



Soul Integrity: a Soul Identity novel

Dennis Batchelder

NetLeaves

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Soul Integrity is an explosive story of time travel, courage, and redemption.

In *Soul Integrity*, Dennis Batchelder's latest science-fiction mystery, a woman who's down but certainly not out attempts to correct mistakes in her past while also outfoxing her destiny. Throughout its methodical twists and turns, the story captivates. Batchelder's action-packed, readable tone alongside a courageous, relatable protagonist make this an enjoyable selection for fans of speculative fiction.

Soul Identity is an elite, super-secret, 2,600-year-old organization that claims reincarnation is real and has the ability to track and connect people with their past lives by registering members with retina scans. It's reincarnation without the religion, and this group has figured out how to profit from it, with understandably significant, potentially life-altering consequences.

Security analyst Scott Waverly is the company's security analyst alongside sexy ex-girlfriend Valentina Nikolskaya, whose faith in the system has been broken by the loss of her parents. Scott believes that the "overseers" of Soul Identity have been tricked and abducted, and convinces Val to help. Reluctant to probe her feelings, Val is drawn into the search while also facing her own fears and doubts about Soul Identity's purpose. Though the book is told through Val's point of view, Scott is a major presence in her life and in the storyline.

Retinal scans, reader apps, and text messaging are common elements. In fact, the technology in this book is so up-to-date that "e-mail's so old school," as one of the characters exclaims. Rather than send an emoji-laden text to their pals, characters employ this technology to leave money and memories about their past lives for their future selves. Characters jump from 1960s Cuba, to China and India in the 1980s, and to present-day Seattle, which takes some adjustment. Still, in less capable hands, the story and emphasis on technology might feel forced, but Batchelder, a former computer security analyst, makes it all sound authentic and plausible.

The tone is quick-paced and full of dramatic dialogue. Val and Scott exchange numerous heated jabs at one another, in stark contrast to dialogue taking place between characters in different eras. The frequent switches in tone and word choice are smooth, however.

As the long-awaited third volume in the series, much of the story feels similar to opening a book at random and then inferring what's going on. Though the book contains anecdotes to bring its audience up to speed on Soul Identity's current predicament, understanding all of the backstory in *Soul Integrity* is a somewhat confusing prospect, and this book is often difficult to read as a stand-alone story.

Soul Integrity is an explosive story of time travel, courage, and redemption. Those looking for a spiritual and emotional challenge will find much to savor here.

BARBARA NICKLES (May 16, 2016)

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