

## The First Traitor: The Agent Bennet Saga

**R. S. Twells**

FriesenPress

(362pp)

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*The First Traitor is an exciting, heartfelt young adult spy saga.*

In R. S. Twells's action-packed novel *The First Traitor*, a teenage agent wrestles with the ghosts of his past while trying to decipher who, and what, is worth fighting for.

The Orphanage is a top secret agency that raises orphaned children to become the best agents, spies, and assassins. Bennet hopes that his last year of training here will be his most outstanding one yet. Still reeling from the death of his twin brother, Collin, on an otherwise successful mission the year before, Bennet focuses hard on his training as a field agent. With the help of his trainer, Darcy, and a few good friends, he works on moving on.

But the mission that killed Collin is not yet complete. The Orphanage's best agents are on the hunt for the Shepherd, an unknown person who is calling all the shots to take down the Orphanage and start World War III. The chief kicks Bennet and Darcy off of the case and instead assigns them to a standard hacking assignment, wherein Bennet comes face to face with an impossible reality. As events within and outside the Orphanage unfold, some people come to think that Bennet may be a traitor. Bennet and his most loyal friends set out on a mission that gets him closer to the truth. Meanwhile, he struggles with questions about all that he's ever known.

The characters in *The First Traitor* are deadly weapons who still have the pains of adolescence to deal with. They have moments of confidence, insecurity, and everything in between. There are touching points on mental health and emotional processing, adding a deeper layer to the connections between Bennet and those around him. And the depth of Bennet's experiences is dramatic, warranting emotional investment in his story. Some of the teenagers' decision-making is questionable, though, considering their strict upbringing and training within the Orphanage.

Though active and propulsive, the story includes moments of overexplanation and unnecessary detail that slow its pace. Some points and themes repeat as well. Still, the book's thrills are captivating and attention-holding.

The rapport between the characters includes a good bit of humor, especially in Bennet and Darcy's playful, tough-love friendship. The Orphanage and its high-tech spy gear, intensive training games, and hierarchy of strict but caring adults results in a world that's intriguing but impersonal, adding to Bennet's plight of knowing only one life and being scared to challenge its boundaries.

Laying the groundwork for later series entries, the enthralling secret agent novel *The First Traitor* follows as a young agent decides where his loyalties lie.

LEAH WEBSTER (September 14, 2022)

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