



**ETIQUETTE & ESPIONAGE: FINISHING SCHOOL, BOOK THE FIRST**  
*Carriger, Gail*  
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# The Queen of Quirk

BY LAURA JENKINS

GAIL CARRIGER IS THE QUEEN OF QUIRK, if by quirky you mean highly imaginative, boldly authentic and deliciously unconventional. She holds master's degrees in anthropology and archaeology and, until a few years ago, spent months at a time working as an excavator in places like Italy and Peru. Carriger is also the *New York Times* best-selling author of the genre-bending Parasol Protectorate series, books that place the words “steampunk,” “paranormal” and “romance” in the same breath.

Though some may consider her mix of genres peculiar, Carriger sees it as a logical progression that reflects where she's been. “When you read an author, you're looking at their loves,” she says. “I write steampunk because for me it's an ode to the origin of my passion, which is science fiction and fantasy. When I was writing the Parasol Protectorate books, I was hearkening back to those very first seeds of genre fiction,” she says. “I basically took the seeds of created monsters and supernatural entities and made them alive for the Victorians, and then poked my Victorians to see how they would react. For me it was this spiraling wheel within a wheel within a wheel of the genres that I love and the origins of my own genre.”

If necessity is the mother of invention, in Carriger's case, it was also her inspiration. She began to notice that a lot of contemporary literature stayed close to the boundaries of established genres, and she longed to read things that pushed the envelope. When Carriger wrote her first adult book, *Soulless*, in 2009, she remembers feeling “genuinely frustrated.” “I kept thinking, ‘I like this urban fantasy thing, but why is it always contemporary?’ And, ‘I like this steampunk thing, but it doesn't have to be all about the technology.’ And, ‘Why aren't they funny? There aren't enough funny books out there. I want funny! Why is nobody writing this?’ Finally I was like, ‘Fine. I guess I have to write it.’”

After authoring five Parasol Protectorate books (all of which were aimed at adults and became successful beyond Carriger's wildest dreams), she's now publishing *Etiquette & Espionage*, the Kirkus-starred first installment in her new young-adult Finishing School series. Most of what Carriger wrote before becoming a published author was aimed at teens, so it was a no-brainer when her publisher asked if she'd be interested in writing for a younger audience.

This year, she's working on books for both adult and young-adult audiences. “It's about the voice of the main character,” Carriger explains, “and also her perspective on her world. When you're writing an adult character, she thinks about the repercussions of her actions, whether or not she takes that into consideration. Teenagers are intrinsically more selfish. I don't think that's a bad

thing; I think that's just how they perceive the world. It's accessing that teenage voice that for me makes the book a YA book.”

Carriger's heroines—whether grown women or teenagers—are a rare amalgam of strength and softness. For example, Sophronia, the 14-year-old protagonist in *Etiquette & Espionage*, has a modest, gentle side. But she also has plenty of strength, wit and determination. Carriger has consistently managed to craft female characters that have plenty of moxie yet maintain and even celebrate their femininity. “I like Tamora Pierce, who says, ‘I write girls who kick ass,’” says Carriger. “And I like to write girls who kick ass, but they tend to do it politely. I'm a nonviolent person by nature, so I like to write characters that can change the world but don't necessarily have to do it with guns or knives. I don't think that reliance upon a weapon is necessarily a strength; you could argue that, in a lot of cases, it's a weakness.”

“I want my female characters to be strong because of the strength of their intellect,” she continues, “and to make changes because they're brilliant. I'm also very concerned about making sure that my women are strong in their friendships. I don't like books where women have backstabby relationships or where a woman can only accomplish something if she's completely alone. That's very much a male hero's journey.”

Carriger herself is a hero to many. As a result of yielding to the excavation process in her own life, she's created steampunk/sci-fi/paranormal worlds that delight scores of readers around the globe. “I feel so lucky,” says Carriger. “I know some of my success is skill, but a greater portion of it is luck. I just wrote the right book at the right time that people fell in love with.”

*Laura Jenkins is a writer and photojournalist based in her hometown of Austin, Texas.*

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