

contents

introduction . . . 1

an auspicious beginning:
cecily von ziegesar's *gossip girl* . . . 4

you're nobody until you're talked about:
josh schwartz, stephanie savage, and the CW . . . 8

great adaptations . . . 16
 Guide to the *Gossip Girl* Books . . . 22

you know you love them: the cast
 Blake Lively (Serena van der Woodsen) . . . 25
 Leighton Meester (Blair Waldorf) . . . 29
 Penn Badgley (Dan Humphrey) . . . 32
 Chace Crawford (Nate Archibald) . . . 36
 Taylor Momsen (Jenny Humphrey) . . . 38
 Ed Westwick (Chuck Bass) . . . 41
 Jessica Szohr (Vanessa Abrams) . . . 44
 Kelly Rutherford (Lily van der Woodsen) . . . 46
 Matthew Settle (Rufus Humphrey) . . . 48

season 1

- 1.01 Pilot . . . 51
 - Gossip Girl*, version 1.1
 - Connor Paolo as Eric van der Woodsen
- 1.02 The Wild Brunch . . . 61
 - Eleanor Waldorf Designs by Abigail Lorick
 - Robert John Burke as Bart Bass
- 1.03 Poison Ivy . . . 68
 - Upper East Side 101
 - Jason Robards as Captain Howie Archibald
- 1.04 Bad News Blair . . . 74
 - Breakfast at Bendel's
 - Sebastian Stan as Carter Baizen
- 1.05 Dare Devil . . . 81
 - Best Frenemies Forever
- 1.06 The Handmaiden's Tale . . . 88
 - Nan Zhang and Nicole Fiscella as Kati Farkas and Isabel Coates

- 1.07 Victor, Victrola . . . 95
Francie Swift as Anne Archibald
- 1.08 Seventeen Candles . . . 102
Susie Misner as Alison Humphrey
You Know You Love Me. (You Do, Don't You?)
- 1.09 Blair Waldorf Must Pie! . . . 110
Don't I Know You From Somewhere? The Bloodlines of *Gossip Girl's* Characters
Margaret Colin as Eleanor Waldorf
- 1.10 Hi, Society . . . 118
Caroline Lagerfelt as Celia Rhodes
- 1.11 Roman Holiday . . . 125
John Shea as Harold Waldorf
- 1.12 School Lies . . . 132
Mindblowingly Inappropriate: *Gossip Girl's* Been Bad
- 1.13 The Thin Line Between Chuck and Nate . . . 139
Strike Out for K
Zuzanna Szadkowski as Dorota
- 1.14 The Blair Bitch Project . . . 146
- 1.15 Desperately Seeking Serena . . . 151
Michelle Trachtenberg as Georgina Sparks
- 1.16 All About My Brother . . . 159
Game Over?
Jesse Swenson as Asher Hornsby
- 1.17 Woman on the Verge . . . 166
"And Who Am I?"
- 1.18 Much 'I Do' About Nothing . . . 172
By Any Other Name . . .
The Devil's in the Details: Season 1 Stats
Kristen Bell as Gossip Girl

season 2

- 2.01 Summer, Kind of Wonderful . . . 182
Mädchen Amick as Catherine
- 2.02 Never Been Marcused . . . 191
Patrick Heusinger as Marcus Beaton
- 2.03 The Dark Night . . . 197
Michelle Hurd as Laurel

- 2.04 The Ex-Files . . . 202
Home Is Where the Art Is
- 2.05 The Serena Also Rises . . . 209
“Untitled” by Daniel Humphrey
- 2.06 New Haven Can Wait . . . 216
- 2.07 Chuck in Real Life . . . 221
Meta Moments
Marquise de Waldorf & Vicomte de Bass
- 2.08 Prêt-a-Poor J . . . 228
Willa Holland as Agnes Andrews
- 2.09 There Might Be Blood . . . 233
John Patrick Amedori as Aaron Rose
Music Supervisor Alex Patsavas
- 2.10 Bonfire of the Vanity . . . 241
“5.19.91” by Daniel Humphrey
Wallace Shawn as Cyrus Rose
- 2.11 The Magnificent Archibalds . . . 249
- 2.12 It’s a Wonderful Lie . . . 255
It’s Britney, Bitch
Amanda Setton as Penelope Shafai
and Dreama Walker as Hazel Williams
- 2.13 O Brother, Where Bart Thou? . . . 261
- 2.14 In the Realm of the Basses . . . 267
Desmond Harrington as Jack Bass
- 2.15 Gone With the Will . . . 272
Yin Chang as Nelly Yuki
- 2.16 You’ve Got Yale! . . . 277
The Shakespeare Club
Laura Breckenridge as Rachel Carr
- 2.17 Carnal Knowledge . . . 284
Kate French as Elle
- 2.18 The Age of Dissonance . . . 289
Constance Billard and St. Jude’s Present *The Age of Innocence*
- 2.19 The Grandfather . . . 296
James Naughton as William van der Bilt
- 2.20 Remains of the J . . . 303
Chasing Dorota

- 2.21 Seder Anything . . . 308
 - Armie Hammer as Gabriel Edwards
- 2.22 Southern Gentlemen Prefer Blondes . . . 314
 - Tamara Feldman as Poppy Lifton
- 2.23 The Wrath of Con . . . 319
- 2.24 Valley Girls . . . 324
 - The Ruffy Timeline
 - Brittany Snow as Lily Rhodes
- 2.25 The Goodbye Gossip Girl . . . 331
 - Gossip Bombs
 - By Any Other Name . . .

sources . . . 341

acknowledgments . . . 348

introduction

For someone now so hopelessly enamored of *Gossip Girl*, I was a late convert. A fan of YA fiction, I'd read one of Cecily von Ziegesar's *Gossip Girl* novels back in the early 2000s and dropped it in favor of smarter, funnier novels like Louise Rennison's Georgia Nicolson series. *Gossip Girl* was catty, mean, and superficial, a world so tightly embracing brand-name worship it made my skin crawl. When I saw a billboard advertising the CW's adaptation of *Gossip Girl* in fall 2007 (starring Bridget from the *Sister Pants* movie!), I took it as a sign of the apocalypse. But like Dorota, I think it's important to know thine enemies, so I tuned in. And then I tuned in again. Then my brave co-worker Sarah said that she liked the show, not liked-to-hate it, but earnestly enjoyed it. Slowly the guilty pleasure of watching *Gossip Girl* turned into me buying hairbands and suggesting Colored Tights Day at the office and talking about Serena, Dan, Chuck, Blair, Nate, and Jenny every Tuesday morning.

There's no denying that *Gossip Girl* is a soap opera full of impossibly good-looking people with drama-filled lives and conveniently connected plotlines, but what makes the show more culturally important than its daytime counterparts or savvier than its teeny-bopper predecessors like *Beverly Hills, 90210* is that it transcends the limitations of its genre by being more subversive, smarter, more self-aware, funnier, and better dressed. There's no reason to feel guilty for watching *Gossip Girl* instead of a highbrow show. Challenging, engaging television involves interwoven threadlines, narrative

complexity, and a lack of “handholding,” as Steven Johnson describes in *Everything Bad Is Good for You*. In *Gossip Girl*’s case it makes the viewers figure out the subtleties of character interactions and catch the rapid-fire references, allusions, and in-jokes as the plot quickly weaves and thickens all in a New York minute. It’s complex and layered enough to warrant a book-length companion guide (in my humble opinion).

Meant to be read as a complement to, not a replacement for, watching the show, *Spotted*’s episode guide, bios, sidebars, and background chapters aim to help illustrate why *Gossip Girl* truly is, as *New York* magazine called it in April 2008, the “most awesomely awesome show ever.” The bulk of the book is the episode guide. Before you get into it, here’s a mini guide to the guide:

Each episode begins with *Gossip Girl* giving us some choice wisdom, so I’ve picked a line from her narration that encapsulates that episode best. After giving you a general analysis of the episode, I will highlight one moment, a line so funny or painful or bang-on it deserves a high five.

JTLYK: The “just to let you know” section catches intertextual references, character insights, and other pieces of interest.

Secrets & Lies: Tells you who’s been lying to whom in a series chock-full of lies, secrets, ruses, and manipulation.

Scrap!: For people with so-called good social graces, the *Gossip Girl* characters get into physical altercations quite frequently. I’ll catalog them here.

Not a Girl, Not Yet a Queen Bee: All about Little Jenny Humphrey and her arc through the first season.

You’ll B a Woman Soon: For season 2, the focus switches to Blair Waldorf.

The Original Gossipverse: The TV world of *Gossip Girl* is adapted from Cecily von Ziegesar’s book series, and here you’ll find the origin of plot details and how minor characters differ from page to screen. (See page 16 for a further discussion of the adaptation.)

That’s How It’s Done in *The O.C.*: Creators Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage imported some of their best stuff — character traits, events, one-

liners — from that show about beautiful, rich teenagers growing up in Califoornia. Be warned: this section contains spoilers for *The O.C.*

Each episode title is named after a film (with some punning added on top for good measure). In this section, I'll give you some background on the movie (spoilers abound!) and how it relates to the episode.

Welcome to the Real World: Our quick-witted Upper East Siders make tons of off-the-cuff references to the world we live in. If one went over your head, I'll explain it here.

Locations: *Gossip Girl* is primarily filmed on location in New York City and the characters talk about real-life places they visit off-screen; plan your tour of the city with this guide.

Oops: Inconsistencies, bloopers, continuity errors, and the occasional arguable nitpick are cataloged here.

Spotted: If you were a celebrity, wouldn't you use your influence to get a walk-on role on *Gossip Girl*? Me too. Here I'll list the people of note who appear in each episode.

The Look: I will provide you with details on what the characters are wearing in this section. (But with an average of eight costume changes per character per episode, **The Look** is a highlight reel rather than an exhaustive index.)

Music: Last but not least, I will tell you what songs were playing in each scene.

Make sure you watch an episode before reading its corresponding guide — it contains spoilers for that episode (but not for anything that follows). And if there's something you think I missed, or completely read your mind about, drop me a note at crissycalhoun@gmail.com, and/or stop by **The Calhoun Tribune** for a weekly reaction to the glory of *Gossip Girl* (calhountribune.blogspot.com).

xoxo
crissy calhoun

an auspicious beginning:
cecily von ziegesar's *gossip girl*

Gossip Girl was born in a brainstorming meeting at youth marketing and media packaging firm Alloy Entertainment in the late '90s. Cecily von Ziegesar, then an editor at the company, worked up a proposal based on a name tossed out during the meeting — “Gossip Girl.” Having grown up in New York City attending the Upper East Side private school Nightingale-Bamford, von Ziegesar followed the “write what you know” adage and set the story in the world she experienced as a teenager.

President of Alloy Entertainment Leslie Morgenstein said, “Cecily took the assignment and knocked it out of the park.” Cindy Eagen at Little, Brown scooped up the pitch. “She seemed to have caught on to trends before they happened, with *Gossip Girl* being what was initially described as a ‘Web mistress,’ before the word ‘blogger’ was known. I jumped on the book right away.” For CvonZ, “[Blogging] seemed like the logical thing to use within a book and it’s a great literary device, allowing me to plant things in her column.”

Von Ziegesar initially plotted *Gossip Girl* as an imitation of Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence*, but scrapped most of that version, hit her stride, and wrote the first book in just four months. “I was just so into it, it came so easily because I felt that I was writing about people that I know,” she told the *Daily Telegraph* in 2002. Based on people she went to school with, the characters are “fabulously rich and wild. These kids drink, talk, dress and act like adults; they’re jaded by the time they hit 18.”

The initial print run of 35,000 for *Gossip Girl* was not enough copies to satisfy the ravenous YA audience. Cecily, who went on maternity leave shortly after taking on the project, never returned to her editorial position at Alloy. She kept on writing the *Gossip Girl* series until the eighth book (*Nothing Can Keep Us Together*). After that book, the covers read “created by” rather than “by” Cecily von Ziegesar. (The switch in authorship may account for some of the inconsistencies between books, but for the most part the changeover went off without a hitch. Cecily doesn’t write the spin-off series *The It Girl* either.)

Each novel covers roughly one month in the lives of Blair, Serena, Dan, Jenny, Vanessa, and Nate as they go to parties, break up and make up, choose colleges, lose their virginity, flit off to the Hamptons, and buy \$40,000 wedding dresses. What Cecily *didn’t* want in the books was moralizing. “It’s completely unrealistic to have a group of kids who are constantly reforming or who are being punished because they’re ‘naughty.’ And I always resented that quality in books I’d read.” To *New York* magazine, she expanded on her approach to portraying deviant behavior, “I mean, of course I want to be the responsible mother who says, ‘Oh, there are terrible repercussions if you have sex, do drugs, and have an eating disorder!’ But the truth is, my friends and I dabbled in all of those things. And we all went to good colleges and grew up fine. And that’s the honest thing to say.”

“These books are meant to be funny, so most of all I hope people laugh while they’re reading them. But there are sad and touching scenes too, and I hope readers can relate to what the characters are going through. Even though they’re rich and spoiled on the surface, they’re still just like everyone else,” explained Cecily. The difference lies in “the extraneous stuff, like the clothes that they wear and the fact that they have their own credit cards and country houses. All the important stuff is pretty much the same for teenagers wherever you go. It’s the same angsty world.”

While some parents were just glad their children were reading, others criticized the series. “While the activities of these youngsters are not glamorized, they are presented as business as usual,” said Amy Coffin of The Book Haven, a book club for teenagers. “While older teens will be able to separate the drama from reality, younger teens could admire the vindictive natures and twisted pleasures of the cast, and adopt smoking, drinking and promiscuity as the real-life fast track to popularity.” Naomi Wolf criticized the *Gossip Girl* series and other YA novels of its ilk in the *New York Times*: “The problem

is a value system in which meanness rules, parents check out, conformity is everything and stressed-out adult values are presumed to be meaningful to teenagers. The books have a kitsch quality — they package corruption with a cute overlay.”

Cecily shrugged off the criticism. “I actually think that it just makes people want to read the books. I’ll stand by them. I don’t think anything the kids do is there for shock value or is all that offensive. It’s just based on the way kids behave. They talk about sex all the time, but whether or not they’re actually doing it is another question. It’s not until the fourth book that two characters actually have sex. . . . There’s certainly profanity in the books, but I don’t think it’s gratuitous; I think it’s really the way teenagers talk. And some of the characters swear more. Blair swears more because she’s always pissed off.

“Also, Blair has this bulimia problem, but in the fourth book, somebody makes her admit that she has it. It’s done in a way that’s true to Blair. She’s like, ‘Oh, God. Are you gonna make me say it?’ I want to reassure the reader that she’s aware of it. She’s not just completely insane. . . . I’m sure it’s alarming to some teachers and parents. But I’m not glorifying it. I think it’s actually portrayed in a pretty disgusting way. It’s not anything that any reader is going to want to emulate.”

The combination of no-holds-barred honesty about what teenagers can, and do, get up to in an over-the-top fantasy world of Amex Black Cards, designer everything, and ludicrous plot twists has made the *Gossip Girl* books bestsellers, with over 5.6 million copies sold as of August 2008. In addition to the *It Girl* series (which follows Jenny Humphrey at boarding school), there’s another spin-off, *The Carlyles*, about triplets who move into the Waldorf apartment after Blair’s family relocates to California (I know, as if, right?). After the 11 books in the original line, Ziegler returned to the series, penning a prequel (*It Had to Be You*) in October 2007, shortly after the premiere of the TV show, and the original characters return to the city in November 2009’s *I Will Always Love You*.

Alloy Entertainment, the company behind *Gossip Girl*, its spin-offs, and other successful YA series like *The Clique*, *The A-List*, *Pretty Little Liars*, and *Private*, works with film and television producers to develop these properties onscreen. (Alloy was behind *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* movies.) Before the CW picked up the television rights for the *Gossip Girl* project, there was a feature film adaptation in the works, circa 2004, at Warner Bros.

Pictures, with Amy Sherman-Palladino (*Gilmore Girls*) attached as a writer and Lindsay Lohan set to star. Thankfully the rights reverted to Alloy, and Josh Schwartz, Stephanie Savage, and the CW were able to bring us the *Gossip Girl* we know and love.