



# Masque

*W.R. Gingell*

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Beauty met the Beast and there was . . . Bloody murder?

It's the Annual Ambassadorial Ball in Glause, and Lady Isabella Farrah, the daughter of New Civet's Ambassador, is feeling pleasantly scintillated.

In the library is Lord Pecus, a charming gentleman whose double mask hides a beastly face, and who has decided that Isabella is the very person to break the Pecus curse.

In the ball-room is young Lord Topher, who is rapidly falling in love with an older woman.

And in the card-room, lying in a pool of his own blood, is the body of one of Isabella's oldest friends: Raoul, Civet's Head Guardsman. The papers sewn into his sash seem to suggest espionage gone wrong, but Isabella is not so certain.

Lord Pecus, as Commander of the Watch, is of the opinion that Isabella should keep out of the investigation and out of danger. Isabella is of the opinion that it is her murder to investigate, and that what a certain Beast-Lord doesn't know won't hurt him. . . .

Will Isabella find the murderer before Lord Pecus does, or will she end her investigation as a bloody spatter on the parlour floor?

W.R. Gingell is a Tasmanian author who enjoys reading, bacon, and slouching in front of the fire to write.

More titles in the Two Monarchies Sequence will be upcoming, and readers are encouraged to visit [wrgingell.com](http://wrgingell.com) or follow @WRGingell for the latest news and publication dates.

Other publications by W.R. Gingell include *A Time-Traveller's Best Friend: Volume One*, and *Ruth and the Ghost*.

## Masque Details

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## From Reader Review Masque for online ebook

### LPJ says

If you love fantasy, mystery, love, and amazing heroines then this may be your next favorite book. I'm a huge fan of beauty and the beast stories, and while this does have that element, I'm not sure it could be called a retelling. What you get is a thoroughly inventive take on beauty and the beast, in the form of a fantasy mystery. Added to that is one of the best character voices I've read in quite a long time.

Gingell puts you in a nineteenth century-esque fantasy world with a touch of the steampunk to it. We have diplomatic relationships between neighboring nations, monarchies, street urchins, magic—all the good things you want in any story, right? The characters shine and though it's a murder mystery, with some particularly grisly murders, the story manages to be lighthearted and extraordinarily fun.

The love story was a subtle thread throughout—just enough to satisfy my inner romance fanatic. I really can't say enough good things about it!

The exact method of the resolution left me scratching my head a bit, however, the story builds up so much good will that the details stopped bothering me almost immediately. As I write this, Masque is free, but even if that changes, it's worth every penny!

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### Sylvia Mercedes says

Don't forget--Every book I read this month is a possible Book of the Month winner! **At the end of the month, I'll be giving away a copy of my Book of the Month and Cover of the Month to one lucky mailing list subscriber.** So be sure to subscribe if you want a chance to win some amazing Beauty and the Beast retellings!

Okay, on to my review of "Masque" . . .

I went into this one thinking I would like it. I read the first few chapters and thought I was going to be disappointed. Then, by the time I turned the last page . . . I realized that I didn't just like it. I LOVED it.

#### WHAT I LOVED

This book is just nuts! Yes, it's a retelling of "Beauty and the Beast," so, you know, you kind of think you know what you're going to get. And it wasn't that AT ALL. It was hilarious and unexpected and magical and romantic and . . . you know what? It reminded me the most of Diana Wynne Jones since I last read Diana Wynne Jones. If you've read my "about me" page, you know I'm always looking for the next book that will give me at least some of the "Howl's Moving Castle" feels I love so well. THIS BOOK finally did that!

Lady Isabella was a riot. She could be a little exhaustingly herself sometimes, but after I got used to her incredibly larger-than-life personality, I find myself thoroughly enjoying her POV.

The magic was great. It was natural and intuitive, without a whole lot of specific development, but it read really well, really convincingly. I have to admit, I LOVED that Isabella was not magical. She had to be clever to solve her own problems, not falling back on magical abilities. She didn't stand out as a character because she is the Super Special endowed with Super Special Abilities. She stood out because of her own

personality, determination, and humor.

I actually was starting to think the book wasn't a real Beauty and the Beast retelling for a little while. You can't have Beauty and the Beast without at least SOME variation on the heroine's selfless exchange for her father as the beast's prisoner. But then . . . oh, my. Ms. Gingell pulled it off, and it totally fit with her world and her characters, and I was just blown away! I had been fully prepared to mark the book down, but the way that part of the story was done instead forced me to mark the book way up!

Also, let me just say that I really loved how vibrant all the side characters were. Lady Isabella is SO over the top, I half expected everyone else to pale by comparison. Instead, this author pulled off the miraculous and managed to give her whole cast sparkling life equal to that of her heroine. I loved Vadim and Keenan. I adored the Beast Lord (and can I just say that I loved that she made me love him WITHOUT him being all tortured by his curse and everything. Yes, he's cursed, but he doesn't let the curse define him. So great!)

I would be very happy to read a book about Isabella's sister Susan, and I am quite eager to pick up the book about Melchior and Annabel (which is coming later this month). And, even though I am well in the midst of my **Beauty and the Beast Month** and have a bazillion more Beauty and the Beast stories to read in the next few weeks, I went ahead and purchased "Spindle", another one of W.R. Gingell's fairytale retellings, which will be waiting for me come May!

#### WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE SO MUCH

I do want to give readers a word of warning . . . those first few chapters are a bit exhausting. It takes some doing, getting used to Lady Isabella's perspective and W.R. Gingell's writing style. The style and approach is so different from anything else I've been reading lately, so at first I wasn't even sure I liked it. I did like it . . . I LOVED it . . . but I had to adapt to it first. So I do urge you to give it some time. Don't leap to a quick judgment.

And honestly, though Lady Isabella is ultimately a plus for this story, she can be a bit of a negative too. Her relentlessly cheerful attitude even in the face of grisly murders can come across as callous or cavalier by turns. Sometimes it made me struggle to like her. Granted, the book is told 1st person, so you have a sense that she is painting the story to hide some of her deeper, darker feelings. She controls her own narrative, after all. But I would have liked to see a little bit more real reaction from her to some of the deaths, several of which were REALLY sad.

And yeah . . . for such a funny book, there are quite a few very horrible murders. It ultimately all works, but sometimes I found myself a bit jarred by the incessantly bright style coupled with the incredibly dark subject matter.

Nevertheless, I'm not going to knock a star off for any of these critiques, because ultimately they were minor quibbles and definitely more about personal preference than about anything I think the author should have done differently. The author (if you're out there in the wide world reading this, Ms. Gingell) simply needs to write more amazing stories EXACTLY the way she wants to, without regard to any critiques from me or anyone, because she has a completely WONDERFUL writing voice that finally, finally, FINALLY gave me some of that Diana Wynne Jones feel I've been looking for!

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#### Intisar Khanani says

How in the world have I not raved about this book yet? ... Well, nothing to be done but to fix that at once!

MASQUE is a regency-style, fantastical retelling of Beauty and the Beast, but it's also so much more than that. We have a murder mystery with magical elements, we have a Commander of the Watch who happens to hide his face behind a mask because... well, you know why. The dude's cursed, but that does not at all bother our intrepid and seriously smart heroine Isabella. She is such a pleasure to read--even when she's under house arrest, she doesn't sit still. If you were to kidnap Sophy from Georgette Heyer's *The Grand Sophy* and put her in a room with Isabella, they would probably turn the world upside down while becoming the best of friends.

Isabella is strong, loyal, protective of her family, and did I mention smart? I love heroines that I can not only respect but would love to spend a day with. Guaranteed, it would not be a quiet day!

What more can I say? Read it. I sincerely doubt you'll be disappointed.

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### **MB (What she read) says**

You know, that was a lot of fun to read!

I always enjoy Beauty and the Beast retellings, so took a chance on this one. It was definitely quirky and fun...right down my alley! The take-charge heroine Belle reminded me of *The Grand Sophy*, and her interactions with the Beast were a joy as they each tried to outsmart the other, solve the crime, and protect each other and their friends and country-mates. The espionage element and murders added dramatic interest. Very fun world-building. I am looking forward to the other 2 books in this series (particularly *Blackfoot*, coming in April. The hero's character, as introduced this book, intrigues me.)

I've found a new and enjoyable author and plan to work my way through Gingell's books.

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### **Athena says**

Disclaimer: I loved this book *and* got it for free from the author - score hard!

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*Masque* brings the spirit of Elizabeth Peters' delightfully forthright Amelia Peabody into a vaguely 'oh-by-the-way-Beauty and the Beast' reworking which is actually more of a Jane Austen drawing room comedy murder mystery with politics, magic, ballroom gown design, and a snarky 'talking' book thrown in for good measure. Add a starship and Gingell would have covered all the series possibilities. Frankly I don't put starships past her at this point, and I think she'd pull it off, too!

The great thing is: it all *works*, and works very enjoyably. This reads like a complete world and all its rules and politics are well in place, and even poked fun at by the author once in a while.

*Masque* is by far my favorite read by Gingell thus far: witty, droll, surprising, and occasionally laugh-out-loud. Her 'Belle', Lady Isabella, is a formidable and complete woman, perfectly happy as a self-described spinster at age 28. She's been assisting her widowed Ambassador father since she was 14, knows her own mind (and everyone else's too, if they know what's good for them), and has no desire to get caught up in anything as love-fraught as curse breaking. Unfortunately there's been a murder and her dear Papa has been framed for it so she really has no choice but to solve the crime, not to mention an army couldn't keep her away from it. She's made up her mind. As the book goes on more dead bodies appear and it's clear she's up against some serious magic; she has absolutely no magic whatsoever which dissuades her not at all. She uses her wits to even the playing field and grandly sails in where angels fear to tread, bending kings to her will

and outwitting even very clever Beasts.

As with all of Gingell's work that I've read thus far I was able to see the ending coming but it was still a thrilling climax. She does a great job of bringing the murder mystery genre into tweaked fantasy fiction, almost its own genre at this point, using interesting plotting and strong characterizations to keep the pages turning.

A thoroughly enjoyable romp of a book with a wonderful cast of characters and situations.

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### **Suzannah says**

MASQUE is a frothy comedy loosely structured around a murder mystery, which also happens to be, in some unexpected ways, a retelling of Beauty and the Beast. Very Georgette Heyerish, with light touches of Wodehouse, this book features a free-spirited heroine who instead of chafing under her regency-esque society's rules, instead manipulates them with awesome confidence. Lady Isabella Farrah reminded me of no one so much as Heyer's Grand Sophy, minus the rather chillingly manipulative high-handedness, and I loved how little she was fazed by this story's Beast, Lord Pecus.

I admit that I guessed the villain's identity within the first couple of chapters, but I forgave this because MASQUE made me laugh out loud on just about every second page. WR Gingell is an indie author to watch.

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### **Hannah Clark says**

I heard about this book when Intisar Khanani posted her own review here on Goodreads. And I'm so glad she did, because not only did this book see me through an icky allergic reaction where I was laid up all day, but this book was fantastic. Truly. I can never pass up a retelling of "Beauty and The Beast." But when you add murder mystery, political intrigue, and a heroine who is just as laugh out loud funny as Sophie from Georgette Heyer's "The Grand Sophie," I'm completely smitten.

My only complaint is that I guessed the villain right from the very start. That being said, I will definitely be reading more from this author.

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### **Katie says**

So I enjoyed this, but also DITTO ANDREE'S REVIEW RE MISSING INFORMATION. I thought for sure I was missing a whole Annabel book, but apparently it does not exist yet.

(I liked the Beauty and the Beast adaptation a lot. One of those that isn't afraid to do its own thing with the bare bones of the story.)

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## **S. Usher Evans says**

Masque was a book I had on my 2016 Indie-Mas TBR post, and I'm so excited that I actually read a book on my TBR (that actually happens rarely cause... SQUIRREL!). This one is as I said: A Beauty and the Beast retelling plus a murder mystery.

But the reason why I recommend this book isn't because of that (I mean, how many BatB retellings are out there?), but it was actually the protagonist. Girl was TWENTY-EIGHT and was like "Yo, I'm an old maid and I am proud of it!"

After my own heart, right?

Really, it was so refreshing to see a woman who patted the twenty-something men on the top of their head and sent them on their merry way, who treated her teen/tweenaged servance as her "children," and was totally cool with an unmarried life. No bitterness, no snide remarks to her friends with kiddos. And when Prince Charming shows up, she's very much like "Uh, we will get to you when we have time."

Even though the protagonist is 28, the heat rating is negligible, so this one is actually for most fans of YA and up. Definitely put this one on your TBR if you haven't already.

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## **Rachel McMillan says**

Delicious heroine. The voice in this is to die for.

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## **Anna says**

Really, truly enjoyed it! Full review to come.

## **My Review**

So, the gorgeous cover is what initially caught my eye in regards to this book. Then I read that it was a retelling of *Beauty and the Beast*, and I was completely in -- hook, line, and sinker!

But for the first half of the book, it's far more of a slight fantasy/Victorian-esque murder mystery, and screwball comedy. I absolutely LOVED Lady Farrah (aka Isabella, aka Belle)! She was such an intelligent, manipulative (in a good way), strong-minded woman who refuses to let her status as woman and lack of magic stop her from solving the murder of a friend. Her father is an Ambassador, so she's used to political dealings and working around people. So it shouldn't be any different managing Lord Pecus, head of the Watch, right? Wrong! He's there to intercept her at every turn and the investigation becomes a battle of wits before long. Who will solve the mystery first and who will make it out alive?

This is a difficult book to explain. It is fantasy in the sense that everything happens in a made up world with

a complex political system, it's own laws and social codes, royalty, treaties, feuds, magic, etc. You are thrown into the deep end right away, with no background. This is a learn-as-you-go book and that will put off quite a few people. Usually it puts me off. But the bright, shining wit and the loveable heroine made me keep reading. Also, love Keenan and his older sister Vadim, resourceful (and quite cheeky) orphans, who come to "work" for Belle. Lord Pecus is also somewhat likeable, and improves as the book moves along. He's grumpy, over-protective, wears a mask at all times (so do all of his servants), and has a secret curse placed upon him that he's trying to break.

Belle however, is determined that she won't be the one to break it. She likes her independence and her father needs her to take care of him. There are some surprises, the famous "I won't come to dinner" scene (with a hilarious twist), and the ending wasn't what I expected at all! Although it did feel like it stopped kind of abruptly, I really enjoyed reading it and I'd recommend it for anyone who doesn't mind being taken on a bit of a wild ride. If you like fairy tales, screwball comedies, and fantasy, this one's for you. It was just plain fun!

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## Andree says

Reread this too! (2018 Reread)

Yeah, still really enjoy this one. And, since I've now read the entire trilogy from the same world, I can confirm that Isabella's sister is at least mentioned in an earlier book! Could she have been mentioned earlier in this one, absolutely! Do I really care? Not particularly! Also, I figured out why the final resolution works this time around, so Yay? (Not gonna lie, I find this so much fun - particularly Isabella - that I don't care about the flaws.)

(view spoiler)

Basically, it's fun.

xxx

So, am in a reading slump. But yesterday this was 99 cents on Kobo, so I bought it on a win.

Yeah, this is super fun. Turns out what I wanted was a fantasy murder-mystery adaptation of Beauty and the Beast, set in a society with similarities to let's say Victorian London. Basically, I really enjoyed this. Also, you know how I've been demanding a heroine who actually likes elements of her society? MEET ISABELLA. She's an ambassador's daughter, and she basically uses social protocol and her position to her advantage FOR THE ENTIRE BOOK. She basically manipulates the system.

This is what I wanted. I want independent heroines using their society's rules to their advantage, and not just authorial tossing them out the window when they're inconvenient.

Also, the dialogue in this is excellent.

Fun, fun read.

Admittedly, I can't give it five stars for all I enjoyed it. There are plotting/pacing problems. The ending is abruptish. I'm still not sure why the resolution of the murder-mystery worked out. And I think that's part of a larger problem of the magical system not being super well-defined (partly because Isabella is non-magical - which P.S. also makes this an example of a non-magical user being awesome in a magical world). The author has decided to slowly explain things to you as you go along, not info-dump at the beginning. Which I generally like, but it also results in a few times where I thought I was missing information. The book will for example describe Isabella reading a bunch of juicy details about the case, but then the reader isn't really told them. Ever. Also, some of the things you find out as you go along are introduced ridiculously suddenly. Like the existence of Isabella's younger sister back at home. Who is only introduced more than midway through the book, when she is necessary for plot reasons. Look, I don't need the whole family tree up front, but it also seems ridiculous to introduce a younger sibling (and major character in the second half) the second she is needed for major plot-related purposes. Particularly since the sisters are super-close (also a nice feature). If they are that close, there should be a couple of passing references in the first half. A sentence or two would do! As it stands, it makes the character feel like a bit of a convenient plot contrivance. A fun one that I was totally willing to go along with, but I did have a moment of, "Well, that's awfully convenient." Also, I'm not entirely sure what was going on with the curse and how it came into effect. That was super-hand-wavey, and it is implied that Isabella knows what's going on, but she doesn't really share that information with the reader, which was... weird.

I think this is the second in the series, so some of the things that feel under-explained might be explained in the first book. But even if that's the case, a few sentences summarizing key points wouldn't go amiss.

But those are details. Mostly this is just super fun.

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## **Roslyn says**

4.5

This is a murder mystery set in a fantasy/steampunk world incorporating a unique take on the Beauty and the Beast story.

What really makes the novel special is the ironic and witty narrative voice of the wonderfully clever and very capable heroine. I spotted the murderer early on and there was some (I thought) unnecessary exposition towards the end. I would have loved some more information about the curse and how it came about, but none of these quibbles interfered with my enjoyment. Every character is memorable and it's an utterly charming read.

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## **L. Penelope says**

I ♥? this book so hard! What an amazing story!!

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## **Denae Christine says**

**Intrigue, curses, dancing, and spies**

**Reader thoughts:** Lady Isabella's ability to read faces (even masked faces, even cursed faces) is truly phenomenal. She notices when people are actually teasing and when they're serious, and she responds appropriately. Most of the time she's sarcastic and prying, but she does know how to comfort and listen, too. She's a perfect ambassador.

She constantly jokes that she's an old maid and hides behind this identity (she's 28). She loves sewing and fashion, and she knows how to appreciate someone's value (her streetrat servants are awesome!). She has no magic, but that doesn't slow her down.

For the plot, it unwrapped at a good pace. The ending was a touch confusing (magical curse stuff works how?), but it's not a problem. I guessed the murderer, but I didn't know for sure much before Isabella did. She and Lord Pecus really should have worked together.

The romance was clean and sweet. They understood each other on a level many couples never enjoy. Several times one would figure out the other was only pretending to be upset in order to make such and such happen. Then they would laugh together. I quite enjoyed that each had such a ready sense of humor.

The similarities between this story and Beauty and the Beast are many but not overwhelming. Roses cropped up a lot (he gave her rose tea once, ha!). She was imprisoned in her father's stead. She had a magic mirror that communicated with others. The beast's servants were sort of cursed, too. I think there was even a Gaston character.

Very fun!

**Favorite quotes:**

"I absolutely refuse to discuss matters of dress with a book."

(discussing a homecoming gift) "A vase, perhaps. Something ugly for their children to break."

And last but not least

Beast "And you said something about my face?"

Little boy. "Well, it's a bit ugly, init?"

"So I'm told. Your mistress thinks otherwise."

"Well, she's a girl, though."

**Writer thoughts:** Isabella is a great example of a 3D character. She has likes (tea, sewing), dislikes (horses, mornings, humidity), talents (navigating a crowd, managing unruly councilors), weaknesses (magic skill, trusting others), a past (boarding school with future queen, childhood of getting siblings in trouble), and even a plethora of nicknames (Belle, Bella, Lady Farrah, Carrots, etc.). Perhaps the only thing she doesn't have is a comprehensive religious view.

When you write a character, especially a main character (and especially an MC when she is the first-person narrator), you need to know all these things, or else the character will fall flat. Now, weave them into the narration without infodumping or becoming repetitive.

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