

Series Profile: Simon Snow Series

Summary

The Simon Snow series was introduced as a fictional book series, reminiscent of *Harry Potter*, within the world of Rainbow Rowell's 2013 young adult/new adult novel *Fangirl*. In *Fangirl*, the main character was a "big name fan" of Simon Snow, writing a popular fanfiction story that paired the two main male characters, Simon & Baz. After the popularity of *Fangirl*, Rainbow Rowell further explored the world by writing *Carry On*, which takes place during main character Simon Snow's seventh and final year at a magical British boarding school.

Beginning in media res, *Carry On* introduces readers to a magical world clearly based on that of *Harry Potter*, with many small differences. Main characters include Penelope (the know-it-all best friend), Baz (the mysterious and potentially evil school rival), and Agatha (the long-term girlfriend). By the end of *Carry On*, the plot has differentiated itself significantly from *Harry Potter*, especially in major reveals about The Mage (the wise and powerful but stand-offish mentor) and The Insidious Humdrum (the evil antagonist), as well as in the rivals-to-lovers gay romance that develops between Simon and Baz.

The second book in the series, *Wayward Son*, picks up months after the explosive final battle of *Carry On*, exploring and complicating the "happily ever after" of the Chosen One. Depressed, still processing his trauma, and without magic, Simon embarks on a road trip across the American West with Baz and Penelope, where they run into a host of magical creatures. The third and final book, *Any Way the Wind Blows*, was announced in October 2019, and is due to be released sometime in 2021.

Developmental Assets Demonstrated

- **Support:**
 - **Other adult relationships** (also **Adult role models**) – There are both positive/healthy and negative/unhealthy mentor and teacher adult-child relationships modeled
 - **Caring school climate** – It could be argued that this is either modeled well or very badly, or even both
- **Boundaries and expectations:**
 - **Positive peer influence** – Simon's friends, especially Penelope, support and encourage him
 - **High expectations** – Especially in the second book, the series demonstrates the potential downside of overly high expectations and high pressure on young people (obviously exaggerated in this situation due to the "Chosen One" premise)
- **Commitment to Learning:**
 - **Bonding to school** – Simon loves his school and misses it a great deal when not there
- **Positive Values & Positive Identity:**

- Caring, Integrity, Responsibility; Personal power, Sense of purpose, Positive view of personal future – As a hero, Simon has great responsibility to save the world; *Wayward Son* especially explores the effects of too much responsibility on a single young person and the struggle to find an identity, sense of purpose, and optimistic sense of the future, when their life, purpose, and identity have previously been defined for them by others

Audience

Because *Fangirl*, the first book in the universe, featured a college-age character, and because the series in general tends to appeal most strongly to fans of *Harry Potter*, many of whom are now in their 20s and 30s, readers for the Simon Snow books tend to skew older, despite the main character being only 17 in *Carry On*. Perhaps realizing that, Rowell aged up the characters slightly (to university students) in the second book. The complex themes, especially of *Wayward Son*, which grapples with mental illness and generally has a moodier tone, will probably resonate most with high school students. Although there is romance, there is nothing more explicit than kissing, and the violence (and character deaths) is about the same as that in *Harry Potter*, so middle schoolers who express interest should be fine picking it up, although they may lose interest before the end of *Carry On*. I would set the age range at 12+, with no maximum -- many adults will enjoy it as well.

Both regular fantasy readers and those who typically focus more on realistic fiction will find something to enjoy here, although for fantasy haters the “magickal” world will take a little getting used to. The enemies-to-lovers romance will appeal to LGBTQ fans and romance readers. Although this series is distinct from Rainbow Rowell’s typical fare, fans of her witty dialogue, as well as readers who enjoy authors like Becky Albertalli, Adam Silvera, and Alice Oseman, and books like *The Gentleman’s Guide to Vice & Virtue*, *The Raven Boys*, and slightly older/new adult romances like *Red*, *White*, & *Royal Blue*, will enjoy this book.

How the Series Could be Used

- For a book club or reading list on fandom (include *Fangirl* for this one; for other suggestions on this list, just *Carry On*)
- On a list or display of “slump-busters” or “escapist reads”: engrossing and addictive books
- As read-alikes for *Harry Potter* (including for parents who complain that their kids are “only” reading and re-reading *HP*; or for readers who want something more LGBTQ+-friendly and/or have disavowed J.K. Rowling and are looking for something to replace her work)
- On a list or display of “YA books adults will love” or a mixed/crossover display of YA & new adult books in the adult section to try to get older YA books circulating among a new audience, including older teens who may avoid the teen section
- For Valentine’s day, Pride, or “Read a romance” month, in a display of “Enemies-to-lovers” romance books or LGBTQ romances
- For a high school class discussing the hero’s journey, antagonists, and anti-heroes, in comparison with books like *Beowulf*, *Oedipus*, *The Odyssey* (and possibly *The Song of Achilles*), *Romeo & Juliet*, etc.– this would be a great easy-reading “treat” for the end of a semester or year of reading classics

Popularity

This would likely do well anywhere, in both public and school libraries. However, it is a bit difficult to understand exactly what you're picking up if you're not "in the know," so I imagine some teens would quickly put it down, confused about why a fantasy boarding-school series starts in the seventh year. You may also end up with readers who are surprised that it's a gay romance, which isn't explicit or obvious from the cover, but on the flip side it could do well if pushed with other recent YA LGBTQ+ romance & fantasy series. It would probably be most popular in large urban libraries, especially in places where there is more use of the young adult section by older teens and early twenty-somethings, as well as adults, and where people are less hesitant to pick up LGBTQ+ books (e.g. where there is a [self-checkout option](#) and/or where the environment is viewed as more liberal and accepting by patrons), as is the case in New York & Brooklyn, where the many copies are often in circulation. The earlier books will likely also see a bump when the third and final book comes out.

Series Read-Alikes/Similar Series

- *Harry Potter* series, by J.K. Rowling

For those who like the witty dialogue and romance:

- Creekwood series (*Simon vs. & Leah on the Offbeat*) by Becky Albertalli
- Montague Siblings series (*Gentleman's Guide, Lady's Guide*), by Mackenzi Lee
- Heartstopper series, by Alice Oseman
- All for the Game series (*The Foxhole Court*), by Nora Sakavic
- Fence (comics) series, by C.S. Pacat
- Check, Please (comics) series, by Ngozi Ukazu

For those who like the magic/fantasy world-building and adventure (with a focus on other LGBTQ+ fantasies):

- The Raven Cycle (*The Raven Boys*), by Maggie Stiefvater
- Six of Crows series, by Leigh Bardugo
- The Folk of the Air series (*The Cruel Prince*), by Holly Black
- Infinity Cycle (*Infinity Son*), by Adam Silvera (only 1 book out so far)
- Dread Nation series, by Justina Ireland
- The Kingston Cycle (*Witchmark*), by C.L. Polk
- Crier's War series, by Nina Varela (1 book out)

For older readers (17-24+), who want something similar but more adult, darker, and/or sexier:

- Alex Stern series (*Ninth House*), by Leigh Bardugo (1 book out)
- The Locked Tomb series (*Gideon the Ninth*), by Tamsyn Muir (1 book out)