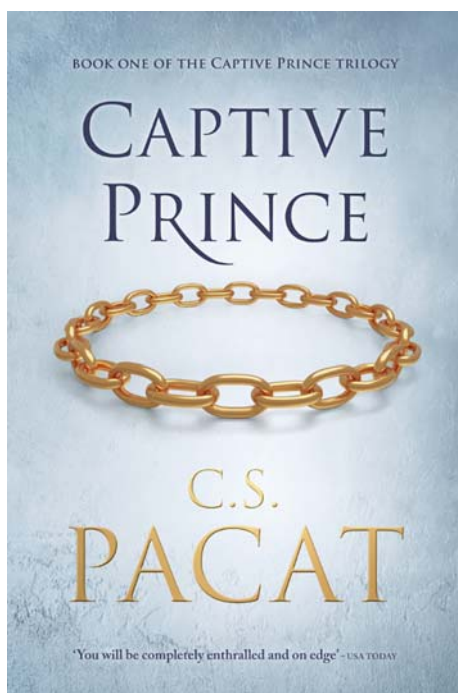


## Hearts set free



*Captive Prince* Trilogy – *Prince's Gambit*, *Kings Rising*

C S Pacat

[Penguin Viking](#) 2013-16

ISBN: 9780143799597 / 9780143799603 / 9780143799610

\$19.99 each

262/376/341 pp

This trilogy is, at heart, a complex love story. We see it develop through the three books, heartrendingly and carnally. It is no ordinary romance, but one beset by intrigue, power, false starts and danger.

The burgeoning love is both achingly private and extremely public. The lovers ultimately cannot hide their feelings, much less their actions, from the public gaze, though they put a lot of effort into trying to hide it from themselves and each other.

Although the complex story in *Captive Prince*, *Prince's Gambit* and *Kings Rising* is set in a time long past, the speculations and revelations about the relationship between the two central characters are very similar to the way these are so

frequently played out in our modern world, with its celebrity press and the internet and the telephotographers. While the exploration of love should be a very private matter, this becomes wellnigh impossible for two people who otherwise live such public lives.

Pacat fleshes out the two main characters with a depth and understanding that few writers manage. We are again and again let into the hearts and minds of these two, into their inner conflicts and their interpersonal struggles. We are also allowed to 'view' the carnal expression of the unfolding relationship, which deepens our investment in the story, though the detail may upset some readers. Pacat is not voyeuristic – the reader is drawn into the sexual episodes in the same way as s/he is drawn into the battles and the feasts.

The story that is wrapped around the inner, not-quite-private one is a classic tale of intrigue, deception, power play, war, murder, loyalty and treason – all the elements you would expect in a tale of two neighbouring kingdoms that despise each other. Pacat does not disappoint in her thrust and parry, her weaving of plans, her laying of baits, her hints and misdirections. It all comes together in a way a good thriller should, so that the reader finds it difficult to put the book down.

The author is clever in her setting of this epic. In the names of many of the characters, the geographical names, the cultural details and the weaponry, she hints at the worlds of ancient Greece and mediaeval Europe. For example, we have people called Pallas, Makedon and Laurent; places called Patra, Ios and Fortaine.

*Captive Prince* can also be read as a treatise on the eccentricities of fashion and the ease with which cultural identity can lead to xenophobia and a hatred of the 'other', and the way power is used by unscrupulous people to their own ends, with little if any regard for the 'ordinary' people.

The reader is helped through the complexity of the three books with a map and a list of all the named characters and where they fit into the geography and the societies to which they belong.

Like all stories worth reading, the *Captive Prince* trilogy allows us to reflect on ourselves and on our world as it appears now. Embark on this one with care and an open mind, and be prepared to lose some sleep.