

[Online library] File size: 75.Mb

# Masques



*Par Patricia Briggs*  
*DOC | \*audiobook | ebooks |*  
*Download PDF | ePub*

Dtails sur le produit Rang parmi les ventes : #249457 dans eBooksPubli  
le: 2010-09-28Sorti le: 2010-09-28Format: Ebook Kindle

[Online library] Masques

**Par Patricia Briggs : Masques** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Masques:

 **Download**

 **Read Online**

## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurExperience the fantasy and adventure of #1 New York Times bestselling author Patricia Brigg's first published novelthe thrilling start of the Sianim series...After an upbringing of proper behavior and oppressive expectations, Aralorn fled her noble birthright for a life of adventure as a mercenary spy. But her latest mission involves more peril than she ever imagined.Agents of Sianim have asked her to gather intelligence on the increasingly popular and powerful sorcerer Geoffrey ae'Magi. Soon Aralorn comes to see past the man's striking charismaand into a soul as corrupt and black as endless night. And few have the will to resist the sinister might of Geoffrey and his minions.So Aralorn, aided by her enigmatic

companion, Wolf, join the growing rebellion against the ae'Magi. But in a war against an enemy armed with the powers of illusion, how do you know who the true enemy is or where he will strike next?

**Extrait Prologue**

The wolf stumbled from the cave, knowing that someone was searching for him and he couldn't protect himself this time. Feverish and ill, his head throbbing so hard that it hurt to move, he couldn't pull his thoughts together. After all this time, after all of his preparations, he was going to be brought down by an illness. The searcher's tendrils spread out again, brushing across him without recognition or pause. The Northlands were rife with wild magic which is why other magic couldn't work correctly here. The searcher looked for a wizard and would never notice the wolf who concealed the man in its shape unless the fever betrayed him. He should lie low, it was the best defense; but he was so afraid, and his illness clogged his thoughts. Death didn't frighten him; he sometimes thought he had come here seeking it. He was more afraid he wouldn't die, afraid of what he would become. Perhaps the one who looked for him was just idly hunting but when he felt a third sweep, he knew it was unlikely. He must have given himself away somehow. He'd always known that he would be found one day. He'd just never thought it would be when he was so weak. He fought to blend better with the form he'd taken, to lose himself in the wolf. He succeeded. The fourth sizzle of magic, the searcher's magic, was too much for the wolf. The wolf was a simpler creature than the mage who hid within him. If he was frightened, he attacked or ran. There was no one here to attack, so he ran. It wasn't until the wolf was tired that he could gather his humanity that was a laugh, his humanity well then, he gathered himself together and stopped running. His ribs ached with the force of his breath and the tough pads of his feet were cut by stones and an occasional crystal of ice from a land where the sun would never completely melt winter's gift. He was shivering though he felt hot, feverish. He was sick. He couldn't keep running and it wasn't only the wolf who craved escape because running wasn't escape, not from what he fled. He closed his eyes, but that didn't keep his head from throbbing in time with his pounding pulse. If he wasn't going to die out here, he would have to find shelter. Someplace warm, where he could wait and recover. He was lucky he'd come south, and it was high summer. If it had been winter, his only chance would have been to return to the caves he'd run from. A pile of leaves under a thicket of aspen caught his attention. If they were deep enough to be dry underneath, they would do for shelter. He headed downhill and started for the trees. There was no warning. The ground simply gave out from under him so fast he was lying ten feet down on a pile of rotted stakes before he realized what had happened. It was an old pit trap. He started to get up and realized that he hadn't been as lucky as he thought. The stakes had snapped when he hit them, but so had his rear leg. Perhaps if he hadn't already been so sick, so tired, he could have done something. He'd long ago learned how to set pain aside while he used his magic. But, though he tried, he couldn't distance himself from it this time, not while his body shivered with fever. Without magic, with a broken leg, he was trapped. The rotting stakes meant no one was watching the pit no one to free him or kill him quickly. So he would die slowly. That was all right because he didn't want to be free so much as he didn't want to be caught. This was a trap, but it wasn't his trap. Perhaps, the wolf thought, as his good legs collapsed again, perhaps it would be good not to run anymore. The ground was cold and wet underneath him, and the flush of heat from fever and the frantic journey drained into the chill of his surroundings. He shivered with cold and pain and waited patiently; even happily, for death to come and take him. "If you go to the Northlands in the summer you might avoid snowstorms, but you get mud." Aralorn, Staff Page, Runner, and Scout for the Sixth Field Hundred, kicked a rock, which arced into the air and landed with an unsatisfactory splut just ahead of her on the mucky trail. It wasn't a real trail. If it hadn't led from the village directly to the well-used camping spot her unit was currently stopped at, she'd have called it a deer trail and suspected that human feet had never trod it. "I could have told them that," she said. "But no one asked me." She took another step, and her left boot sank six inches down into a patch that looked just like the bit before it that had held her weight just fine. She pulled her foot out and shook it, trying unsuccessfully to get the thick mud off. When she started walking again, her mud-coated boot weighed twice what her right boot did. "I suppose," she said in resigned tones as she squelched along, "training isn't supposed to be fun, and sometimes we have to fight in the mud. But there's mud in warmer places. We could go hunting Uriah in the old Great Swamp. That would be good training and useful, but no one would pay us. Mercenaries can't possibly be useful without someone paying us. So we're stuck literally in the case of our supply wagons practicing maneuvers in the cold mud." Her sympathetic audience sighed and butted her with his head. She rubbed her horse's gray cheekbone under the leather straps of his bridle. "I know, Sheen. We could get there in an hour if we hurry but I see no sense in encouraging stupid behavior." One of the supply wagons was so bogged down in mud that it had broken an axle when they tried to pull it out. Aralorn had been sent out to the nearest village

to have a smith repair the damage because the smith they'd brought with them had broken his arm trying to help get the wagon out. That there had been a nearby village was something of a surprise out in the Northland though they weren't very deep into them. That village had probably been why the mercenary troops had been sent to practice where they were instead of twenty miles east or west. The mended axle was tied lengthwise onto the left side of Sheen's saddle, with a weighted bag tied to the opposite stirrup to balance the load. It made riding awkward, which was why Aralorn was walking. Part of the reason, anyway. "If we get to camp too early, our glorious and inexperienced captain will be ordering the wagon repaired right away. He'll send us out from a fairly good campsite to march for another few miles until the sun sets and we'll be looking for another reasonable place to camp all night." The captain was a good sort, and would be a fine leader eventually. But right now he was pretty set on proving his mettle and so lost to common sense. He needed to be managed properly by someone with a little more experience. "If I don't arrive with the axle until it's dark, then he'll have to wait to move out until dawn," she told Sheen. "With daylight, it won't take long to fix the wagon, and we'll all get a good night's sleep. You and I can trot the last half mile or so, just enough to raise a light sweat and claim it was the smith who took so long." Her warhorse jerked his head up abruptly. He snorted, his nostrils fluttering as he sucked air and flattened his ears at whatever his nose was telling him. Aralorn thumbed off the thong that kept her sword in its sheath and looked around carefully. It wasn't just a person he'd have alerted her to that with a twitch of his ear. The scent of blood might have called her horse's battle training to the fore, she thought, or maybe he sensed some sort of predator. This was the Northlands, after all; there were bears, wolves, and a few other things large enough to cause Sheen's upset. The gray stallion whinnied a shrill challenge that was likely to be heard for miles around. She could only hope that her captain didn't hear it. Whatever Sheen sensed, it was in the aspen grove just uphill from where they stood. It was also, apparently, in no hurry to attack them since nothing answered Sheen's call: no return challenge, not even a rustle. She could go on past. Likely, if it hadn't come out yet, it wasn't going to. But what was the fun in that? She dropped Sheen's reins on the ground. He'd stand until she came back at least until he got hungry. Aralorn drew her knife and crept into the thicket of aspen. He heard her talking and smelled the horse without moving. He'd heard them come by earlier, too, or he thought so anyway. The horse put up a fuss this time because the wind that ruffled the leaves of the aspen would have brought him the wolf's scent. He waited for them to leave. Tonight, he thought hopefully. Tonight would be the third night he'd spent here, maybe it would be the last. But part of him knew better, knew just how long it took for a body to die of thirst or of hunger. He was too strong yet. It would be tomorrow, at the soonest. He'd distracted himself with the hope of death, and only the sound of the woman's feet told him that she'd approached. He opened his eyes to see a sturdily built woman, plain of face except for her large sea-green eyes, leaning over the edge of the pit. She wore the uniform of the mercenaries, and there were calluses and mud on her hands. He didn't want to see her eyes, didn't want to feel interest in her at all. He only wanted her to leave him alone so he could die. "Plague them all," she said, her voice tight and angry. Then her voice softened to a croon. "How long have you been here, love?" The wolf recognized the threat of the knife she held as she slid down the far side of the pit to stand, one foot on either side of his hips. He growled, rolling off his side in preparation to get up because he'd forgotten he wanted to die. Just for a moment. He shook from exertion, sickness, and from the pain of moving his leg. He lay back down again and flattened his ears. "Shh," she crooned, inexplicably sheathing her knife in the face of his aggression. "Not so long as all that, apparently. Now what shall I do about you?" "Go away," he thought. He growled at her with as much threat as he could, feeling his lips peel back from his fangs and the hair rise along his spine. The expression on her face was not the one that he'd expected. Certainly not one any sane person would turn on a threatening wolf she was standing over. She should fear him. Instead; "Poor thing," she said in that same crooning tone. "Let's get you out of this, shall we?" She dropped her gaze away from his and knelt to examine his hips, humming softly as she moved closer. She didn't stink of fear, was all he could think. Everyone feared him. Everyone. Even Him, even the one who searched. She smelled of horse, sweat, and something sweet. No fear. He snarled, and she wrapped one hand over his muzzle. Sheer astonishment stopped his growls. Just how stupid was she? "Shh." The words blended into the music she was making, and he realized that her humming was pulling magic out of the ground around and beneath them. "Let me look." He was as surprised at himself as he was at her when he let her do just that. He could have torn out her throat or broken her neck while she examined every inch of him. But he didn't and he wasn't quite certain why not. It wasn't that killing her would bother him. He'd killed a lot of people. But that was before. He didn't want to do that anymore. So perhaps that was part of it. He knew she was trying to help him but he

didn't want help. He wanted to die. Her magic swept over and around him, cushioning him. The wolf whined softly and relaxed, leaving the mage in him fully in charge for the first time since the illness had hit. Maybe even longer ago than that. Her magic didn't work on the mage because he knew what it was and, he admitted to himself, because it wasn't coercive magic. He was mage enough to read her intent. She didn't want the wolf to become a lapdog but only to relax. But evidently helpful intent wasn't why he didn't kill her. Not the real reason. He hadn't been interested in anything in longer than he could remember, but she made him curious. He'd only ever met a practitioner of green magic, wild magic, once before. They hid from the humans in the land if there were any still left. But here was one wearing the clothes of a mercenary. She could pick him up which surprised him because she didn't weigh much more than he did. But she couldn't hoist him high enough to reach the edge of the trap, so she set him down again. "Going to need some help," she told him, and clambered to the top. She almost didn't make it out of the pit herself; if it had been round, she wouldn't have. When she departed and took her magic with her, it left him bereaved as if someone had covered him with a blanket, then removed it. And only when she left did he realize that her music had deadened his pain and soothed him, despite his being a mage on his guard against it. He heard the horse move and the sound of leather and something heavy hitting the ground. The horse approached the pit and stopped. When the mercenary who could do green magic hopped back into his almost grave, she had a rope in her hand. He waited for the wolf to stir as she tied him in a makeshift harness that somehow managed to brace his bad leg. But the wolf waited as meekly as a lamb while she worked. When he was trussed up to her satisfaction, she climbed back out. "Come on, Sheen," she told someone. Possibly, he thought, it was the horse. The trip out of the hole was not pleasant. He closed his eyes and let the pain take him where it would. When he lay on the ground at last, she untied him. Freed at last, he lay where he had fallen, too weak to run.

Maybe too curious as well. Chapter One Four Years Later Aralorn paced, her heart beating with nervous energy. It had seemed like a good idea at the time. She intended to sneak in as a servant she was good at being a servant, and people talked in front of servants as if they weren't there at all. But then there had been that slave girl, freshly sold to the very Geoffrey ae'Magi whose court Aralorn was supposed to infiltrate and observe; maybe if the slave girl hadn't had the gray-green eyes of the old races, eyes Aralorn shared, she wouldn't have given in to impulse. But it had been easy to free the girl and send her off with connections who would see her safely back to her home proof that though she had lived in Sianim all these years, Aralorn was still Rethian enough to despise slavery. It was even easier to use the magic of her mother's people to rearrange her body and her features to mimic the girl and take her place. She hadn't realized that slaves could be locked away until they were needed; she'd assumed she'd have work to do. It was well-known that the Archmage's passions were reserved for magic, and he seldom indulged in more fleshly pleasures. She'd figured that the girl had been purchased to do something not sit locked in a room for weeks. Aralorn had been just about ready to escape and try again using a different identity when she'd been brought up to the great hall of the ae'Magi's castle four days ago and put into the huge silver cage. "She's to be decoration for the ball," said the servant who put her in the cage in response to another servant's question. "It won't be for a week yet, but he wanted her here so he could see the decorations and her at the same time." Decoration. The ae'Magi had purchased a slave to decorate his great hall. It had seemed out of character for the Archmage, Aralorn had thought. It took more than power to become the ae'Magi. The man or woman who wore that mantle of authority was, in his peers' eyes, a person of unassailable virtue. Only such a one could be allowed the reins to control all of the mages at least all those west of the Great Swamp so there was never again a wizard war. Purchasing a person in order to use her as decoration seemed; petty for such a one as the ae'Magi. Or so she'd thought. Four days ago. Aralorn shivered. Her shoes made no sound on the marble beneath her feet, not that anyone would have been able to hear them over the music. Beyond the silver bars of her cage, the great hall of the ae'Magi's castle was resplendent. By reputation, if not fact, the room was nearly a thousand years old, kept beautiful by good maintenance and judicious replacement rather than magic. Though this room was the heart of the ae'Magi's home, by tradition, no magic was to be done here. This was the place the rulers of men conducted business with the ae'Magi, and the lack of magic proved to one and all that there was no magical coercion taking place. Aralorn now knew that the current ae'Magi didn't particularly care about following tradition, and coercion was something he used; on everyone. That first day, she'd been shocked when the stone beneath her feet vibrated with magic. She looked out at the room. Ten centuries old, or at least ten centuries of care and careful preservation by the finest craftsmen available. And the ae'Magi had saturated the stone with magic. No one would think to check, would they? And if they did, they'd just suspect another ae'Magi, an earlier one, because Geoffrey ae'Magi would never

defy tradition. This evening it was lavishly decorated for the pleasure of the people who danced lightly across the floor. Late-afternoon rays of sunlight streamed through the tear-shaped crystal skylights etched on the soaring ceilings. Pale pillars dripped down to the highly polished ivory-colored marble floor that reflected the jewel-like colors of the dancers' clothing. Aralorn's cage sat on a raised platform on the only wall of the room that lacked a doorway. From that perch, she could observe the whole room and be observed in return. Or rather they could see the illusion that the ae'Magi had placed on the cage. Instead of the tall, white-blond woman that the ae'Magi had purchased to decorate his great hall with her extraordinary beauty, observers would see a snowfalcon as rare and beautiful, the ae'Magi had told her, as his slave, but not so controversial. Some people, he'd told her, licking blood off his hands, disliked slavery, and he disliked controversy. He'd decorated the room around his slave for his own amusement. Disguising her as a rare predator was simply a joke played upon the people who'd come here for entertainment. A chime sounded, announcing new visitors. Aralorn hugged herself as the ae'Magi greeted his guests with a warm smile. He'd smiled that same smile last night while he'd killed a young boy and stolen his magic. The stone floor had been red with blood, but it wiped up cleanly, and only someone able to sense magic might notice the pall that unclean death had left. Or not. The ae'Magi was the lord of mages, after all, and they could only use their powers to the extent he allowed. She was scaring herself again that was really not useful at all. Biting her lip, Aralorn gazed at the dancing nobles in an effort to distract herself. She matched names and countries to the dancers' faces with the ease that made her the valuable spy she was. The ae'Magi had killed an old man, an old man without a spark of magic human or green about him and used the power of the death to turn the walls of the great hall a sparkling white. "Not an illusion," he'd told her. "It takes more power, and I don't like to use my own when I might need it at any time." That had been the first night. On the second, he'd brought a man one of his own guardsmen. With that blood, the ae'Magi had worked some magic so foul that the taste of it lingered on Aralorn's skin still. The boy had been the worst. Only a child, and; Dozens of the rulers of the kingdoms of the Anthran Alliance were present. Some of them had been members of the Alliance for centuries, others were newer than that. The Empress of the Alliance wasn't here, but she was six, and her guardians kept a sharp eye on her lest any of her subjects decided to make her cousin the new empress instead. Just because they were allied didn't mean they were loyal subjects. The squabbles among the Alliance helped keep the coffers of Sianim full. Gradually, she managed to replace the boy's dead eyes with dates and politics, but she still paced her cage restlessly. It wasn't just the horror of her discovery of exactly what kind of man held the power of the ae'Magi that kept her from sitting down it was fear. The ae'Magi scared her to death. *Revue de presse* Entertaining. Locus Many enjoyable aspects of the world-building and characters to savour. And a sweet and touching tentative romance. Urban Fantasy Book s