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Etiquette & Espionage: Finishing School, Book 1



Synopsis

It's one thing to learn to curtsy properly. It's quite another to learn to curtsy and throw a knife at the same time. Welcome to Finishing School. Fourteen-year old Sophronia is the bane of her mother's existence. More interested in dismantling clocks and climbing trees than proper etiquette at tea - and god forbid anyone see her atrocious curtsy - Mrs. Temminnick is desperate her daughter become a proper lady. She enrolls Sophronia in Mademoiselle Geraldine's Finishing Academy for Young Ladies of Quality. But little do Sophronia or her mother know that this is a school where ingenious young girls learn to finish all right - but it's a different kind of finishing. Mademoiselle Geraldine's certainly trains young ladies in the finer arts of dance, dress, and etiquette, but also in how to finish in other ways: the fine art of death, diversion, deceit, espionage, and the modern weaponries. Sophronia and her friends are going to have a rousing first year at school. Book One of the Finishing School series.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours and 55 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Hachette Audio

Audible.com Release Date: February 5, 2013

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00B2TYRXE

Best Sellers Rank: #109 in Books > Teens > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Science Fiction > Steampunk #139 in Books > Teens > Mysteries & Thrillers > Historical #152 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Values & Virtues

Customer Reviews

Review written for and originally published at steamingingenious.blogspot.com I have been eagerly anticipating this first book in a new series by Gail Carriger, author of the fantastic The Parasol Protectorate series. The book follows the exploits of 14 year old Sophronia Temminnick, a troublemaking youngest daughter of a middle class Victorian family. Not knowing what to do with a daughter interested in technology and books, her mother is only too happy to send her off to an exclusive finishing school. Except this finishing school teaches more than just deportment. It also

teaches the arts of espionage and assassination. This book has all the fun of the first Harry Potter novel; it shows an unsuspecting protagonist encountering a weird and wonderful boarding school, and, in fact, almost an entire new society of which she was previously unaware. So this book takes some pretty familiar "starting a new school" tropes and puts a nice spin on them. Sophonia is an extremely likeable character and her new school provides lots of opportunities for her to show off her daring. This series takes place in the same world as the Parasol Protectorate series, but it's set several decades earlier, in the 1860s, I believe. So fans of that series will enjoy seeing some familiar characters pop up here and there. As for the steampunk elements, while I tend to think of the Parasol Protectorate as a predominantly supernatural series set in a steampunk world, this series seems to be a steampunk series set in a supernatural world. Meaning that this series seems to involve a lot more technology in more important roles than the previous series. There are also vampires and werewolves, but the supernatural elements don't drive the main plot and are pretty much incidental. I don't want to spoil all the surprises of the book, but I will say that the steampunk elements include: airborne highwaymen in small balloons, a giant airship, a steam-powered dog, mechanical servants, airship pirates, a school for evil geniuses, aetheric communication devices, and a group who adorn their clothing with gears and their top hats with decorative goggles. Ultimately, I loved this book. I found it totally charming, with its combination of polite manners, adventure, and emphasis on practical skills such as how to fake a faint without wrinkling your skirts. I would absolutely enroll in this type of finishing school. My one and only complaint is that I wish it were longer. It's a young adult series, so it's fairly short. Otherwise there's no noticeable difference in language or style from Carriger's other books. There's no sex or any real romance in this one, which is another difference. (And can we take a moment to celebrate a YA book with a female protagonist that DOESN'T place any emphasis on romance?) I'm extremely excited about the potential for this to be a phenomenal series. I know the second book is already written and I think is supposed to come out later this year? I can't wait.

I've enjoyed the "Parasol Protectorate" novels a lot, but this one was even more fun. It's set in the same world, I think somewhat before the PP series, and focuses more on intrigue and steampunk, and less on the vamps and weres. Plus- as an American who went to local public schools, I have always ADORED boarding-school fiction! And a boarding school on an airship??? with the companion school for boys devoted to developing Evil Geniuses??? What's not to love? OK, the kids don't Save The World. What kids really can expect to? but they do rise to their challenges, outwit the adults, and have a grand time doing it. A good ending, but with enough threads left that #2 can

pick up nicely. I think a lot of Harry Potter fans could love this, if they're OK with the focus being on GIRLS (the horror!). Highly recommended. And for YA's, too!

I'm not a young adult but enjoy reading what they consider "theirs". But, I started the book thinking the story would be describing the how and what of a spy school for young women, not so. The plot seemed to be (from my senior adult perspective) "how to survive other young women's evil/vicious intents in a school type environment" (and I remember those intents at that age!). I enjoyed the author's use of an Victorian-age setting with fantasy and magic complete with were-wolves, wizards, and vampires. One of the funniest characters was a teacher who wore nun's clothing but wasn't a nun. Another tickle to me was the amount of time to produce the "proper curtsy" that seemed like it was equivalent to some "required" courses in high school.

This was my first book by Gail Carriger, and it definitely won't be my last. This one was fun, humorous, and overall, really enjoyable. I really liked Sophronia, the atmosphere of the school was fantastic, and even at the times when I wasn't particularly enthralled by what was going on in the book, the pages seemed to fly by. It took me a while to get used to the voice of the book, but once that happened, it was hard to put down. My only complaint is that the central plot of this particular book didn't really draw me in, but the concept of the school Sophronia had been recruited to intrigued me enough to keep reading, and I'm glad it did. I LOVED the idea of a school training girls in both etiquette and, well, espionage. :) It took me a while to get around to reading this one, but I'm so glad I did, and the timing turned out pretty spectacular, because the other books in the series happened to go on sale while I was reading it. Looking forward to reading them when I can, and maybe catching up in time to read the fourth book later this year! (I received a copy of this book from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.)

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