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The warning message arrived on Monday, the bomb itself on Wednesday. It became a very busy week...

The Care of Time Details

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From Reader Review The Care of Time for online ebook

Marie says

Actually, I didn't read very far into this book. The nearly exclusive use of dialogue, boring dialogue at that, became annoying enough that I finally decided to give it up and move on to another book. I read "The Mask of Demetrios" (originally "The Coffin of Demetrios") about a year ago, and loved, loved it. Written in 1939, it relates to events dating from the early 1920s (Greco-Turkish War and the horrible events in Smyrna--now Izmir) through the narrator's/protagonist's present time of 1938, taking place in Turkey, Greece, other Balkan areas, and Paris. Ambler has been considered by many to be the father of the spy novel, and influenced Graham Greene and John LeCarre as well as Alfred Hitchcock. So "The Care of Time" was especially disappointing, but given that it was written 42 years and quite a few books later, maybe Ambler became formulaic in his writing (think of any one of the myriad popular writers cranking out Stuff every year.) Or maybe I just picked a not so good one. Or didn't give it a chance. I thought so highly of Demetrios though that I will try some other Ambler work.

Anfri Bogart says

Questa tarda (1981) opera di Eric Ambler non è stata una lettura coinvolgente. A mio parere la trama è inutilmente complicata, i personaggi sono poco verosimili. Ambler ha sempre avuto la tendenza ad infarcire i suoi romanzi con approfondimenti e elucubrazioni sui temi più disparati, ma qui ho l'impressione che vengano tirati in ballo argomenti molto complessi (e svilupparli) per poi essere abbandonati senza esito alcuno. Curiosamente una parte dell'ambientazione si svolge a Milano e dintorni, con un buon dettaglio della topografia locale, anche questo però senza uno scopo preciso. Meglio dedicarsi al primo Ambler.

Al says

Later Ambler, picked up at a book sale just to see what it was like. Didn't expect much, and wasn't disappointed. His protagonist is still a little clueless, but in this case winds up acting a bit too clever. I liked the old protagonists better. This book also suffers from the literate dialogue disease. Real people don't talk like this. Plus, there's too much talk and not enough action for my taste, and I completely lost track of whether all the plot turns really would have worked or not. Oh well, guess there's a reason why it's the early Amblers that are regarded as the classics.

Robert says

I picked up The Care of Time because I had read a strong piece by Eric Ambler in an anthology edited by Alan Furst called The Book of Spies.

The Care of Time, however, isn't strong. It's slapdash with a lot of undeveloped characters and motivations careening into one another. The prose is professional and crisp, but it's full of cliches. The settings (from Bucks County, Pa., through Milan, Italy, into Austria) are underexploited. Much of the plot is presented in the form of explanatory dialogue. The shadows are just gray, not black. The villains are labels undeserving

of gravestones.

The really interesting element of the book revolves around a bit of early plotting related to the 19th century Russian anarchist/Nihilist Nechayev. Allegedly a manuscript of his has been found. Nechayev in many ways was a precursor to today's Islamic terrorists, notably by virtue of his association with the phrase, "the propaganda of the deed." This, of course, is the essence of terrorism--generating an outsized psychological effect with a beheading, a car bomb, or a series of murders. The Nechayev manuscript is simply forgotten in *The Care of Time*, but it caused me to reflect on how much emphasis "revolutionaries" placed on terror in the 19th century.

Dostoevsky turned Nechayev into a major character in his novel, *Demons*. Ambler simply didn't bother. There are many differences between these two writers but one is that Dostoevsky took literature and culture seriously and Ambler didn't. Dostoevsky understood certain forces to be existential and moral challenges. Ambler understood similar forces as entertaining games.

Margaret1358 Joyce says

Without question, the smartest and smoothest of the several Ambler spy stories I've read, this book lifts the spy genre neatly into the realm of good literature. Its theme is the plight of the aging criminal, and Ambler easily evokes our empathy for his characters. The story, dripping with historical relevance - high level negotiations between NATO and international terrorists - is a tough, concentrated masterpiece.

Tony says

THE CARE OF TIME. (1981). Eric Ambler. ***.

This was Ambler's last novel published before he passed away. It followed his usual plot device of an unsuspecting individual – in this case, Robert Halliday, a ghost writer – getting embroiled in a plot that turns out to be deeper than he thought. He was offered \$50,000 to ghost write a recently discovered text on the principles of terrorism written by a historical figure. The money looks good, and his publisher seems behind it too. Then he discovers that the whole project is backed by a large terrorist group which suddenly takes over his life. The situation gets a little complicated at times by the introduction of a large cast of terrorists who ultimately reveal their purpose. I had to fight my way through to the end of this novel.

John says

Robert Halliday is an ordinary writer-for-hire till one day he gets a letter telling him that a bomb will arrive by next post. The bomb is to serve as a credential, and Halliday's correspondent closes by saying that he looks forward to working with him. Not long after, Halliday's agent calls to let him know that he has a plum offer from an Italian publisher that wants him to collaborate on a book. What's the subject? They didn't say. Who's he to collaborate with? They didn't say. Like the bomb in the mail, it leaves him with lots of questions and no one wants to give an honest answer.

One of the more intricate Ambler novels of the seven I've read so far, *The Care of Time* can be a little bewildering, as the story involves a false pretext, complex character background, and an elaborate ruse to accomplish the ultimate aim of the devious emir who serves as the story's prime mover.

By the time you meet Karlis Zender, the shadowy, international wheeler-dealer at the story's center, you'll already know his three aliases, his affinity for fish, that he was born in Estonia, escaped from the Russians in WWII, fought in the wehrmacht, escaped to Algeria, enlisted in the French Foreign Legion, and made lots of Arab friends to do business with, among which the Algerian FLN and the PLO. Already you'll want to take notes, and I promise it hasn't gotten complicated yet. We haven't even discussed Garibaldi, Bakunin, Herzen, Herbert Marcuse, or the circumstances attending the descent of a manuscript by Sergei Nechayev.

On the other hand, I enjoy Ambler's discussion of personal and geopolitical intricacies, the drawing room discussions of the enemy's next move, and the light-hearted byplay between kidnappers and the person they've kidnapped. Also, I can't help feeling that if someone wearing a balaclava is brandishing a syringe, I've showed up for the right book.

I admit to feeling, by the end, somewhat as if I'd been sapped on the neck, tied in a bag, and rolled down a steep hill. But there are worse ways to end a weekend. Three stars.

Cheyenne says

What I find remarkable about Eric Ambler's writing is his ability to fuse the intrigue of a thriller with the conviction of a political manifesto. In his final spy novel, *The Care of Time*, originally published in 1981, he does so, however, with mixed results.

Editor Bob Halliday's new contract begins with a bang when he receives a bomb threat followed by an actual, albeit already defused, bomb from Karliss Zander, a known terrorist middleman seeking Halliday's assistance. With this bluff of violence, Zander lures Halliday to Italy under the pretense of ghostwriting a book that will be part memoir of 19th-century anarchist Sergey Nechayev (the inspiration for Dostoevski's *The Possessed*) and part expose of government corruption that benefits from covertly backing terrorist organizations. Zander's true intention, however, is to use Halliday as a pawn in negotiations between NATO, the CIA, and an Arab prince known only as "the Ruler, who will allow NATO to build a military base in the Persian Gulf in exchange for permission to found a health clinic in Austria. Through this mediation, a second cover story evolves in which Halliday, Zander, and his associates pose as a television crew to interview the Ruler about the plans for said clinic in an attempt to reveal his true motivations for seeking refuge in Austria.

The Care of Time has all the hallmarks of an Ambler thriller -- a protagonist trapped by his situation, fantastic journeys of flight and pursuit, and a narrative layered with falsehoods -- yet the pacing of the novel's second half suffers from lengthy and sometimes convoluted dialogue as information passes among parties and overly detailed exposition of the television set-up storyline. Where Ambler excels is in the first 100 pages in which he uses Zander's bomb threat to assess the history of terrorist philosophy. In conversation with previous espionage works, Ambler recalls the first wave of anarchism featured in Conrad's *The Secret Agent* before denouncing the bureaucratic back-room deals that fuel and finance the second wave of terrorism. Had Ambler continued this thread, *The Care of Time* would be on par with his earlier works that reinvigorated the espionage genre. Instead, the novel feels like the embodiment of Zander himself, a worn, world-weary intelligence agent for whom the spy game has gone on too long. The novel may not appeal to fans of contemporary fast-paced techno thrillers, but those interested in the more cerebral strain of classic spy fiction will appreciate Ambler's overview of the transitory end of the Cold War and the onset of the new

age of terror.

John Gribbin says

The thing I learned from reading this book is that although Eric Ambler's early novels are entertaining and paved the way for people like Len Deighton, his later work, this being an example, is tired and doesn't stand up in such company. *The Care of Time* is sort of all right, but has long passages in which nothing much happens, a chief protagonist you don't really care about, and plot holes big enough to drive a bus through. It is almost true that once I put it down I could not pick it up again, but I made myself finish it if only for the sake of sharing my views with you.

Bruce Beckham says

Eric Ambler wrote his first novel, *The Dark Frontier*, in 1936. His last was *The Care Of Time*, published in 1981, when he was aged 72.

I didn't realise this fact when I read the book, but with hindsight I wonder if it explains my need for matchsticks each night (there could be other reasons, of course).

Ambler certainly had a talent for making a modest cameo stretch to a full-length feature, but I think in this instance the plot was too thin to begin with, and as such became rather tenuous, and pedestrian and repetitive, when action and scene changes were called for.

Like many of his books the subject matter is ambitious (an oil sheik building a secret nuclear bunker in Austria) and not a little perspicacious (when talk of chemical warfare suddenly rears its ugly head). That said, I felt in this case it lacked his usual ring of gritty authenticity.

Ambler's protagonist is generally a bumbling amateur that finds himself entangled with professional crooks; here in *The Care Of Time* the 'hero' is more competent (and strangely successful with an attractive member of the opposite sex).

I got this book as part of a trilogy, 'free' with my Amazon Prime membership, so I can't complain. But my recommendation would be that, just like it was Ambler's last, to observe the same protocol and read his others first.

Ajitabh Pandey says

Another of those 80s book without the modern gadgets. I found it quite interesting when everything happens on the field and your life depends on your smart thinking. The author has provided a very detailed description of everything in this book and then there are lengthy pieces of dialogue between the characters. Because of that the book has grown to close to 278 pages. The actual plot and the story line is quite simple. If you do not like reading details and you do not have patience then this book is not for you.

I liked it. :-)

Gerald Sinstadt says

Eric Ambler's long career as a thriller writer shows no sign of failing grip. The central character of *The Care of Time*, Robert Halliday, a freelance ghost writer, ingeniously and plausibly is drawn into a plot with international ramifications. The action moves between the US, the Middle East and Austria, the characters are well drawn, the outcome hard to predict and the tension skilfully maintained.

The book begins:

"The letter arrived on Monday.

"The bomb arrived on Wednesday.

"It was a busy week."

In short, this is the old master at his best.

Peggy Walker says

This book was kind of a slow read for me. The plot is very dense and convoluted with a larger cast of characters than was really necessary. It is a very dated cold war/spy story involving the first hints of issues arising from the Gulf. It also involves a journey to an asylum for a retiring foreign "spook" for hire. In the end, it was a lot of work for not much payoff. And WAY too dated. They used Telex to communicate, for heaven's sake. Pass it up.

jsewellmcevoy says

Ambler's late-in-the-day thriller pitches an American ghostwriter into regime change and Middle East intrigue through the rather novel device of a simple television interview. Of course, the interview is heavily rigged as it is conducted deep within an Austrian mine-shaft, which an Arab prince proposes to turn into a nuclear shelter. The latter part of the book consists of the Prince's desperate attempts to retrieve the tapes. Ghostwriter Halliday understands his NATO brief from the start, even if the interview comes as something of a surprise to the reader. All in all, as complex as most of Ambler's thrillers, but less satisfying. Reading between the lines of dialogue is difficult first time round - this is a book that handsomely rewards re-reading.

Comrade_Bazarov says

Ambler wrote thrillers for nearly five decades, and in doing so transformed the genre completely. His early thrillers were written in the backdrop of World War 2, while this one - his last - is at the tail end of the Cold War. His mastery of geopolitics is very sound, as always. The beauty of the book is how much he accomplishes merely through clever dialogue and intricate plotting. He doesn't need explosions, cool gadgets or contrived action to keep the book interesting.

robert halliday, a professional ghostwriter of some repute is hired, in a rather bizarre way, by an international mercenary to ostensibly write a biography of sergei nechayev, a 19th century russian anarcho-terrorist. the plot takes off from there and touches upon the delicate geopolitics of the middle east and how nato, the us, and the soviet union are all vying for some sort of superiority. thoughtful, interesting and delighting.
