former Army Ranger and MMA fighter (that's mixed martial arts for those of you unfamiliar with the MMA) who

has completed two tours of duty in Iraq. He is a victim of PTSD, ashamed of his discharge, isolated from his family. He feels he has little future and helpless, especially with Kalani comotose. He hid his love for Kalani and ran from him rather than force Kalani to face it for what it was -romantic love. It was so easy to empathize with Ori and I became invested in his character early on. Kalani is a little more of a mystery as the book starts and then the reader becomes more familiar with him as Ori's memories of their shared past surface and you come to love him as much as Ori does. All the secondary characters are as fully realized as Ori and Kalani, giving the story the depth it needs with all its complicated layers of flashbacks, memories and spirit worlds.

So why not give this story 5 stars? Well, it certainly came close and I am still debating the rating even now. But I am still quibbling over two things. One concern is an m/f/m element here that was required for the exposition of a plot point. But for me its extended narrative went on too long and removed us from the main storyline unnecessarily. Plus I know that for some readers any m/m/f or combination thereof is not something they want to see in their m/m fiction. And usually I would agree with them. But I absolutely understood its inclusion by the authors here. My second quibble involves the numerous flashbacks used by the authors to highlight certain elements of their story. Did it work well in most instances? Yes. Most of the time it was a satisfactory method to better understand the main characters pov and history. But then its continued use and varied time frames (1988, 2004, 2010, 2009, etc) started to become a little irritating and less effective, distracting rather than contributing to a captivating and addictive storyline. And trust me, this is such a great story that nothing should ever divert the reader away from the saga at hand.

So pick up Hawaiian Gothic and visit the islands. Whether you be Malahini or Kama'aina, this story will have you ohana in no time. Make no mistake Hawaiian Gothic is da kine or the best in every way. Aloha!

Cover. I love this cover by artist April Martinez. Its beautiful from its model to Hawaiian cloth. Perfect for the story.

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### **Susan says**

This is a story that turned out to be a lot more complex than it first appeared. We enter the story at a point where Ori has returned to Hawaii as his best friend, Kalani, lies in a coma, victim of an horrific hate crime. The story is told in the present and through a series of flashbacks and very cleverly, things in the present become clearer as important parts of the past are revealed. Ori and Kalani have always been incredibly close but have never revealed their deepest feelings to each other. Just as Ori believes it is time to say goodbye to Kalani, it appears that they may have a chance after all but they will have to fight for each other.

I was a little concerned when I first started reading as I have no real knowledge of Hawaiian culture or its legends but everything was beautifully explained. Slipping into this world of Hawaiian myths was effortless and, although parts of it were dark and shadowy, like Ori and Kalani, I kept my eye on the light at the end of the tunnel.

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### **G.B. Gordon says**

Somewhere between 3 and 4 stars - can't decide.

A somewhat wistful and forlorn story, because the hero is essentially a lonely man, and that didn't change for me, despite fulfilled wishes, so the HEA is a melancholic one. Maybe it's because Kalani never really came alive for me (pardon the pun); he works as a catalyst rather than a second main character. But I found I didn't mind that; it fit well with the otherworldly plot.

The one part that really annoyed me was that little three-way background exposition concerning Kalani's parents. Like fixing a hole in a fine art print with duct tape.

Apart from that, it's absolutely beautifully written, engages all the senses and makes the world it is set in come superbly alive on the page.

Can't wait for the next Belleau/Vane.

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### **Elisa Rolle says**

This novel reminded me of a very nice movie, Undertow, with a tragic ending, and so I was reading it teetering on the edge of fear, wanting to like these characters but afraid of what would be of them. Lucky for me, this is a romance, and of course, although non-conventional and not even totally rounded, there was a some sort of happily ever after for them.

Ori is finally coming back home, but unfortunately his childhood friend, and unrequited love, Kalani, is not waiting for him, or at least, not in a way Ori is happy to acknowledge. Kalani is in coma, according to the doctors it's irreversible, and Kalani's foster mother is asking Ori's consent to detach the machines maintaining his body alive. When Kalani was attacked, Ori tried to come back home as soon as possible, but instead he ended up doing 1 year of prison for attacking his superior officer. Now one year later, Kalani's situation didn't change, and basically they are waiting only for Ori to have the chance to say goodbye. But the same night, Kalani's spirit appears to Ori, and he is very much alive. Both Kalani than Ori know Kalani's body is dying, and basically Kalani is asking Ori to let it go, but Ori thinks that, if he will be able to solve a mystery in Kalani's past, that will allow his spirit to find peace. But finding peace will mean that Kalani will really go forever, in a place where Ori and him will not have the chance to be finally together, unless Ori doesn't follow him there too.

Hawaiian's tradition are quite complex, and they are a mix of religion and myth. What I always find in these novels is the feeling that the admixture between them is so strong that paranormal becomes almost ordinary, seeing spirits is exceptional but not extraordinary, and to someone like Ori, after the first surprise, is natural to accept Kalani is real and in need of his help. Ori and Kalani's relationship, before and after Kalani's accident, is bittersweet, already marked by tragedy, even before they were born.

This is not an easy novel, the plot is complex, made even more that by the different flashback not in chronological order, and at one point we even go back before Ori and Kalani were born, to a totally different pair who perhaps share the same forbidden love. More than paranormal, Hawaiian Gothic is spiritual, new age, mystic; if you like all these you will love it.

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B008ENPBQI/?...>

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## **Jen Davis says**

### **3.5 Stars**

This was an unusual story. One tough to categorize. It's a love story and a ghost story. It's about loyalty and sacrifice, yearning and hope. It's got mystery, mythology, emotion and sensuality. I'm not sure I've read anything quite like it.

As the story begins, Ori is on his way back home to Hawaii after spending the past three years in the army and in military prison. He's been dishonorably discharged and has no idea what he is going to do with his future. The only thing he knows for sure is that he needs to get back to Kalani. He wasn't there when his best friend needed him most --when he was jumped and beaten into a coma. Now the doctors are ready to give up. But Ori is holding on to hope for a miracle.

Ori has been in love with Kalani almost his entire life, but never believed his feelings could be returned. It seems even more hopeless once he sees his friend's lifeless eyes and wasted body. Everything changes, though, when he is visited by Kalani's spirit. He finds out that Kalani returns his feelings and for the first time, they can express their love. Unfortunately, Kalani doesn't think he'll ever be able to return to his body. That sends Ori on a quest to find a spiritual way to help his lover return to the land of the living.

The beginning of the book is emotionally heavy. Then it grows sexy. But then it gets really wrapped up in Hawaiian mythology. It's a really important element of the book, but one of the things I liked about it the least. Maybe it's my lack familiarity with the culture, but I just didn't connect with what was happening in the spiritual plane... at least not to the great degree it was explored in the second half. There was also a lot of time jumping which I found hard to follow at some points. The flashbacks were frequent and didn't follow a strict chronology. I didn't exactly get lost, but there were times they felt disjointed, even as the past helped unravel the mysteries of the present.

What I did really like was the relationship between Ori and Kalani. The love between them was palpable. Their sex scenes were steamy, but they clearly sprang from deep and true emotions. It was worth it for me to hang on through their metaphysical journey to see how their love story would end.

Rating: C+

*\*Book provided by author for review*

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## **Alex says**

Stars: 4.5/5

### **Overall**

A wonderfully refreshing story that breaks out of the mold of standard romance while still keeping one foot in the contemporary. Although Hawaiian mythos is heavily used, the authors did an excellent job of providing the reader with the necessary information and keeping the reader comfortable--if not knowledgeable--with what is happening. A mix of a heart-breaking plot, an innovative setting and hobbies, and realistic characters makes this definitely worth a read, especially for fans of mythology.



## Review

Before I rave about this story, the one "negative": a fair amount of sex. Most people probably won't be distracted (well, disheartened) by the several sex scenes, but I was--although in thinking back, I'm not sure there were actually that many sex scenes. It was just one of those instances where the story and plot were so good that I didn't want to be interrupted by delicious, tender, rough ghost sex! I wanted to know what was going to happen!

Sounds pretty ridiculous in retrospect. Anyway, I wanted *The Story* so badly that the necessity of the emotional and physical development of the main characters' relationship seemed almost secondary. Much of the development happens through flashbacks, providing an idea of where they come from and how they got to the point in their relationship that they are. Speaking of which, readers who get bothered by flashbacks that interrupt the flow of the story may have some issue here, but I found them interesting, even if I did *want to get back to The Story* (Noticing a theme?).

This is a great exploration of Hawaiian mythology as viewed by a somewhat outsider, which keeps the text from becoming too overloaded with references that the reader won't get but without treating the reader like an idiot, either. I wasn't sure what to expect from the blurb, but I was pleasantly surprised. It felt like a journey that Joseph Campbell would be happy to read as the hero faces great challenges and overcomes difficulty.

There was depth of character, a twisty plot, tough decisions, and ultimately a satisfying ending, which I won't say much about, since the ending isn't really determined until the final pages. The journey was fantastic, and I loved discovering everything along with the narrator. There are so many ways a story like this could go wrong, but it was masterfully crafted into a compelling tale of ghosts and monsters.

*Received this book for review.*

Be sure to check out my other reviews on my blog.

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## Merrian says

I love the voice that these authors bring to their work. It is deeply human and lyrical. Even when writing about dark things and the supernatural there is a care for Ori and Kalani as suffering people. They are not merely characters whose lives are lived for the vicarious thrill of the reader.

Hawaiian Gothic is lushly beautiful like the place and is framed by Ori's grief and fear for Kalani; it is driven by his horror and helplessness and his memories of the Kalani he loves. The importance of memory is a touchstone for this story. It begins with Ori remembering and is resolved in dealing with past events from Kalani's life. We touch on memory in the supernatural elements of the story as the Goddess notes all those who are being lost because they have no link with their own cultural beginnings.

Ori is unable to think of himself or define himself in anyway except through his relationship with his childhood friend Kalani. Over the years, for him this has become an abiding love, one he was not sure Kalani could accept. This relationship one-sided though it seems, shapes everything about Ori's life. He left his family and Hawaii and returns with the life he had made in tatters because of this connection with Kalani. Both Ori and Kalani are broken when we first meet them, one at heart and the other in body and it is clear that it is only in coming together and owning that they love each other that this brokenness can possibly be mended. The book is the story of Ori's heroic quest to save Kalani and the terrible tests they have to meet to find their happiness together.

Kalani doesn't make a magical, full physical recovery despite the supernatural causes and curing of his

curse. Each time Ori and Kalani make love we learn something about them as people and together as a couple. It was hot and beautiful and showed us some of the why they needed and loved each other. The MMA imagery (Ori is an MMA fighter) is skilfully used in the descriptions of them having sex and it seemed to me that Ori talks with his body and knows himself through this body of his. The MMA threads also worked for me as a sort of foreshadowing and as a basis for their future lives together. It showed us that Ori is capable of being the hero he was on the supernatural plane; that what he did wasn't a fluke but judgement and choice and being good at what he does. Most important for me though was the way it framed Kalani's slow and limited physical recovery from his injuries and the coma. We had the compare and contrast between Ori's fighting fitness and Kalani's state but as Ori says "...The thought dawned on him that Kalani was fighting now too, harder and braver than Ori ever had." We see them both working just as hard in rehab and training so sharing their bodies in this way as well as in bed (or on the floor). Kalani's smile may always be uneven but it is his. Kalani and Ori do have what they need in each other. I believe in them together.

There are many flashbacks to different times as Ori's memories and research trying to understand past events are used to make sense of the awful present. I liked how the book explores the impacts of grief and rage and wrong doing over the generations of a family. I liked Ori's complicated family who did what they could to help. This makes Hawaiian Gothic a sometimes disjointed journey for the reader, even though understanding the mystery of Kalani's past is crucial to his survival. The authors have tried to show us rather than tell us about it which is great but left me at times wishing they had more space for the amount of story they were cramming into the pages. The many strengths of this story mean that I rate it at 4 stars. It would be higher but I did struggle with the structure.

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## **Nancy says**

### **Cross-posted at Outlaw Reviews and at Shelf Inflicted**

Gregorio "Ori" Reyes and Kalani Lihilihi have known each other since childhood. Although they were always very close, Ori left home to serve in the Iraq war before either man had a chance to explore the strong feelings growing between them.

A vicious hate crime leaves Kalani's body comatose in the hospital while his spirit wanders freely. Ori was dishonorably discharged from the military and served some time in prison. He returns to his home in Hawaii, disconsolate and penniless, blaming PTSD for his visions of Kalani.

These visions are very real, and for the first time, both men have a chance to overcome the pain of missed opportunities and regrets from the past.

Through flashbacks, the reader gets a glimpse of Ori's and Kalani's childhood and teen years, their family and friends, Ori's stint in Iraq and his brief stay in prison, Kalani's brutal assault, and the mystery of his parents' deaths.

What starts out as a rather conventional love story, turns into something quite surprising and unexpected when Ori and Kalani embark on a journey through the spirit world, where dangers lurk, curses must be reversed, and lives are healed.

This is a very thoughtful and moving story that I personally feel could have benefitted from first-person

dialogue. Many times I wanted to get into Ori's head and know the depth of his feelings, but mostly I felt somewhat distant from the main characters until well into the novel. The flashbacks, while very effective and essential to the story, slowed the pace for me and made the story seem a lot longer than it actually was.

I loved the vividly described Hawaiian setting and culture and the emotionally-charged and beautifully written love scenes. This highly original non-traditional romance should appeal to adventurous readers.

*\*Book provided by author in exchange for an honest review.*

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## **DarienMoya says**

### **4.5**

I am going to honestly write, that I do not have the freaking words to describe this book. I am huge fan of horror and crazy, since my mom had me watching Twilight Zone at four. The book isn't scary in a 'there's a boogeyman in the closet'. The fear lies within the risks one is willing to take for the person they love, because sometimes it can be bad things, it can be good things, and it can be great things.

With Hawaiian Gothic, there is greatness in this love story. Kind of fucking unbelievable, but made to come alive with the wonderful writing offered up by two authors everyone should be keeping their eyes on. They manage to do a little something new with every book they write, and I can never predict the outcome in their books.

Ori is a Filipino-American who has just been released from the army on a dishonourable discharge. He's now back home in Hawaii, struggling with some shame and guilt. His visit is bittersweet because he closest friend of many years lies in the hospital in a coma. The best-friend he has loved for many years, the friend he still loves even now, the friend he is willing to give everything for.

Their story is told in a series of flashbacks, and you experience teen Ori and Kalani. There is an organized way to these flashbacks so the reader does not become confused. It's through the flashbacks you see how important these men are to each other.

With Kalani now in the hospital, Ori and his family has to decide what to do. Others have already given up but Ori refuses to believe that his smiling surfer boy is gone. This is where the story takes a turn, when Ori starts seeing a very real Kalani. His body still remains in the hospital but his spirit wanders and can become corporeal for Ori. Trapped between the living world and the spirit world Kalani finally confesses his real feelings for Ori and the men come together in a passion so explosive I lost my pants numerous times.

Ori finally having Kalani, he now desperately refuses to let him go, and concludes that it has to be some kind of a curse that probably can be stopped. So he goes on a mission to save the man he loves. What he learns about Kalani's past is sad, and what he has to do to secure Kalani's future is dangerous. Ori must make his way to the Hawaiian spirit world, and bring his man back to land of the living.

### **4.5**

I enjoyed reading this book so much! Hawaii came alive for me, and the characters became so extraordinary. I have always been in love with the paranormal/supernatural, and this book had it tenfold and I was so

captivated. It really freaked my freak sometimes, but it's a good thing when books can throw you a curve ball and then hit a home run.

This book is not traditional in the romance or the writing. So be aware that you will not be getting romance built on rainbows on sunshine, because without the supernatural trope. It's a hard-hitting book battling real emotions and dealing with loss.

Love, love, and love the interracial love! Filipino-American/Hawaiian-American seriously no pants were invited in the reading of this. I am trying to think of when I read a Filipino in m/m??? I don't think I have, and this book was a wonderful representation of them as someone with Filipino children, I approve this message.

The sex in this one is hot enough to burn all the hairs on your body. Like dirty, sexy, powerful wrestling, the desire to be on top was just beautiful. Ori and Kalani are very male, and I would pay good money to see them together. The ending of this book is so beautiful, love it to death, and just loved the whole story. If you are looking for a different read? Something that will remain on your mind days after reading it, then *Hawaiian Gothic* might be it for you.

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## **Val Kovalin says**

*Hawaiian Gothic* is an amazing read. It's a true breath of fresh air into our m/m genre. I'll admit that the book and I turned out to have one of those lucky almost-across-the-board matchups between a reader's interests and a novel's themes:

I mean, mixed martial arts? (I'm a more of a die-hard "Golden Age of Boxing" fan -- as in Ali, Frazier, Foreman, Leonard, and Duran -- but, yeah, why not? Bring it on!)

Hawaii? (One of the most beautiful places on earth.)

Filipino-Americans? (A gracious and vibrant culture, sadly underrepresented in our mm genre.)

But it's more than that. The emotional power of the story and the authors' beautiful writing won me over even on the parts that I thought I would find offputting, such as the medical situation of poor Kalani, and also the Hawaiian spirit world.

I mean, the Hawaiian spirit world? This part I was the least certain about, despite my decades of reading science fiction and fantasy, mainly because I've drifted away from reading most paranormal fiction. But what you find here will blow your mind. (view spoiler)

The story opens at a point of almost unbearable angst. Our very serious but endearing Filipino-American hero Ori has just got out of military prison with a dishonorable discharge from the army (for such a sad reason, you'll learn) after having served in the Iraq war with the elite Army Rangers. He's come home to Hawaii to see the (unrequited) love of his life Kalani, who is Hawaiian-American.

The two boys were best friends through childhood and their teen years.

Their shared past flares up throughout the present-day story in numerous short, vivid flashbacks that occur to

Ori in no particular chronological order. (These flashbacks are kept clear and organized by space-breaks and dates.)

Now, Kalani is in the hospital in a coma from being nearly beaten to death by thugs, and he's not coming back from the coma. Ori and Kalani's family gather to decide what to do.

Right there, I might have abandoned the book because unrecoverable coma does not sound good. But, readers, have faith! This story is not what it initially seems to be (that is, it's not a medical drama, thank God).

Ori begins to encounter a fully physical Kalani in real life. Kalani can only appear like this to Ori and only from time to time. Otherwise, he's trapped in the Hawaiian spirit world between life and death. He admits that he's always loved Ori. He was always too afraid to show it. But now they come together and explore their physical passion. (So-o-o hot! More about that in a moment).

Based on what he remembers from Kalani's troubled childhood, Ori decides that Kalani is the victim of a family curse that perhaps can be reversed. He starts hunting for answers and for a *kahuna* (shaman) who can advise him on his quest. This leads to some startling revelations about Kalani's long-lost mother who was involved in a *ménage à trois* (briefly shown in the narration) with two men.

At about the 55% mark, Ori pays a heavy and shocking price to find a way into the Hawaiian spirit world. It is a nightmarish place. There he struggles to locate Kalani and win him back to the land of the living.

Readers who are die-hard m/m traditionalists may find one aspect of this novel to be challenging. You are not going to get a linear narrative that lingers on scenes of Ori's and Kalani's evolving relationship. Instead, we have numerous short flashbacks to a shared past drenched with Ori's tragically unrequited love. And we have most of the present scenes centering on Ori alone, doing detective work or dealing with family. But there are some intensely hot sex scenes in the present. Each hot encounter keeps you hanging on through the parts in which the heroes are separated for when they can get together again.

Which leads me to the sex. OMG, it's hot! It involves two strong men testing each other's strength and dominance, and not in the usual stale, ritualistic BDSM way, either. Ori is the skilled wrestler. Kalani has the advantage with sheer physical size. The two wrestle to see who tops whom – with varying outcomes. It's realistic, rough, edgy, and superhot.

The sex scenes take all this lust and aggressiveness and saturate it with the intensely emotional state of being desperately love, and it's unforgettable. As a reader, I want to re-read and re-live these scenes. As an author, I'm thinking I could learn a lot from this!

*Hawaiian Gothic* and *Cruce de Caminos* (my review [here](#)) have made me a huge fan of these authors for their smooth, elegant writing and deeply original and daring ideas. If you enjoy paranormal / horror / urban fantasy as gay romance, it doesn't get much better than this. Very highly recommended!

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**Helyce says**

This is the story of Ori and Kalani, childhood best friends. Ori knows he's in love with Kalani but believes that Kalani can never feel the same way about him. So he joins the Army and spends about three years away from home. In that time, he's dishonorably discharged for punching an officer and spends a year in jail. When Ori learns that Kalani was attacked, beaten and left for dead, he decides to return to Hawaii. Coming home is not easy for Ori. He feels he's disgraced his family-a family with a strong military background. He feels incredible guilt for not being there for Kalani when he needed him most. When Ori first sees Kalani in the hospital he's devastated. His beautiful Kalani, bedridden, his skin ashen, nothing like the man he remembered. He is saddened that he never had the courage to tell Kalani exactly how he felt.

Kalani's body may be damaged and broken, but his spirit is alive and well and when he comes to Ori he finds that his spirit can take corporeal form, but only with or for Ori. Ori realizes that he has a second chance to tell Kalani how he feels and express his feelings for Kalani physically. Kalani wants Ori to discover the secrets of his family as they may explain why Kalani's life was so cursed. Ori will need to dig into Kalani's past to see when, who and why the curse was placed and if Ori is able to survive the journey, perhaps they will finally have the truth Kalani longs for.

I really don't know what to make of this book. I struggled with it, but I was determined to finish it as I had to know how it ended. Initially I was drawn to the book because it takes place in Hawaii. As I grew up there and am part Hawaiian myself, I really wanted to see the author's take on Hawaiian Mythology. Like anything, mythology is really left wide open to interpretation, and I am certainly no expert on Hawaiian Mythology just because I grew up there. I was really looking forward to it in this book; sadly, it was probably my least favorite part.

The first part of this book is really sad as Kalani's family struggles with the decision to keep Kalani on life support or pull the plug. Ori is adamant that they wait, he's not ready to say goodbye. When Kalani's spirit first comes to him Ori realizes that he has a second chance to say all that he's ever wanted to say to Kalani. As they talk and reminisce, Kalani realizes that he has so many questions that need to be answered and he tasks Ori with finding them. Ori will do anything for Kalani. As he starts digging into Kalani's parent's past, he realizes that there was so much more to the story than even Kalani may have known. Determined to see this through, Ori takes a journey through the ghostworld where he will learn the truth about Kalani's parents and their deaths.

I liked Ori and Kalani together. Their scenes are beautifully done and heartbreaking at the same time. It's a second chance love story of two people who should be together, though circumstances kept them apart. It made me wonder how different both their lives would have been if either one of them had just been honest and had admitted their feelings for each. The intense longing they have for each other comes through strongly and is well done.

I really had a hard time with the fact that the story is told primarily in flashbacks and flash-forwards. The back and forth used here to give background and history while moving the story forward was incredibly frustrating at times and made me have to work for the story. It just didn't flow smoothly for me and I often had to look back to see if I was in the past or present.

Lastly, the whole ghost world portion of Ori's journey to find the truth of Kalani's parents just didn't work for me. It felt a bit drawn out and I persevered only to learn the final truth and see if the journey Ori took would have a positive result where Kalani was concerned. I was pleased with the ending, and the fact that Kalani and Ori did get their HEA but I felt somewhat disconnected throughout the whole read. This one just

was not for me.

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