



Q&A INTERVIEW WITH STEPHANIE BURGIS

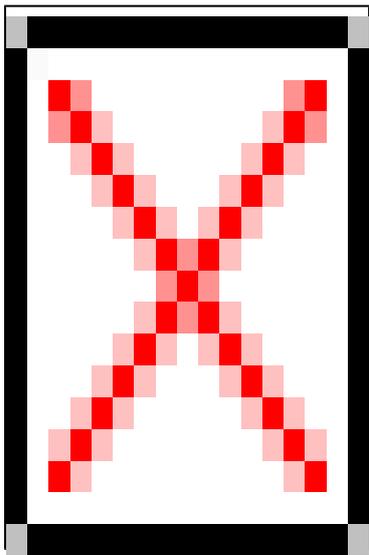
Article Author:

[Stephanie Burgis](#) [1]

[222](#) [2]

Byline:

The author answers questions on **[The Dragon with a Chocolate Heart](#)**



Please sum up [The Dragon with a Chocolate Heart](#) [3] for someone who hasn't read it.

When fierce young dragon Aventurine is tricked into drinking enchanted hot chocolate, she's horrified to find herself transformed into a puny, blunt-toothed, wingless human girl. But she's still a dragon on the inside, and her instincts combined with her new-found passion for chocolate take her to the Chocolate Heart, a quirky chocolate house in need of help (and customers). Still, it will take all her courage, lots of chocolate and perhaps a little magic to learn to be her true self?

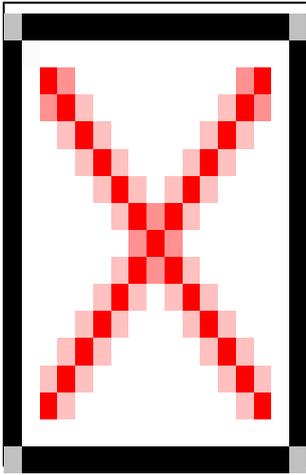
Your previous books were set in Regency England, but in [The Dragon with a Chocolate Heart](#) [3] you've invented a new world. Why did you make the change and what were the challenges of creating the book's magical setting?

I wanted to give this book the feel of a fairy tale, which meant (for me) shifting from historical to high fantasy. I made up an imaginary city named Drachenburg for the main setting of my story. To make it feel more real, I grounded it in history by basing several details of the clothing, food, etc., on real details from the early nineteenth century - but I took those details from early nineteenth-century German principalities, this time, instead of from England, and I felt free to make up quite a different society around them.

One of the most fun challenges of that invented setting was deciding which details from the real world I wanted to keep and which ones I wanted to change. For instance, at one point my heroine witnesses a meeting of the king's privy council, and my first instinct was to make all of those council members men, as you might expect in the real version of that time period - but then I stopped myself, thinking: "Wait, WHY should I keep that kind of sexism in my own invented version of the world?" So I immediately made half of the councillors women instead!

You live in Wales, did that help with the invention of the dragon family?

Living in Wales means I'm constantly reminded of dragons! Of course the national symbol is a dragon, so I see it all



over town whenever I go shopping, imprinted on everything from rugby shirts to flags and jewellery. But I also think of dragons every time I look out of my own window at the gorgeous mountains that surround our town. I've always imagined dragons sleeping inside them...so that led to my dragon-heroine's own mountain home!

Do you have a favourite fictional dragon?

Smaug will always be my top-favourite fictional dragon. He was the first one I ever heard about, when I was five years old and my dad first read me [The Hobbit](#) [4], and he made a HUGE impression.

Do you have an inner dragon, or wish that you had?

I'm a book-dragon - I love hoarding books and gloating over them!

How important is chocolate in your life?

Chocolate is *essential* in my life! I adore rich dark chocolate, and I make myself a cup of hot chocolate (melting 70% dark chocolate into milk along with cinnamon and nutmeg) almost every day, regardless of the weather outside.

The book is a page-turning adventure, but also considers how we see ourselves and the importance of in harmony with our neighbours, no matter how different they seem. Was that important to you?

It's extremely important to me personally, as an immigrant myself and as the descendant of immigrants. My family came to America from all over the world, several of its branches fleeing religious persecution or war; I emigrated to the UK for love, and my children and I are all dual citizens. I've been seriously disturbed by the rise of xenophobia both here in the UK and in the US in the last several years, and I believe strongly in the power of a diverse society.

Will there be more adventures for Aventurine and her friends?

There will! Aventurine's best friend will get to be the heroine of her own book in 2018 - and of course Aventurine will be a VERY important part of that one too. Best friends always watch each other's backs! We don't have a fixed title for that one yet, but I've been calling it my spies-and-fairies book, and I can't wait to share it with everyone!

[The Dragon with a Chocolate Heart](#) [3] is published by Bloomsbury, £6.99 pbk.

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