



This Time of Dying

Reina James

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It is October 1918, and England is gathering its dead. For Henry Speake, of Speake & Son Undertakers, laying to rest the shattered bodies of young men sent home from the front has become a grimly familiar duty. But then a country already reeling from war faces an unexpected shock: an epidemic. The Spanish influenza will kill more people than World War I, and more people than the fourteenth-century bubonic plague. There is no cure, no help from the government, not even a clear sense of what is happening---but more and more people keep getting sick, and strangely enough, it is often the young and healthy ones who die.

Henry sees the dangers much sooner than most, especially when he finds a letter left behind by a dying doctor, who begs health officials to start closing ports and setting up quarantines before it is too late. Unable to get a government minister to listen to him, Henry turns to a local schoolteacher, Allen Thompson, a woman who would usually be above his station. But as the flu continues to claim its victims and there are no more grand coffins in which to bury even the wealthiest dead, the old social order begins to crumble. Henry and Allen find themselves imagining a new life together---if only they can survive themselves.

Inspired by the deaths of the author's grandparents in the Spanish flu epidemic, *This Time of Dying* is a powerfully imagined story of love and redemption in a world where nothing can be taken for granted anymore.

This Time of Dying Details

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From Reader Review This Time of Dying for online ebook

Cheryl A says

At a time when the people of England were suffering from a major change in the social fabric of their nation - years of fighting in WWI, the loss of sons and fathers, wounded warriors returning, women working outside of the home and pushing for the vote - another terrible blow hit them. The Spanish Influenza hit England another reeling punch, taking the lives of many of the few remaining young adults.

In *This Time of Dying*, so aptly named, undertaker Henry Speake finds correspondence on a flu victim that indicates that the current sickness isn't just another bout of the 'flu, but a plague that could end life the world over. As Henry notices the alarming increase in the number of victims, he turns to a friend, Miss Allen Thompson, a schoolteacher, to share his concerns. As they battle separately to keep their lives together during this dreadful time, they end up depending on each other much more than their social status would allow, and much to the dismay of their friends and family.

Full of detail about the London neighborhood where the story takes place and the undertaking profession and customs of the time, this novel is rich in atmosphere. Few novels dealing with this chapter in the world's history have captured the anguish and desperation of living and dying with this epidemic.

janetandjohn says

Not about WW1 itself, but the aftermath when the Spanish Flu is brought home by returning troops. Horrific loss of life even after war is over. Interesting subject, and a good read.

Lauren J says

This novel surpassed all my expectations. It was an enjoyable and engrossing read in spite of its grim subject matter. It was well written and it seemed completely realistic to me so I would guess that it must have been well researched too.

Lori says

This was an amazing rendition of the time when Spanish flu was ravaging London.

Cami says

This just didn't have enough pull for me. It was as murky as some classics can be, but didn't have that desire-to-finish-a-classic-ness to it.

This may be the stupidest thing I've written about a book. Be that as it may.

Brooke says

I felt that this book was all over the place. The writing style is what mostly got me all wound up. I couldn't connect to the characters at all, and I didn't enjoy this book.

I would not recommend it.

~Brooke~

Hilary says

The description of this book on goodreads makes it sound like a stirring thriller romance. It's really a quiet, subtle, grieving little book, beautifully written, with wrenchingly believable characters facing a reality that is impossible for them to believe. As things spiral out of control and the influenza pandemic settles over their families, friends, and neighbors, people go mad. They fear one another. They cope by clinging to their old values and patterns, unable to face the fact that everything has changed.

Henry Speake and Allen Thompson are dignified and self-contained, but straining toward the modern. They build a friendship despite the difference in their social classes and the staunch disapproval of everyone they know. They struggle to accept the sweeping changes riding the wave of the epidemic. Watching everyone around them, everyone they care about and those they barely know, succumb to illness and despair, they work together, cautiously, to build a spark of hope for a better future they fear will never come.

A slice of life rather than a story with a clear direction and ending, it's a lovely, devastating novel.

Lolliepop says

slow.

Carole says

This was an engrossing and slightly squeamish book about the flu epidemic of 1918. Of how ordinary people coped in extraordinary circumstances. The main character was **Henry Speake**, the Undertaker, who confided his fears of a large scale epidemic to **Allen Thompson**, the Schoolteacher. Even though I didn't really warm to either of them I was still hoping they would turn their friendship into something more by the end of the book.

I found the whole story very readable and I read it very quickly, it was quite a page turner.

Rena Nowacoski says

A thoughtful book about the effects on trying to live through WWI and the Spanish flu. I wish I had paid more attention to my grandmother describing being a widow, sick in bed and trying to take care of 3 children under 5.

Alison Evans says

This is a fascinating story about the end of the first World War and the flu epidemic that killed so many. It is about the people who weren't soldiers; the women, children, older men and workers. The main character is a funeral director who realises what is going on early on, helped by finding a letter dropped by a doctor who drops dead in the street. Nobody in government seems to be doing anything about quarantine or stopping the movement of people. Every body feels helpless. Despite the disapproval of everyone who knows them, he begins a friendship with a woman schoolteacher (definitely not a social equal!) to whom he feels he can confide. The feeling of impotence felt by ordinary people is very clearly conveyed, although it is by no means a cheerful read!

Shoosh Qadri says

I did not know much about the 1918 flu epidemic. This book made me feel like I was living that period of time. Beautifully written.

Jean D says

The book *This Time of Dying* by Reina James is a book based on the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918, the influenza epidemic was a major event, but to me this book didn't convey that as much as I imagined it to. The main character, Henry Speake, owns a workshop which builds coffins for the deceased. Through Henry's busy schedule, he also makes time to see his friend, Mrs. Allen Thompson. Allen Thompson is a school teacher, but the influenza has caused all the schools to be shut down, leaving Allen with no work. Henry also has questions on the influenza and so does Allen and throughout the book then try uncover the answers to them. While reading the book I realized that it's quite difficult, and takes a lot of attention and understanding to comprehend the meaning of the book. The pace I took to read this book was rather slow than my usual pace, and I still had a little trouble. The book also didn't have the "hook" that many other books that I've read have had. It is hard to compare books, but for example the *Hunger Games* series is very popular, an outstanding series, and all have great hooks, but *This Time of Dying* just didn't quite make all that criteria. Finally, the book *This Time of Dying* wasn't organized as usual chapter books are. The book didn't have chapters like 1, 2, 3 etc., but it went by dates, which made it a little bit tricky. The chapters for me, help me understand the book, rather than dates which don't allow me to keep my mind organized with my thoughts on the book. Hope this review helps you toward your decision of choosing a book!

Gwen says

I read this book for influenza, so in the beginning everything else was incidental. Maybe it's my desire to see how people, especially an undertaker and government officials, would deal with the rising death toll (and

shortages of coffins, pallbearers, grave diggers, and the like). Maybe it's my forgetting how rigid and impermeable boundaries of class were. The evolving relationship -- friendship? infatuation? love? -- between Allen and Henry was glacial; the glib acceptance (or non-surprise in the face of larger catastrophe) of Ada and Gladys was surprising; the lack of depth to Henry's sisters made it hard to read their strength. To be sure, a global epidemic that you don't know is hitting is hard to deal with. On top of war, returned soldiers wounded in both body and spirit, and shortages wrought by the war, disease that seems to be ordinary -- until it isn't -- is beyond comprehension. I wish for Henry, and Allen, to get gumption, and go to New Zealand and be uncle and aunt to the orphaned Flora and Grace.

Annie Oosterwyk says

This is a terrifying story of how English society copes with pandemic influenza. Schools close, church is unattended, people no longer shake hands and the dead pile up in warehouses and stables waiting for burial. Due to the war, wood and labor is scarce and the government takes no action. In this tale the only thing that remains constant is the expectation of class distinction and the two main characters find themselves rebuked by their friends and families as they cross that line with their friendship.
