



Full Steam Ahead

Nathalie Gray

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This is a race against time. Against oneself. This is the Vendœe Globe, the most grueling race around the world. Singlehanded. No stopovers. On board is Laurel Benson-Desmarais, a thirty-six-year-old racer from a family of sailors. Five foot and a quarter inch of pure adrenaline junkie. One hundred and forty-seven pounds of thrill-seeking, motor-mouth, caffeine-addict of a woman who redefines the word "stubborn determination". Laurel's venture starts admirably. Day one of the race sees her well in advance. Until the meteorological forecasts start messing with her patience. The mother of all storms is gathering speed. Heading straight for the race. For the first time in its history, the Vendœe Globe is annulled due to bad weather. She's worked years for this but has to turn the boat around. She's not fast enough. The storm catches up with her, tosses the 60-foot sloop as if it were a bit of cork. Electricity crackles in the air. Spray hits her like rocks. Then as she pitches into a mountain-size wave, everything changes. The water, the very air. As if she crossed over to another world. Crazy. Phineas Hamilton, captain of the brigantine the Brass Baron, never thought he would one day run into a woman who physically looks like the enemy, with pale hair and eyes, but yet is not one of them. The exotic prisoner is also the most obstinate, argumentative, confrontational...and fascinating woman he has ever met. He does not really care where she hails from and what brought her to his ship-no one speaks to him that way. And certainly not on his own damn ship! A lesson in manners is most definitely in order. But for now, he must make sure his crew and ship survives the latest enemy attack. They all depend on him.

Full Steam Ahead Details

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From Reader Review Full Steam Ahead for online ebook

Romancing the Book says

Review by Zita: Laurel Benson-Desmarais is an adrenalin junkie. We first meet her at sea racing solo during a storm and loving it. Lightening flashes, thunder crashes, waves splash(es) and she and her boat are hurled into an alternate reality. Before she even realizes she's in trouble, her racing yacht is hooked from above by, of all things, a dirigible. A sailor boards her boat trying to free the grappling hook. To make matters worse, the ocean appears to be corrosive and is eating away the hull.

Laurel manages to board the dirigible, but she finds out soon enough that the reality she's been dropped into is a world at war. Naturally, her rescuers are convinced she's a spy, and she spends the first half of the book trying to win over the crew and earn the captain's trust. The captain, of course, is a hottie, one Phineas Hamilton (your typical alpha with issues), which just complicates Laurel's life even more. Eventually they follow their libidos and the encounter between them is smoking. The waters do not run smooth, however, and misunderstandings ensue. Our intrepid hero must realize the error of his ways, save the day, and rescue the girl.

I thoroughly enjoyed this story. Phineas is kind of a boiler-plate alpha hero, but Laurel's character more than makes up for it. She's a great heroine: feisty, smart, competent, and likable. There are a couple of rough spots mid-way through the story, particularly in the slightly stilted conversations, but nothing that detracts from the reading enjoyment. There are a whole crew's worth of secondary characters that are just excellent, and the villains are brutish and dastardly--everything you expect a Victorian-era villain to be. The world- and character-building is very well done. One can only hope that Nathalie Gray will revisit this world and these characters to give us further adventures with Laurel and Phineas.

Netanella says

Nathalie Gray is a favorite author of mine, so I came into this with high expectations. Happily, those expectations were fully met with this fantastical, swashbuckling, steampunk novel about a sailboat racer who's transported to an alternate world filled with floating cities, toxic seas, and flying steam-powered dirigibles. The action is non-stop, the romance engaging and passionate, the characters lively and memorable. A great read!

Rebecca McNutt says

Steampunk is a relatively new genre to me but I've been looking at a few I've wanted to read and this one drew me in. I enjoyed reading it, and although at times it seems to forget its own setting, it's still a great book with a vibrant and fantastic writing style and story.

Book Utopia says

I love Nathalie Gray. I haven't read a story by her yet that I didn't really enjoy. She writes tough heroines and broken heroes, with some gritty, fantastic action thrown in for good measure, and I can't get enough of it.

This one is no exception. Laurel is in the middle of a boat race when a freak storm literally changes the world around in her. She finds herself caught by an anchor from the sky, hauled out of the sea as it eats away at her boat. After getting dragged up through the clouds, she ends up on what looks like a flying boat, with a crew dressed up in funny Victoriana-style clothing and tools and weapons she's never seen before. The captain and crew think she's an enemy. Apparently, her blonde hair and blue eyes match their coloring, though her size does not. When the ship comes under attack and she helps them out, however, the captain is forced to accept her, at least for the time being. There's no place for her to go without causing a scene, though, so he agrees to let her stay on board to help keep her safe.

Laurel is resourceful, strong, and smart-mouthed, quick with a comeback and refusing to take crap from anyone. She stands up to Phineas, the captain, from the start, even not knowing what is going on around her. I loved her scrappy nature and fearlessness, especially when paired opposite his almost prim and equally fearless behavior. He's enigmatic at best, but very sexy in spite of his recalcitrance to act on their attraction. They play beautifully off each other.

If you're looking for a sex romp, you're not going to find it here. Sure, there are hot scenes in the book, definitely erotic, but it takes a long time to get there. The first half is packed to the gills with action and world-building, with the romance playing second fiddle. That gave me time to get to know Phineas and Laurel better before they leapt into bed with each other, though. I appreciated that. I also think it helped to believe in their HEA, because I was more committed to both of them as people first rather than as romantic foils.

It's not perfect – the steampunk world sometimes feels a bit too generalized to truly stand out – but Gray is turning into one of my go-to authors. I should just go to one of her titles any time I'm in a drought. I always find an entertaining, fantastic read.

Robert Appleton says

A rip-roaring steampunk adventure set in an alternate world of privateer airships, toxic oceans, and bustling cloud cities. FULL STEAM AHEAD boasts a terrific, spunky heroine, a stoic but passionate hero, and some of the best worldbuilding you'll see in an erotic sci-fi/fantasy. Bravo, Ms. Gray!

Amber says

my internet went down as I was submitting my review. you'll just have to imagine the grandeur. liked the world, decent story, recommend.

Madbabs says

The one thing that saved this from one star was the modestly well done sex. Other than that - meh. Thin plot, cliché characters, contrived dialog, too many unsupported adjectives. The parts with detail about the actual sailing of the various ships were pretty convincing. But that and a couple of decent sex scenes are definitely not enough to make the whole thing worth my time. There are so many GOOD books on my list waiting for me to get to them. I finished this because I paid for it - had it been from the library, for sure would not have gone that far.

Maylin says

I am amazed at the sheer variety of themes in the steampunk genre. I guess this is Steampunk erotica (or romance - where is the dividing line these days?)

More than anything it is a rip-roaring adventure though. Farscape meets Pirates of the Caribbean in a steampunk universe.

The heroine was very relatable - yes she was kick ass and very self sufficient but she was also mouthy and didn't know when to keep her opinions to herself. Unusually she also got scared and like most of us could get reduced to fear by her tears even if she was too proud to give in.

Laurel is a lone yachswoman who gets transported to another world during an epic storm. A world where the sea is corrosive and makes short work of her boat as she is being captured by privateers in a fantastical dirigible. In this world the skies substitute for the high seas and are populated by the Varangians, a non-human, vicious species that instill fear and loathing, and privateers who play both sides of the law; as well as traders, navy etc.

The action scenes are spectacular with boarding parties being fired like harpoons into the sails of the enemy and nail biting maneuvers from the helm.

I hope there is more from this universe to come.

Saskia Walker says

A terrific read! Superb steampunk world building, rollicking fantasy adventure, and a passionate romance — an all round excellent read. The author has immense talent for writing vivid action scenes. The fiery relationship between the drop dead gorgeous hero and sassy heroine stole my heart. I didn't want it to end! I'm hoping there will be more stories in this world.
