

The Human Trial

Audrey Gale

Books Fluent (Sep 26, 2023)

(270pp)

978-1-953865-70-0

In the series-opening medical thriller The Human Trial, a consequential scientific discovery leads to deadly intrigue.

In Audrey Gale's historical thriller *The Human Trial*, two scientists make a groundbreaking discovery that puts their lives at risk.

Randall has been the target of bullying and resentment all his life because of his intelligence, poverty, and short stature. The experiences scarred him. Now, he's a Harvard-educated doctor who's married to a clever and wealthy woman, but he still exists in the constant pursuit of more.

Randall's wife, Elizabeth, also wants more than is expected of her. She pursues a teaching career. And her choice to marry Randall—who was struggling when they met—over a man from high society still confuses her family.

One of Elizabeth's would-be former suitors, Adam, is a brilliant physicist. He develops an advanced microscope. In time, Randall and Adam come together to study a phenomenon that flies against established medical science: it seems, to them, that microbes in the most advanced stages of terminal diseases behave in a similar way. The medical implications are vast and hopeful. However, their work on the subject puts their careers, and their lives, in jeopardy: its revelations could collapse the medical establishment, which is capable of great misdeeds in order to preserve its power.

Set between 1921 and 1939, the book weaves national and global events into its fabric well. It sometimes does so using minor details, as with a celebratory bottle of champagne that is obtained illegally during the Prohibition era. Other details contribute more to the plot, as when Elizabeth is unable to find teaching positions during the Great Depression. Scientific and medical facts also play in, as with the discoveries and theories of various scientists that are mentioned in Randall and Adam's passionate discussions with one another.

Randall, Elizabeth, and Adam are complicated heroes. In his pursuit of success, Randall is willing to compromise his professional ethics in exchange for advancement. Further, though he cares for his wife, she comes second to his career. Elizabeth and Adam are also self-interested: despite their ties to Randall, their lifelong friendship becomes more. All three struggle to outgrow their upbringings. The book's secondary cast also lives in the gray—at times, in ways that feel gratuitous: at one point, Randall's high school counselor preys on him when he's feeling vulnerable. Nonetheless, character judgement is evaded throughout.

Closing with a shocking twist that is brilliant in hindsight, the series-opening medical thriller *The Human Trial* follows a consequential scientific discovery that leads to deadly intrigue.

CAROLINA CIUCCI (August 25, 2023)

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