

The Curse of the Brimstone Contract

Corrina Lawson

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Magic—and love—balanced on the tip of a needle...

The Steampunk Detectives, Book 1

Magic existed at the fringes until Prince Albert discovered he was a mage. Now he and others like him are leading a revolution in steam technology that's held tight in the grip of the upper classes.

A man of half-Indian heritage, rejected by his upper-crust, mage-gifted family, Gregor Sherringford lives in working-class London, investigating cases involving magic among the lower classes. But he's never met a client quite like spirited, stubborn Joan Krieger.

Joan's dream was to lead a fashion revolution designing women's clothing suited to the new technology. But when her richest client mysteriously dies outside her shop, it deals a mortal blow to her dreams.

She hopes the handsome, enigmatic detective can prove the death a magical murder. She never expected a dark plot would be woven right into the fabric of her family. Or that cracking the case will mean merging gifts, minds—and hearts—with the one man who could be her partner in every way. If they survive the release of a soul-binding curse.

Warning: This novel contains an intelligent, repressed detective and a woman who won't take no for an answer, not when she hires him...and not when she falls in love with him.

The Curse of the Brimstone Contract Details


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Author : Corrina Lawson

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From Reader Review The Curse of the Brimstone Contract for online ebook

Perry says

I liked it, anyone who follows Sherlock Holmes will enjoy this read. Pace is slow but steady and really enjoyed Joan and Gregor as the story progressed. Interesting premise, love the mix of steampunk and magic defining classes. The only reason I gave three stars instead of four is it needed a little something more to really grab you and drag you into the story. I would like to give a shout out to Corrina Lawson and thank her for the book, as I was a winner in the recent giveaway. Keep up the good work, and I look forward to the next adventure in the series. :)

Lila says

Prior release of this book I read this interesting post author made and I was sold after reading one particular line:

"Gregor Sherringford, the hero of Curse of the Brimstone Contract, is my steampunk Batman. He was obviously inspired by the Dark Knight but also by Sherlock Holmes, as played by Benedict Cumberbatch in the new Sherlock television show."

This combo?

This has to be the best combo ever.

Made of awesome.

Now, I already love to read steampunk, but when you tell me something like that, geek in me can't contain herself.

And she has expectations.

So, what's up with rating?

Well, check that line about expectations. They were not met.

First thing is the fact that entire novel is told from Joan's pov, who is heroine of this story. Joan is a female clothes designer, but dressmaking is a family business. Her father just died and they are struggling to keep rich customers, since they had an unfortunate incident where one man strangled himself with cravat they made.

When their only customer and chance for earning some money ends up in similar fashion, Joan suspected their clothes pieces were spelled and the only man who can help her is Gregor Sherringford, lord with mixed heritage and uncanny gift for solving mysteries.

I really liked the setting, origins of magic that's running in Joan's family and the clothes was great. Plot was also interesting and fast paced... but if i haven't read that line in that post... I would like it better. I got into it expecting Gregor to bemore. I was wrong, this novel is Joan and she is truly a star. Gregor was great as a

romantic interest, but I reserve accolades for Joan. :)

Hm, one bit about writing I noticed and it bugged me a little was leading (sorry, lawyer in me). Every time heroine met, had an interaction with other man, she compared him with Gregor and that made him lacking. For example, if one man held her hand, she would notice his touch is sweaty and uncomfortable and then she would remember how Gregor held her hand and his touch was great and soft and comforting. We get it, Gregor is da bomb. :D

Anyway, fun read.

Elizabeth Eckert says

My first steampunk novel, I had no idea what to expect, and am not entirely sure if I know what steampunk is lol

However, this novel was quite delightful! Joan and Gregor are engaging characters who are easy to like.

The writing quality has great flow, intrigue and is void of any editing errors. The character descriptions are great and I liked the toe-dip in what could turn out to be an interesting romance. I found the ending was very well done and not what I expected!

Overall, a wonderful novel!!

Darla Stokes says

Absolutely wonderful. Mixing magic, Sherlock Holmes, and a strong, intelligent heroine makes for an entertaining, page-turning read. I particularly enjoyed the combination of mythology, Holmes canon, and originality.

Very different from Lawson's other books, but she never disappoints.

Maya says

I spent an afternoon ignoring what I was supposed to be doing and devouring this book. It is a super fun roller coaster ride in a richly developed world filled with magic and Victorian influenced politics (this is Steampunk after all!).

The story centers around Joan Krieger, a talented dress designer who wants to revolutionize women's fashion. She finds herself and her family business embroiled in controversy because a rich client died while wearing one of her designs and the culprit just be magic infused clothing. The company is in financial difficulty and Joan was counting on the recently deceased client for good word of mouth to increase business but instead they find themselves in even greater difficulty. The only way to save the company might be for Joan to marry a wealthy man which isn't exactly her first choice.

Joan turns to Gregor Sherringford, an enigmatic detective, for help to find out what is going on and if indeed there is something untoward happening at her family shop.

I loved the diverse characters. Joan is Jewish and this is very important to the story. Gregor is bi racial, he is half Southeast Asian (Indian). This appealed to me as I'm of Indian heritage (my parents emigrated in to the United States in the late 1950s). I confess I always hold my breath when I'm reading about Indian characters because I worry it'll descend in to stereotype. This was not the case here.

Granted, Gregor was somewhat of a black box and I didn't feel that we got to know him as well as I was hoping but then again he was meant to be a mystery. Meanwhile, my husband is of Jewish heritage and my children bi-racial, so I really felt a kinship to the characters on a deeper level than I usually do.

That said, as I mentioned, I didn't feel that we got in to Gregor's head the way we did Joan's which for me made the romance between them seem a little rushed. They definitely had chemistry which came through in their scenes, I just felt that (view spoiler)

The world building and the mystery are top notch and a lot of fun. I love that Joan saves herself more often than not. She is a strong heroine worth rooting for.

I'm really looking forward to the next chapter in this story.

Melindeeloo says

3.5 stars = I liked it. Seamstress Joan Krieger is on the verge of success, her patroness loves Joan's radical new votwing designs and is about to take the new driving outfit for a whirl when tragedy strikes and an the unfortunate accident occurs involving one of the accessories. But having witnessed the event with her own eyes Joan believes that magic is involved and determined to fund the truth, Joan approaches consulting detective Gregory Sherringford in hopes of saving her family business, which is now on the verge of ruin.

I missed all the Sherlockian 'nods' when I read Curse of the Brimstone Contact - apparently Sherringford was the eldest Holmes brother, and Moran who is a watchdog for magical misuse here) was Moriarty's right hand man. Recognizing that time in might have popped this up another notch for me having been a fan of the stories when I was a tadpole. Still I thought the story was pretty good, I liked Joan and thought it was interesting having a leading lady of Jewish heritage in that time period and I liked how the villain was tied to that heritage. There was potential in the Holmesian Sherringford, but he and the thin touch of romance weren't really developed well enough at this point, though this was just the first book so that was not a deal breaker for me and I'll likely give this magic/steam punk/detective series another shot.

On a side note, I really like the cover for this and noticed that others from the same photo shoot are gracing the fronts of many other books in this genre. Two of my favorites are:

I went all geek girl looking for the rest on the web, if you are curious here's a link to my search for the cool steam punk pics by Andrey Kiselev

Dorothea Lynne says

The Curse of the Brimstone Contract was my first introduction to a steampunk novel. I really enjoyed it. It was a fun read. I think the author created a wonderful balance between fantasy, mystery and romance. The characters were well written. Joan was my favorite. I loved that she was a strong woman in that time period. I enjoyed the ending and look forward to more. If you are looking for a fun, unique read...check this novel out.

Sharon Price says

Steam punk in nature, this book reminds one of a Jules Verne meets Sherlock Holmes. No explicit sex. Meets and in a few instances, exceeds the conventional expectations of the genre. A good introduction for Young Adult readers. Just misses being predictable in nature. If the story is important and you prefer no explicit sex in your books, this is the book for you. Do not be put off by the fact that it is published by Samhain Publishing.

C.A. King says

Steampunk... hmmm... I have to admit I don't read a lot of it. I actually think this is my second. I have to admit that is mainly because I never fully understood the hype around the genre. Having said that, I found Lawson's version a wake up call. I have been guilty of genre neglect based on my own preconceived notions on what was to be expected.

The Curse of the Brimstone Contract: The Steampunk Detectives, Book 1 is an amazing world filled with magic and mystery I am glad I didn't miss. Joan is an amazingly woman who gives readers a strong female lead in a Victorian setting.

This author's writing style simply clicked with me and is now in my must read all by list. 4.5/5

Riley says

Mystery, magic, adventure and romance mixed to precise and perfect proportions make Corrina Lawson's *The Curse of the Brimstone Contract* one of my new favorites.

Steampunk is one of my genres of choice. So I am always on the lookout for a something new in that classification. *The Curse of the Brimstone Contract* fits the bill very nicely. Steam power makes machines run in 19th century London. But magic makes the wheels of commerce turn. Only the upper class possesses mage power and the nobility will do everything to ensure it stays that way.

Joan Krieger is the merchant seamstress who aspires to design trend-setting fashions and is on her way to getting a rich client to endorse her latest design. But her client dies under mysterious circumstances. When it

appears the cause of the death may have been magical, the family business comes under suspicion. It seems that Joan's prospects are dashed and her family's business is doomed.

Needing to know the truth about the suspicious death, Joan hires Gregor Sherringford to help her find the facts. Gregor is aloof, intelligent and seems to command a little magic himself. But his true genius is revealed when he recognizes Joan's quick mind and determined nature and agrees to team up with her.

There are many things I liked about *The Curse of the Brimstone Contract*. But mainly I like the two main characters.

Having a seamstress as a main character appeals to the needleworker in me. I've sewn all my life and even went through stage of designing my own clothes. I related to Joan's thrill of creating a new and unique design, especially one that is appreciated by others. Joan is creative and very intelligent. She is ever aware of class and sex differentiations that determine too much of her life. But her insistence in knowing the truth is what makes her bloom into a force to be reckoned with, whether you are her friend or her foe.

Gregor is a genius. He is also opinionated (arrogant), distracted, observant, enigmatic and seemingly magical. He is not always forthcoming, which only serves to annoy Joan. But overall, Gregor is a likable man, with an honorable nature that is both attractive and sexy. Joan and Gregor make a formidable investigative team. And as they investigate the case, they get closer to each other.

The author mentions Arthur Conan Doyle as an influence. Yes, I can see a bit of Sherlock Holmes in Gregor. And for you Sci Fi fans, in Gregor, I also saw hints of The Doctor.

One of the ongoing themes in the book is the source of magic. Supposedly, only the upper echelon of society is supposed to be able to wield magic. Of course, when you think about that, there are all sorts of flaws with that theory, the primary one being that nobility does not consort only with nobility. So where did the magic come from in the first place? There is one theme that I really loved. The idea that energy of creativity is a source of magical power. That a person's ingenuity has the power to alter the rules of the world as we know it. I fear this idea spells trouble for the nobles of London.

There is so much more than a mystery to be solved in this book. Romance. Of course there is romance. Gregor's and Joan's ability to merge their minds to solve a mystery presages the sweet uniting of their hearts. In addition to mystery and romance, there are class issues, an arranged marriage (unwanted), old magic, curses, new magical ability, and secrets. So many secrets. There is not a boring page in *The Curse of the Brimstone Contract*. I hope to be reading another book in the series soon!

Cecilia Dominic says

This was a really fun steampunk book with a unique heroine and a mysterious hero who is reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes but with slightly better social skills. I liked that the heroine was Jewish and the author's incorporation of Eastern European lore. I was excited to see it's the first in a series and hope the author writes more soon.

Fabia Scali-Warner says

I loved the world building in this book. A Victorian England where magic is the engine of the steampunk setting, and social conflict brewing as control of over magic is revealed as the pathway to wealth and power. I enjoyed a Sherlock Holmes kind of detective finding his match in a strong female lead, and how finding out the truth doesn't necessarily mean a happy ending. Family dynamics play a strong role for several, well-defined characters and I look forward to reading more of the series, although the book is perfectly concluded in its own (kudos to that that too).

E. says

“The Curse of the Brimstone Contract” is the first in ‘The Steampunk Detectives’ series by Corrina Lawson. This intriguing tale centers around Joan Krieger, whose family business is threatened by a series of uncanny fates for those who have purchased their custom-made clothing. Desperate to save their livelihood, Joan contacts Gregor Sherringford, a consulting detective who has lofty connections and an uncanny ability to ferret out information. Pooling their abilities will be essential since their foe has a hidden agenda that involves magic and political maneuverings and may uncover secrets better left untold. Joan has several factors that would automatically cause discrimination against her but she may discover she has far more worth than she ever imagined, now it’s up to her to discover who really wants her for who she is rather than what she can achieve for them.

This is a fun introduction to what promises to be a very entertaining steampunk series featuring atypical main characters. I greatly enjoyed the focus on different cultures as it contrasts with the challenge of dealing with a society that is stratified by magic. This gives a very different view of historical England as it deals with both the complications and progress made as industrialization progresses plus the struggle to gain equality for women. I enjoy the fact that Joan is an artist who has an incredible ability to create remarkable items of clothing but she is unaware of her innate abilities and the journey that she makes under Gregor’s guidance is great to watch unfold. There is a very unconventional magical duel that results in some fascinating revelations that show the danger of exposing truth and change Joan’s perceptions forever, which illustrates the author’s wondrous facility at creating a compelling and imaginative story. I look forward to reading more exciting stories featuring this intriguing couple.

offered to Night Owl Reviews

J.B. Trepagnier says

I've actually never read a steampunk book before, but I fell in love with this book the more I read it. It intertwines what I know of the steampunk genre and Jewish folklore and mythology almost seamlessly. Joan is a strong female MC and a feminist for her time. I really liked Joan. Gregor is mysterious and sexy, but quite useful.

I'm eager to read book 2 if it's out and if it's not, I'll be sure to pick it up once it is

Marlene says

This joint review was originally published at The Book Pushers

E: I have enjoyed reading murder mysteries from a rather young age so when I read this blurb and saw that it contained murder, magic, private investigators, dreams for the future, and love I had to give *The Curse of the Brimstone Contract* a try. I am glad that I did because I completely enjoyed reading this first installment and I am looking forward to seeing what Lawson creates as this series goes forward.

Marlene: I saw the words steampunk and detectives and I was all in. I've heard good things about Corrina Lawson, so I wanted to try something by her. Since this was the opening book of a series, it seemed like a good place to start. That it turned out to be an alternate version of a Sherlock Holmes story was just icing on the cake!

Speaking of Sherlock Holmes, I utterly adore Holmes pastiches, but this definitely is one. (The name Sherringford gives it away even before you read the description of the hero)

Sherringford is every bit as intelligent and enigmatic as his original. A consulting detective who solves cases the police can't using methods of deduction. The way he turns his emotions on and off seems just right.

E: And now you have me wanted to dig up my collection of Sherlock Holmes stories! Anyways I found Sherringford rather fascinating. His focus on the science or reason "why" behind events not to mention his awareness of political currents added to his depth of character. I also enjoyed how he tested every prospective client to see if they had the mental agility and certain need to put up with his idiosyncrasies before even beginning the discussion about what they wanted him to investigate. I also felt that his not quite belonging in any particular area – visible magical ability or not, aristocracy or not was an asset when it came to his investigations.

Marlene: One of the things about the story that isn't in the summary, but was marvelous, is that the heroine Joan Krieger is Jewish. It's not something I see often, but made her that much easier for me to identify with. What I enjoyed about her was the way she dove into the case; no sitting back and letting the men solve everything, unlike so many of Holmes' clients.

Joan was used to working for a living, in a way that seemed realistic and not anachronistic. She was used to dealing with her own problems, and hiring Sherringford to solve the mystery of the enchanted garments wasn't a way of passing off the problem for her, it was a way of finding professional assistance. I loved the way that she kept rescuing herself, even if her efforts sometimes went awry. She's never passive about events unless she's waiting for a better time to get herself out of her current predicament.

The progress of Joan and Sherringford's relationship reminds me of Mary Russell in Laurie R. King's series (start with *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* for an absolute treat).

E: I also really enjoyed Joan. She had wishes and dreams and was used to working to obtain them. I liked how her independence transitioned to the investigation as she refused to let Sherringford go off on his own but insisted on maintaining an active role. The way she dealt with a variety of supporting characters ranging from her hired seamstresses to a few rather unsavory types was also extremely telling. It fit nicely with how

she built her relationship with Sherringford and at the same time worked to extricate herself from an unwanted pending marriage.

Marlene: I found the worldbuilding to be absorbing and as logical as one ever gets when postulating that someone (in this case Prince Albert) discovered magic. The way that the upper classes controlled magic usage seemed just right. In a rigid class society, anything that had the potential to allow upward mobility was going to be regulated and quashed.

E: I enjoyed the world-building. It actually reminded me of the Lord Darcy series by Randall Garrett, which is another alternate world Sherlock Holmes *grin*. I loved the complexity Lawson brought to her creation and how holes in the class stratification system were beginning to form. In this world, a lack of knowledge was deadly but the spread of knowledge was also tightly controlled which reinforced a power imbalance and added to the overall tension. It also hinted at the potential of a yet to be named individual pulling all of the strings and really catching my interest for more.

Marlene: Oh my goodness yes! Lord Darcy! Those were so marvelous and it was beyond sad that the series (and the author) were cut short untimely.

E: While I did figure out a piece of the mystery, Lawson included a rather interesting twist that I was not suspecting. It certainly made me wonder how many events in the past that negatively impacted Joan's future livelihood were chance or chance given a little nudge. I thought the conclusion to this story was very intriguing and certain individuals received their just results. I am really looking forward to what Lawson provides for the next installment because this first one was a great introduction and lots of fun to read. I give The Curse of the Brimstone Contract an A-

Marlene: This is, at heart, a mystery, like all Holmes stories. I did guess who the "lesser evil" was, but not the "greater evil". It makes sense now, but as you read, it is definitely not obvious. However, I wonder if this is the first book in a series. I hope so. Not just because Inspector Moran is clearly not done, but because Sherringford was hinting at a spider in the web, just as Moriarty was Moran's boss in the original series.

I had fun with this story, and I look forward to more.

I give The Curse of the Brimstone Contract a B+
