



Fourth Trait

Benjamin A. Bryan

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A fascinating future world is the setting for Fourth Trait, a supernatural science fiction tale.

Benjamin A. Bryan's science fiction thriller *Fourth Trait* is action-packed, emotional, and powered by psychic characters.

Many years after the Great Catastrophe killed all humans except those with hyperperception, Raile Alton has four of the psychic traits humans possess, a rare combination. He can perceive people's "thoughtspaces" and read their feelings.

Raile works for the government on a project to understand how the consciousness separates from the body upon death. Since the Great Catastrophe, consciousnesses have "unattached" after death, and they remain in a between state, unless scientists can find a way to destroy them or transfer them into new bodies. But the government is hiding the truth: they've already accomplished that feat, one once thought impossible.

Expansive world building provides the backdrop for everything that happens, including the Great Catastrophe and its consequences, people's altered perceptions, the new government system, and the secret programs that the government runs. All are imagined with depth and detail, and information about them intertwines and propels the story.

The book is dialogue heavy. Conversations are natural and align with characters' personalities. They are the driving force of the book, as the characters reveal—or don't reveal—secrets, construct complex plans, and declare their feelings for each other. There is so much dialogue, though, that the settings are drowned out, and actions and conversations feel performed in a vacuum. When settings are described, vibrant language results in striking, yet fleeting, images.

Myriad characters populate the story, and while all are individualized, there are too many to track. Minor characters enter and exit, complicating the plot. Who wants what, and where everyone is, are difficult to discern at any given time, confusing the story and obscuring central themes. Raile himself is a gritty antihero plagued by a heartbreaking past—a likable, if grumpy, main character.

Paced at a slow and steady beat, the action ebbs and flows as the characters plan attacks and heists. Slow sections consist of scientific research, romantic trysts, and conniving government officials debating each other over whom they can trust. Romantic interests are prone to fall for each other too fast. The book's conclusion does not tie up all plot lines, but it is still satisfying.

Fourth Trait is supernatural science fiction set in the future; its world building stands out, as does its entertaining dialogue.

AIMEE JODOIN (September 11, 2019)

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