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The Inheritance Games by Jennifer Lynn Barnes

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Discussion Questions

1. Did you think Avery made a good "Cinderella" in this story? If so, what parallels did you see with the fairy tale?

2. What were some of your impressions of Tobias Hawthorne?

3. Was the Hawthorne mansion believable? Why or why not?

4. Why do you think Tobias' letter to Avery simply said "I'm sorry."?

5. Which of the four brothers—Xander, Jameson, Grayson, or Nash—did you like the most at the beginning? Did that change as you kept reading?

6. About midway through the book, Avery and Jameson have an exchange where he accuses her of wanting the fortune, saying, "How could you not? Growing up the way you did." Avery retorts by parroting his words back to him. Which do you think would be more difficult: growing up poor and never accruing wealth or growing up wealthy and losing everything?

7. What was the significance of all the stained glass pieces Tobias left hidden around the house? What led him to leave so many of them?

8. What do you think Grayson meant when he described Xander as "the best of us, even on his worst days"?

9. If you inherited a billion-dollar fortune, what would you do with it?

10. Were you able to solve the mystery before the end?

Author Biography

Jennifer Lynn Barnes (who mostly goes by Jen) is the author of more than a dozen critically acclaimed young adult novels. She has advanced degrees in psychology, psychiatry, and cognitive science, including graduate degrees from Cambridge University, where she was a Fulbright Scholar, and Yale University, where she received her Ph.D. in 2012. Jen wrote her first published novel when she was nineteen-years-old and sold her first five books while still in college. In additional to writing YA novels, Jen has also written original pilot scripts for television networks like USA and MTV, and she is one of the world's leading experts on the psychology of fandom and the cognitive science of fiction and the imagination more broadly. Jen is an Associate Professor at the University of Oklahoma, where she holds a dual appointment in Psychology and Professional Writing.

Author Interview

What was your inspiration for *The Inheritance Games*?

When I was a senior in college, my parents embarked on the years-long process of designing (and eventually building) their dream house. My dad had recently retired and became really involved in the design process; he sketched out almost everything in the house himself, from tiny details to the big picture. He asked me if I had any requests, and I requested a secret passage. When my parents eventually moved into the house (which does have my requested secret passage!), I was just overcome with this feeling that I could feel my dad's presence in every room. He'd put so much creative energy into the house that the house just feels like him. I started thinking about the fictional version of this—an over-the-top mansion, instead of a house, dozens of secret passages instead of one. And then I started thinking about the kind of man who would build a house like that. It was years before I had the actual story to go with the house. This is the only one of my books that started with a place, rather than a character or premise.

Are Avery, the Hawthornes, or any of the other characters in the novel inspired by or based on specific individuals?

No. I'm a developmental psychologist by training, so my character design process involves giving a lot of consideration to how a character became who they are, the impact of their childhood, and the way that their innate characteristics were then shaped by the environment they grew up in. Avery and the Hawthornes all have really distinct childhoods, and those early experiences formed them into individuals who feel very real to me, but aren't actually based on or inspired by real people.

How did the novel evolve and change as you wrote and revised it? Are there any characters or scenes that were lost in the process that you wish had made it to the published version?

My books tend to grow in complexity during revision, while simultaneously shrinking in terms of word-length. In other words, for me, revising is a process of figuring out how to do more with less. When I revise, I inevitably end up introducing multiple new characters, new subplots, and new dimensions to existing characters and relationships, but as the story solidifies in my mind, I mercilessly cut and combine scenes, so the final product ends up shorter than the first draft. As a result, even though I added characters and plotlines to *The Inheritance Games* in revision, I ended up cutting a ton of scenes. I don't think there's anything from the early drafts that I miss, because for me, revising means replacing four scenes with one scene that does more.

What's currently on your nightstand?

Among other things, three books: *Fragments of the Lost* by Megan Miranda, *None Shall Sleep* by Ellie Marney, and *Wild Card* by Marie Lu.

What was your favorite book when you were a child?

In elementary school, it was *Matilda* by Roald Dahl. In middle school, it was *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, and in high school, it was *Wild Magic* by Tamora Pierce.

Is there a book that changed your life?

I don't think I can pinpoint just one book, but I can say that the books I read in middle and high school—particularly the dozens that I re-read over and over—did a lot to make me feel less alone. Now in my day job, I study the psychology of fiction, including what researchers call "parasocial relationships," which are the one-sided, but psychologically meaningful relationships that we form with favorite fictional characters. These relationships can convey a lot of the psychological benefits of real-world friendships, and that has always made me reflect on why books were so important to me during a time in my life when I hadn't yet found a place where I felt like I belonged.

Can you name a book for which you are an evangelist (and you think everyone should read)?

I don't think there is a book that I think everyone should read. Books and the reading experience are so personal; as a scientist who studies fiction, I believe pretty strongly that no two people ever read the same book, because so much of a story depends on the imaginative engagement and contributions of the reader.

That said, the book that I have probably put in the most hands in the past few years is *Scythe* by Neal Shusterman. I even got my older brother and my husband hooked on the series, despite the fact that neither of them typically reads YA.

What is the question that you're always hoping you'll be asked, but never have been? What is your answer?

"What scientific paper are you currently working on?" I'm a psychology professor who runs a lab dedicated to studying the science of fiction, and there is nothing I love more than talking about my scientific research to people who really love stories. As for the answer, right now, I'm working on a paper that examines individual differences in the extent to which readers mentally co-author and elaborate on what they read, as they read. Some people are really prone to wondering about characters' backstories, mentally fleshing out underdeveloped characters, theorizing about what's going to happen next, filling in gaps in the story, and so on, and as a reader who is constantly doing all of these things when I read, I'm really fascinated by the fact that some people do this all the time and other people tend to do it very little.