



## Alias Dragonfly

*Jane Singer*

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**Alias Dragonfly** Jane Singer

Fifteen years old. Wanted: Dead or Alive.

"Don't love a spy," warns fifteen-year-old Pinkerton agent Maddie Bradford, a lonely, rebellious outsider with a mind on fire and a photographic memory. It is 1861, the Civil War has just started and this motherless teen must move with her soldier-father from New Hampshire to Washington, DC-a city at war, packed cheek by jowl with soldiers, Rebel spies, slave catchers and traitors of all stripes bent on waging a war of destruction against the Union, and President Lincoln himself.

Maddie's journal, written in secret, of course, begins with her arrival at her aunt's DC boardinghouse through the first year of the Civil War, a time, as Maddie puts it, full of "dips and dangers," when she becomes a fearless Union spy. And then there is the mysterious, maddening Jake Whitestone, a young man who awakens something equally dangerous in Maddie: Love in a time of terror.

Civil War historian, author and lecturer Jane Singer brings her unique voice to Alias Dragonfly.

## Alias Dragonfly Details

Date : Published November 1st 2011 by Bell Bridge Books

ISBN : 9781611940411

Author : Jane Singer

Format : 161 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Young Adult, Mystery, Romance

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## From Reader Review Alias Dragonfly for online ebook

### Amy Denim says

15 year-old Maddie Bradford becomes a Pinkerton spy during the Civil War.

Now, before you pu-shaw (say it out loud) this concept know that the author is a Civil War historian and through her research not only discovered that Allan Pinkerton hired women as spies, but that he placed one in the home of a Confederate socialite Washingtonian as a governess.

I really loved Maddie's character. She's a little bit broken (fell from a tree as a child), she's also got a photographic memory. She's always thought she was extra strange (what teenager doesn't), but learns to embrace her uniqueness to support a cause she believes in (as an awesome spy!). Thanks go to Jane Singer for creating a believable heroine who isn't whiny or in some co-dependant relationship (with a vampire) and is a fantastic role model for today's young women.

While I really liked Maddie, the story she told needed a little work. It's relayed to us through her first person eyes, after the fact. Maddie lets us know she is telling us this story, and often pops out of the narrative to ask us, the reader how we feel about something. I found that weird and unnecessary. I'm guessing the editor may have recommended this technique to get the reader more involved in the story, but it threw me out of it.

I wished the story had moved the romance between our heroine and the hottie newspaper reporter along a bit more. (But that might just be me, I love a good romance!)

I have to tell you I was a bit miffed at the end. Okay, so the war isn't over, and there are gonna be more books, but I just didn't get that nice fulfilling 'here's the end of the story' feeling. I kept turning the pages, expecting one more chapter.

#### My Recommendations:

I liked it, and the only thing keeping me from saying I would have paid for it is the ending. Make that more satisfying and I'd totally fork over the bucks.

Still, well worth my one-click (and yours too)

I give this one three stars (Hey Jane, I'll give the fourth if you give me another chapter!)

This and other reviews of free ebooks is on my blog 365 days 365 free ebooks at

<http://amydenim.blogspot.com>

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### Rose says

Jane Singer's "Alias Dragonfly" is written from the perspective of a young woman acting as a spy for the Union during the Civil War, following the death of her mother and her father's serving time as a soldier. Yet given a fascinating premise where 15-year old Maddie Bradford, sporting a photographic memory, is said to be recounting her spy activities and encountering enemies in a journey full of "dips and dangers" - I found it progressed quite pedantic compared to what the premise makes it out to be.

What one should know coming into this novel - it is based with several real historical figures being players in the novel - with conflict ranging in the infiltration of Confederate informants. I don't debate the presence of those figures and their accuracy, not as much as there's really not a compelling story to be had in the work for the most part. This is unfortunate because I saw quite a few places where Singer's writing did pull me into one or two of the respective conflicts, but it wasn't until well after the novel's midpoint had passed, and even then the characters weren't fully realized or developed progressively considering the age range this novel is intended for. The story doesn't really start off with Maddie's work as a spy as much as it builds up to

the point where she becomes one, and as for the mysterious boy Maddie falls for? He's not present enough in the novel to be a convincing love interest. It's not established why Maddie's drawn to him, or provided with the measure that he's drawn to her. It feels forced, being told more than shown, which is something I could attribute to the collective work's flaws - telling, not showing and lacking intimacy as well as sense of urgency for the themes it draws.

The novel concludes a bit abrupt, lending to a sequel presumably continuing Maddie's work as a spy, but since there were so many threads that were established (i.e. the girl that looks like the protagonist, noted in the prologue) but subsequently dropped, "Alias Dragonfly" does not work well as a standalone novel and feels incomplete, ending before it truly begins. I wish I could give this novel a full recommendation, but unfortunately it fell flat for me in more ways than one. It's at least worth trying to see some of the sparks in the writer's style and moments where Maddie rises to the occasion of breaking gender barriers for her time, but much of it is overshadowed by storytelling that never quite finds its footing.

Overall: 1.5/5

Note: I received this as an ARC from NetGalley from the publisher Bell Bridge Books.

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### **Nicolle says**

Alias Dragonfly is an easy to read young adult novel with a fascinating story line which had me on the edge of my seat.

Jane Singer established the character of Maddie in an emotion packed and dramatic way, conveying what happened in her past in short bursts throughout the book. The book is written in a diary form from Maddie's point of view, which I thought was a great way to get across Maddie's thoughts and feelings of the war going on and her special ability.

The plot was original, one I had never come across before, and this was definitely a huge plus. I'm not saying that parts weren't predictable, as a lot of the time I seemed to know what was coming and was hardly surprised as the events unraveled, but the constant twists and turns throughout the novel compensated for this. Maddie is a fabulous spy and though I envy her attitudes and appearance, I also admire her bravery for herself and her father. She is a wonderful and very likeable protagonist.

This was the first ebook I have read all the way through, and though it was good, I'm not sure whether I am willing to give up my real material books.

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### **Danica Page (One Page at a Time) says**

**My Overall Thoughts/Impressions:** First off, let me say that I'm so glad that I accepted this book for review on NetGalley, because I loved loved loved this book.

I'm a sucker for spy books and historical fiction. Basically, I love this entire genre, so I went into this novel with very high expectations. I was also fairly confident that this book wouldn't live up to my expectations. And I was right, it didn't live up to my expectations--it surpassed them. This novel was even better than I had hoped it would be.

From the very first page, I was captivated by this story. I loved Maddie's character and found it very easy to connect to her tale. The writing was well-crafted and really conveyed the voice of a fifteen year old girl living in 1861. I easily felt myself getting attached to her character and felt like I was seeing the world through her eyes.

The character development throughout the novel was spectacular. It has been awhile since I read a novel that had characters that I found so likable and easy to connect to.

This book was one that left me smiling and thoroughly intrigued the entire time I was reading it. Every time I started reading it, I found myself being sucked into the story. I would definitely recommend this novel to anybody who loves historical fiction, spy books, war books, and just ya in general. This novel was amazing and I will definitely be keeping tabs on both this series and this author.

**In Summary:** A masterfully written YA historical novel that left me captivated from the very first page to the very last page. Plus it's a book about spies, what is not to love?

**For my extended review, [click here](#).**

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## Jennifer says

*This review, based on the galley, contains spoilers a-plenty, but after you read it, you won't want to read the book anyway.*

True rating: a half star.

To come straight to the point, *Alias Dragonfly* is a half-hearted, sloppily written book. I hate that it is so, and even more that I have to write a review describing it as such, because the premise – a novel about a young girl who is recruited as a Union spy at the start of the Civil War – excited me. I am a lover of historical fiction and have been a Civil War buff since I was a kid. But the text reads like an unedited first draft, full of poorly realized characters, scenes that are partially drawn, and mistakes of all kinds.

The only consistently solid writing in the entire tale is to be found in the prologue, which relates a dream (that turns out to be a cheap trick to capture the reader's attention), and the opening four chapters, in which our heroine, Maddie, recounts her journey to Washington City and settles in at her aunt's boardinghouse. However, from this point on, as the settings and characters compound, the author flounders. Too often a typical scene consists of Maddie briefly interacting with other characters in hastily sketched locations. Seldom is a scene truly set for the reader, with adequate descriptions of the surroundings and characters. And mistakes abound. For example: In a scene at breakfast in the boardinghouse, Maddie tells us her father "got up from the table." A short conversation follows, and then on the next page, Maddie says, "My father got up from the table" – but obviously, he was already up. These sorts of errors in continuity plague the text. (In fact, at the start of this scene, Maddie states that her aunt has only one boarder. Yet on the very next page, a second boarder enters and sits down for breakfast!)

In an effort to keep this review under book length, I'm going to detail just a handful of the problems and errors found in *Alias Dragonfly*:

– It is never explained why Washington, a Union city and the (temporary) home of Abraham Lincoln, the anti-slavery president (as the reader is reminded over and over), is such a hotbed of slavery. Slaves are dragged through the streets in chains, whipped in plain sight, mistreated, and even gunned down. Yet the reader is supposed to blame the South for what is being allowed to occur in a Northern city. (The reason for this confusion was the Compromise of 1850, which preserved slavery in the nation's capital while banning the slave trade there, but the author doesn't mention this.)

– Sometimes a scene is so carelessly tossed together that the reader isn't even told which characters are in it, and their sudden appearance as if from thin air is disconcerting, to say the least. For instance, in chapter nineteen Maddie is taken by Mr. Webster, one of her fellow spies, to a photography studio. He raps at the door and it opens. The room is deserted, as far as we're told, but Mr. Pinkerton, the detective chief, enters from the back. Pinkerton speaks for a couple paragraphs, and then this strange line appears: "Mr. Webster and Mrs. Smith clasped hands." But at no time was Mrs. Smith said to be in the room! (Mind you, this is one of many problematic scenes in the book.)

– In another scene, a Rebel spy is told to "ride east at sunset" from Washington City to Centreville, Virginia. But Centreville is, and always has been, almost due west of Washington.

– Directions are a continual source of trouble in this 'historical' novel: One of Maddie's spy colleagues mentions that he chose to room at her aunt's boardinghouse because of its proximity to the house of Mrs. Greenhow, the Rebel spy he is stalking. And indeed, 1625 K Street, the location Maddie later gives us for this house, is only about three blocks due south of 1240 16th Street, the address of the boardinghouse. To get there, one simply walks down 16th and turns on K. But when Maddie wanders off in search of her father's camp, she is described as going "up" 16th (in reality, down), then taking a "right" turn (in reality, a left) onto New York Avenue. Eventually, she arrives at the intersection of K and New York. Here she pauses, for it's been a long, hot, dusty ramble, but where she stops to rest just happens to be in the alley beside Mrs. Greenhow's house – yet based on the author's detailed relation of her walk, and her mention here of the address, Maddie is actually about eight blocks away from where the house is said to be. Well, you say, fiction is fiction after all. Yes, and if this were anything but an historical novel, such a mistake could be shrugged off as poetic license (albeit still staggeringly poor research and proofing – the same house can't be in two different locations). But the author is clearly making an effort at realism and is badly off the mark.

– What sets Maddie apart from the average fifteen year old is her photographic memory. Time and again we are told that she is able to recall everything she sees with perfect clarity, even down to the number of roses in a wallpaper pattern that she counts after little more than a glance at the wall. The author, however, clearly doesn't share her gift. On (Nook) page 47, Maddie describes a doll a little girl is holding as having a "blue checked petticoat," and then, a few seconds later when the doll is placed in a window of Mrs. Greenhow's house, Maddie says the petticoat has been changed to one of yellow. Fine so far. But on page 99, in an effort to demonstrate her amazing memory to Mr. Pinkerton, Maddie recounts what she saw: "The doll's petticoat was red. Moments later someone placed it in the window. The petticoat color had changed to blue." (We will soon revisit this remarkable gaffe.)

– Maddie's general conduct is eccentric, to say the least. She falls in love in a split second, for no reason that the reader can see beyond a man's eyes and general demeanor. She can have outbursts of anger or tears at any time, sometimes for baffling reasons, and then she's immediately in control again. While this wildly inconsistent and unpredictable behavior might make for a good sketch of a fifteen year old girl in stressful times, it makes for an extremely bad potential Pinkerton agent.

– Maddie and her companion make camp one night close enough to a Union regiment that she can hear "the

low voices of soldiers” and “the clanking of cook pots.” Yet when she awakens in the morning, she finds to her dismay that the regiment has departed. Which means that she and her companion somehow slept through the shouted orders, the neighing of horses, the creaking of wagons, the blowing of bugles (!), and all the sundry and very loud noises that a military encampment makes as it prepares to decamp.

– As the plot moves *west* to Centreville and the First Battle of Manassas (Bull Run), one expects a Civil War historian (as the author is said to be) to shine, with descriptions of the battlefield, soldiers, etc., that bring the battle to life. Sadly, that doesn’t happen. The battle is not much more than some distant shouts, rifle shots, and cannon blasts. The confusion among civilians is rendered nicely, to be fair, but no image lingers in the reader’s mind of the battle itself. Worse, there is no sense of the immensity of the conflict. The way it is presented, the reader feels that Bull Run was a quick skirmish involving a few regiments of troops fighting it out on a small patch of land. In reality – and realism is the goal of any historical novel – the battle spread out over miles of terrain, lasted many hours, and involved over 60,000 troops.

– One of the most unrealistic scenes in the book unfolds when Maddie is kidnapped. Unknown to her, the kidnaping is a test by her spy mates to see how well she’ll hold up under duress. Maddie is blindfolded and gagged, her hands are tied at the wrist – *in front of her* (and, even more strange, her legs and feet are not bound at all) – and she is dumped in a carriage. She eventually ends up on the floor of a pleasant smelling, carpeted room, and the kidnappers leave. At this point she becomes the first blindfolded person in history who, when her captors are gone, doesn’t, as a first instinct, reach up and pull down her blindfold. Instead, she leaves it in place and gropes about the room. Ah, but we can’t totally blame Maddie, for we quickly find out that the author needs her blindfolded for the next scene – the interrogation. (Had she removed her blindfold she would have recognized her captors as her new friends.) The grilling she undergoes consists entirely of a slur against her father and a question about another person, to which Maddie, lying, answers “No.” Physical violence is not used to attempt to force the truth from her, and no cold steel barrel is placed against her head (although this happened in the carriage – why not here as well, where such a threat would actually make sense?). Her captors simply issue a few verbal threats then leave again. And Maddie immediately pulls down the blindfold. No, she doesn’t. For some reason, she is able to use her hands and fingers for everything but pulling off her blindfold (and removing the comb from her hair, as will be seen next). Instead, she shakes her head until her comb falls out of her hair and, *blindfolded and in a completely dark room*, she instantly grabs the fallen comb in her mouth. She eventually removes her blindfold and the scene cranks on. But the main point here is that this brief ‘ordeal’ is enough to convince professional spies that she won’t crack under the torture of the Rebels. (There are many other scenes that defy belief, like the fight with an enemy spy in which Maddie *crawls across the ground* instead of standing up and running, though she’s not seriously injured. This was contrived so she could be easily pushed into a ground-level well by her opponent. The whole incident makes poor Maddie look not a little like a simpleton.)

– Maddie eventually infiltrates Mrs. Greenhow’s household. Although ‘infiltrate’ is too strong a word, for Greenhow, a supposed super spy whose life and freedom are in imminent danger, accepts Maddie into her household with scarcely any suspicion or background investigation. She blithely puts her in charge of her young daughter, and then the next day entrusts this total stranger with a spy mission! Of course, this leads to the woman’s capture (not a bad few hours’ work considering that the entire Pinkerton force had been unable to nab this woman for months). Oh, and I promised we’d revisit the doll’s petticoat. When the doll is first mentioned, it is blatantly obvious to the reader that the petticoat is a signal. A spy has just entered Mrs. Greenhow’s house, and suddenly the doll appears in the window with a different colored petticoat. Even the dullest of wits can see that for what it is. However, when Maddie describes this scene later to Pinkerton and his agents, it dawns on none of them that this is a signal. It’s mind-boggling, actually, given the number of times we’re told about the brilliance of Pinkerton and his employees.

– There is no mention of Maddie being taught how to decode messages, but there she is near the end of the book, speedily decoding a Rebel message.

Earlier I said *Alias Dragonfly* seemed like a first draft. But now, having read through it a second time while working on this review, I realize that it is more of a glorified outline. It's as though after the first few chapters, the author began to run out of time or interest, and simply fleshed out her bullet points. Only the character of Nellie, the Negro servant, is truly believable. Her dialogue is nicely written and her actions realistic, and if Ms. Singer had applied her skills equally well to the other characters, this would have been a better book. And then there are occasionally good lines to be found, such as this comment a Union spy makes after humming *Dixie*: "Catchy little tune, isn't it? When we win this war, I hope we capture the song along with all the soldiers they have left." It's a shame the writing wasn't up to that level throughout the novel.

I am aware that this is an angry review. But angry I am. I wasted several hours in reading and rereading this book, and in writing this review. Of course, no one forced me to write it, but I am tired of the fact that so many books of low caliber are being published in YA fiction. It does author, publisher, and reader a disservice, and in this case, it gives historical fiction a bad name, potentially turning a young reader's head away forever from an entire genre or period in history. Had this come across my desk back in the day, I would have redlined the errors and advised the author not to return the manuscript until every mistake had been corrected. Even then I might not have accepted it. Perhaps the editorial staff at Bell Bridge Books doesn't have the philosophy that a book should be *right* before it is set loose. But in the end, the blame, as with praise, always belongs to the author. Surely Ms. Singer could have taken the time to at least get her facts right. I don't expect every writer of historical novels to have the storytelling skills of a Walter Scott, nor do I expect every tale of the Civil War to resound with the authenticity of an Ambrose Bierce. But a reader has the right to expect a certain amount of honest effort for her investment of time and money, and it was not given in *Alias Dragonfly*. Any book that relies on the ignorance or apathy of its readers for its success is not worth the print (or battery power) it consumes.

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## Hope Irvin Marston says

Rip-roarin' YA story of a teen spy during the Civil War

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## Alice in Readerland says

Title: *Alias Firefly*

Author: Jane Singer

Publisher: Bell Bridge Books

Publishing Date: November 2011

ISBN: 9781611940411

I received this title courtesy of NetGalley

"You might pass me on the street and not even know it." Maddie tells us in chapter one, "I could be the one-armed beggar with a half-moon scar on her forehead, the orphan under the gas lamp selling wilted violets, or the young woman in crimson velvet awaiting her escort to one of President Lincoln's White House balls."



It's 1861 and fifteen-year-old Maddie Bradford is about to become a Pinkerton spy. Maddie can tell you how many roses are on the wallpaper of each wall of her aunt's house when she walks in; Maddie also quickly finds her aunt's gold wedding band. So of course she notices a suspicious exchange in the alley. And when she sees one of her Aunt's boarders disguised as a clergyman and starts to piece together who he is, she makes him a deal: she'll recount all the details of the exchange if he lets her meet Mr. Allan Pinkerton, the great detective. And not only does Maddie get to meet Mr. Pinkerton, she gets to work for him.

Throughout the novel, Maddie proves her strength by masquerading as a boy, seeing through disguises, setting off to find her father who's a soldier, and shooting.

"How well do you shoot?" Pinkerton asked.

Without waiting for an answer, I slid the revolver from the shawl pocket. At that moment, Mike threw a tobacco tin up in the air.

"Mind the cat!" Pinkerton snapped. I did not flinch. I fired. The bullet struck the tin. It tumbled through the air and landed on the floor.

I lowered the weapon.

"I hope the cat is all right, sir," I said. "I like cats."

"Well done, indeed," said Pinkerton, a hint of a smile on his face. Of course, there never was a cat.' –Alias Dragonfly, chapter thirteen

But what happens when Maddie receives her most dangerous mission yet, one that involves the infamous Little Rose? What is Nellie, Maddie's Aunt's servant, hiding? And who is PAN, (the reporter for the New York Tribune), really?

I heard that this book was the first in a series, and I can't wait to see more of Maddie's adventures!

Cynical Cindy Says:

The whole 'dead sister' subject didn't really seem to mesh that well, but maybe that will be elaborated upon in later books in the series. I also wish it didn't have such an open ending, but I suppose that was done to make way for the rest of the series.

The language was as rich as the historical setting and the plot was full of adventure. For a book filled with excitement and romance, all in a historical setting, read Alias Dragonfly!

3 out of 5 teacups.

Check out the full review on my website, 'Alice in Readerland'.

Link to 'Alice in Readerland' homepage: <http://aliceinreaderland.wordpress.com/>

Direct link to 'Alias Dragonfly' review: <http://aliceinreaderland.wordpress.co...>

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**SheLove2Read says**

*Some call this conflict between the North and the South the Civil War. That's a bunch of bosh! There is nothing civil about it. After more than a year it still rages, destroying everything in its path. And here I am*

*smack in the middle of it, a girl of fifteen who never believed she's fit in anywhere, let alone contribute to a great cause. In spite of the danger, I am bursting proud to do my part. Bursting proud and changed forever.*

This was the first book I've run across by Jane Singer and it's very engaging. I would classify this as YA historical (Civil War) with a hint of mystery. Written in first person, this is the story of Maddy, a young girl with a photographic memory and some Aspergers-type behaviors from New Hampshire. She has traveled to "Washington City" (DC) with her father, who has joined a NH regiment fighting for the North. Her incredible eye for detail has landed her into the notice of the famed Mr. Pinkerton (of the Pinkerton Detective firm) who enlists her help spying for the North. In 2012, asking a child of fifteen to do this would be unconscionable - if caught Maddy would have been executed - but in the 1860s you have to remember a "child" of fifteen was considered on the cusp of womanhood, if not a woman already.

The book starts off strong and there are several conversations that literally had my emotions in my throat. I do think it got a little lost about 2/3rds of the way through, trying to do too much too quickly, but this appears to be the first in a series about Maddy and her group of Pinkerton agents, so I tried not to be too judgmental.

3.75/4 stars and a recommended read if you enjoy Civil War stories

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### **Majanka says**

Book Review originally published here: <http://www.iheartreading.net/mini-rev...>

Original plot, but predictable every now and then. Maddie is a likeable protagonist, and the setting was unique and entertaining and historically correct, as far as I can say. The ending is a bit abrupt though, and slightly dissapointing.

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### **Katy says**

I didn't like this book as much as would have liked. The premise had potential, but the story was rather dull. For a girl who is supposed to be a spy during the Civil War, the events in the book were rather uninteresting.

First of all, I felt like I was reading a long version of the first few chapters of a book instead of a whole book. What I mean is, I thought this book was going to be about Maddie's spying adventures. But the whole book was pretty much led to Maddie becoming a spy, and the action of her being a spy really took place in the last few chapters.

I was a bit disappointed with Jake's role in the whole book. With the summary teasing that there is this mysterious boy, I thought he would have a larger role in this book. I appreciate an author focusing more on the story than the romance, but according to the summary, "And then there is the mysterious, maddening Jake Whitestone, a young man who awakens something equally dangerous in Maddie: Love in a time of terror." I'm sorry, but Jake did not impress me. And when he was in the picture, I didn't feel that connection

to him to like him as the romance object in a novel.

I also had a hard time picturing some of these scenes and found myself confused about what just happened. Even though I wouldn't want a story to be bogged down with details, I felt Singer was so brief with description sometimes that we have a hard time seeing the whole picture.

I was also left with a LOT of unanswered questions, namely the Rebel girl that looked like Maddie that she dreamed about in the prologue and when she met the girl in real life at the end. Who is she and what role does she play. It sounds like Singer is planning to write a sequel, where this mystery girl will have a bigger role, but I find it very frustrating that a book would start with this, come full circle with it again at the end and still don't give us any answers. I think this is a major fail in my eyes.

Overall not a bad read. I liked it enough but didn't love it.

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## **Crystal ☆ Lost in Storyland says**

Review copied from original post at Imaginary Reads

When I saw that this was a book about a Union spy, I expected it to be filled with suspense and action. However, the story lags for the first half--I would not have finished this novel if I hadn't wanted to see the spy action--and then runs too quickly in the second half. Even then, it ends all too soon without much spy action.

The beginning is about Maddie's dad joining the Union army and Maddie worrying about him while adjusting to life in her Confederate-sympathizing aunt's boarding house. In fact, Maddie doesn't officially meet the spies until midway into the book and even then it is mostly about her learning how to be a spy.

I wanted to see more of Maddie's life and training as a spy. The novel ends before more is revealed about the rebel spy that looks like Maddie and how Maddie deals with said spy being out to kill her. It is one of the most unique plot angles to the story, and it isn't developed! I was also disappointed that there isn't as much danger to Maddie and Jake's relationship as the synopsis suggested.

While I am disappointed about the lack of action as suggested by the synopsis, I did love the characters. Maddie is a fun character. She isn't just an independent-minded woman in a time when they were expected to be domestic caretakers. She is fun, witty, and has the power of photographic memory. I love her fellow spies, all of whom have unique traits, and Jake adds a sweet romantic element to the story, though their love seems to blossom out of the blue.

Historical fiction lovers will love the Civil War setting. If you're an avid YA reader, however, there isn't sufficient plot development, and the story ends before it feels like the story is over.

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## **Katie says**

In a needed departure from science fiction and fantasy, *Alias Dragonfly* is a historical novel set during the Civil War. From the onset one realizes that the author, Jane Singer, knows her stuff when it comes to

documenting actual events that took place in our nation's capital over a hundred years ago. The scenery comes alive with raw sights and sounds of battle and of those civilians living their lives within the bounds of war. Add to this a fifteen-year-old female spy and you have all the makings of a page-turner that educates as well as entertains.

The story centers around Maddie Bradford, a spunky tomboyish lass with a photographic memory. Maddie and her father travel to the nation's capital so that her father can fight for Lincoln's army. Maddie is left to stay with her stuffy and proper Aunt Salome as her father rushes off to war. Worried about her father's safety and determined to make her own mark, Maddie soon uncovers a world of secrets, spies and intrigue. And she can't wait to jump right in.

Maddie joins a gang of Pinkerton spies and uses her powers of observation to help them uncover a Rebel plot to destroy the very army for which her father fights. There is also a love story as Maddie falls for the daring reporter Jake Whitestone, though it often takes a backseat to the drama of runaway slaves, bullet dodging and false identities. The book ends rather abruptly leaving us with more questions than answers, but I know more loose ends will be tied up with the next book in the series. There are many more Rebel plots to uncover and I am sure Maddie is up for the job.

The strength of this book is the heavily accurate historical detail. Singer reports that each character was researched down to the buttons on their shoes. Many lived and breathed during the Civil War. I could smell the gun smoke, hear the cannons in the distance and feel the grit of the city. This makes it an excellent book to educate school-age children. I could imagine history teachers around the country pairing this novel with their lectures on Lincoln and maps of his battle fields. The one sticking point I had was that I never did learn to love Maddie as I should. She was often reckless and rude for little reason that I could detect. She was brave and fearless almost to a fault, but I never got the sense for that deeper goodness we long for in the characters we love. That being said, I am sure Maddie will develop over the series, making her someone we will root for and follow throughout her adventures. The book is definitely worth the read for all you can learn about a turning point in our country's history and more fun than a History Channel documentary.

You can find more reviews like this one on [www.undergroundbookreviews.com](http://www.undergroundbookreviews.com).

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## **Margot says**

for more of my reviews and the better version of this one please visit my blog  
<http://thereviewsofmar.blogspot.com/>

note: thanks to the author and Netgalley for letting me read and review this book. It's not what I usually read, but I liked it :)

the book:

Fifteen years old. Wanted: Dead or Alive.

"Don't love a spy," warns fifteen-year-old Pinkerton agent Maddie Bradford, a lonely, rebellious outsider with a mind on fire and a photographic memory. It is 1861, the Civil War has just started and this motherless teen must move with her soldier-father from New Hampshire to Washington, DC-a city at war, packed cheek

by jowl with soldiers, Rebel spies, slave catchers and traitors of all stripes bent on waging a war of destruction against the Union, and President Lincoln himself.

Maddie's journal, written in secret, of course, begins with her arrival at her aunt's DC boardinghouse through the first year of the Civil War, a time, as Maddie puts it, full of "dips and dangers," when she becomes a fearless Union spy. And then there is the mysterious, maddening Jake Whitestone, a young man who awakens something equally dangerous in Maddie: Love in a time of terror.  
(summary from goodreads)

review:

I liked this book. The writing style was ok, the characters were nice, but not great. The book was not like the usual books I read. Most of the time I don't read historical books, but this one sounded great so I gave it a shot. And I did not completely dislike it, so that's a great thing! Still, I did not love the story. Maybe that's because I don't know a lot about the civil war \*and by not much I actually mean nothing\* because I am not American and my history teacher did not teach me a lot about the civil war, or maybe historical fiction just isn't my thing...

Still, this book taught me a lot, and that is awesome. I kinda like to learn something while reading a book. It's like learning without feeling like you're really doing so. That's one of the things that made this a great read, which I will not soon forget.

Aside of the subject, the story was fine. I would not call it boring, but I would not call it full of action either. But there happened a lot in the 161 pages this book contained, more than I had expected of such a thin book :)

Being a spy in the civil war really sounds like a job I would like, but would not, and never, be fit for... I am not really fearless enough, so I have to show some respect to Maddie, who rocks. And also it's awesome that there is someone who writes pieces for the newspaper, and that she gets to meet him.

This book taught me about the civil war, but also about the importancy of family :D

rating:

I give this book 3 stars :3

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## Christine says

“Alias Dragonfly” starts with an intense scene in which 15 year old Maddie Bradford is in a confrontation with another girl and appears to be in grave danger. This turns out to be a dream Maddie is relating, but then the actual story begins which is just as dramatic. Maddie’s mother Jenny died 6 months ago and she and her father are still in mourning. Now, Maddie must move in with an aunt she doesn’t know in a totally new place. Her father has joined the Union Army to fight in the Civil War and that is why Maddie must move from New Hampshire to “Washington City” to live in her Aunt Salome’s boarding house. While Maddie’s unusual ability to notice minute details and remember everything she sees has made her somewhat of an outcast in her hometown, she still doesn’t want her father to leave her with her aunt and a totally new way of life. However, two of her aunt’s boarders soon change her life forever - Jake Whitestone, a handsome young man who can’t fight in the war due to an injury and Timothy Webster, who recognizes an important use for Maddie’s unique abilities.

The prologue describing Maddie's nightmare is a great opening to the book that immediately engaged me and would capture the attention of a tween or teen reader as well. The book is fast-paced, although there are a few times it's hard to tell if the events being described are just another of Maddie's dreams or if they are part of the story. Maddie, however, is a character that readers from ages 12 and up will relate to. Maddie is independent, passionate about her beliefs, and willing to make sacrifices for her country, even if it puts her life in danger. She speaks up for what she feels is right when voices her opinions against slavery, even when it puts her at odds with her aunt. Maddie's photographic memory is amazing and is a great basis for a book and is made even more interesting when paired with the Civil War backdrop. Young readers will also be interested in the friendship between Maddie and Jake and whether or not it will lead to romance.

It seems that most historical fiction for young adults dealing with the Civil War features a Southern heroine, so Maddie's tale from the point of view of a Northern teenage is unique and interesting. The author's afterward puts the events of the story into historical context, which adds to the book's appeal.

The best parts of the book are those dealing with Maddie's adventures as a spy. They seem realistic, but are exciting and will appeal to readers of all ages. I did think the summary for the book is a little misleading since it talks about Maddie's life as a spy, but the first half of the book builds up toward Maddie becoming involved with the Pinkerton agents and the second half actually relays those events. This is a good book that could have been great if there would have been more of Maddie's adventures as a spy and less time spent on her attempts to join her father in battle. It seems just when I really started getting absorbed in the story, it abruptly ends. The author's afterward mentions an upcoming sequel, but it looks like the focus may be on another character other than Maddie. Hopefully, she will be a part of future stories, because she is a unique character that seems to have many more untold adventures that I would like to experience.

I received this book from NetGalley through the courtesy of Bell Bridge Books in exchange for an honest review.

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## **Brandy says**

Maddie has always been considered different in her small New Hampshire town. After a childhood accident left her with amazing observation skills and memory, she was always different than the others in her hometown and was regarded as an oddity. With the Civil War breaking out and her father joining the Union forces, Maddie has to stay with her Aunt Salome in a DC boarding house. While her father and aunt want her to stay out of trouble and be a proper young lady, all Maddie wants is to be involved in the war effort and to make a difference. When her powerful skills come to the attention of a spy working with the famed Allen Pinkerton, she finds herself drawn into an exciting world where she is known as Dragonfly.

Maddie was a delightful character to read about, and I found myself urging her on in all her endeavors and tests. I look forward to reading more installments in this series to see what else will be in store for Miss Maddie! This will be a great addition to the historical fiction section in my school library.

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