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Another Me



Synopsis

Set against the backdrop of plague-ravaged Europe, this spellbinding new novel from one of Canada's foremost writers of historical fiction for young people will have readers racing to the electrifying climax. Seventeen-year-old Natan has a safe and happy life in fourteenth-century Strasbourg, France. He works with his father in his rag trade, helps his mother around the house, and studies the Torah at night with his young brother, Shmuli. He's even feeling the first stirrings of love with Elena, the daughter of the master draper who is his father's best customer. But something is rotten in the streets of Strasbourg. There is tension between the Jewish community and the rest of the citizens, and there is fear as the deadly plague sweeps through towns and cities nearby. When rumors begin to circulate that Jewish residents are contaminating the town's well water to try to hasten the plague's arrival in their city, Natan knows that there are dangerous days ahead. When he sees who really poisoned Strasbourg's water, he is determined to speak the truth and save his people from the false accusations being made against them. But a moment of violence threatens to derail his plans and change his life in ways he could never have imagined.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Gr 5-7 • A heartbreaking account of a young Jewish man, Natan, who defies death in order to save his people. The Jewish inhabitants of Middle Ages-era Strasbourg face daily

persecution, intolerance, and even physical violence. They are forced to pay high prices to ensure a tremulous sense of safety and are segregated from the general population, and their way of life becomes even more difficult as the Black Death falls like a shadow over the land. Natan, in the wrong place at the wrong time, stumbles across an active plot to falsely accuse the local Jews of poisoning the town's water and finds himself the mortal victim of paranoia and hate. While his body lies prone at the feet of his killers, Natan's consciousness miraculously moves to inhabit the body of a young Christian man, and romantic rival, Hans. Granted a second chance, Natan seeks not only to bring justice to his murderers but also to save the Jews of Strasbourg from further plots. While the historical element of the writing is, at times, a bit heavy-handed, the simple narrative and unique story line serve to engage readers. Although this tale centers on heinous acts, the actual violence is glossed over, making the text palatable for more sensitive readers. VERDICT More broadly approachable, if clunkier, than Karen Cushman's *Catherine, Called Birdy* and with a fast-paced narrative reminiscent of Laurie Halse Anderson's *Fever 1793*, this offering will engage reluctant readers—even those who are normally averse to historical fiction. Recommended for general purchase.

—Rose Garrett, Cliff Valley School, Atlanta, GA

PRAISE FOR *Another Me*: "It is a heart-rending tale based on actual events... Readers will need the Kleenex for this one." --Kirkus Review "... this offering will engage reluctant readers—even those who are normally averse to historical fiction." --School Library Journal "Set against the backdrop of plague-ravaged Europe, this spellbinding new novel from one of Canada's foremost writers of historical fiction for young people will have readers racing to the electrifying climax." --49th Shelf (blog) "Wiseman, an award-winning Canadian author, has turned a little-known moment in history into a thoughtful, humane page-turner." --Historical Novel Society "[A] sense of inescapable fate drives a doomed and sorrowful tale, reminding readers that sometimes in the face of inalterable situations all we have are our good intentions and actions." --National Reading Campaign

A teenager named Natan works with his father in 13th century Strasbourg, Germany. The Jews have to wear a yellow Star of David to identify themselves as they did in the Holocaust and they are persecuted by their Gentile neighbors. Natan meets a young Gentile girl named Elena who is the daughter of one of his fathers' employers - they fall in love and they meet secretly by night. The Black Plague is spreading rapidly throughout the country and the Jews are being blamed for poisoning the wells in the cities and spreading the plague even though they are innocent and they

are murdered by the city's Gentiles. Hans, Elena's father's apprentice is in love with Elena and has asked her to marry him, but she refused because she loved Natan. Hans resents Natan, but he tolerates his presence because he loves Elena and he knows that she cannot marry a Jew. Elena warns Natan that the Jews of Strasbourg may be accused of poisoning the town well even though the mayor of the city wants to protect them and that Natan and his family would be wise to leave the city so that they can stay alive. Natan hears a group of men carrying a sack of rotten food and dung discuss throwing it and a cat into the well to poison it so they can blame the Jews for the plague. Natan is captured and killed by Kaspar the Butcher - but a wondrous thing happens, Hans appears on the scene and Natan feels his soul entering Hans' body. What will happen next - will all the Jews be slaughtered and only Hans/Natan escapes or will Hans save the Jews and marry Elena? You will have to read the book to find out!

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