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# Mechanica



## Synopsis

A New York Times Bestseller Nicolette's awful stepsisters call her "Mechanica" to demean her, but the nickname fits: she learned to be an inventor at her mother's knee. Her mom is gone now, though, and the Steps have pushed her into a life of dreary servitude. When she discovers a secret workshop in the cellar on her sixteenth birthday and befriends Jules, a tiny magical metal horse, Nicolette starts to imagine a new life for herself. And the timing may be perfect: There's a technological exposition and a royal ball on the horizon. Determined to invent her own happily-ever-after, Mechanica seeks to wow the prince and eager entrepreneurs alike.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Gr 6+ This inventive and subversive "Cinderella" retelling features Nicolette "Nick," who at 16 discovers the existence of a basement workshop, complete with a furnace, glassblowing apparatus, and other mechanical tools powered partly by fey magic. In secret, she makes mechanical steampunk creatures and devices, skills learned as a child while helping her inventor mother. Nick's been in servitude to her stepmother and stepsisters ever since her father died when she was 10, shortly after his remarriage. The King has banished the fey from the palace

and kept his remaining son and heir Christopher sequestered from public view for fear of losing him to fey assassins like the Queen and his older son. No fey goods or magic are allowed in Esting. The protagonist secretly sells some of her creations at Market, but her dreams of selling enough to become independent are soon dashed when her stepfamily discovers some of her contraptions. They destroy them and jeeringly begin calling her Mechanica. Will she still be able to create something to show at the Exposition Gala & Ball that's being held by Prince Christopher to celebrate Esting's inventors and artisans? Readers looking for an atypical fairy tale will find this refreshing because it relies less on traditional romance or happy endings, and more on living independently and unconventionally, loving freely, and being able to choose your own destiny. VERDICT Fans of Marissa Meyer's *Cinder* (Feiwel & Friends, 2012) will gravitate to this tale. —Sharon Rawlins, New Jersey State Library, Trenton

With a unique mix of steampunk and the maker movement, *Mechanica* introduces a smart, strong, talented heroine who may be able to find her prince, but doesn't necessarily want to. BookPage: "If you are a fan of fantasy or fairy tale retellings, you'll love *Mechanica*. Miss Literati: "Combines a feminist Cinderella story with a beautiful steampunk world. Hypable: "Betsy Cornwell twists Cinderella to her own unique take, and *Mechanica* will definitely please readers. USA Today: "Cornwell creates a diverting plot starring a unique cast of characters. RT Book Reviews: "Sure to appeal to fans of Marissa Meyer's *Lunar Chronicles*. . . With a strong focus on making your dreams happen no matter what, this feminist fairy tale breathes new life into an old favorite. Bookish: "A smart, refreshing alternative to stale genre tropes." Kirkus, starred review: "Mechanica has a thoroughly modern theme and teaches young readers to find their passion and become self-reliant." VOYA: "Readers looking for an atypical fairy tale will find this refreshing because it relies less on traditional romance or happy endings, and more on living independently and unconventionally, loving freely, and being able to choose your own destiny." School Library Journal: "Fans of fairy-tale updates will find it easy to lose themselves in this bright, romantic story, whose hero shows she can not only have it all but also do it herself." Publishers Weekly: "Readers who can't get enough of the growing steampunk trend will happily pick this up." Booklist:

\*\*THIS REVIEW CONTAINS SPOILERS\*\* *Mechanica* is a Cinderella retelling with a steampunk

element, a heroine that can fix and build all kinds of things, a POC love interest, and an extremely adorable mechanical mini horse as sidekick. Sounds really good, right? And it was, for about 80% of the story, but the last couple of chapters ruined it for me. But let me go back to the positives, I liked the protagonist, Nicolette, from the very start, she's one of those heroines who will never stop to feel sorry for themselves--no matter how bad things are, and I admired her for it. Her determination, her spirit, the fact that she not only hopes for a better life but does something about it, and how she works SO HARD, my goodness, I was exhausted just from reading about it. On top of all the chores she has to do around the house every single day, plus the errands for her stepmother and stepsisters (the Steps, like Nicolette calls them), she always finds the time for her own outrageous projects, to go sell her stuff at the market, to make friends and plan things with them--truly remarkable. I was also pretty intrigued by the fantasy element in this story,

Nicolette's late mother used to build these mechanical creatures out of plain materials--metal, glass--but then somehow they became sentient, to the point that, the people who bought them sometimes treated them as pets, and when Nicolette finds her mother's workshop, she comes across a substance that she believes was her mother's secret "ingredient" for the creatures, and I was so into this, I wanted to know everything about it, where did it came from and how did she get it? What was it exactly? How does it work? And why? I kept waiting for an explanation but it never came. At some point Nicolette even starts using the substance, and still no explanation is given to the reader. Other aspect of this story that I felt like was lacking was everything to do with the Steps--apart from one or two scenes, they're basically not even present, Nicolette certainly talks about them, about the wicked things they say and do, and about the endless list of jobs they demand from her every day, but there are hardly any scenes where one can actually see the Steps being horrible. Plus, we never get to see their reaction to Nicolette's success, because they kind of disappear altogether from the story towards the end. Now, the thing that bothered me the most: the romance. I'm sorry but it was just... so... wrong. Especially for a story that's inspired in a fairy-tale. Truthfully, I don't need fluffy happy ever afters, I don't even need romance in a story (though I prefer that it is there and that it makes me cry and laugh and almost sends my heart into cardiac arrest with joy), but if there is romance, I need it to \*at least\* have some kind of consistency, to make sense, to not leave me confused and thinking What the hell just happened...? Well, guess what happened with Mechanica?? -.-'The romance is not a strong element to begin with, Nicolette falls for her love interest after seeing him maybe twice, and even though I

wasn't entirely happy with this, I kept saying to myself that insta-love happens all the time in fairy-tales, and that the story focuses on Nicolette's journey to be free and independent anyway, but it's hard to keep making excuses when all Nicolette suddenly can think about is this boy and how she's so in love with him. The worst was still to come though, \*\*\*and please stop reading this review now if you don't want spoilers, because I can't go on expressing my frustration regarding the romance without spoiling it\*\*\* because this love interest barely shows any strong feelings for Nicolette, but still, in what feels like a completely random scene, asks her to marry him, and get this, at that point Nicolette had realized that maybe he loved another girl too, their good friend Caro, and she asks him about it... and that's when he starts telling this incredibly touching tale of how "there hasn't been a single moment in my life when I haven't loved Caro" and how "I fell in love with her before I could speak, before I could think". WHAAAAAT??... he goes on and on about his love for this other girl, and he wants Nicolette too. IMAGINE MY HORROR. I abhor love triangles of any kind, and this one was particularly offensive to me because 1. it just appeared, suddenly, out of nowhere, without a warning whatsoever, 2. the guy (and Nicolette) thinks it's okay??, and 3. when later Nicolette talks about this whole situation with Caro, Caro is like, Oh it's fine! So what if he likes us both, and we both like him? Maybe one day we will fall in love with someone else, or maybe we'll always love him, doesn't matter! What matters is that we stay bffs forever! The three of us! I kid you not, this is more or less how the thing goes, and I could barely believe my eyes--what happened to the story I was enjoying so much... ? What happened?? I understand that with retellings there's always the need for plot twists, especially with fairy-tales, I mean, we've all heard these stories being retold so many times before, but in this case, in terms of the romance, and how the whole thing comes together in the end, with all its twists and turns, is wide of the mark for me. It's a bizarre ending, to say the least, totally anticlimactic, and like I said before, ruined the book for me.

I'm a sucker for fairy tales and this story was highly recommended to me. I enjoyed the main character. She is determined to pull herself out of her situation and does just that. The author did a great job at world building. I liked all the gadgets that make up this universe. I would have liked to see the "Step" characters developed a bit more. They are flat, predictable characters. I would have liked to have seen more interaction with the protagonist and her step family. Less telling about how horrible they were, more showing so the reader can draw their own conclusions. The ending of this book was rather satisfying, although I didn't care for the way the protagonist interacted with new business partner. Too flippant and dismissive. Another character that could have used more

development. He was a means to an end, but nothing more. He could have easily been replaced by anyone. I would have liked to see more growth and change in the protagonist, but I suppose this isn't that sort of book. Instead, the protagonist seems to start out as a strong person in low circumstances. She just needed the opportunity to fulfill her destiny. I had the feeling that even if she hadn't had help or this particular opportunity, she would have made a better life for herself, eventually. She doesn't need someone else to rescue her. Her personality doesn't really change. She simply moves forward. All in all this is a clean and truly unique retelling of the Cinderella tale, suitable for teens and adults. It's not quite as lush of a fairy tale as some, but well worth the time to read. The bones are there for a second book and more. I would read more books by this author.

Read more:

<http://www.sarcasmandlemons.com/2015/08/arc-review-mechanica-by-betsy-cornwel.html> In short, one can say without reservation or qualification that *Mechanica* is an absolute dream, the spiritual successor to *Ella Enchanted* that we've all been waiting for. You'll see it sardonically compared to *Cinder* on Goodreads. Yes, both are Cinderella retellings. Yes, both young women are skilled with machines. The similarities end there, except that they're both damn good books. *Mechanica* is the story of Nicolette, a lonely girl oppressed by her stepmother's cruelty and her kingdom's embargo on all things magical. One day, a lost letter leads her to her mother's workshop, where she made her famous mechanical wonders before dying of a magic-borne disease. Her love of machinery rekindled, Nicolette soon makes a secret name for herself by inventing clever machines and beautiful baubles. Her inventions could buy her freedom--but in the way are her vicious stepsiblings and a handsome prince she never anticipated. Written in a gorgeous storyteller's prose, *Mechanica* is a tale of hope, self-reliance, and friendship that at once applauds, modernizes, and subverts the cherished tale of *Cinderella*. In depth, it's a faithful, yet innovative cinderella retelling. Like *Ella Enchanted* (to which I'll try not to compare it too often), *Mechanica* keeps the bones of the Cinderella story intact. You have a girl reduced to a servant in her own house by a cruel stepmother and stepsisters. You have a handsome prince who finds himself besotted with our lovely heroine. You have a bit of magic, a great deal of finery, and a midnight ball. I could almost see Cornwell smiling to herself when I read some of her cheeky references: mechanical insect helpers instead of birds, a coal-powered horse-drawn carriage, and of course hand-blown glass slippers. Even Nicolette's name recalls the story's French origins. It has all the trappings of a fairy tale that conjure that magical, nostalgic quality for the reader. Embedded in a unique fantasy, it's the perfect backdrop to spin a lovingly altered tale. In this world, magic is known but feared. Fairy tricks were once prized,

but their power began to scare the human rulers. An epidemic of a magical disease prompted a final embargo on magic. Nicolette's mother, who once used magic to animate her clever mechanical creatures, died of the disease when her magic-loathing husband refused to deliver the magical cure. The tension between humans and magic is ever-present, creating a more worldly drama than your average Cinderella. It also creates the perfect situation for Nicolette: with magic banned, the crown hopes to hold an exhibition of human engineering to prove that it does not rely on magic. The winner will receive a royal commission, one that could free Nicolette from her stepmonsters forever. charmingly written and tightly plotted, Nicolette's journey is giddy and delightful. Cornwell has a mastery of language that really shows her MFA roots. It's pretty without being pretentious. It evokes the antiquated style of a Grimm's fairy tale and borrows some olden turns of phrase, but is much richer in description and more evocative than Jacob or Will ever were. And while her stepcharacters are a little type-y, the rest feel perfectly real. Particularly Nicolette. She's clever, lively, and spirited, impossible not to love but certainly not saccharine. She's also wicked smart. She devises a system to do her chores using her mother's remaining mechanical creatures, befriends a tiny metal horse called Jules who is ethereally smart and ridiculously adorable, and begins selling her inventions at market. Oh, how I want my own Jules! It celebrates love and friendship. At market, Nicolette meets Caro, a girl who loves too fiercely and quickly (and is easy for a reader to love), and Finn, a swoony boy driven by wild passions. As they help Nicolette to work on her projects secretly, the three of them form a friendship built on mutual care, respect, and understanding. Funny how that works, huh? At this point, you probably think you know what happens. You'll be right about some things. Nicolette develops an affection for Finn, whose snarky adorable banter seems to suggest an equal affection. There is a ball, which Nicolette attends against her stepmother's wishes, where Nicolette captures the eye of a prince. while also lauding independence. But to tell you how clever the story is would be spoiling it. What I can say is that Cornwell handles the fairy tale tropes so innovatively. She builds up your expectations in one direction, only to dash them and provide another avenue, only to surprise you yet again. She gives Nicolette some sense, too. Her concern for Caro is just as strong as her love for Finn, and she even hesitates to call it "love"--because she knows that she doesn't know him well and refuses to let him distract her from her dreams. The thread through the story is cooperation, not codependency. In the end, Cornwell explores the nature of love, friendship, and their intersection, and provides a happy ending that doesn't depend on fairy godmothers. *Mechanica* is a beautifully written fairy tale that mixes the classic and modern into one romantic, charming story of perseverance and self-discovery.

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