



## The Fallen Within: The Agent Bennet Saga

**R. S. Twells**

FriesenPress

(318pp)

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*The Fallen Within is a nuanced and complex thriller in which there are no pure heroes or villains.*

A teenage spy is caught between his twin brother and the organization that raised him in *The Fallen Within*, R. S. Twells's witty and action-packed third installment in the Agent Bennet Saga.

Seventeen-year-old Agent Bennet is finally a field agent for the Orphanage, a shadowy spy organization that raises infants from birth. The novel explodes into action when Bennet's traitorous twin, Collin, appears during his assignment in Colombia. Collin betrayed both Bennet and the Orphanage in previous series installments for the Shepherd, who wants to take the spy organization down. What follows is a fast-paced adventure in which Bennet and his friends must root out a traitor in the Orphanage and try to stop the Shepherd, all while facing adversity from the adults in charge.

In this nuanced and complex story, the Orphanage is not obviously good, and the Shepherd is not obviously evil. Bennet doesn't doubt his loyalty to the cultish organization that steals infants from birth and grooms them to be spies, hackers, and assassins, but he does miss his twin brother who disavowed it. He wrestles with his mistreatment at the hands of the Orphanage along with Collin's betrayal throughout, and it is neither clear what Bennet will choose nor what he should choose. The second traitor hanging over his shoulder further complicates his loyalties. This creates the effect of a psychological thriller wherein Bennet cannot fully trust his instincts, even while entrenched in the action involved in espionage.

Bennet, Collin, and the other lead characters are dynamic. Their youth is a part of their identities but is not consuming. For example, Bennet is preoccupied with his first date with his crush, an agent who works as a mechanic and knits in her spare time, as much as he is concerned with the Shepherd, Collin, and the possibility of another traitor in the Orphanage.

Gender roles are subverted in refreshing ways too: Bennet has no qualms about dancing at a ball with his brother in identical tuxes (it's a hilarious and chilling moment: Bennet has orders to shoot his twin on sight). Furthermore, Bennet's crush has a "callused mechanic's hand" that he describes as "rough but perfect, fitting into mine like a sculptor had molded them together." He enjoys wrapping his arms around her waist as she drives them on her motorcycle as much as he relishes the violence and action of being a field agent. This blend represents a new type of diversity, defying binaries rather than swapping roles. Further, this third series installment can be enjoyed as a standalone thanks to expository details that are provided when needed without interrupting the book's flow.

A teenage spy wrestles with betrayal, love, and loyalty in *The Fallen Within*, a thrilling installment in an espionage saga.

LEAH BLOCK (April 2, 2024)

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