

[NY HEARD & SCENE](#)

April 21, 2013, 11:31 p.m. ET

## Hollywood Writers Target Young Adults

By MARSHALL HEYMAN

Young-adult properties like "The Hunger Games" and "Twilight" are hot at the box office, which has bought more attention to the literary genre. But the subject matter isn't the only thing the two formats have in common: some popular teen fiction series are produced from outlines, editorial outlines, much like a television-writing staff might create.

"I learned to write television by ghostwriting 'X-Files' novelizations," said the television producer Rob Thomas, who got his start in YA fiction and just completed a Kickstarter campaign to make a movie version of the television series "Veronica Mars" (the campaign raised more than \$5.7 million). "You learn what it's like to work in a certain structure."

Books for teen audiences, like movies and television, also have to be well-plotted and grab the reader from the get go. But you can't adjust your tone, said Paul Rudnick, whose first novel for teens "Gorgeous" comes out next week from Scholastic. "You never condescend to a young reader. Things don't need to be simplified."

Added Kirsten Smith, who showed her book "Trinkets" to her 17-year-old pal Tavi Gevinson before it was published, "You always worry that 'I hope it's authentic and true to a teenager's life and feelings.'" Ms. Gevinson gave Ms. Smith's novel the thumbs up—or whatever positive gesture young people are using these days.

"That was a big relief," said Ms. Smith.

Here are a few of the Hollywood writers with new-ish books on the YA shelf.

**Kirsten "Kiwi" Smith, 42**

**From:** Port Ludlow, Wash.

**Hollywood cred:** Screenplays for "Legally Blonde" and "The House Bunny."

**YA novel:** "Trinkets." Her first, "The Geography of Girlhood" was told completely in poems.

**Logline:** An unlikely friendship sparks between three girls in a Shoplifters Anonymous group.

**Why YA?** Ms. Smith originally wanted to turn the story into a heist movie, but watching "Oceans 11," she realized plotting that "is not really my skill set. But I could make it about girl bonding rather than keep it locked in an idea file."

**Hollywood interest:** "When a screenwriter writes a book, it's all about them adapting it. I'd need to drive that process," Ms. Smith said. "But I would especially love it if someone would say, 'Here's how to turn it into a heist movie.' That would be my dream."

**Influential books growing up:** "I was a total Judy Blume head."

**YA she recommends:** "A Fault in Our Stars" by John Green.

**Guilty pleasure meant for teenagers:** "I love One Direction and I eat cookies for breakfast."

**Paul Rudnick, 55**

**From:** Piscataway, N.J.

**Hollywood cred:** The movies "Addams Family Values" and "In & Out."

**YA novel:** "Gorgeous"

**Logline:** A girl from a Missouri trailer park is transformed into the most beautiful woman who ever lived by a wizard-like fashion designer.

**Why YA?** "I've become something of a YA addict," said Mr. Rudnick. "The storytelling grabs you from the first paragraph." Besides, the genre made sense for a tale about an 18-year-old girl. "I've always thought, let the material dictate the form."

**Hollywood interest:** Summit, which made the "Twilight" movies, optioned the rights.

**Influential books growing up:** Any biography for young people—"It didn't matter if it was about Babe Ruth or Madame Curie."

**YA he recommends:** "Dash and Lily's Book of Dares" by Rachel Cohn and David Levithan.

**Guilty pleasure meant for teenagers:** "I'm both proud and ashamed to watch Nickelodeon," said Mr. Rudnick, who is currently at work on a second YA novel and a pilot for HBO. "It's fascinating to watch very young actors who might become the mainstream stars of tomorrow."

**Rob Thomas, 47**

**From:** San Marcos, Texas, near Austin.

**Hollywood cred:** "Veronica Mars," which will soon be a movie and, Mr. Thomas hopes, a series of YA books.

**YA novel:** "Rats Saw God," originally published in 1996, was reissued last month by Simon & Schuster.

**Logline:** The pothead son of an astronaut must write a 100-page essay to graduate high school, so he writes one about himself.

**Why YA?** "I thought that with the sex and the drugs, I was writing it for my peers and other guys in bands," said Mr. Thomas. "I didn't think I was writing for teenagers. I wrote it as smart as I wanted to write it."

**Hollywood interest:** Dick Clark optioned the book years ago, "but it never got made," Mr. Thomas recalled.

**Influential books growing up:** Sci-fi trilogies by John Christopher.

**YA he recommends:** "I was the 80 millionth person to read 'The Hunger Games.'"

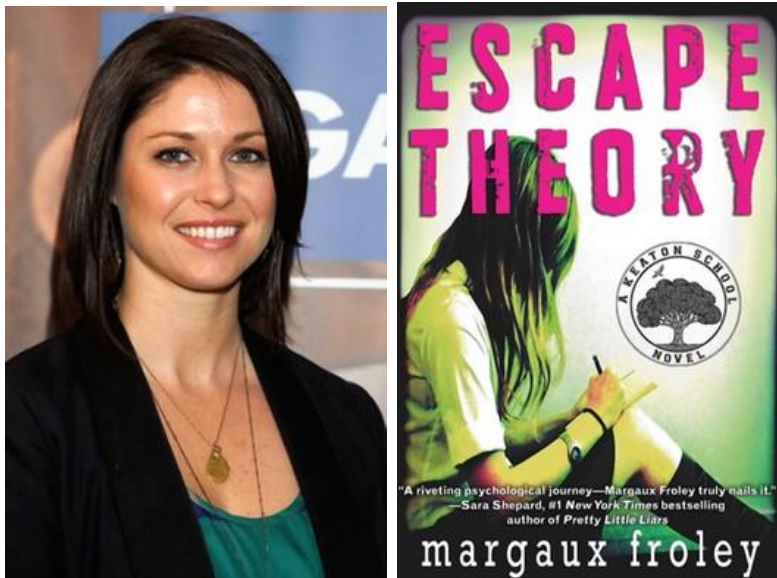
**Guilty pleasure meant for teenagers:** The television show "Freaks and Geeks," although "now that I have an 8 year old and a 4 year old I'm up on 'Phineas and Ferb.'"

## Margaux Froy, 33

**From:** Santa Barbara, Calif.

**Hollywood cred:** Worked at MTV and wrote for the CW show "Privilege."

**YA novel:** "Escape Theory," out last month.



WireImage/Getty Images

Margaux Froy, whose first YA novel, 'Escape Theory,' was released last month.

**Logline:** A peer counselor tries to solve the mystery of a popular student's suicide at a boarding school.

**Why YA?** "I'm a huge fan of the genre," said Ms. Froy, who herself attended boarding school at Cate in Carpinteria, Calif. "These books happen to be fast-paced with great storytelling."

**Hollywood interest:** Ms. Froy has been pitching it around.

**Influential books growing up:** "Catcher in the Rye" by J.D. Salinger and "Tiger Eyes" by Judy Blume.

**YA she recommends:** "Daughter of Smoke and Bone" by Laini Taylor and "The Diviners" by Libba Bray.

**Guilty pleasure meant for teenagers:** The websites Figment, which "fosters productive writing," she said, and "Dear Teen Me," in which writers send letters to their teenage selves.

## **Mark Kruger, "over 40"**

**From:** Merrick, N.Y.

**Hollywood cred:** The television show "Necessary Roughness" as well as the movie "Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh," directed by Bill Condon.

**YA novel:** "Overpowered," out later this summer.

**Logline:** A 16-year-old girl moves to Colorado to live with her dad and discovers a mysterious pulse of energy that gives her and her friends powers.

**Why YA?** A decade ago, Mr. Kruger wrote the story as a television pilot called "Pulse," and though it didn't get made, "it became my signature calling card in television that got me a lot of work," he said. A few years ago, his television agent suggested he turn it into a young adult novel.

**Hollywood interest:** "It's early," Mr. Kruger said, "but most definitely. There are a million scripts that are unproduced pilots, but a book gives it a whole different patina."

**Influential books growing up:** Anything by Edgar Allen Poe, Ambrose Bierce and Shirley Jackson, whose "We've Always Lived in the Castle" he recently adapted.

**YA he recommends:** "Cirque du Freak" by Darren Shan.

**Guilty pleasure meant for teenagers:** "Pretty Little Liars" on ABC Family, which "doesn't take itself too seriously," he said.

**Write to** Marshall Heyman at [marshall.heyman@wsj.com](mailto:marshall.heyman@wsj.com)

*A version of this article appeared April 22, 2013, on page A21 in the U.S. edition of The Wall Street Journal, with the headline: Hollywood Writers Target Young Adults.*