



## The Gilded Scarab

*Anna Butler*

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When Captain Rafe Lancaster is invalidated out of the Britannic Imperium's Aero Corps after crashing his aerofighter during the Second Boer War, his eyesight is damaged permanently, and his career as a fighter pilot is over. Returning to Londinium in late November 1899, he's lost the skies he loved, has no place in a society ruled by an elite oligarchy of powerful Houses, and is hard up, homeless, and in desperate need of a new direction in life.

Everything changes when he buys a coffeehouse near the Britannic Imperium Museum in Bloomsbury, the haunt of Aegyptologists. For the first time in years, Rafe is free to be himself. In a city powered by luminiferous aether and phlogiston, and where powerful men use House assassins to target their rivals, Rafe must navigate dangerous politics, deal with a jealous and possessive ex-lover, learn to make the best coffee in Londinium, and fend off murder and kidnap attempts before he can find happiness with the man he loves.

## **The Gilded Scarab Details**

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Author : Anna Butler

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## From Reader Review The Gilded Scarab for online ebook

### M says

I really liked this book. It was a fun steampunk caper about proper coffee set against an interesting alternative-universe Edwardian London. I liked it for the writing, sure, but also because it reminded me of one of my favourite places in Cape Town:

Truth Coffee. Super cool steampunk roastery. (A bit touristy now, but still worth the visit)

Anyway, it's an entertaining, sexy novel with a likeable protagonist and a satisfying ending. Give it a go if you're into that kind of thing.

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### Misty says

#### 4.5 Stars

Well-written m/m Steampunk from Anna Butler. Really enjoyed the world-building, very entertaining story and plot with some great characters!

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### Ulysses Dietz says

I try not to grant five stars to books, but I finally gave in as I finished Anna Butler's "The Gilded Scarab." This was such fun, so deeply romantic, and so richly written. I can imagine that people who have no liking for Dickens or Trollope might find it tough sledding, because Butler meticulously creates a parallel world to ours in late Victorian London, and embellishes it with details that are historically accurate, even as she envelops her narrative in a savory steampunk fantasy that throws everything just a little bit off.

The aged Queen Victoria still lives, and rules a vast Imperium Britannicum without benefit of Parliament. Instead, her aristocracy is divided into corporate "houses" bound by blood and money, each of them somewhere between the family houses of the "Dune" novels and the mafia clans of "The Godfather" books. While the houses rule the empire largely through business and financial manipulation, there is rather more assassination going on than is strictly comforting. Londinium is still mostly recognizable, but for the fact that horses and other pre-technological notions have been replaced by cold fusion, phlogiston and aether as power sources. A nod to H.G. Wells reminds us of the setting and the author's mindfulness of precisely what she is doing.

The central character, through whose damaged eyes we see Butler's fantasy world, is Rafe Lancaster, black sheep of a cadet branch of a minor house. Bereft of the aerofighter career that had made his name in the Queen's army, Lancaster quietly returns to Londinium (indeed the original Roman name for that city) and tries to build a new life for himself. Soon after his return, he spends one night with a beautiful man in an elegant Covent Garden molly house – a discreet place for men seeking male companionship – and then finds

a haven in a run-down coffee house by the Museum Britannicum. The action of the book is surprisingly small in focus, and all of it derives from these two moments in Lancaster's rebuilt life.

Butler is as careful with language as she is with seemingly minor details. The names of the various houses smack of pre-modern England, suggesting their antiquity and their sources in the mists of history post-1066. This is a world where everyone speaks English, but in which street signs still use Latin. Butler gets the feel of the place and the time, right down to a visit to Garrard's, the royal jewelers. This is not grandstanding; it roots the narrative in a kind of authenticity that makes the steampunk fantasy flow logically into the historical framework. There are times when the dialogue veers into more modern idiom, but the author is careful to maintain the tone of Sherlock Holmes (who does NOT appear anywhere here, because, after all, he was fictional) so as not to break the spell of her skillful world-building.

In the end, this is a romance. It is about Rafe Lancaster's discovery of love in a way he never anticipated, in a world he is trying to re-learn. There is a very Victorian approach to love here, very old-fashioned and genteel – even in the context of molly houses and illegal homosexuality. And yet, through it all, Anna Butler gives her readers a very modern vision: a world where love will find a way and change a man's life.

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### **Vivian (????)? says**

All my friends (ie two) have suddenly reappeared on GR and so, in honour of the sudden onslaught of nostalgia, I decided to write a review.

And then I realised that I forgot how to write reviews.

And so I'm going to (weakly) dot point the shit out of this:

# overall a wonderfully well written steampunk romance that unfortunately suffers some interesting ... pacing and development issues let's say. It lingers too much in the beginning... speeds up for a little... and falters when they literally introduced the love interest, AND THEN DECIDED TO SEND HIM TO EGYPT FOR HALF THE BOOK (what were you thinking?)

# fresh and intriguing world building, especially in terms of the socio-political nuances --> political power plays, the society created etc.

#strong characterisation with endearing and well-fleshed out characters

# A+ romance... when it was present (again- development + pacing issues). In a weird roundabout sort of way, the absence of the love interest almost made the book stand out in some aspects... there was a sense of growing anticipation, and we allowed to watch the development of the main character without the focal point of romance. The balance of character development and romance was lovely, but maybe could have been achieved in a more satisfactory manner.

All in all, a lovely read that could have perhaps used some extra editing. Whatever. I'm still gagging for a re-read so I guess her job is done.

God reviewing is hard. I'm going to go in hiding again, after this.  
I recommend for a light yet hearty read.

## **Kaje Harper says**

This is a great read - a fun steampunk setting for a Victorianesque tale of love and intrigue, with a great main character. Rafe is an aviator in the Imperium's Aero Corps whose injuries after a crash force him into medical retirement. Rafe is very self-sufficient and determined to live on his own terms, These include finding like-minded men at local molly-houses, despite the risk, and finding a new occupation that doesn't put him under the thumb of the leaders of his House.

On his first visit to an establishment after leaving the forces, Rafe meets Edward. A night together forges a connection between them, but Edward is leaving the country for months, and Rafe relegates him to the "if only" category, while rebuilding his life. In the process he then meets Daniel, another attractive man with some common interests. But Daniel is moody and clingy, and then Edward returns from abroad. Rafe's retirement becomes complicated, as it turns out that people are not always who they seem, and the Great Houses are deeper in his life than he realized. His personal goals, Imperial issues, class, intrigue, and money, intersect in an action-filled climax.

This story is heavy on action and plot, but there are also effective moments of understated emotion on Rafe's part. There is a small amount of nicely-heated sex and some well-drawn-out tension, and although the end is HEA, I would dearly love to read more about these two men and this interesting society.

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## **Karen says**

An interesting reading experience for me. I was impatient with this steampunk/a-u British Empire story's pace for quite awhile, then found myself on board. I didn't take to Rafe right away, but his self-deprecating humor and internal monologue revealing a strong moral compass gradually won me over. This feels like a longish story and takes awhile to focus on the nice bit of intrigue woven into it. I suspect the dangling threads and loose plot points noted by other readers may be there to leave room for a sequel or series. One can only hope.

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## **Elin says**

Exactly my type of book. This one pushed all my buttons for all kinds of reasons, so it's my recommendation for the week.

I adore the whole steampunk vibe with shades of Rider Haggard stiff-upper-lippery, men of enormous personal bravery and magnificent whiskers and clothing with buttons and laces enough to slow the between the sheets action down to a delicate pavane before the frantic scramble of consummation. There are manners, there is politeness, there is what should be done and the heroes dance between the expectations of society, each other and necessity to try to achieve happiness.

[More here](#)

### **Amy Durreson says**

Oh, that was fun. Great steampunk adventure. Our hero is a dashing aeronaut, forced to retire after an accident. Trying to make a fresh start, he takes over a coffee shop near the British museum, gets embroiled with one Egyptologist (and falls for another), and ends up tangled up in shady political goings-on. A high note to start the year on. Recommended. :)

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### **Julie Bozza says**

Lots of fun, in a late-Victorian steampunk Britain. ♥

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### **Chris, the Dalek King says**

I really hope that this gets a sequel one day because I really loved it. This is an AU steampunk story that is set in an England that does not have a parliamentary monarchy, but an oligarchical monarchy (there is not a democracy with MPs and Prime Ministers, instead it is really run by a collection of Powerful Houses that control both the economy and the government in most aspects). It was a fascinating mixture of Victorian setting and morals, with modern technologies like datapads and burglar alarms. Instead of things being run by electricity they are run on aether and steam. And despite how weird a mixture, this book really worked. All the various aspects were mixed together perfectly so that you don't even notice that you are totally accepting that wireless communicators work in Victorian Londinium (London).

I found this story so much fun to read and despite the fact that the romance was a bit of a slow burn (after the initial meeting, that is) I didn't mind at all. The characters and setting really bring this story to life and I enjoyed every minute I was reading it.

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### **K.J. Charles says**

I liked this very much. The writing is terrific, the descriptions vivid. Great story set-up. Rafe, the narrator, is strongly characterised and immensely likeable and funny. Fabulous political machinations and a well done setting. Loved the concept of the Houses.

I do wish it had had a better development edit, because there are several plot points and threats that are set up and then defused, or left dangling. They promised lots of lovely extra conflict and excitement and I'd have really liked to see those played out.

A good, well-written story that I really liked, and more books in this world would be very welcome.

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## **Karen says**

*This was good...like really, really good...*

While I really enjoy steampunk, I have to admit I'm kinda' picky about what I read. I've had this book for a while now and I kept doing that thing where I squirrel off to this and that but when I saw that a second book was being released I decided that it was time to buckle down and get it done and I am more than a little happy that I did.

'The Gilded Scarab' is my first time reading a book by this author and let me just say 'not only is this Ms. Butler's wheel house she is in the driver's seat' and before the end of the first chapter I was more than a little confused as to why I didn't read this sooner.

I was totally enamored with both the world building and the character development. The world building in this story was huge which can sometimes be an obstacle for me because I admit I can become bored in spite of the fact that world building especially in genres like scifi, fantasy or steampunk can be as crucial to the story as the characters and plot but Ms Butler has created a story here that perfectly mixes the development of plot, characters and world building both getting and keeping my attention no matter what the story focus was at the time.

Rafe Lancaster is the main character and the focus of much of this story and he's awesome. Rafe became a fighter pilot in an effort to remove himself from his families influence and basically because flying is his passion. Unfortunately the resulting injury from an accident forces Rafe out of the Aero Corps and into making some life changes...one of which is his return to Londinium.

Rafe's return to the place of his birth also brings him under closer scrutiny from his house...houses are the social system that this society functions under and their influence over the individual members is both considerable and unwanted by Rafe.

When Rafe takes his maiden journey back into society he meets one Ned Winters. It's just suppose to be casual, no attachments, an evenings dalliance. But as their evening progresses each man realizes that they want more than one night and how much they enjoy each others company...unfortunately Ned is an Aegyptologist and about to leave for Aegypt for a few months separating him and Rafe before things can really even start between them. Rafe's efforts to reintegrate himself into society and rebuild his life goes from challenging to more than a little complicated as new people enter his life and old friends re-emerge.

With Ned gone Rafe throws himself into rebuilding his life and becomes the owner of a coffee house...how can you not love a man who appreciates coffee? Personally I'm not even going to try and honestly I just like Rafe. He's someone I'd sit down and have coffee with. With the successful launch of his coffee house Rafe again ventures out into society looking for company and finding an entanglement that may be a whole lot more than he'd bargained for...especially once Ned returns. Things begin to get more than a little bit complicated and interesting as Rafe and Ned are reunited and realize that one night months ago was only a small sample of what they could have and despite the obstacles both men want more.

I was so enchanted with this story it's twist, turns and complexities drew me in and kept me both interested and wanting more. This is neither a simple nor easy story it's filled with twist, turns and complexities as the story unfolds while this story contains two plots the first one being an over all arc that begins with this book but continues, the second plotline is contained within this book but still connected to the overall story arc and the growing relationship between Rafe and Ned.

As the first book in Anna Butler's series "Lancaster's Luck"...'The Gilded Scarab' undertakes a big task

setting the scene for a series that's filled with a diverse group of characters, it's own unique settings, social structure and story lines that take the reader to a different place and time, but it's a task that's been accomplished and has left this reader wanting more so I'm definitely on board for whatever comes next at the Lancaster's Luck Coffee House...anyone care to join me for a little adventure and a cuppa'?

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## Marge says

I really liked this tale of Rafe Lancaster finding a new place for himself back in Londinium after he was invalidated out of the Service following an accident which damaged his sight. This is a long book, which was wonderful because we get to see Rafe relearning how to live in the civilian world, finding new friends, a new career, and dealing with the various family members who have little use for him unless he can advance their interests. The writing flowed very smoothly and I found the initial setup interesting and fun, I think because of Rafe's ironic and somewhat humorous take on much of what was going on. As for his change in circumstances? Well, that never bothered Rafe at all, and the watering of his eyes occasionally--that was just a bit of dust in them, or a reaction to his new glasses, or the lighting...or something. \*grin\*

I am not very fond of the steampunk genre, but this book seemed more like an alternate universe to our own and I liked it immensely. Much of the new or altered technology needed little explanation, and most explanation was done quickly and seamlessly, with no unnecessary fanfare. The House system of families was probably the most different from our world. I didn't bother to puzzle over it too much, and I felt I understood what I needed to know to fully enjoy the story.

It does take a while to get into the romance in the book, though sex was on the table fairly early on. In many books I would probably have been impatient to get to "the good stuff," but I really enjoyed seeing Rafe's relationships with all the secondary characters. We get some foreshadowing that romance is in the air for our hero, but from his POV he doesn't really believe in "love" but rather the enjoyment of a companion and a friendly relationship. I eagerly anticipated his dilemma as he realized he was actually falling in love and tried to tell himself that it wasn't really so.

Minor spoiler: (view spoiler)

This is such a well-developed world and I liked so many of the characters that I really do hope we see more books following this one. There was a bit of setup so we get an idea that Rafe could be involved in some dangerous and covert operations in the future. And I would love to see more of Rafe and Ned together, since dealing with the outside world will have to mean their relationship will not be an easy one. I really look forward to additional stories about them.

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## Sarah Madison says

I've been waiting for this book to be released so I could come here and tell everyone what a marvelous story it is! This is the part where I tell you that Anna is in my critique group, and I've been privileged to watch this tale unfold from the beginning, however, this isn't a case of 'omg, I have to say something nice about a friend's book!'. No, this a situation where you read something that is so good, it makes you weep with despair because you know you'll never write anything a tenth as fantastic!

Steampunk, political intrigue, coffee houses, lovers separated by duty, Egyptology--and best of all, Rafe Lancaster, a rakish pilot trying to make his way in the world when he receives a medical discharge from the military--and the only life that gave him the freedom to live on his own terms. Accepting aid from his family would make him beholden to them--and in a time where oligarchies and powerful Guild Houses rule, it's the equivalent of being part of a mob family to a certain extent--something Rafe wants no part of. He may not have a choice, however...

The world-building is phenomenal, the story is gripping, but it is the characters that will make you fall in love. Don't take my word for it--read it for yourself! Trust me, everyone will be talking about their new favorite book boyfriend--Rafe!

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### **Eugenia says**

Utterly divine! This steampunk mystery-romance had me enthralled not only by its intriguing plot, but by its complex and imperfect characters, fantastic world-building, and, above all, above par writing.

At the beginning I didn't much care for our MC, Rafe Lancaster. He was a conceited, proud, tactical, and irreverent pilot. Of course, his devil-may-care attitude was also extremely attractive. Unable to fly due to a head and eye injury in the war, he now finds himself back home in Londinuim with little money or prospects unless he kowtows to his House.

Our other MC, Ned Winters is very distrustful of strangers and especially Rafe when he meets him in Rafe's newly purchased coffeehouse.

I won't go into much more detail--there are several stellar reviews that properly do this book justice. Suffice it to say, that I loved this book. I am a fan of steampunk, and mystery, but above all I am a fan of excellent writing and, for me, this book had it all.

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