

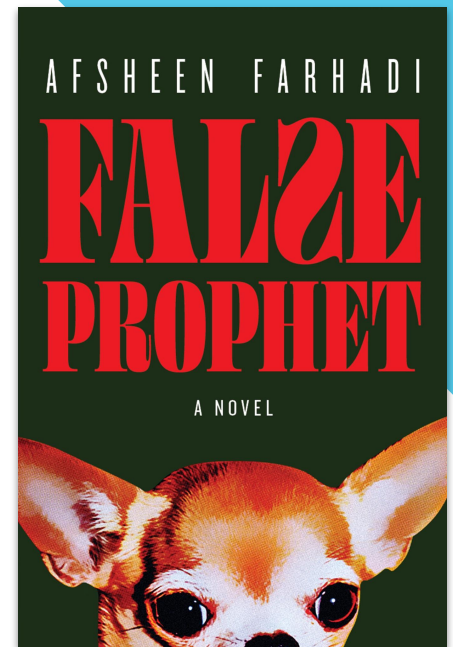
# FALSE PROPHET

A Novel

Afsheen Farhadi

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- “ With a wickedly compelling premise and a clever structure, *False Prophet* escalates suspensefully toward a final climactic choice. Afsheen Farhadi’s debut is a smart and very entertaining exploration of fame, faith, family, and the lies that we are desperate to believe.” — **Chris Bachelder, author of *The Throwback Special***
- “ *False Prophet* is a tense literary thriller about how what feels true can become more real than reality.” — **Foreword Reviews, STARRED review**
- “ One commanding tale. . . exploring in different ways grief, immigration, colonialism, self-mythologizing, and the value of stories, regardless of their veracity. The result is a beautifully written consideration of the overwhelming need to belong.” — **Booklist**

## INTRODUCTION

**A grieving actor-turned-memoirist reimagines his mother’s encounter with Jim Jones, the deadliest cult leader of all time—the only problem is, it’s mostly all lies . . .**

Actor Jal Persad is enjoying moderate success when the death of his mother, Rita, sends him into a tailspin—after all, how could he grieve a woman he barely knew? Rita had grown up in Guyana during the rise and fall of the Jonestown cult, but never spoke of her home to Jal, always keeping him at a distance.

After months of avoiding work, a misunderstanding at lunch with his manager leads Jal into a web of lies. He soon finds himself writing a memoir of his mother’s adolescence, one that places her in direct contact with Jim Jones himself. There’s just one issue—Rita never met the man. Suddenly, the book goes viral, and Jal must face the looming threat of exposure and his own guilt.

Alternating between Jal’s rapid rise and Rita’s distorted story, *False Prophet* confronts the intergenerational legacy of colonialism, the allure of power, and the age-old question—how much of yourself are you willing to lose in order to succeed?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The protagonist of *False Prophet*, Jal Persad, makes a decision in the opening pages that the rest of the novel attempts to contextualize and explain as we learn more about his character, his past wounds, and the things he desires. In thinking through the events of the novel, as well as Jal’s character arc, consider the following.

# FALSE PROPHET

1. Jal's lie about his mother at lunch with his agent sets the events of the story in motion. How does your sense of why Jal tells that lie change from the beginning of the novel to the end?
2. Jal has a unique relationship to his dog, Teddy. What is it that Teddy does for Jal, and how might this relate to Jal's decision to continue his lie as he starts garnering attention for it?
3. Kate, the ghostwriter, goes from someone innocently telling Jal's mother's story, to a sort of conspirator/accomplice. Why do you think Kate continues to tell the story even after she learns it is based on a lie?
4. How would you describe Rita's (the made-up version in Jal's story) relationship to her family? How would you describe her relationship to her country? To her unborn son?
5. As Jal transforms, becoming, in some ways, a little more like Jim Jones, how aware do you think Jal is of the ways he is changing?
6. Would you, in fact, say that Jal changes from the beginning of the novel to the end? Why or why not?
7. What do you think Jal's Uncle Ramesh is trying to warn Jal about regarding the lie he is telling? What do you think Jal does with this warning?
8. Why do you think people are so taken and inspired by Jal and his mother's story? What is it that they are responding to?
9. What does it mean to be a false prophet? Why, according to the novel, would someone be tempted to become one?
10. At the end, the reporter, Rupert, offers Jal one final way out. Jal doesn't take it after finding out that Teddy will be okay. Why do you think this is the case?



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Afsheen Farhadi** was born in Phoenix, Arizona, and his short fiction and essays have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *The Georgia Review*, *Conjunctions*, *The Southern Review*, *Catapult*, *Bright Lights Film Journal*, and elsewhere. He served as the inaugural Hughes Fellow in Creative Writing, Prose at Southern Methodist University, and is currently an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Nevada, Reno.

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