



The False Prince (The Ascendance Trilogy, Book 1): Book 1 of the Ascendance Trilogy

By Jennifer A. Nielsen

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Choose to lie...or choose to die.

In a discontent kingdom, civil war is brewing. To unify the divided people, Conner, a nobleman of the court, devises a cunning plan to find an impersonator of the king's long-lost son and install him as a puppet prince. Four orphans are recruited to compete for the role, including a defiant boy named Sage. Sage knows that Conner's motives are more than questionable, yet his life balances on a sword's point -- he must be chosen to play the prince or he will certainly be killed. But Sage's rivals have their own agendas as well.

As Sage moves from a rundown orphanage to Conner's sumptuous palace, layer upon layer of treachery and deceit unfold, until finally, a truth is revealed that, in the end, may very well prove more dangerous than all of the lies taken together.

An extraordinary adventure filled with danger and action, lies and deadly truths that will have readers clinging to the edge of their seats.

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- Sales Rank: #10262 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Scholastic Paperbacks
- Published on: 2013-02-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.50" h x 5.50" w x 1.00" l, .50 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 352 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Exclusive: A Q&A with Jennifer A. Nielsen

Question: What inspired you to write *The False Prince*?



Nielsen: I'd had the general idea for *The False Prince* for some time, but could never find the right protagonist to carry the weight of the story I wanted to tell. The central character, Sage, was found in the words of a song called *Guaranteed*, by the great Eddie Vedder. It said, "I knew all the rules, but the rules did not know me, guaranteed." From that line, I had the instant image of a defiant but charismatic boy who always stays a step ahead of the game, and where other players have no clue that all the rules are very quietly being rewritten.

Q: Where did Sage's voice come from?

Nielsen: Sage came to me as a complete character, as fully developed as if he had been a real person. So writing *The False Prince* wasn't really about creating him, but instead, it was the experience of discovering him as the story unfolded. There were several moments when I knew what was waiting for Sage if he didn't back down, and yet, he never would. So I gritted my teeth and let things unfold the only way they could with him. As I work on the sequels, he continues to surprise, amuse, and shock me. He's the most complex character I've ever written, and I'm always thrilled to get feedback from readers who are as fascinated by him as I am.

Q: Was the setting or any of the other characters inspired by real people or places?

Nielsen: Sage is very much his own person, and as a whole, is completely unique. However, there is one trait of his that I borrowed from a student I had when I was a high school debate teacher years ago. He was popular, brilliant, charming, and an amazingly talented thief. At the start of every ride to a tournament, he would steal the watch off of the bus driver's wrist, then keep it for the entire trip. As he left the bus at the end, he would hand the watch back to the driver, explaining it must have fallen to the floor. Then the driver always thanked him for being such a great and honest kid. I should've been angry, but I never was – he just pulled off his scams that well

Q: Where do you like to go to write?

Nielsen: I'll write anywhere. I work out scenes in my head while driving or in the shower, and pick up inspiration from events I notice each day. I try to always keep a pen and extra paper handy so that if something occurs to me I can write it down and not risk losing it (I hate it when I know there was something

I thought of earlier that I had loved, but now can't remember it!). My favorite places for actual writing aren't very exciting. I love to write curled up on a loveseat beneath a sunny window. And nearly every night I'll print out pages I've worked on in the day and edit them in bed before I fall asleep.

Q: Have you always wanted to be a writer? When did you first know this is what you wanted to do?

Nielsen: I've written for as long as I can remember, but the idea that I could turn that into a career never seemed real to me. I never knew any authors growing up, and as far as I could tell, they were mythical people who lived like the Great Gatsby on the other side of the country, or who had lived a hundred years ago. So I wrote as a hobby, then planned on other careers that real people had, such as being a detective, or working somewhere in the theater, or being a teacher.

That all changed after my oldest child was born and I stayed home to care for him. Suddenly, I had a lot more time on my hands, which I filled with reading. But it wasn't long before the stories in my head became more interesting than the books in my hand, and I realized that I wanted to hold a book of my own. That was when I decided to seriously pursue writing as a career. It's the perfect place for me to be now, and I can't imagine being happier anywhere else.

From [Booklist](#)

This first book in a planned trilogy is action-oriented fantasy, but don't expect magical creatures. Instead, it revolves around political intrigue (à la Megan Whalen Turner's *The Thief*, 1996). Sage is a street-savvy orphan, and along with two other boys he is recruited by Conner, a nobleman who wants to remake them in the image of their country's lost prince, a victim of pirates and presumed dead. The task is urgent, as the rest of the royal family has been murdered and civil war seems imminent. As the boys, chosen for their passing resemblance to Prince Jaron, compete to assume a new identity and the throne, Sage discovers some unpleasant truths about their host, beyond his treasonous plans to pass one of them off as royalty. Sage is a likable hero full of smart-alecky snarkiness. Especially appealing are the friendships he forges: one with his bodyguard and teacher; another with a mute serving girl. Though lacking in subtlety, Nielsen's plot twists keep coming, and readers will want to see how they play out as Sage's adventures continue. Grades 4-7. -- Karen Cruze

Review

Praise for *The False Prince*:

A *New York Times* Notable Children's Book

A *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year

Winner of the Cybils Award for Middle-Grade Fantasy & Science Fiction

"A page turner...." -- *New York Times Book Review*

"Sage proves to be a compelling character whose sharp mind and shrewd self-possession will make readers eager to follow him into a sequel." -- *Wall Street Journal*

"This kickoff to her new 'Ascendance Trilogy' is a swashbuckling origin story. . . . Sage is a quick wit, and Nielsen showcases it with terrific dialogue... chock full of alluring details for adventure-loving boys." -- *Los Angeles Times*

* "Sage is deftly characterized through humorous first-person narration, quickly establishing himself as a

beguiling antihero. . . . First in the 'Ascendancy Trilogy,' this is an impressive, promising story with some expertly executed twists." -- *Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"Nielsen has written a terrific story that carries readers along to the very (surprising) end and will leave them clamoring for the next book in her trilogy." -- *BookPage*, featured "Top Pick" review

"The False Prince is more Harry Potter(minus the magic) than Hunger Games... with authentic characters, a convincing sense of danger and a genuinely high-stakes plot.... " -- *Hollywood Reporter*

"Sure to appeal to middle-grade readers, *The False Prince* is an imaginative, plot-driven adventure story with a classic feel.... Readers will be turning pages feverishly, especially toward the climax of the novel. Deception and betrayal abound!" -- *RT Book Reviews*

"The delight of Nielsen's story is the discovery of the true motivations of all the characters in a fast-paced plot with plenty of action, mystery and violence." -- *Columbus Dispatch*

"The False Prince is a gracefully written fantasy that flows from beginning to end without a hitch.... In addition to dynamic characters, Jennifer Nielsen has created a plot with twists and turns in all the right places." -- *Deseret News*

"Ruthless ambition, fierce action and plotting, complex characters and lots of sword play and hidden passages keep pages flipping. Readers of this multifaceted, well-crafted tale will eagerly await Sage's further adventures." -- *Kirkus Reviews*

"Fast-paced and exciting, this book will appeal to readers who enjoy intrigue mixed in with their adventure.... Full of machinations and surprises, this book will keep students reading until the last page and eager for the second in the trilogy." -- *School Library Journal*

"A sure-fire mix of adventure, mystery, and suspense." -- *The Horn Book*

Users Review

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Kenneth Connolly:

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