



# PAPERBACK SERIES ROUNDUP

▶ LORRAINE  
SQUIRES



*[Editor's Note: Welcome to the reincarnation of VOYA's teen series paperback column. After loyal service since December 1996, our veteran columnist Holly Ward Lamb moved on to work with younger youth; her last column appeared in February 2005. With a revised format that covers more series in less space and also notes new trends in teen series publishing, our new columnist Lorraine Squires brings along her Share-a-Media teen group to help her take the Roundup reins. Organizing series by type or genre, she will review each new series once; future volumes will not be added. This opening column plays catchup with some 2005 titles but concentrates on 2006. Look for the next Roundup in February 2007, with additional genres such as Christian series as well as increased input from teen readers. Forthcoming columns will appear in alternate issues each February, June, and October.]*



I've taken some flak over the years (most notably from the librarians who caught me reading *Sweet Valley High* in the stacks when I was supposed to be shelving), but I love series. There is something so appealing about a line of series paperbacks on a shelf, all the-same-but-slightly-different, all guaranteeing the comfort of the known with the thrill of wondering what will happen next. Series will work with reluctant readers looking for a quick and easy read, and with voracious readers who like to know that there's more waiting for them.

I shared some of the series discussed below with the Share-a-Media (SaM) teen group at Middle Country Public Library and have noted some of their impressions here. The group (five regulars, with a few occasional visitors) enjoys series—its members launched into a long reminiscence about *The Babysitters Club* when the topic came up. They say that the big problem with series is that if you like one, you have to read them all, which takes too much time during the school year.

## THE YOUNG, THE RICH, AND THE FABULOUS

Looking at the teen series landscape for any amount of time makes one thing absolutely clear: Everyone *does* want to be a *Gossip Girl* (or at least a member of *The Clique*). The fabulousity (and fabulous sales) of these series have launched a gaggle of imitators in the YA sections of libraries and bookstores, trying to capture some of the magic of rich girls, catty comments, and good old-fashioned serial storytelling.

In the first volume of *The 310*, Eva Cordes graduates early and flees small-town Massachusetts to move to Los Angeles, where she

hopes that her aunt's talent agency contacts will make her a star. Along the way, she must contend with her new Paris Hilton-esque roommate, her tabloid-hungry mother and mystery father, and a truly lame white-boy rapper who wants her digits. Fast-paced and sassy, this series promises to deliver the brand names, celeb-speak, and trash-talk that make up a satisfyingly soapy read.

The small desert town of Grace, California, is a far cry from L.A., but the teens featured in *Seven Deadly Sins*—each volume named for a sin, from *Lust* to *Wrath* so far—are creating their own excitement with sex, drink, gossip, and intrigue. Boyfriends and girlfriends are won, deceived, and manipulated by each other with ruthlessness and Byzantine complexity. The characters are from central casting—the schemer, the rogue, the virgin, and the downtrodden best friend—but the soap-opera twists and turns combined with quotidian high school concerns about SATs and Varsity playoffs make for good escapist reading. These books did engender some debate within SaM about whether or not all high school students are backstabbers and whether reading about other people studying for the SAT is fun.

The appeal of the MTV Books series, *Fast Girls, Hot Boys*, can be summed up in its title. The only thing more important to the protagonists than sex and drinking is fame—getting into the right clubs and the right magazines while living the high life in South Beach. The twist of this series is that it opens with a funeral—one of the “fabulous five” of the Miami Academy for Creative and Performing Arts will be dead soon—but will it be the celebante, the hip-hop hopeful, the anime-obsessed lesbian, the bad boy, or the poor British hottie? Before we find out, we'll be taken on a tour of exclusive clubs, luxurious homes, shady poker games, and

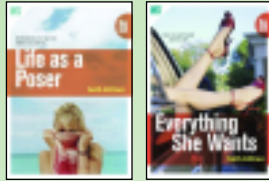
scandalous strip clubs. The series is very racy and very hot—definitely aimed at older teens and up.

Another twist on the lives of the young and fabulous comes from *Vampire Beach*, a series that owes a debt to both *Beverly Hills 90210* and R. L. Stine. Jason Freeman moves with his parents and younger sister from Michigan to exclusive Malibu Beach, where he falls in with the super-rich, super-hot, popular crowd. But partying has a truly dark side—a girl turns up dead with suspicious bite marks, and Jason discovers that beautiful people can be deadly. This take on vampire myth will drive purists crazy, but might sell well to *A-List* and *The OC* fans.

**The 310** by Beth Killian. MTV Books. 5Q 5P S

**Life as a Poser.** 2006. \$9.95. 1-4165-2031-7.

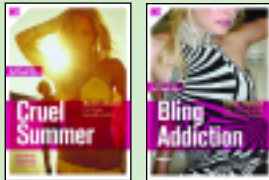
**Everything She Wants.** 2006. \$9.95. 1-4165-2168-2.



**Fast Girls, Hot Boys** by Kylie Adams. MTV Books. 4Q 5P S

**Cruel Summer.** 2006. \$9.95. 1-4165-2032-5.

**Bling Addiction.** 2006. \$9.95. 1-4165-2041-4.



**Seven Deadly Sins** by Robin Wasserman. Simon Pulse/S & S. 4Q 4P S

**Lust.** 2005. \$7.99. 0-689-87782-X.

**Envy.** 2006. \$7.99. 0-689-87783-8.

**Pride.** 2006. \$7.99. 0-689-87784-6.

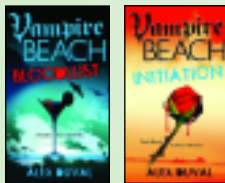
**Wrath.** 2006. \$7.99. 0-689-87785-4.



**Vampire Beach** by Alex Duval. Simon Pulse/S & S. 3Q 4P JS

**Bloodlust, Book One.** 2006. \$5.99. 1-4169-1166-9.

**Initiation, Book Two.** 2006. \$5.99. 1-4169-1167-7.



## CUTE GIRLS MEET CUTE BOYS

The bedrock of series books is, of course, the romance—the predictable plots and situations are a draw for comfort readers, even while various authors find ways to play with the conventions enough to make them interesting to new and experienced romance readers alike.

Simon Pulse's *Romantic Comedy* series is a great example. In each story, a slightly off-center girl learns about life and finds love, often through stepping out of her comfort zone to try new things. These books are adorable (with great covers) and fun to read. Although some in the Share-a-Media group find them "too fluffy," others love them. Particular favorites include *Ella Mental and the Good Sense Guide* by Amber Deckers and *A Novel Idea* by Aimee Friedman, but any of them are good, fun reads with a lot of appeal.

*Students Across the Seven Seas (S.A.S.S.)* also trades heavily in self-discovery and cute boys. Each title features an American girl visiting a foreign country for a study-abroad semester, learning about the culture, making friends, and kissing a hottie. In trade paperback size with sleek cover illustrations, these books look more sophisticated than they are. The travel experiences get no spicier than a glass of wine and a light makeout session, and the characters are sweet and well-intentioned. This series makes a good addition to a "clean" romance list.

More sophisticated and much, much more British is Sarra Manning's new paperback trilogy, *Diary of a Crush*, in which sixteen-year-old Edie falls madly in love with nineteen-year-old Dylan, an "art boy" at her college. Much of Edie's time is spent dressing in adorable vintage clothing, befriending sweet gay boys while battling mean girls, and obsessing about snogging with Dylan, who is the prototypical moody boy, running hot and cold in his affections. It's brilliant, glossy fun for Anglophiles and thrift-shoppers.

**Diary of a Crush** by Sarra Manning. Puffin. 4Q 5P S

**French Kiss.** 2006. \$6.99. 0-14-240632-5.

**Kiss and Make Up.** 2006. \$6.99. 0-14-240642-2.

**Sealed with a Kiss.** 2006. \$6.99. 0-14-240648-1.



**Romantic Comedy.** Simon Pulse/S & S. 4Q 4P M JS

**Ella Mental and the Good Sense Guide** by Amber Deckers. 2006. \$5.99. 1-4169-1322-X.

**A Novel Idea** by Aimee Friedman. Simon Pulse, 2006. \$5.99. 1-4169-0785-8.



**Students Across the Seven Seas (S.A.S.S.).** Puffin. 3Q 4P M J

**Westminster Abby** by Micol Ostow. 2005. \$6.99. 0-14-240413-6.

**Getting the Boot** by Peggy Guthart Strauss. 2005. \$6.99. 0-14-240414-4.

**Spain or Shine** by Michelle Jellen. 2005. \$6.99. 0-14-240368-7.

**Pardon My French** by Cathy Hapka. 2005. \$6.99. 0-14-240459-4.

**The Sound of Munich** by Suzanne Nelson. 2006. \$6.99. 0-14-240576-0.

**Heart and Salsa** by Suzanne Nelson. 2006. \$6.99. 0-14-240647-3.

**Now and Zen** by Linda Gerber. 2006. \$6.99. 0-14-240657-0.



## STRANGE POWERS, NORMAL TEENS

Something about the combination of extraordinary powers and ordinary problems works particularly well in series fiction. The most popular series by far in the Share-a-Media group is Meg Cabot's *The Mediator*, hailed for combining interesting plots with cute boys and realistic emotions. (The first four *Mediator* books were published under the pseudonym Jenny Carroll by Pocket Books in 2000 and 2001. The most recent titles are in hardcover from HarperCollins: *Haunted* [2003/VOYA April 2003] and *Twilight* [2005/VOYA February 2005]).

Cate Tiernan, who mixed high school anxiety with the supernatural so well in the *Sweep* series (Puffin, 2001/VOYA Paperback Update April 2001), is back with *Balefire*, a four-book series about twins separated at birth. Clio is sophisticated, popular, and experienced at magick while Thais, who has been sent to New Orleans after the mysterious death of her father, is more sheltered and naïve. When they reunite as teenagers, they find themselves at the center of a magical struggle for control of the Treize, a group of thirteen witches bound together by dark secrets. Their story is an excellent blend of magick, intrigue, and interpersonal drama.

The New Age/Wicca publisher Llewellyn has several supernatural series, including *The Seer*, featuring young psychic Sabine, who alternately loves and hates her gift. Since getting kicked out of her last school, Sabine is living with her grandmother and trying to hide her powers so that she will be accepted as a “normal” girl. But her spirit guide and the ghosts that visit her in the night won’t let that happen—she must ensure that their souls rest in peace. As the series progresses, Sabine meets like-minded people who help her to take her responsibilities seriously. The characters tend to be a little flat, but the plots are satisfyingly twisty and the premise is quite appealing.

The *TimeTripper* series’ take on the supernatural is quite different. Instead of witches and spells, Harry Keller must contend with A-Time, a strange space in which he can see past, present, and future—and change them. In addition to regular problems (his classmates think he’s weird, the teachers at his school want to put him on meds) he must battle evil beings in A-Time to save the people around him from tragic futures. The series offers lots of action, a little romance, and an interesting take on mental illness and medication. One Share-a-Media reader was drawn in by the twist on time travel.

**Balefire** by Cate Tiernan. Razorbill/Penguin Putnam. 4Q 4P J S

- A **Chalice of Wind**, #1. 2005. \$5.99. 1-59514-045-X.
- A **Circle of Ashes**, #2. 2005. \$5.99. 1-59514-046-8.
- A **Feather of Stone**, #3. 2005. \$5.99. 1-59514-047-6.
- A **Necklace of Water**, #4. 2006. \$5.99. 1-59514-048-4.



**The Seer** by Linda Joy Singleton. Llewellyn Publications. 3Q 4P M J S

- Don’t Die, Dragonfly**. 2004. \$4.99. 0-7387-0526-8.
- Last Dance**. 2005. \$5.99. 0-7387-0638-8.
- Witch Ball**. 2006. \$5.99. 0-7387-0821-6.
- Sword Play**. 2006. \$5.99. 0-7387-0880-1.



**TimeTripper** by Stefan Petrucha. Razorbill/Penguin Putnam. 4Q 3P J S

- Book One: Yestermorrow**. 2006. \$5.99. 1-59514-076-X.
- Book Two: Inrage**. 2006. \$5.99. 1-59514-077-8.



## TEEN SPIES AND SURVIVORS

Adventure and spy series are popping up as well, in response to the popularity of Anthony Horowitz’s hardcover *Alex Rider* series (Philomel/Penguin Putnam, 2001–current/VOYA August 2001 +). Good reads for both boys and girls, such books lend a nice balance to the lipstick-and-heels emphasis of many series.

In *CHERUB: A Division of MI5*, James is an orphaned juvenile delinquent on a fast track to nowhere when he is recruited to be a CHERUB agent, part of an elite British spy force made up of teens. After intense training in survival, martial arts, and other tools in the spy’s bag of tricks, James and his fellow teen agents are sent out to uncover drug dealers and terrorists in settings in which adult spies would look suspicious. Despite a slow start, this series picks up steam quickly, and the far-fetched situation is balanced by believable teen characters. A SaM reader was disappointed that it wasn’t “more

British,” but felt that it would appeal to *Alex Rider* readers.

*Flight 29 Down* was described by the Share-a-Media group as “*Lost Lite*” and that’s what it boils down to: Seven teens are stranded on a desert island in the South Seas and must learn to rely on each other to survive. The teens are stock characters—the ditz, the overachiever, the rebel—but the plots move along and the situations are mostly believable (sadly for *Lost* fans, there is no hatch or smoke monster so far). The series is a novelization of the Discovery Channel series and might be good for teens who are not allowed to watch *Lost*.

**CHERUB: A Division of MI5** by Robert Muchamore. Simon Pulse/S & S. 3Q 4P M J

- Mission 1: The Recruit**. 2005. \$5.99. 0-689-87779-X.
- Mission 2: The Dealer**. 2005. \$5.99. 0-689-87780-3.
- Mission 3: Maximum Security**. 2006. \$5.99. 0-689-87781-1.



**Flight 29 Down**, created by D. J. MacHale and Stan Rogow. Grosset & Dunlap/Penguin Putnam. 2Q 3P M

- Static**, #1 by Walter Sorrells. 2006. \$5.99. 0-448-44106-3.
- The Seven**, #2 by John Vornholt. 2006. \$5.99. 0-448-44107-1. ■

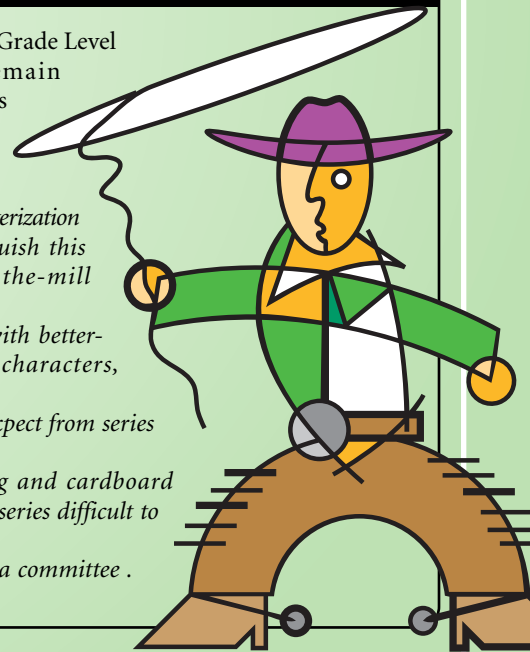


## PAPERBACK SERIES REVIEW CODE

All P (Popularity) and Grade Level Interest ratings remain the same as VOYA’s established code.

### QUALITY

- 5Q** A distinctive voice and thoughtful characterization and plotting distinguish this series from run-of-the-mill series fiction.
- 4Q** A satisfying read with better-than-average plot, characters, and/or dialogue.
- 3Q** Exactly what you expect from series fiction.
- 2Q** Awkward phrasing and cardboard characters make this series difficult to read.
- 1Q** Possibly written by a committee . . . of robots.



Lorraine Squires has shoulder-length, sun-streaked blonde hair and almond-shaped aquamarine eyes. She is exactly five feet six, and always wears a golden lavalier necklace. (Oh, wait—that’s the Wakefield twins.) Lorraine Squires is an Adult and Teen Services Librarian at Middle Country Public Library in Centereach, New York. She is a Serving the Underserved trainer for the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA). She began reviewing for VOYA in 2004. The MCPL Share-a-Media group started out as a Share-a-Book club before they realized that they spent as much time discussing TV, movies, and music as they did books.