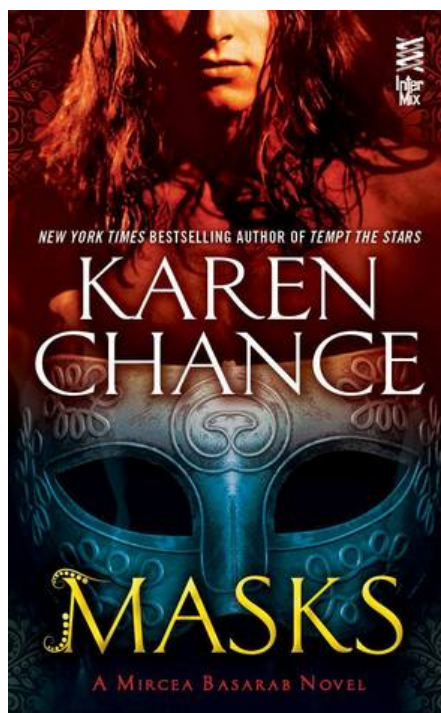




Masks

Karen Chance

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Masks

Karen Chance

Masks Karen Chance

Fifteenth century Venice is a safe haven for the masterless dregs of the vampire world, a city where they can live without the fear of retribution for violating another's territory.

Still, there are plenty of ways for a young vampire to die in the glittering city, a lesson that prince turned pauper Mircea Basarab must learn quickly. But there are opportunities, too—in the service of a secretive courtesan, in the bed of a beautiful senator, and in the hunt for an ancient assassin.

As a vendetta older than Venice itself comes to a climax, Mircea struggles to evade the dangers of his current life, to come to terms with his past, and to uncover the truth hidden behind a city of masks...

Masks Details

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Author : Karen Chance

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From Reader Review Masks for online ebook

Fangs for the Fantasy says

Mircea Basarab is a vampire who readers of Chance's Cassandra Palmer series are well acquainted with. In *Masks*, Mircea is no longer the confidant, powerful centuries old vampire whom we have come to know. *Masks* travels back to fifteenth century Europe where Mircea is a newborn vampire, trying to adjust to his new undead life. Even though Mircea is powerless relative to the courtesan who owns him, the senator who is intrigued by him. Though she has bigger fish to fry dealing with a consul who has most certainly gone mad. There are certainly good and bad vampires but when powerful vampires with unknown goals, grievances and priorities take interest in a newborn, it can be a dangerous thing, as Mircea is about to find out.

I have read all of the Cassandra Palmer's World and so when I learned about *Masks*, I jumped quickly on this book. To see a different side to Mircea, was a huge hook for me. Though Mircea doesn't know much about what it means to be a vampire, he really isn't that different than the character we have come to know. He continues to be confidant in his abilities and hyper aware of the world around him. Even though Mircea is essentially a slave and a prostitute, he eschews this label and instead sees himself as a free man in a precarious situation.

Chance doesn't go as far as to give us an origin story for vampires but she does widen the world by telling us of the different ways in which a vampire can be made and the various talents they are capable of. This means that you cannot take any of the characters at face value. It's a constant game of politics.

Being a former Prince, Mircea is a vampire with a lot of preconceived notions. He thinks about the castles, power and wealth that he lost and it is not until he meets Bezio that his perspective on the world really changes. Chance uses Bezio, a former farmer made vampire against his will to discuss class poignantly. To the poor, powerless person, it doesn't matter who is going rule because it essentially will not change their day to day life. Chance also uses Bezio to talk about loss. Mircea grieved for all of his worldly losses but it was Bezio who points out that as a poor man, he didn't lose any less; it was just valued less because he is poor. One's home, one's family and one's identity is sometimes all someone has and that is worth something. I loved their discussions and how it taught Mircea to look at power and identity differently. I do however feel that some of the good work was undone with Marta and her revenge. Poverty exists because of an imbalance and greed and the way her storyline ended made it seem as though she was not entitled to her rage for the wrongs done her.

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Cathy says

I thought it was going to be a short story and it turned out to be a book, so I'm rounding up a little for the effort that went into writing it. But it wasn't really my cup of tea. A lot of that length was an excuse to write sex scenes that I wasn't interested in, I barely knew this Mircea and didn't feel a connection to him, I never got a sense of the compelling man that I knew from the other novels. I certainly didn't feel connected to the strangers he was with, it didn't do anything for me. But sexy books aren't my thing these days, others might enjoy it more. The general idea of showing what motivates Mircea, and some of the other major vampire

players, was fine, I just don't know that it actually needed 400 pages. The parts about the super creepy consul and the senators, the action and politics, were all pretty good because it mattered to the overall story arc, it mattered to who Mircea became in the long run and how the vampire world developed, plus the characters were well drawn and more compelling. The parts about Mircea being a slave were less successful. I see that it also mattered as to his motivation long-term, but it didn't work very well because Mircea, the center of the story, was the least successful character in the book. I got who Jerome was, Bezio was crystal clear, but Mircea was a cypher, I couldn't picture him as anything distinct other than some random princeling with good manners. I knew a lot of things that had happened to him and what he thought about them, but there was nothing about him that was any different than any other guy in the world from a reader's perspective. He had no sense of humor or wit or sarcasm or anything that made him be different from the guy in a hundred of other books I could pick up. He was just a boring former prince. So, it was a free book, it was interesting to see how Chance imagined Mircea got his start as a vampire and what motivates a lot of his actions. It was also interesting to see what she imagines to be the foundation for a lot of the current the political structure and the current political players in the vampire world. It's always interesting to put the pieces together between the past and present when authors give you pieces of the puzzle over many books and in this case also different series to fit together as well. Dory made a rather adorable appearance at the end of the book that fans of her series should definitely enjoy. It was fun but not great.

Cass says

4,5/5

Anna Wick says

I loved well written prequel stories and this is one of the best. Mircea is such a wonderful character and his friends are so crazy and fun.

Angela says

Was going to be a freebie short story, turned into something much longer...

Read Karen's post here for more info on its release.

As for Masks, Penguin plans to bring it out as an e-book special. No, they haven't told me when. I will post an update whenever they do. If it does well as an e-book, they may bring it out in paperback, but that's not the plan right now. No audio. That is all I know.

Noodle TheNaughtyNightOwl says

9/10: *Fantastic, left me wanting more.*

I am utterly surprised that I liked this so much. Which is a strange thing for me to say, because I *love* Karen Chance.

But the third person perspective, (not my preferred), the historical aspect, (I've shelved this under historical-romance, but it's not a romance, I just can't be bothered making a new shelf just for this - historical is also not my bag, baby!), the fact that there was no Cassie & we had a Mircea without power, ignorant of vampires, and nowhere near a Senator - all the things I love about The Cassie Palmer Series - made me think this wouldn't go down well.

No need to worry, this *is* Karen Chance we're talking about and she does not let us down.

It reeled me in and took me for a ride. I adored it. I fell for the side characters, wished I could follow their story some more. Even found a less manipulating Mircea intriguing, if not the alpha male I've come to love. It was an eye opener in any case.

Well done Karen Chance. Wonderful insight into Mircea & yet another wonderfully well written book.

Yes, it's not free as promised, but heck yes it's worth purchasing. Don't deny yourself this opportunity to see a different Mircea just because Karen's publishers are prats. Well worth the read.

All Things Urban Fantasy says

Review courtesy of All Things Urban Fantasy.

While I'd have to go back and read all of Karen Chance's books again to be sure, I am pretty sure MASKS is my favorite. I always loved Mircea as a character and been disappointed when he was fairly absent in the last Cassandra Palmer book, and the opportunity to have a book devoted all to him was pretty awesome.

To be perfectly honest, it took me a while to really get into Karen Chance's writing. I started with Cassie's series, but it took Dory's series and a second try at Cassie before I really started to enjoy them, so I was a little worried about the possibility that I wasn't going to enjoy MASKS. Sure, it stars Mircea, a character who appears in both series, but MASKS is also a historical paranormal, and stars Mircea from way back before he's a master (which for me was a large part of his appeal, the power) – it could have fallen really flat. Not to mention the idea started out as a freebie novella. Luckily, MASKS totally worked for me. Now, I'm just upset that we don't have more to read about Mircea's back story.

My one complaint was that at times, the sheer number of characters was a bit overwhelming. I suppose I should be used to it, since it's not as if Cassie's books ever skimp on people, but since this is a stand-alone, there obviously isn't going to be the investment in each individual that you'll get in a series. Otherwise, I loved reading about the vampire politics, and Mircea as a newly created vampire was a wonder. His thinking seemed so much different than his thinking now, and it was fascinating to get inside his head, since that's one place I always want to be in the Cassie series. Not to mention the action, mystery, and relationships (Mircea's friendships especially) that keep the plot moving along and make sure the reader is always occupied.

For a fan of the Cassandra Palmer and Dorina Basarab series, MASKS is a must-read. While not perfect, it is an awesome addition to the world, and gives some great back-story of a main character and vampire politics as we know them from their modern day counterparts. Even if you aren't a fan, I think MASKS offers plenty for you. Since it's back-story, this isn't like jumping in at the middle of the series, and like I said, the story

moves along at quite a clip, so readers not familiar with Mircea should find it interesting while they're getting to know him. If you're curious, I would definitely try it out – and have Dory's books on order, because I'm confident you'll want to move directly to them.

Sexual Content: Several sex scenes, scenes with sexual actions and dubious consent

Sara says

See the main blurb for a plot summary.

What I liked:

An earlier look at Mircea before centuries of being a politician. It was nice to see a less guarded and manipulative Mircea.

A nice, ensemble of new characters and appearances of favorites from the main series.

The original consul - A very creepy, scary, and extremely powerful individual.

The bad guy - The individual had a very understandable, justifiable reason for wanting the target of their vengeance dead. Unfortunately, in their vendetta they became as callous and indifferent as their target.

The epilogue - It showcased my favorite side of Mircea.

No Cassie. I like Cassie but I didn't want a time travel story I wanted a Mircea story and that's what I got.

What I didn't like:

No Radu! I love that crazy, flamboyant man.

Warning, vague sort-of spoiler ahead...

It's not a dislike but I found it sad that the book ends with Mircea making the decision to not let his vampirism from obtaining something he wants more than anything else - but he makes the decision too late to have a positive outcome.

Highly, highly recommended for any Mircea or Basarab fans.

Lannister says

Masks is the story of a young Mircea Basarab, as he washes up in Venice a couple of years after becoming vampire.

Mircea is my favourite Karen Chance character. He's incredibly well-developed, with a depth that's often lacking within the 'sexy vampire' UF trope, though you have to read both the Cassie and Dory series to truly appreciate the different aspects of his personality. I was keen to get my hands on this book in the hope that I could figure out just what makes him tick.

Mircea of modern times is powerful, wealthy, stylish and assured. 15th century Mircea is starving, bedraggled and in jail at the start of the novel. All the older vamps in KC's books have stories to tell, and often these stories involve regret, loss and ill-treatment, and Mircea's tale is no different. Our former prince spends some of the book musing on how misfortune and sorrow are no respectors of rank or class. It's not all bitter introspection, though. Mircea is a survivor, after all. And some of the things he does to survive left me a little shocked, yes, shocked! And giggling furiously!

I think the book has a slightly different feel to the Cassie and Dory series. Whilst there are action scenes, they don't have the frenetic pace of the Cassie books. Nor is there much of the wise-cracking that pops up in the Dory series. Instead we get to see Mircea struggle to come to terms with his situation and find a way forward. There's a secondary plot involving power plays among the vampire rulers, with a few familiar faces popping up, and I liked the contrast of seeing Mircea floundering with the weakest, instead of in his usual position amongst the elite.

So, after finishing, do I have Mircea all figured out? Sadly not. There are still huge gaps in his backstory that I'd love to be filled. Can we have another two or three prequels please, KC?

Eldarwen says

A young Mircea - now that was very different from how I've gotten to know him in the other books. I didn't expect him to be that hilarious in his younger days hehe.

The story itself was a bit confusing at times what with all the back and forth but it was an enjoyable read and I would happily read a few more stories like this one set in between the end of this particular book and the beginning of the Cassie series. There is a looot more to tell after all.

Also there are a handful of characters I wouldn't mind getting to know better to hear more about their stories and what has become of them in later years.

Claire says

I actually read this book several years ago, and while looking for the upcoming Dorina Basarb novel realized I had not marked it as 'read' for some reason.

Masks is an excellent story. In the main Cassie Palmer series, we get to learn a little bit about Mircea's history: that he fled to Venice as a newly turned vampire, seeking refuge. Masks delves into that time period.

It's fascinating because of the detail Chance put into the research: Medieval Venice really comes to life. I could really almost "see" the details of the book in my imagination as Chance described lavish palazzos and elaborate costumes.

The story also had the effect of endearing Mircea to me. In the main series we see him completely in control: he is suave and manipulative and will stop at nothing to get what he really wants. But here, Mircea is still a young man trying to get back on his feet. This story throws him off balance, and it highlights how adaptable and quick-witted he is.

It also explains a lot of his current personality: Mircea back then was totally helpless, at the mercy of the older and more powerful vampires in the city. In a way he was even worse off than some human inhabitants, because he had no way of earning a living in the human world. The things Mircea is forced to do to support himself must have driven home the need to always be independent, especially when his 'work' takes him inside the home of wealthier vampires and he sees what power can buy him. Incidentally, we also meet the young Consul in this book. Turns out she and Mircea go way back, which explains her conflicting attitude toward him in the main series: she trusts him, because of how long she has known him, but she is afraid of him because she has seen exactly how crafty Mircea can be.

This book takes place entirely out of the main series' continuity. You don't really need to know anything about the other characters for this to make sense. However some of the world-building, like how the vampire hierarchy works, only takes place in the main series. So this probably isn't your best entry point into Chance's work because you will be seeing some crucial background information.

That being said: if you only read the Cassie books, or you only read the Dory books, Masks will still make sense to you.

Lynsey (A Bookish Life) says

The Masks We Wear

A whole book from Mircea's POV? *le sigh* Is there a more dignified, refined, sophisticated man on the face of the fictional planet? I think not. And even here, in his humble vampiric beginnings, during the rags phase of his riches-to-rags-and-back-to-riches-again story, he was still the Mircea we know and love. Yay!

MASKS is kind of everything you're thinking it's going to be, and a bit more besides. Yes, I missed the mad-cap narration of my girl Cassie. Yes, I missed all the regular Cassandra Palmer World peeps. But Mircea is, in my opinion, Chance's most well-crafted creation. I would never accuse an author of playing favourites - I mean, my goodness, it would be like picking your favourite kid, surely - but if the time and effort spent establishing a character is any indication of favour, then... he's totally hers!

So what is MASKS about? Well, it's set 2 years after Mircea was cursed with vampirism. Long enough for him to get a grip on his initial uncontrollable urges, but not long enough to establish any kind of position within the vampire world. As a masterless vampire, Mircea is easy pickings for anyone in search of a new plaything. So he, and his trusty, still-currently-human tutor, Horatiu, head to Venice, a supposedly "free" area and haven for masterless or abandoned young vamps. Or that's what it said on the brochure, anyway. Unfortunately for Mircea, it seems they used a fair bit of poetic license with that word "free"...

You may notice the page count here. 400-some pages. This is most certainly not novella length or novella-like in its plotting. It's well-crafted and exciting, just like all KC's other books. It does have a completely

different tone, thanks to it being from Mircea's POV, but I really feel like, having read, it, I understand his character, and also his relationship with the consul, a whole lot better. So it's absolutely worth a read for that sneak peak alone. And aside from that, it's just a good read. I suppose it could be read as a stand alone, but I'm not sure I would recommend it. Better for fans of the series to use it to meet the "real Mircea", than for new readers to try and sample the Cassandra Palmer series via this entry, because, like I said, the tone is so completely different from all the other books, it wouldn't be a good indicator of what's to come.

A suave and elegant 4 Stars ★★★★★

A copy of this book was provided by the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Exina says

2.5 stars

Masks is the long-awaited story of Mircea Basarab, one of the main characters of the *Cassandra Palmer* series by Karen Chance.

As Mircea is a hero I definitely want for myself, **my expectations were high**. I expected to learn about his background story: his life as a human, his *Change*, and his years until he had become one of the most influential and powerful vampire senators.

Instead of this, **the story covers a short period of his early life as a vampire which he had spent in Venice, in the fifteenth century**. It was two years after his *Change*, when he was still mourning his human life, was still suffering from his losses: home, family, and a possible future.

All he wanted to know was that this pain, this longing, this terrible guilt he felt every time he thought about the past, was going to lessen, perhaps one day to stop. All he wanted was a reason to go on.

Through 70% of the story I was persistent, I really was. I love Mircea, and I wanted to love his book so much. But I just skimmed the last 30% because **I lost interest, patience, and all my goodwill**.

In one sentence, it was boring as hell.

First, a significant part of the story is like a 15th century **travelogue of Venice**. Both the atmosphere and the physical beauty of Venice were depicted meticulously. But enough is enough!

Second, not only Venice, but everything else, such as cloths, masks (of course), fabrics, cosmetics, even types of candies were **unmercifully detailed**.

While I enjoyed as Mircea slowly accepts his new situation, and learns about the nature of vampires, their rules, laws, etiquette, customs, politics, and power relations, the repetition of his thoughts exhausted me.

Eventually he realizes that he is the same man as he was before: his intelligence, morals, and confidence survived the *Change*. He is still a fighter, still a leader.

The **erotic scenes** were the most remarkable parts of the story thanks to Ms. Chance's **sensual and vibrant** descriptions.

The dialogues were slow, and often irrelevant, the plot couldn't capture my interest. Scenes and chapters ended abruptly, making the story hard to follow and enjoy. **The epilogue was sweet**, with his daughter Dorina, but still lots of things remained in shadow.

Masks has its moments, and some meaningful thoughts, but overall it left me unsatisfied.

My favorite quotes on Tumblr.

Originally posted on my blog on April 11, 2014.

Ferdy says

2.5 stars - Spoilers

Not bad, not great either. I was expecting more action and revelations instead of boring inner monologuing, irritating dialogue, and a mystery of sorts that I didn't really care about.

-What's what: Mircea's POV, all about his early years as a vampire in Venice.

-The story was rather slow for the most part, there were so many dragged out scenes. Things only really kicked off in the last few chapters. Most of the book was just Mircea learning about vampires, vampire politics, and how to be a whore. I found the majority of it pointless.

-I did somewhat enjoy seeing Mircea as a young, idealistic, and clueless vampire. It was so very different from the manipulative and powerful Mircea of the main novels. Even though it was quite interesting getting some backstory on Mircea, I would have preferred to read about Mircea and his family or Mircea's rise to power or more of Mircea/Dorina's early relationship. Reading about Mircea as a very young vampire was like reading about a totally different character... So at times it felt as if I was reading about some random character I didn't know or care about.

-Most of the secondary characters annoyed me. I didn't really like any of them... Jerome was an idiot, Paula was annoying, Bezio was dull, the Senate was boring. Antony and Auria were entertaining characters though, they both seemed quite layered whereas the others were just blah. I was confused about Antony and Cleo/the Senate - I don't remember there being any hint of a romantic relationship between them before. Also, I'm fairly sure Antony was just a Senate member and not a consul in the main novels. I really wish the characters in this hadn't featured such minor characters from the two main series, it just left me questioning who was who and what was what.

-The mystery with Sanuita wasn't all that interesting, it was pretty obvious who the bad guy was. The whole Marta/Sanuita/venom/antidote thing was kind of confusing, it was all rather convoluted.

-Was I meant to feel sorry for Mircea in regard to the whole Elena situation? Yea, right. Mircea couldn't have loved Elena (his wife/Dorina's mum) all that much since he pretty much forgot about her. Not only that, he got all passionate and crazy for someone else a mere 2 years after being separated from her. Then there were

all the other girls he flirted with and lusted after, he didn't spare a thought for his poor faithful wife. Why didn't he ever check to see if she was okay or if she needed help? He didn't give a fuck about her. His love for her was so mundane and weak, he barely remembered her and was able to move on from her with other women and it hadn't even been that long since he'd left her. It seemed like he had more of a connection and affection for Horatiu (his old servant) than he did his wife. I bet Elena was faithful to Mircea and grieved for him until she died whereas he was getting all randy for any woman he so much as laid his eyes on... I very much doubt she got all lusty and hot and bothered about other men. Ugh.

-I really hope Elena isn't somehow saved by Cassie so that she can be reunited with Mircea in the future. Mircea has had loads of relationships, love, and adventures without her... There would be no point in her being with him since he's moved on perfectly fine without her. She just wouldn't be important or special to him considering how much of a rich life he's led without her presence. The only way they could work for me was if she was turned into a vampire shortly after he was and lived a good life full of passion and joy without him, that way they'd be equals. Otherwise, I hope she stays dead.

-The last chapter was the only thing that I found really interesting, it showed Mircea with a young Dorina and their interaction was great.

-It bugged me that Mircea mostly thought and spoke like someone in the present day instead of someone from centuries earlier.

-Did people really say 'saggy butt' and 'fuck that' and 'bragging rights' and 'asses' (as in arses and not donkeys/fools) in 1600s Venice?? Also, I doubt a woman would be described as cute in those days.

-The dialogue was annoying to get through at times, there were so many half finished or interrupted sentences. It was a tad ridiculous.

-Some parts were confusing and written poorly, especially the action scenes.

-The Venice setting was great.

All in all, I wasn't overly impressed. Dorina and Mircea's scene was brilliant but everything else ranged from rubbish to mediocre.

Sabrina says

Mar 20, 2014 (before reading)

Me haz it!

On my ADE reader, it has 349 pages. Even considering the front/back matters, that's longer than most books. Karen, you are awesome just for thinking to give this away for free!

Feb 14, 2014 (before reading)

What happened to this? It didn't even come out, and it has just vanished from the author's website.

Feb 20, 2014 (before reading)

There were some contractual issues with Penguin concerning this "too-lenghty" novella released for free. As

I understand it, it will come out in the next few months not as a self-pubbed freebie but as an ebook special for Penguin.

Here an explanation on KC's website: <http://www.karenchance.com/news/masks...>

KC has promised other free novellas in the future, so all is well that ends well :)
