



Gilded Hearts

Christine d'Abo

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Samuel Hawkins, Sergeant in the King's Sentry, has been called in to investigate a murder case. As he awaits the Archivists to arrive—the team who will use a special device to extract the memories of the dead man to help find clues to his murder—he never expects to come face to face with the woman he'd left behind when he'd fled the Archives five years earlier.

Piper Smith has grown from the girl Samuel remembered into a strong woman and full-fledged archivist. Shadowed by her mentor, Master Ryerson, Piper will be performing her first extraction. When she sees Samuel, she must push aside her childhood crush, else risk her standing within the Guild.

As the two begin working together to find the killer, Samuel and Piper explore their intense attraction to each other. But "Jack the Ripper" proves to be harder to catch than the two originally thought. What's worse, they discover he may very well work for the Archives. Now, Samuel and Piper must battle internal and external threats as they try to foil a plot against the Crown and stop Jack the Ripper from taking his next victim.

Gilded Hearts Details

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Author : Christine d'Abo

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Genre : Science Fiction, Steampunk, Romance, Historical Romance, Historical, Paranormal Romance, Science Fiction R..., Steampunk Romance

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From Reader Review Gilded Hearts for online ebook

Kara-karina says

I should man up and learn to DNF review books without so much guilt, peeps. I have no compunction doing it to the books I bought, but ARCs? Oh, man. The guilt eats me up.

Gilded Hearts which I featured on my Dreaming of Books and was very excited about, took me just under a month to read, and that on its own is an indication of what was wrong (takes me a couple of day on average to devour a book).

As a combination of factors it should have worked. There is Jack The Ripper, there are steampunk elements, a mysterious Guild of Archivists, a determined heroine, a tortured man, secrets and shadows and interesting secondary characters.

As a whole it falls apart. It's like building something where all the joints are wrong for each other. You can't connect them, you get frustrated and try harder, and it turns into a nightmare.

There is no writerly magic happening here, no zing, peeps. Pip and Sam have zero chemistry together. They are characters with a personality of a peanut.

The story arc does not make sense, Jack does not make sense, the main villain goes against everything he believes in with only a half hearted justification for his actions. The ending is absurd. Argh, I think my brain exploded!

I can not make sense of it all, and I won't recommend you trying either.

Aly is so frigging bored says

I like the writing style but the world and the characters... I just can't connect.

? BookAddict ✍️ La Crimson Femme says

Absolutely fabulous! Ms. D'abo is an author I've read over the years and enjoyed her kinky erotic romances. This is a new genre she's writing in. She's done an excellent job with her steampunk world building. This new world of Archivist and memories is mind blowing. From page one, I was hooked and had to read the entire story in one sitting.

Sam Hawkins is a lawman, escaped from the Archivist. He's pulled back to this sinister guild when one of his homicide cases requires an archivist to harvest the memories. Piper Smith used to be the little girl hanging off his arm when they were at the guild together. While she was the shining star, he was the constant whipping boy. Reunited years later, both of them have grown. The attraction to each other is still there. In fact, it only increased with each renewed contact.

The characters in this story are lovely. I really liked Sam. He's the quiet steady one. Piper is a headstrong idealist. The two of them together is like listening to a melody and harmony weaving in and out. It's

beautiful. Their relationship takes a step forward and several back. It is all entwined with memories. Ms. D'abo takes an interesting perspective of what it means to have a soul. The reason why people's memories are saved is also fascinating. The abuse of this kind of power is great. The blending of spiritual and steam powered machines is what makes this an awesome steampunk story.

Ms. D'abo completely steps up her writing skills in this book. She's developed a compelling plot with provocative concepts and alluring technology. It is all up my alley. As the reader learns more about this world she's created, it generates more questions and yearning to read the next book in the series. I highly recommend this steampunk tale to those who love to question what it means to exist and what death really means.

**provided by NetGalley*

Christal says

See this review and others like it at [Badass Book Reviews!](#)

I wasn't sure what to expect going in to **Gilded Hearts**. I had never read Christine d'Abo before and steampunk romance can be hit or miss for me. This book truly surprised me and I ended up really enjoying it. I thought the characters and the writing were very strong and the story was intricate but not overly complicated. The only thing I thought was a little lacking was the ending. I have seen this classified as erotica, but I would not consider it that. There are two beautiful love scenes, but that's about it in this 400 page novel.

Gilded Hearts tackles Jack the Ripper and our main character Sam is investigating the case. While he is working at the crime scene, the Archivists show up to do their part. The Archivists are an organization of people who are able to extract the memories of the dead and to see through their eyes. They give their report to the authorities and then their minds are wiped. They forget everything from the extraction until the wipe. Usually this is just a few hours or maybe a day, but the weight of the missing memories still pulls at them. Sam never expected his former love Piper (or Pip as he calls her) to be the Archivist assigned to the Ripper case. When Pip sees a connection between the Archivists and the murderer, Sam is pulled back into the Archivist world he fought so hard to escape and back into his feelings for Pip. Can these two solve the Ripper murders and figure out how they can be together in spite of the Archives?

I liked Sam, but I loved Pip. She was such a fun character but also realized the severity of what she was doing to her mind. She balanced the darkness of possible madness with an infectious attitude of cheery brightness. She made decision and stuck with them, no wishy washy-ing around. Sam, on the other hand, was a bit of a runner. He ran from the Archives and he ran from his feelings for Pip. He was a good man, but he was so scared of hurting someone that he never realized how much he was hurting himself. Once he realized that Pip wasn't letting him go again, he became more settled and it even seemed he became more sure of himself as an inspector. These two fit well together and it was easy to see the love between them, even when Sam thought his leaving was for the best. They were destined, one way or another.

"You were always a blind fool." Dennison pulled on the leathers and replaced his shoes with the knee-high boots. "It never mattered what I tried, she was content to be on her own. She'd rather that than settle."

"Settle for what?" [Sam asked.]

"Anyone who wasn't you."

Gilded Hearts took a horrible historical figure, Jack the Ripper, and made me feel pity for him. He is a vicious murderer intent on inflicting pain, but what drove him to that point is just so horrible. I never expected to feel sad when he meets his eventual end. That's a testament to Christine d'Abo's storytelling abilities. I forgot all about the real man and immersed myself with her creation. The last few chapters did go off the rails a little bit and that is the reason why this did not get five stars. I was confused through most of them and it seemed some characters acted in ways I didn't believe. The actual plot was explained well enough, but the action became a bit muddy and hard to follow.

This is such a fantastical new steam punk world and I cannot wait to explore more of it. Though I will be sad to leave Sam and Pip behind, I am looking forward to meeting new characters and seeing more of this London. **Gilded Hearts** was a solid steam punk romance, in the vein of Kristen Callihan's *Darkest London* series, and I am eager to get my hands on a copy of the next book, [Quicksilver Soul](#).

Thank you to Netgalley and Forever Yours for providing an ARC copy of this book!

KathyAnne says

I actually think that this book is being promoted under the wrong category on netgalley. It's labeled as erotica, and even though there are a couple of sex scenes in the book, I think those looking for straight up erotica might be a little disappointed that it is actually MOSTLY a sci-fi/fantasy story. Being familiar with the steampunk world in general is also a plus. A bit of reader patience is needed in the beginning so that you can wrap your head around this world that the author has created. Once I got the world and characters all sorted out the story just grabbed me and held on to the end. That entails my only complaint really is that I felt the story needed more background info... maybe a prologue or something to help the reader get their head wrapped around the setting. It was mildly confusing...

Piper and Sam were plucked from their families as children and brought to the archive facility to be trained to be archivists. The job of an archivist is to extract the memories of the deceased for storage. This information is gathered and used for various reasons... and sometimes helps to solve crimes.

There are a few dark secrets lurking in the archive facility that are a little shocking and disturbing. Most of this we find out towards the end.

This is very much a story that dabbles with the concept of God vs. Science. Some people believe that the archive is in essence stealing souls while others believe there is no such thing. A moral battle of sorts. Many people fear the extraction at their time of death because they want their souls to be set free and not trapped. I was very touched by Piper's reaction when she was holding on to the memories of one of the murdered prostitutes to gather data. The prostitute kept insisting she was alive and it brought out conflicting emotions for Piper. It was also one of my favorite parts of the book because the prostitute was having a little fun while visiting her mind and had a bit of fun whispering naughty thoughts and suggestions into Piper's head. The expression "shut up" was used quite a lot. And nope, she didn't listen... just kept taunting her anyway. There is also a serial killer on the loose and by the end of the book it becomes clear that there is much more to this serial killer than everyone realized. Without giving anything away, it all revolves around the secrets of what is actually going on in the facility.

We learn a lot about Sam and Pip as the story moves back and forth from past to present. They connected as children and now that they are all grown up... their attraction and love for each other blossoms. I loved both of these characters and I really wanted their Happily Ever After.

My favorite character was David (smile)... the quirky and extremely intelligent clockworker who has an occasional tendency to "accidentally" blow things up. But, he mostly gets it right. His character added a little comedy relief to the story.

This book was at times emotional, other times funny and kept me on the edge of my seat. I'm definitely on board for more. This is a stand alone but there is a book two coming. It's on my list! This author is a very talented and creative writer.

Not sure if I would recommend this as erotica but I would definitely recommend to my fantasy and sci-fi loving folks that like a little romance sprinkled into the mix. This was a nice healthy balance of all the things that I personally love in a book.

ARC provided by Forever Publishing via netgalley

www.ktbookreviews.com

Debbie says

All I can say about this one is... meh. Sure, there were a few interesting parts. Unfortunately, overall the book just didn't really grab my interest. The main characters were not all that likable, and the plot was actually rather strange. The whole "Jack the Ripper villain" thing is already so over-used, and it just didn't work for me. The ending didn't leave me feeling very satisfied, and parts of it were just plain weird. The whole plot just grew odder as the story progressed. I won't be continuing this series, if there are more books planned.

Amanda says

Reviewed for:Where the Night Kind Roam

Gilded Hearts by Christine D'Abo is the first in her new erotic historical steampunk series. I'm a fan of Ms. D'Abo, in particular her Long Shots contemporary series so when I saw this book come up I was quick to grab it. In general, I not a huge fan of steampunk as in I don't go purposefully looking for but I do enjoy it from time to time and I think this one was a decent effort into the Steampunk genre. The concept of the Archives is interesting and a different twist on things. It's a little bit creepy, im not sure I would want my memories stored in a little glass vial for anyone to study but D'Abo did a decent job at not making it too creepy. As a whole with this book the world building could have been better, it got confusing in places, things mentioned and then forgotten about and it took me a while to get a grasp on this world but there is potential there and I hope that it gets better as the series moves on. Where I like Christine D'Abo is her characters. She tends to write flawed but likeable characters and this one is no different.

Samuel grew up in the Archives there wasn't a time that he does not remember being there. He's always had an affinity for machines, which branded him as different in the Archives. In the Archives different is not a good thing, Sam got beaten on a pretty regular basis. The only thing that seemed to make his living situation better was Piper, she came to the Archives as a young girl and decided that Sam was going to be her friend and didn't look back, until that one night when Sam left her which she never quite recovered from. Something happened in the Archives that made Sam snap and he had to leave, he tried to take Piper with him but she refused to go. Sam was found on the streets and taken in and he worked his way up in the King's Sentry. He is at a murder scene when he comes face to face with Piper again and all those feelings he set aside for her come rushing back stronger than ever. Sam is a bit of a runner, he ran from the Archives, more recently from Piper, even though he's a bit of a runner he's fiercely protective and obviously loves Piper so it

was pretty easy to forgive his runner tendencies. As a character I did like Sam, he is intelligent, protective, quick witted and takes his job seriously. He doesn't have many friends but those friends he does have mean the world to him. Piper on the other hand is sassy, strong willed and steady. She's not one to run away but to forge forward even at her own peril. She has a mind of her own and isn't going to let anyone think for her. She is also protective of those she loves and fiercely loyal. I think of the two, I liked Piper just a little bit more.

Overall, this book was pretty good. There were some twists and turns in the plot that kept things interesting. The characters were engaging and likeable. As previously mentioned there were some issues with the world building but by the end of the book I had a pretty good grasp on the world even with some of its issues. I am looking forward to seeing where this series goes and will more than likely be reading Quicksilver Soul the second book in this series which comes out in April of 2014.

Rating: 3.5

*This copy was provided to me through NetGalley for an honest review. No other compensation was provided.

Angela says

I might come back to this at some point, but I'm just not engaged. The world confuses me - the reasoning behind things, along with the actual way the world works - and I just don't really care about the characters yet.

I forced myself to get this far, and I just can't anymore.

Stephanie says

Pipper is possibly one of the worst cases of a self-absorbed, yet idolized character I've read in a while. There was a particular event that happened in the book where one of the other main characters is dealing with some heavy issues, but all Piper can think about is herself and in the end, the other main character ends up apologizing to her. Everyone in the book fawns on her, tells her how special she is, and wants to keep them for themselves for pretty much the duration of the book. She has next to zero empathy for anyone alive, even for the man with whom she supposedly is madly in love. I finished the book in hopes that the author would give her some nice character development, and while she did evolve in some areas, she possibly was more insufferable at the end than at the beginning.

The actual world that the author wrote was interesting, though there was a few times during my read that I felt like things were casually mentioned that deserved more explanation than a passing "Oh yes, the French did this to us back during the wars but also it could have not been the French." Overall, I would say that if you're not sensitive to self-absorbed main characters, this is an intriguing read.

Beth says

Gilded Hearts is a fast paced science fiction romance with a "Jack the Ripper" murder mystery theme.

In *Gilded Hearts* we are thrust back in time to solve the horrific murders of ladies of ill-repute. Christine d'Abo writes a highly imaginative tale of an alternate London, where memory capturing machines, corruption and political mechanization run rampant. Our hero and heroine are two people whose lives were torn apart by society but now are reunited to solve the brutal murders.

The story is dark, vivid and utterly original. Although the book was marketed as Steampunk, I find that is barely the case while the science fiction aspects shine through. The machines are more science/technology than clockwork and gadgetry.

If you enjoy a dark, murder mystery with a strong science fiction flare, *Gilded Hearts* is the book for you.

I received this ARC copy of *Gilded Hearts* from Forever (Grand Central Publishing) in exchange for a honest review. This book is set for publication January 7, 2014.

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Find this book on: Amazon | Barnes & Noble

Lexi says

Originally written for Book Bliss book blog. I received a copy of this book in exchange for an unbiased and honest review

Review: 4.5 stars

General: Steampunk is a genre that can be extremely difficult to write, with all of its science and gadgets and rule breaking and bending. *Gilded Hearts* is an absolutely fantastic addition to the world of Steampunk filled with science, steamy love scenes, a plot twist to die for and characters so charismatic you'll wish they were real. I'm going to have to be very careful writing this review as there is something I feel is a major plot winner, and also a massive spoiler. As well so much went into the Archivists duties that could be spoilers I will do my best to skip them. So I will be upfront, the thing that kept me reading at first was the revelation of the killer- I'm a huge follower of this historical villain and absolutely loved him being the central evil in the story. Not to mention the explanation for why – my skin crawled and I felt so bad for such a vicious serial killer.

When I first picked this novel up I admit I had a lot of trouble. The blurb was amazing and yet when I started to read it was dull, over-explained and honestly confusing as heck in many points. Yet I was still intrigued because I know all Steampunk for me has this moment of "huh, what?". So I pushed on. THANK GOODNESS! Once the book gets going it's fantastic. I could not put it down and cannot wait for book 2.

This book is filled to the brim with every single thing needed for Steampunk. I was so sucked into the world of the Archivists I felt like I was there and experiencing everything with them. I loved that a huge chunk of this story was told through flashbacks, I think it added something to ground the reader in because explaining everything upfront would have been mind numbing to read. On with that wow, the world building!! I absolutely without a doubt want to go to New London. The details were astounding and so vivid. The characters (from the guild to the villain) were wonderful and realistic despite such fantastical elements around them. I legitimately got the chills more often than not in this book. And the romance? Probably one of the hottest I have ever read. I don't normally fall for the hero as hard as I did Sammy-Boy. The plot was very well thought out and suspenseful the entire way. The science behind the Guild was chilling and intriguing as well.

So why not 5 stars? The simple answer is at the end of the day I was confused at the books end. Everything plot wise was wonderfully explained and while I saw most of it coming, I loved it nonetheless. However, the actual actions that occurred in the last 2-3 chapters were mind bogging. I could not follow them at all and after 3 times trying I figured move on the details weren't going to click. I think it took too much on, trying to explain things that were so rough to explain but a wonderful plot. Then there was a really tiny thing- the level of sexual need in this book ran so high and hot filling so many pages at first I was concerned there was going to be a fault in the story and then vanished. I would have liked to to be consistent because to an extent it did read a little like all Sammy-Boy wanted was sex at first.

Characters: Piper- Piper is fantastic. She's stubborn, dutiful, sexual, smart and feisty- sometimes all at once! She was heartbreaking as a character for me. There is an instance that needs to occur after she does her job that broke me every time, especially for Sam. She gets an unfortunate side effect from her job that I loved every minute of, especially how she handled it. Her sexual tension with Sam was off the charts hot and she captured my heart immediately as both a child in the flashbacks and an adult. My only issue is for some reason I was turned off by her name. I don't know why but it didn't fit her for me.

Sam- Sam is downright one of my top 5 book males after reading this. Sam is dark and so dark you question if he will fade into the shadows and turn evil many times in this novel. His back story was heartbreaking, both in terms of Piper and the Guild itself. I cannot share much about him as it will give so so many spoilers away. But he is amazing. Not sure why he was empathetic still but it was a great addition to his numerous other skills! There was one instance in the book that was so absolutely hot and soul consuming I have to share and I have never done this in a review before!

"I'm glad you were taken by the Archives Pip."

Her eyes widened as she pulled her shoulders back against the wall. The blast of annoyance he felt from her was only visible by the tightening around her mouth. Samuel chanced another step closer.

"If it meant that you were pulled from society, that another man wouldn't touch you, then I will be forever grateful. Because you see," he cupped her cheek, "even though we've never so much as kissed, you belong to me."

Sarah says

Buddy read with Amanda, Ange & Aly

When Samuel escaped the Archives five years ago the only thing he regretted was leaving his best friend Piper behind. He has made a new life for himself though and has worked his way up to Sergeant in the

King's Sentry. When his work on a series of grizzly murders brings him back into contact with Piper he realises his friend has grown into a strong and beautiful woman and he is desperate to find a way to make her leave the Archivists Guild to be with him. Piper never forgave Samuel for leaving her, she couldn't understand his desperate need to escape and since he left she has thrown herself into her training to become an archivist. She knows that using her abilities will cost her greatly but with Jack the Ripper on a killing spree she has to do whatever she can to stop him taking more victims. Can the two of them work together to catch a killer before he strikes again and what will they do when their past catches up with them both?

I'm a huge fan of **Christine d'Abo's** erotic romances so when I found out that she was writing a steampunk series I couldn't wait to get my hands on a copy of **Gilded Hearts**. I loved the concept of the world she has created and I found the idea of the archivists very intriguing. They use their abilities to collect the memories of people who have died - usually only murder victims or important members of society - but when channelling the memories they also live through the experiences themselves. I can't imagine a job where you constantly have to relive horrific murders as if you were inside the victim while it happened so it's no wonder the archivists would go crazy if the memories weren't later removed. The memory extraction process was deliciously creepy and the story as a whole was a lot darker than I expected it to be. I liked the fact that the removal process wasn't completely accurate and often cost the archivist some of their personal memories too because it felt more realistic. It was hard to believe that anyone would choose to be an archivist but as you get to learn more about how the apprentices came to join the guild you discover that they were never really given much choice in the matter.

I found the world a really interesting one but unfortunately I struggled to understand the set up, there were a lot of times when I was left wondering why things happened a certain way or where I wanted a more detailed explanation. Although I found the way memories played a part in the story was really cleverly done I didn't like the fact that we got to see so many intimate memories belonging to complete strangers - those moments didn't seem to add anything to the story and just made me feel incredibly uncomfortable. I think it was partly my difficulties with the world building and those memories in particular that made it so hard to connect with either of the main characters. It took a long time for me to really start to care about them and become invested in the outcome of their story. I'm happy to say that things really started to fall into place for me in the last third of the book though and now that I'm getting comfortable with the world I'm more excited about reading the next book in the series. I think this series has a lot of potential and I'm hoping that things will continue to improve in **Quicksilver Soul**.

Dark Faerie Tales says

Review courtesy of Dark Faerie Tales

Quick & Dirty: Sam thought he had put his past at the Archives behind him. Then, when Jack the Ripper makes his appearance in New London, he comes directly into contact with his past, in the form of the woman he left behind. Now they must work together to catch a killer in this thrilling addition to the steampunk genre.

Opening Sentence: The cold bite of the late fall air against Samuel Hawkins' cheek had long caused it to go numb.

The Review:

Steampunk has always been hit or miss for me, so I was a little nervous when I started *Gilded Hearts*. By the end of Chapter One, I was intrigued. By Chapter Three, I was hooked. Christine D'Abo has created a

steampunk version of London that is fascinating, easy to understand, and full of great possibility for future books.

Years ago, Sam escaped the Archives, the most powerful Guild in New London. The Archivists (or zombies as they're known derogatorily on the streets) are responsible for collecting memories from the dead and storing them for posterity. Sam was put through hell during his tenure with the Archivists and finally could not take it anymore and ran away. He started a new life for himself and is now a member of the King's Sentry. One night, a prostitute is killed, and the Archivist assigned to the memory retrieval is none other than Piper, the girl Sam left behind when he ran away. The spark between them reignites, and neither of them is strong enough to resist its pull, despite the fact that Piper's duty as an Archivist means she can't be involved with a man. Piper and Sam's paths continue to cross, however, as more prostitutes are being murdered. It seems Jack the Ripper has made his presence known in New London, and he won't rest until his mission is complete. As the danger ramps up, Sam and Piper must decide if their love is strong enough to withstand Jack's killing spree and the wrath of the Archivists.

The characters in this book practically leap off the page. We get scenes from both Sam and Piper's points of view, and I honestly didn't prefer one over the other. There is a lot to admire in Piper as a heroine. She is very strong-willed for a woman in this time period (albeit an alternate time period). She's having to come to terms with the fact that the Guild that's protected her all of her life may not be entirely what it seems. Watching her struggle with this realization while still moving forward with the investigation made me like her even more as a character. Sam has suffered immensely in his life and managed to come out on the other side a stronger person. While memories of the Archives still haunt him, he doesn't let that affect how he pursues this investigation. Again, a very admirable trait.

While I loved the characters, I think my favorite part of this book dealt with the use of flashbacks. So often, flashbacks in novels only serve to disrupt the flow of the story. Not so here. Flashbacks to Sam and Piper's past at the Archives are interwoven so seamlessly into the narrative that there's no disruption at all. Everything fits together so perfectly. The flashbacks serve to make the reader feel more connected to the characters while giving them information that's pertinent to the story.

Before reading this novel, I had never read any of Christine D'Abo's work. That will certainly be changing now. I've become completely hooked on this steampunk version of London and find myself eagerly anticipating book 2, as it deals with one of my favorite side characters from this novel. Fans of steampunk (and even readers who've never read steampunk before) should definitely check this series out!

Notable Scene:

She stood with her back pressed to the wall, her palms flat against the stone. Chin lifted, she stared right into his eyes. "The Archives and the Guild Masters aren't perfect. Yes, they took me from my mum so long ago that sometimes I wonder if the dreams I have of her are real or simply my own fantasies. I wonder constantly of the life I would have now if I'd stayed there with her. Grown up under her watchful eye until a time when I was to be married off. They took that life from me, but they gave me something else. A place in society that I could never have obtained on my own."

"I didn't mean--"

"Yes you did." Her chuckle was as sad as anything he could ever remember hearing. "Don't worry. I've known since we were children how you felt. I wouldn't expect years of living on the outside to change that perspective. Reinforce it, more likely."

Christ. There shouldn't be this gap between them. Yes, it had been five years, but they hadn't changed that much since they'd last been together. If anything, they'd become more of what they'd always been. They'd

grown into themselves, but still felt much the same as they had back then. About the Archives, and about one another.

Dangerous indeed.

Keeping his gaze locked onto hers, Samuel tried once more to close the distance between them. He took a small step, watching for any sign that Piper didn't want him. She didn't move.

"I'm glad you were taken by the Archives, Pip."

Her eyes widened as she pulled her shoulders back against the wall. The blast of annoyance he felt from her was only visible by the tightening around her mouth.

Samuel chanced another step closer.

"If it meant that you were pulled from society, that another man wouldn't be able to touch you, then I will be forever grateful. Because you see," he cupped her cheek, "even though we've never so much as kissed, you belong to me."

FTC Advisory: Forever Yours/Hachette provided me with a copy of Gilded Hearts. No goody bags, sponsorships, "material connections," or bribes were exchanged for my review.

J.K. Coi says

As Christine's critique partner, yes...I'm not exactly an unbiased party when it comes to a review of this book...but it doesn't change the fact that I loved it. The worldbuilding was fantastic, the characters are riveting, damaged, and sexy, and the suspense is superb!!

Tracy says

Jack the Ripper, Steampunk, and Romance, Oh My!!

A vicious killer is slashing his way through the soot-slicked streets of New London's Whitechapel district, leaving the broken, bloody bodies of prostitutes in his wake.

King's Sentry Sergeant Samuel Hawkins has, in the course of his police work, had the occasional dealing with an Archivist in the five years since he fled their Guild, but Piper Smith isn't just any Archivist. Her arrival at his crime scene affects him more deeply than he was expecting. Once both best friend and deepest desire, Piper was little more than a girl when he'd begged her to leave the Guild with him all those years ago.

She stayed. He couldn't. But he never got over her.

Now both a fully grown woman and a full-fledged Archivist, Piper embraces her role as a memory retrieval agent for the Guild, though the shock of seeing Sam again almost ruins her first job. She's at the scene to take the memories of his murder victim, not to rehash their relationship, and focus is paramount. What she sees in the memories of the murdered woman, however, will shake more than Piper's focus, it will shake the very foundation on which she's built her life.

As more bodies are found and a deadly finger of accusation points towards the Archivists' Guild, Sam and Piper will have to take a hard look at their own past and the secrets buried there. And just hope like hell they survive it.

~*~

Sometimes you just know, ya know?

I wasn't even a tenth of the way into this book before I knew it was going to really work for me. Between initial impressions of the dark, complex Steampunk world, the grim sense of danger and mystery in the opening murder scene, and the intriguing history and emotional detritus between the main characters, the story snatched me up from the start and kept me captivated throughout.

What a world. What a dark, dangerous, well-conceived and deftly-written world. I enjoy Steampunk for the imaginative, mechanically-enhanced alternative history inherent in the genre, but have to admit, the stories themselves are hit or miss for me. D'Abo struck just the right cord for my tastes, weaving a wealth of clever Steampunk elements together with a creative twist on Jack the Ripper, and did it in such a way that it enriched the various dramatic conflicts in the story without extraneous over-description or too much superfluous detail. Everything blended together nicely to provide a robust tapestry of story and substance.

The characters themselves were as carefully and intently created, and they acquitted themselves very well in the story. I think I preferred Samuel over Piper by a slim margin, though that had more to do with my sympathy for his traumatic childhood, as well as greater understanding of the choices he made and actions he took (as opposed to Piper's) both in his past and during the murder investigations. The guy is definitely dragging around a few demons, and D'Abo was deliciously cagey about disclosing those demons to her readers, but it painted a very solid and three dimensional picture of him as a slightly flawed, definitely damaged romantic hero.

Not that I didn't like Piper. I completely did. I found her wonderfully independent, feisty, stubborn, and fiercely loyal. I just also happened to be as disturbed by the Archivists' Guild purpose and presence in the world as Sam was, so the fact that Piper was a very determined Archivist, willfully and knowingly putting holes in her mind for an alleged greater good, was a bit harder to relate to than the guy who had escaped them and went on to make a career for himself in law enforcement.

They did fit together nicely as a romantic couple, though, with a chemistry that extended far beyond sexual and included an obvious and genuine childhood friendship. I loved the snippets of their past that get revealed in well-timed flashes throughout the book. Frequent flashbacks in a story rarely work for me and tend to jar me out of the flow of the current-timeline plot, but D'Abo mastered the transitions smoothly and had a judicious eye for how and when to incorporate them to add depth to the story and the relationship between Sam and his Pip.

I enjoyed the hell out of the Jack the Ripper investigation, too, but have to admit, I got a little lost when it came to a political element in the investigation. That aspect of the world hadn't been explained quite enough for me to really understand everywhere the leads in the case took Sam and Piper. I didn't have trouble following the action, but I definitely felt an emotional disconnect with the story when it came to a few scenes.

And honestly, the resolution to the climax of the book left me feeling...disturbed and a bit unsatisfied.

Don't get me wrong, I loved the culmination of the Ripper investigation, and thought the evolution of Sam and Pip's relationship was nicely done. D'Abo built plot and relationship conflict from the first page of this book, adding layers of horror and dread, dastardly motivation and sick psychosis, and connected it all Sam's

murky past in such a way that I was left impressed by the complexities and entertained by it all. I heartily enjoyed that very much.

How it resolved, though, and what it all means in the big picture, disturbed me. And it's virtually impossible to be any more specific without some huge spoilers and I don't want to do that. I will say this: I don't think there is anything right or good about the Archivists' Guild. Not one thing. That may pose a problem for me in future books depending on its role in the series. It definitely posed a problem for me at the end of this book.

It took a bit of the bloom off what was otherwise a passionate and perilous, wildly imaginative, darkly entertaining, bloody-red rose.

***Disclosure:** An ARC of this book was provided to me by Forever Yours publisher Grand Central Publishing/Hachette Book Group via NetGalley. This rating, review, and all included thoughts and comments are my own.*

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Reviewed for One Good Book Deserves Another.
