

# **Doomsday Book Study Guide**

## **Doomsday Book by Connie Willis**

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## Plot Summary

James Dunworthy, a faculty member of the Oxford History Department, enters a viewing chamber where his friend, Mary Ahrens, is watching the preparations for sending a historian named Kivrin to 1320. The policy has been not to send historians to the medieval period because of the danger to the historian, but the head of the department, Mr. Basingame, is out of town and has left a faculty member named Gilchrist in charge. Gilchrist has overridden the policy to allow Kivrin to go.

As soon as she is through the net, Dunworthy and Mary go to a nearby pub to wait for Badri, the tech in charge of the drop, to get a definite fix on Kivrin's location so she can be picked up in two weeks. Dunworthy admits to being very worried because drops to such distant times have not been attempted. While Mary is reassuring him, Badri rushes in, mutters about a problem and rushes back out with Dunworthy and Mary in pursuit. At the lab, Badri says that he has a fix on Kivrin's location but says again that there's a problem, then faints over the console. Mary, a physician, calls for medical transport and Dunworthy travels to the hospital with Badri. There, it's determined that Badri has a virus and the entire team is quarantined for a period of time. When a second case is reported, the entire city is locked down in quarantine status and the team released with orders to return the following day.

Meanwhile, Kivrin arrives and decides she's at the correct time of year but that there's nothing to definitively say she's in 1320 and realizes she has arrived a short distance from the road onto which she'd expected to be dropped. She begins trying to move her possessions, including a wagon, to the road but soon finds she's feeling ill. She passes out and the next days pass in a delirium of fever and pain. When she wakes, she feigns amnesia and quickly becomes fond of two little girls in the household. She knows there's some problem, but days pass before she figures out that the family has come to this remote village in an effort to escape the plague. Kivrin only then learns that she's missed the target by years and is landed in the middle of the Black Death plague of 1348.

Meanwhile, the plague is sweeping the present and Dunworthy is only one of hundreds who fall ill. Like in the 1300s, the victims blame a great many things for the illnesses until it's finally discovered that the virus originated at an archaeological dig of a church burial ground from the 1300s. Gilchrist, in reaction to public demand, shuts down the time travel lab, and Dunworthy knows that Kivrin is now stranded in the 1300s. With the encouragement of Mary's great-nephew, a young boy named Colin, Dunworthy rounds up a team to mount a rescue mission. The new drop is successful, and Dunworthy locates Kivrin, though not in time to save Kivrin's own nightmarish days of nursing the dozens of residents of the village and seeing them all die. Having been inoculated against the virus before her trip through the net, Kivrin is the sole survivor. As she, Dunworthy and Colin prepare to step back into the year 2054, Kivrin says that she is still glad she came because she alone can give witness to the lives of those who died.



# Chapters One through Four

## Chapters One through Four Summary

James Dunworthy, a faculty member of the Oxford History Department, enters a viewing chamber where his friend, Mary Ahrens, is watching the preparations for sending a historian named Kivrin to 1320. The policy has been not to send historians to the medieval period because of the danger to the historian, but the head of the department, Mr. Basingame, is out of town and has left a faculty member named Gilchrist in charge. Gilchrist summarily reduces the ranking of the time period and schedules Kivrin's trip.

While Kivrin is preparing for her trip, Ms. Montoya is working on an archaeological dig near the university. She is excavating a village known as Skendgate. Kivrin worked at the dig one day so her hands are dirty and her fingernails chipped, points she believes will be in keeping with the period. Kivrin has an embedded "interpreter" which will help her recognize and duplicate syntax for the language she expects to encounter, though she has also learned old English as Dunworthy believes it to have been spoken during the 1300s. Kivrin's preparations include inoculations against an array of diseases she might encounter, having her appendix removed and having concocted an elaborate cover story of an attack, complete with a real wound to her head. She also has a small recorder which is activated by holding her hands together, as in prayer.

In chapter two, the net has opened and Kivrin disappears. Dunworthy and Mary go to the Lamb and Cross, a nearby pub, to wait while the tech, a man Dunworthy respects named Badri, gets "a fix" on Kivrin's location so she can be picked up at the appropriate time and place. They are there only a short time when they're joined by Gilchrist. Badri rushes in, saying that he has a fix on Kivrin, but there's a problem, and they all follow Badri back to the lab. On the way, Badri encounters a number of people, including a woman with a distinctive umbrella. Badri continues to say that there's a problem but to indicate that he has the "fix" on Kivrin's location. Once they are in the lab and before Dunworthy is able to get a clear answer about the problem, Badri suddenly slumps over the console and faints.

In chapter three, Kivrin wakes to find herself transported in time, but she almost immediately realizes she's ill, though she initially puts it down to the time travel lag. She is slightly off where she should have been, the wagon being located a short distance from the road. She hides one box near the road, hoping to use it later to locate the drop site. In the first excerpt from the Doomsday Book, Kivrin notes she can't definitively say that she's in 1320, but that the time of year seems right.

In chapter four, it's evident that Badri is very ill. He says there's "something wrong," though he says that he got the fix on Kivrin. Badri is taken to the hospital where Dunworthy attempts to answer questions about Badri, including whether Badri has been out of the country and whether he has had all his inoculations. The city is quickly



quarantined and Dunworthy begins facing a myriad of problems, including what to do with a group of American bell ringers who are visiting.

## Chapters One through Four Analysis

There is significant terminology introduced in the first chapters, including the word "drop" which is the word used to describe the arrival in the past. Other words, such as "rendezvous," are also used in conjunction with this terminology. The time travel itself is never fully explained. There is a "net" that drops the traveler into the set time period then reopens back at that specific location. The location will be important because Kivrin must be in the same place in order to be picked up by the net at the specified time. The pickup time is determined ahead of time so Kivrin can move around the time period and know when she is to return to the pickup point. An important aspect of the net is that time moves forward at the same pace in both the past and future while the net is open. In other words, if Kivrin plans to remain in the past for two weeks, the net on the Oxford campus must be opened two weeks after the day of the drop. Another important aspect is that nothing that could affect the past will pass through the net. This is one of the "paradoxes" of the time travel. It will also be revealed that there will be a slight amount of "slippage," meaning the net doesn't open at exactly the moment predicted but will be off by as much as a few hours, days or even weeks. This will become an important point in Kivrin's trip.

Dunworthy has no faith in Gilchrist and says that Gilchrist has a very limited view of how the net works. As an example, he says that Gilchrist's resolution for a problem is that they will simply drop back in time prior to the problem and pull Kivrin out. Dunworthy indicates that this can't be done and that anything that happens to Kivrin is "irrevocable." Dunworthy eventually explains it as a quirk of the net in that a person who tries to step in to change a particular event will simply be routed past that event.



# Chapters Five through Nine

## Chapters Five through Nine Summary

Dunworthy begins dealing with the problems of quarantine, including angry people who want to leave the city and the arrival of the mother of a student, William Gaddson, who is overbearing and certain that "her William" is going to fall ill. William is willing to run errands for Dunworthy for the duration of the quarantine by threatening to have William's mother room with William.

In chapter six, Kivrin tries to move her wagon and other possessions nearer the road so she'll be discovered by a passerby but realizes she's very sick. In chapter seven, a medic isolated with Dunworthy's group poses the question as to whether the virus could have come through the net, which Dunworthy says is impossible. Dunworthy and the others are soon released from the hospital, though they can't leave the city and are told to report back regularly for additional testing. Dunworthy again goes to Badri's room, but Badri doesn't recognize him but says that there's "something wrong" and that he must find Dunworthy.

In chapter eight, Kivrin is somewhere between awake and asleep in a delirium of fever. She is confused but believes there to be a cutthroat involved and another man. She believes she is being burned at the stake and pleads aloud to be returned to the drop site. She struggles to find the correct words and finally converses with a priest who is speaking Latin. She realizes that he's administering last rites and believes it's because she's being burned at the stake. A transcript from the Doomsday Book follows, containing a translation of a Latin prayer.

As chapter nine opens, Dunworthy continues to try to talk to Badri in the hospital, though there remain gaps in Badri's time meaning he could have come into contact with other people. Dunworthy suddenly realizes the seriousness of the situation considering that Badri has had all his inoculations but is still very sick. Finch tells Dunworthy that the tech closest to Oxford is "Andrews," and Dunworthy instructs Finch to get together Andrews' contact information as well as other techs. Badri wakes again briefly and tells Dunworthy that "something's wrong," and then says, "They all died, didn't they?" He seems to relax when Dunworthy tells Badri that he has a non-fatal virus. Dunworthy is called when another victim, Beverly Breen, is brought into the hospital and he remembers seeing Badri bump into the woman that morning on the street outside the pub. Mary and Dunworthy are talking about the possibilities when in walks Colin.

## Chapters Five through Nine Analysis

As soon as the quarantine becomes a fact, Dunworthy begins helping establish the contact points for all those who are sick in an effort to find the point of origin. The focus is initially on the possibility of someone having brought the virus from the United States



and that possibility will be pursued for some time before finally being abandoned. An interesting point here is the reaction to the disease. There are references to the "pandemic" and to other epidemic events in the past, and it's apparently an attempt to avoid another major crisis that prompts the early quarantine and security measures.

Dunworthy and Mary discuss several scenarios related to the epidemic. Mary who suggests that Kivrin may be better off in the Middle Ages than in the present where there are all the signs of an epidemic in the making. Dunworthy continues to worry about Kivrin and spends the majority of his time trying to ensure that they will be able to retrieve her at the appointed time. Though several possibilities have been suggested, it is some time before Mary and Dunworthy realize Kivrin was likely infected when she was dropped.

Kivrin's memories of what's happening to her are very incoherent, and it's during this time that she cries out in English for Mr. Dunworthy to come get her. This is evidence that Kivrin, though officially under the direction of Gilchrist, trusts Dunworthy to figure out that something has gone wrong and to come get her. Gilchrist's own lack of knowledge with regard to the net is soon evident, and he will bow to public outcry that the time travel contributed to the epidemic.



# Chapters Ten through Sixteen

## Chapters Ten through Sixteen Summary

Kivrin rouses, realizing that she's been very ill and watches a woman, who will soon be identified as Eliwys, painting wax onto a piece of cloth covering a window. Kivrin recognizes it as a practice of the time period when there were few options for window coverings. Kivrin can't understand the language being spoken and knows the interpreter isn't working. She considers that a fall or the fever might have damaged it and hopes it will begin working in time. There's an older woman in the room as well, and the two women help Kivrin to use the chamber pot. She is so weak she can't stand without help. Then two little girls run into the room—Eliwys's daughters, Agnes and Rosemund, and Kivrin worries that they will be exposed to whatever infection she has but no one else seems concerned. As the chatter goes on around her, the interpreter begins working, though there remain skips and it is a while before Kivrin can be understood.

The following transcript from the Doomesday Book indicates that Kivrin understands the seriousness of her situation and that she knows she's "in trouble." She also notes that there's a rat under her bed.

In chapter eleven, Gawyn arrives, learns that Kivrin speaks in some unknown language, and tells Eliwys that he plans to ride back to the place where he found Kivrin. She wants to go with him but is too weak to get out of bed to follow. There is a little girl named Agnes who arrives, and Kivrin is able to make the child understand her. She next asks Eliwys where they are but can't understand the name of the place. Kivrin has an elaborate cover story - including that she is traveling to visit her brother who is ill and is set upon by thieves that prompted all her servants to run away in fear. Kivrin knows she should now present the entire cover story, but fears to do so and says that her name is Katherine and she doesn't remember anything about her past. The "amnesia" will be viewed skeptically by some.

In chapter twelve, Kivrin learns that the entire village will be going on an outing to find the traditional Yule log, so Kivrin uses the opportunity to go in search of Gawyn, hoping to have him take her back to the drop site. Failing to find him, she believes herself strong enough to search for the drop site but soon is near collapse and finds a slight refuge from the weather in a hut, where she remains until Rosemund and a family servant, a filthy girl named Maisry, help her back to the manor. Kivrin notes that the hut offers little protection and there's a rat in a cage in the corner. There is a pitiful fire and Kivrin wonders how the people survive in such conditions.

In the next transcript from the Doomesday Book, Kivrin notes that she believes she has pneumonia, that the chance of recovery isn't good, and that the family seems to believe her illness related to the wound on her head rather than to some contagion.





In chapter thirteen, Colin explains that he convinced a cab driver to take him to the quarantine line and then simply slipped through and that the guards didn't chase far, since the line was meant to keep people in rather than out. While he's explaining, two more cases of the virus are reported. Mary and Dunworthy discover that there could be a connection between the spreading of the virus and a dance. Colin then goes home with Dunworthy where they discover that the bell ringers are now concerned about the situation and Finch is having trouble coping with the situation. Dunworthy learns there are six new cases, encounters William Gaddson "groping" a young woman, assigns William to figure out the gaps in Badri's schedule on threat of having his mother room with him, and isn't able to get to bed for hours.

In chapter fourteen, Dunworthy awakes to discover Colin is hoping for a package from his mother. Fearing it won't arrive, Dunworthy plans to do some shopping for Colin himself but on his way to the hospital discovers that the stores are mostly closed and that there's nothing other than candy for sale. Badri is somewhat better, says there was only four hours slippage and seems on the verge of saying something else when Dunworthy is ushered out so x-rays can be taken. Dunworthy attends an evening service to a packed house which is noted to be a reaction to the quarantine.

In the next excerpt from the Doomsday Book, Kivrin notes she is much better and that she interrupted a sexual encounter between Gawyn and Maisry, that the girls nor Maisry recognize the name Skendgate, and that the church bells, which have rung often since her arrival, are tolled when someone dies. She finds her possessions have been brought to the barn, but the small chest is missing, giving her hope she can locate it to return to the drop site.

In chapter fifteen, Kivrin has a miraculous recovery that earns Imeyne's suspicions, then takes over the care of the girls, Agnes and Rosemund, because the family is so short on servants. Kivrin hopes to go looking for the drop site and toward that end, volunteers to look for holly to decorate the hall. Kivrin, Rosemund and Agnes ride to the church to ask Father Roche to accompany them. In chapter sixteen, Kivrin realizes that Father Roche is the "cutthroat" that she remembers from her delirium. They go into the woods and Kivrin asks to see the place where Gawyn found her but discovers that it's not the drop as she remembers and can't locate the little casket she left by the road.

## Chapters Ten through Sixteen Analysis

The older woman in the room is Eliwys's mother-in-law, Lady Imeyne. Kivrin eventually decides to concentrate on getting better with the hope that the interpreter will gather enough information to begin working with whatever language is being spoken and she will be able to recover sufficiently to find her way back to the drop site. Kivrin is worried about her situation and at one point grabs onto Eliwys's hand, begging to be understood and to be returned to the drop site. Kivrin begins to gather some information, including the fact that Eliwys and her mother-in-law have been sent to this small village by Eliwys's husband, and that Imeyne is not happy with the situation but that Eliwys is determined to do as her husband instructed.



In the transcript from the Doomsday Book following chapter eleven, Kivrin has begun to figure out the basic situation in which she has landed. She notes she is in trouble, but it seems this family is also in trouble. She cites a story told to her by one of the girls in which a man's head was all red, which Kivrin takes to mean that he'd been injured. Kivrin notes that there's a sense of unreality in her location, and that it seems that Dunworthy and the others should be waiting in the next room, which she wishes is the case. An interesting point here is that Kivrin has begun to realize that many things that had been taken as fact aren't true at all. She notes that the weave of her clothing is too fine, unlike what's worn by everyone else in the household. The language is also much different than what she's been taught. She'll find many other discrepancies over the coming days, but it's noteworthy that the careful research does come to her aid in many situations.

Dunworthy's mind is constantly on Kivrin, and he continues to reassure himself that she's capable of handling whatever situation arises. He recalls his own test trip through the net to a period just thirty years in the past from that time. There had been careful research, and he was supposed to drop in, take the tube train to a set location, and be picked up. The research had been so careful that he even had period-specific money. But when he reached the tube, it had been closed for an accident - a happening no one knows about. There'd been a young man there and Dunworthy had initially been afraid of him, but the young man had pulled out a map and offered directions to reach the destination, which he'd got to with time to spare. Dunworthy now goes to sleep realizing there's no way anyone can consider all possible scenarios, and that there are young men with a map and a piece of advice in every time period. That, combined with his knowledge that Kivrin is a resourceful and capable student, isn't enough to completely quell his fears. The last image that comes to mind as he falls asleep is of the darkened station that wasn't a foreseen situation on his own trip through time.

On the next excerpt from the Doomsday Book, Kivrin notes she is feeling much better and has a talk with Gawyn. One of her concerns is that he would find someone he believes to be her attacker and would kill an innocent person. It's during this time that Kivrin realizes that Lady Imeyne has a low opinion of almost everyone, including the priest, who she claims is illiterate and superstitious, and of Kivrin who she has apparently labeled "adulteress." It's during Kivrin's brief encounter with Gawyn that she realizes that Gawyn is obviously in love with Eliwys.

The hostilities between Imeyne and Eliwys are evident, though it seems evident that Imeyne is set on having her own way and Eliwys wants only to do whatever it is that her husband has ordered them to do. The full story has not yet come out, though it seems evident that Eliwys' husband's actions do not meet with his mother's approval. The political air is likely at the heart of the situation, and Imeyne has apparently sent Gawyn to offer greetings to a man who lives in the vicinity, Sir Bloet. When Eliwys points out that their instructions were to wait, Imeyne says that to have been so near Sir Bloet without offering greeting would have been rude, though it seems evident that she has some other reason in mind as well.



# Chapters Seventeen through Twenty-Three

## Chapters Seventeen through Twenty-Three Summary

Colin wakes Dunworthy very early on Christmas day and is pleased with his gifts. Dunworthy continues to deal with Gaddson, who Colin has begun calling Gallstone, and the bell ringers. Dunworthy goes to visit Badri who is still incoherent and then learns that two of the detainees have been brought in with virus symptoms.

There follows a section from the Doomsday Book. Kivrin has realized that she can't possibly find the drop on her own. She also talks with Rosemund about her approaching marriage to Sir Bloet. Rosemund says only that she knows her father won't allow her to come to harm. Meanwhile, Gawyn hasn't returned and Eliwys is obviously concerned about his absence.

That night there are additional cases reported. In chapter eighteen, Dunworthy leaves the bell ringers to practice in his room with the agreement that they'll take messages of any phone calls. Andrews, the tech Dunworthy wants to come take a fix, declines to come to Oxford but says he can check the drop remotely, but Dunworthy discovers that he's been locked out of the lab with Gilchrist, citing the public outcry that time travel is to blame for the epidemic. Dunworthy learns that Beverly Breen, the second reported case, has died, a fact that makes Mary less confident that the virus is the South Carolina strain of flu.

In the next section of the Doomsday Book, Kivrin takes Agnes to Father Roche, hoping he can help heal the child's knee, which is showing signs of blood poisoning. With nothing available, Kivrin asks for "old wine," hoping the alcohol content will be sufficient to help the healing process, and it does.

In chapter nineteen, Sir Bloet's family, including his "shrewish sister" and a large entourage of servants, arrives. He is fat and fiftyish with bad teeth, facts that dismay Kivrin. Kivrin reads the wording on the brooch given to Rosemund by Sir Bloet - a mistake since few of the time could read, but covers up her ability to read by saying that Sir Bloet had told Rosemund the wording when he presented her with the gift. Kivrin notes that Eliwys and Gawyn have a quiet conversation about the situation in Bath and the fact that there's a new judge to hear the case, which could be good for Eliwys's husband. Others see the two talking and Kivrin notes their disapproval. In chapter twenty, the bells ring announcing mass, and Imeyne finds fault with everything, including that Father Roche calls too soon. Agnes falls asleep beside Kivrin during the service and Gawyn returns to help Kivrin get the girl home. Kivrin takes the opportunity to ask him about taking her back to the place he found her, but he says he's already brought her things from there and doesn't promise. Their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of three men. In the excerpt from the Doomsday Book, Kivrin notes they are an



envoy from the bishop, that they drink readily, and that one had grabbed at Maisry, slipping his hand down the bodice of her gown.

In chapter twenty-one, Dunworthy learns that two more victims have died, that the virus is an apparently new strand, and that it will likely take several days for a treatment to be manufactured and to take effect. Dunworthy realizes this time frame is past the date Kivrin is to be picked up. Gilchrist says he has no intention of opening the net to retrieve Kivrin, citing his belief that a virus could come through. Dunworthy finally reaches Montoya at the dig in his effort to find a connection that could account for the virus, and tells her that there have been seven-hundred-and-eighty cases of the flu and sixteen of those have died. Montoya admits that she forged Basingame's signature but gives no other clues that Dunworthy finds useful.

In the Doomsday Book, Kivrin notes that Imeyne has ordered the bishop's envoy to take Kivrin to a nunnery, so Kivrin now knows she has only until the envoy leaves to find her way back to the drop. In chapter twenty-two, Kivrin continues to try to find a few moments alone with Gawyn; Agnes' puppy dies. In chapter twenty-three, the envoy abruptly departs, refusing to take Kivrin along and leaving a clerk behind with instructions that he's to be allowed to sleep off the excessive drink from the night before. Later that day, Kivrin realizes that the clerk has a high fever and all the signs of the plague. She then discovers that the year is 1348 and that the family had come to the country in an effort to escape the plague.

## Chapters Seventeen through Twenty-Three Analysis

Badri continues to ramble, saying that most of the people didn't survive and that it was "the rats," which leads Dunworthy to believe that Badri is talking about the black plague. Meanwhile, there are picketers outside the hospital, objecting to an array of situations, including membership in an organization and allowing time travel. Dunworthy tells Colin that there are some paradoxes involved with the net and time travel. He says that Kivrin has been "dropped" and that even if the net were opened now, she would not be at the place where she was dropped. He also explains that after dropping Kivrin, the net operates only in real time, meaning they can't drop in prior to the time she was dropped nor can they speed ahead to the time of the rendezvous. They have no choice but to wait for the time for Kivrin to be picked up. Dunworthy also explains that nothing can come back through the net. If, for example, there was a virus involved, the net would simply not open. Dunworthy also notes that Kivrin can't be in two places at one time. These "paradoxes" are somewhat confusing and are explained in bits and pieces.

While Kivrin and the others are gathered in the room where the Yule log burns, Agnes points out that Rosemund's shadow seems to be without a head, which superstition says means Rosemund will die before the year is over. While Kivrin tries to distract Agnes, it suddenly strikes her that all those gathered in this room are long dead by the time of Kivrin's life at Oxford. It's a disconcerting thought, and Kivrin has to focus on other things to get past the idea. It's evident she's becoming attached to this family and it seems this is one aspect of the time travel with which Kivrin isn't prepared to deal.



The sight of the knight's tomb where Montoya is working is another in a long line of references to the dig where Montoya is working and should be serving as a foreshadowing for the reader. Another point of foreshadowing is when Gilchrist argues against reopening the net to retrieve Kivrin. During that conversation, Gilchrist argues there's no way to be certain a virus won't come through. He argues probabilities and Dunworthy says "probability" has estimated that there's more of a chance that her arrival in 1320 would be witnessed than that a virus could travel through the net, but Gilchrist is willing to discount that possibility. At one point, Gilchrist says Kivrin knew the risks and Dunworthy asks if Kivrin knew he would be willing to abandon her, but the job apparently doesn't make any difference to Gilchrist. Dunworthy notes that Gilchrist, having realized he isn't going to have a successful trip to 1320 to report to Basingame, now just wants to protect himself from further fallout.



# Chapters Twenty-four Through Twenty-eight

## Chapters Twenty-four Through Twenty-eight Summary

Montoya is brought into the hospital with symptoms of the virus, and Dunworthy and Mary suddenly realize that the common factor is the work on the knight's tomb at the dig. Dunworthy rushes to Badri's room, having been told that he's somewhat better, and asks if Kivrin had worked on the knight's tomb. Badri confirms this but then asks if Kivrin has been picked up. Told that she hasn't, Badri says that Kivrin was dropped in 1348. In chapter twenty-five, Dunworthy asks how it's possible that they missed the intended destination by so much and Badri says that it apparently has something to do with a minimum amount of slippage. Bardi says he had been trying to tell Dunworthy about this problem when he passed out. Dunwothy's immediate reaction is that he's angry, but Mary urges him to think before he acts, saying that it's not Badri's fault.

Outside, Dunworthy encounters Colin who has orders from Mary to make sure Dunworthy gets a shot to help boost his immunity before leaving the hospital. Dunworthy hurries instead to the lab. He forges Basingame's signature on a note and hands it to the guard at the lab, which is sufficient for the guard to open the lab door, though with obvious reservations. Dunworthy goes inside just as Gilchrist arrives. Dunworthy is horrified to find the power has been turned off, and the net shut down. Gilchrist's lack of understanding is again underlined as he says that there "must be" a backup power source of some kind and expresses the plan that everything will be fine when the power is restored. Dunworthy, shocked by what he's seeing, collapses.

In chapter twenty-six, Kivrin has just come to realize that she really is in 1348. She looks again at the sick clerk and gets hold of herself, telling Eliwys to take the others downstairs and to keep them away from the sick room. Father Roche leaves but returns to perform last rites. Kivrin allows it but has him wear a makeshift mask and explains that the disease is spread easily. She orders the room quarantined and tells Father Roche to urge the members of the village to remain indoors and to forbid outside visitors.

The following day Kivrin believes the clerk to be somewhat better, though his tongue is swollen horribly and he remains unconscious. That afternoon, Agnes calls for Kivrin, saying that Rosemund has hurt herself. Kivrin goes to the hall and finds that Rosemund claims to have fallen and hurt her arm. After determining that it probably isn't broken, Kivrin sends Agnes for Father Roche, but Rosemund falls, landing at an odd angle and hitting her head. It's then that Kivrin discovers the large bubo under Rosemund's arm, the same as the clerk had, which is a sign of the plague. Kivrin calls to Eliwys, asking for Gawyn, but Eliwys says that Gawyn has gone to Bath to fetch Eliwys's husband.



It's interesting that, having seen that Kivrin was ill herself, there are still no real accusations that Kivrin might have brought the plague to the family. The two important points on this front are that there were many myths about illnesses so that it was generally accepted that Kivrin's illness was a result of her injury rather than any illness, and that there is little in the way of comprehensive knowledge about incubation times.

In chapter twenty-seven, Kivrin takes Rosemund into the bower where the clerk is quarantined and sends Eliwys, Agnes and Imeyne to the hall with instructions that they are to see no one. Kivrin notes that Eliwys does so without a backward glance at Rosemund. Kivrin figures it will take Gawyn at least three days to travel to Bath and back, and she wants nothing more than to make it to the drop so she can return with medications. Meanwhile, Kivrin uses willow bark tea in an effort to treat the fever. Father Roche reports several new cases of the fever among the villagers. Kivrin moves the clerk and Rosemund to the hall where it's warmer, keeping Agnes a short distance away by making a partition of benches and tables.

Finally, in desperation, Kivrin cuts into the bubo that's swollen to the size of an apple on Rosemund's side. There is significant bleeding followed by the pus draining from the wound. In the Doomsday Book that follows, Kivrin notes that she'd been told that people ran from the plague, fearing to touch those infected and leaving the sick to fend for themselves, but that Father Roche is nothing like that. She notes that there are bells tolling almost constantly in the area, and that the one that's fallen silent might be a sign that the plague has run its course or that there's no one left alive to toll the bell. She ends the segment by praying that Rosemund recovers and that Agnes doesn't fall ill.

In chapter twenty-eight, Maisry is charged with looking after Agnes but the little girl is soon missing. While Kivrin is desperately searching for Agnes, a young boy arrives with a notice from the bishop. Kivrin reads it, already knowing what it says from her own historical research, that anyone who is in need of last rites and who has no priest available may confess to anyone available. Kivrin notes that when she'd read the document from the safety of seven hundred years in the future, it had seemed frivolous, but she could now see the desperation being felt by the church. Before Kivrin can stop her, Eliwys grabs hold of the boy's reins and asks for news of Gawyn.

In the Doomsday Book following, Kivrin lists those who have the plague and those who have died. She notes that the bells at Courcy are tolling and wonders who has died, adding that she hopes it's Sir Bloet or the envoy who brought the plague to the village. She outlines treatments and symptoms, including the fact that she's lanced some buboes with limited success and that some have the pneumonic version of the disease and are coughing up bloody sputum.

## **Chapters Twenty-four Through Twenty-eight Analysis**

One of the paradoxes is that nothing can travel through the net that would alter the course of history, and there's a brief argument that Kivrin couldn't possibly have traveled back in time if she'd been exposed to the virus from the knight's tomb. This is



immediately discounted when it's pointed out that the she wasn't taking anything to 1348 that wasn't already there. Because the virus already exists in 1348, the net would have opened as usual, even if Kivrin were infected with the virus.

When Kivrin reveals that the clerk has the plague, Imeyne says that "You've brought this on us," and Kivrin immediately believes Imeyne is talking to her, but discovers that the woman was talking to Eliwys, her daughter-in-law. Imeyne says that the plague is the punishment for adultery, leaving no doubt that she believes there to be something between Eliwys and Gawyn. Later, Eliwys takes this same attitude, saying that the judgment is her fault.

Kivrin notes that Imeyne is constantly seeking a way to blame someone for having caused the plague. She blames Eliwys, saying the plague is God's punishment for Eliwys' adultery. She blames Father Roche, saying it's because he failed at any number of trivial tasks. She blames Maisry, saying it's God's punishment for her laziness. Kivrin says that Imeyne should be feeling guilty because it's Imeyne's own insistence that there be a different priest for the Christmas Mass that brought the clerk to the house, but that Imeyne doesn't seem to be feeling any guilt at all.

Kivrin notes that Father Roche is willing to do any task, no matter how horrible, and she seems to have great respect for him. It's noteworthy that she has now commented several times on the fact that he seems to be recounting his observations to God much in the same way she recounts her own observations into the recording device implanted into her wrist.





# Chapters Twenty-nine through Thirty-one

## Chapters Twenty-nine through Thirty-one Summary

Dunworthy wakes to find it's days past the rendezvous date. Coliin soon comes in for a visit and says the crisis is past, though the quarantine has not yet been lifted.

Dunworthy continues in and out of consciousness, regaining slightly more strength as the days pass until he's able to sit up. Montoya and Colin arrive one afternoon, and Dunworthy asks Montoya if she's yet found Kivrin's recorder. Montoya says that she has no evidence of Kivrin's death.

Dunworthy realizes that he hasn't asked about anyone for fear he'll find out they've died. He finally does ask and learns that Finch does not get sick and he is filling in for one of the bell ringers, who remains in the hospital. He then asks about Badri and learns that Badri had relapsed but is now recovering. Dunworthy learns that numbered among the deaths are Gilchrist and Mary.

There follows a transcript from the Doomsday Book in which Kivrin notes that Agnes has gotten worse, constantly crying out for Kivrin but then flailing in her attempts to get away from Kivrin. Imeyne is sick and has refused last rites from Roche, saying God is to blame for the scourge. Maisry is missing and Kivrin believes she's probably gone to another village where she'll either find the plague is already in full force or will introduce the disease. Kivrin notes that the church bells ring nonstop and it's impossible to distinguish one funeral toll from another, and that Father Roche has consecrated part of the green because the church yard is almost full. When the bells abruptly stop ringing, Roche hopes the plague is past, but Kivrin notes an edict from another bishop ordering the bells to stop because of the effect on the people. Kivrin believes a similar edict may have been issued from Bath as well. She admits that the bells were frightening but the silence is somehow worse.

In chapter thirty, Dunworthy is up and walking the halls, visiting some with other patients. He finds Latimer, Kivrin's tutor, who is completely unresponsive following a stroke during his illness. Then Dunworthy finds Badri who worries about his role in Kivrin's situation, saying he should have reopened the net immediately upon discovering the problem and should have recognized he was too ill to feed in coordinates. Dunworthy listens and then suddenly hones in on the fact that Badri has a backup that should open even after Gilchrist closed the net. Colin comes to get Dunworthy and is excited to know they're going to mount a rescue attempt.

In chapter thirty-one, Agnes dies the day after New Year's, screaming for Kivrin but flailing at her whenever she is near. Eliwys doesn't go to the burial, citing the need to stay near Rosemund, but Kivrin returns to find that Eliwys is curled on Agnes's pallet. Rosemund is awake and Kivrin takes it as a hopeful sign. Imeyne has died, having



fallen ill and then refusing almost all aid. Then Eliwys becomes despondent, though Kivrin can't decide if she's ill or not. The clerk remains alive but pitifully so, swollen and literally rotting from the inside. With Agnes's death, Kivrin notes that the mortality rate is at eighty-five percent. She rails against the unfairness, but Father Roche encourages her.

Rosemund wakes periodically, but Eliwys remains lethargic and dies in the night. The clerk dies, then the steward's son who is being cared for in the manor hall, then the steward, who dies in the cemetery, having just dug his own grave. Rosemund seems some better, though she is still weak, and Kivrin hopes that with only Rosemund to care for, Kivrin can escape to Scotland. Rosemund sits on the doorstep as Kivrin prepares food for the trip. Kivrin gives Rosemund an apple but she drops it after a minute, and Kivrin notes she has died.

In the Doomesday Book, Kivrin says that she and Roche are going to Scotland. They have money from the clerk's pouch to buy food after they've gone some distance. Kivrin says she plans for them to remain away from settlements, and perhaps Montoya will someday discover the recorder at a dig in Scotland.

## Chapters Twenty-nine through Thirty-one Analysis

Dunworthy is battling his conscience over several issues, including the fact that he hasn't told Badri that he isn't to blame for Kivrin's situation. Dunworthy is also comparing the situation with Kirvin to that of Jesus being crucified. Dunworthy notes that Jesus, on the cross, calls out to God, asking why He's been forsaken. Dunworthy now torments himself with images of Kivrin, waiting for days at the drop, afraid to even light a fire for fear of attracting cutthroats, and wondering why Dunworthy has forsaken her.

Kivrin notes that the sheer number of deaths is wearing on the survivors. The village steward has the job of digging the graves and one day, shortly after Agnes's death, he comes in and looks over his son and Rosemund, both being nursed by Kivrin in the manor hall, then goes away. Kivrin later finds that he was taking note of Rosemund's size in order to dig a grave of the proper size. Kivrin yells at him to stop, saying that the village has already paid its price, but the steward says that they'll need a grave for every single person. Later, Roche comes to get Kivrin and takes her to the cemetery where the steward is half down in a grave, having tried to bury himself after having buried the last of his children. Roche wants to move him out of the consecrated ground, citing the requirement for a suicide to be outside the sacred ground, but Kivrin convinces him that the steward was a victim of the plague, as they have all been, and Roche agrees. They straighten the steward and finish burying him.



# Chapters Thirty-two through Thirty-six

## Chapters Thirty-two through Thirty-six Summary

In chapter thirty-two, Dunworthy tells Colin that he wants to mount a rescue attempt, and Colin immediately begins carrying out Dunworthy's instructions in that direction. He calls Finch and brings the Middle Ages book to Dunworthy's room. Dunworthy's first questions to Finch are how long it would take for inoculations against the Black Plague to take effect. At the news that the lab is being used for storage, Dunworthy instructs Finch to clear out everything. Colin tells Dunworthy that the protesters are now at the National Trust trying to make Montoya shut down the dig, so there won't be any trouble on that front. Dunworthy takes one look at Badri, who is still very weak, and doubts they can pull off a rescue. Badri insists he wants to try. There are several things Dunworthy needs, including a doctor who is willing to discharge both Dunworthy and Badri and a doctor who is willing to order an inoculation against the plague. Finch calls and says he is not able to find a doctor willing to take on new cases, so Dunworthy has Colin call on William Gaddson. When a nurse later administers an inoculation, Dunworthy sees Mary's identification code on the order and knows that William had somehow used Mary's code to authorize the action.

At four o'clock the next morning, Colin wakes Dunworthy with the news that Colin has been discharged. Badri has already been taken to the lab. Dunworthy slips out with Colin while Wililam, who is a womanizer, keeps the elderly sister's attention.

Dunworthy arrives at the lab where Finch says William has phoned to say there will be medical support available by the time the net is opened, ready to take over when Dunworthy returns with Kivrin. Finch also notes that Montoya is waiting in the lab. Dunworthy hadn't really expected her support, but she provides a map and instructions on what Kivrin likely found and did, hoping it will provide some direction for Dunworthy upon his own arrival in the 1300s. The medical support arrives, and Dunworthy is surprised to see that it's the medic who helped transport Badri to the hospital. Badri prepares to open the net, and Dunworthy closes his eyes for a moment, just as Colin dashes into his arms.

In chapter thirty-three, Kivrin and Roche bury Rosemund. Kivrin notes that the steward had dug the grave and that she and Roche could never have managed it. Now Kivrin wants to leave for Scotland immediately and rushes back to the manor to pick up the items she'll need for the journey. Father Roche insists that he ring the bell for Rosemund's soul, and Kivrin listens to the three peals.

When she returns to the church, Roche is on his knees and Kivrin urges him to lie down. When he says that he believes he must have the plague, she argues that it's fatigue but goes outside and unloads the donkey. Over the course of the night, his fever rises and Kivrin believes she can see the darkening of the skin - a sign of the plague. Roche says he is going to die and asks Kivrin to hear his confession, but she holds to



the historical account that claims only ninety percent of those infected had died. He is soon vomiting blood. Then Roche tells her that she "must return to Heaven," and it's only now that Kivrin realizes that Roche was the one who found her and that Gawyn had only been bragging about finding her in order to impress Eliwys. Kivrin asks Father Roche where he found her and he describes for her the place, using an incident when Kivrin, Rosemund, Agnes and he had been gathering holly to provide her with the location.

Father Roche is then mostly comatose. When Kivrin discovers a bubo between his legs, she goes to great lengths to get a knife and prepare to lance it as she had done for some other victims. However, as she gets in position to make the cut, Father Roche kicks out and strikes Kivrin in the ribs. The blow is severe and Kivrin admits that he's probably broken some of her ribs. His dying words are that Kivrin has saved him "from fear and unbelief," and he is blessed because she is with him in his final moments of life.

A transcript follows in which Kivrin notes she has some broken ribs; she doesn't think she'll make it back, and she now plans to head to Scotland. She is addressing Dunworthy when she says she isn't sorry that she came because if she hadn't, those who died here would have done so all alone.

In chapter thirty-four, Dunworthy and Colin make the trip safely. Dunworthy wants to send Colin directly back, but the net will only open every two hours, and Colin argues that they could feasibly find Kivrin in that amount of time. Dunworthy reluctantly agrees after learning Colin has also been inoculated and noting that they are both in period dress - clothing Colin took from the drama department. Colin has a locator that will bring them back to the clearing for the pickup, so he finds a road. The two choose a direction based on Montoya's maps and set out. They soon find a horse with its bridle tangled in a thicket. Dunworthy gives the horse some grass, instructs Colin on how to mount, and they ride in the direction they believe to be Skendgate.

They find a village and begin their search for Kivrin, but immediately find several dead people. Dunworthy fears he's found her when he locates a blue dress - the color Kivrin was wearing when she was transported. It turns out to be another young woman and Dunworthy, apparently shaken by the number of dead he's seen, says they should simply go home. Colin refuses to give up, saying that they can split up to cover more ground. While Dunworthy doesn't approve of that idea, he does hear a bell and suddenly knows it will be Kivrin, even though that village is in the wrong direction based on Montoya's map.

In chapter thirty-five, Dunworthy and Colin turn the horse toward the sound of the bell and the horse seems to know the way. When they arrive on the green they discover what they believe to be a young boy sitting slumped against a tombstone. It turns out to be Kivrin, and she calls out to them to stay away. Dunworthy goes to her but she seems not to recognize him, initially telling him to go away and then saying they must help her. She leads them into the church where Father Roche is dead, and Dunworthy fears she's going to ask them to help bury the large man. She doesn't, saying instead that they



must ring the bell for him. Dunworthy undertakes that task and sees it through - nine peals - though the heavy bell is almost more than he can manage.

Kivrin seems reluctant to leave but finally agrees to do so, and in chapter thirty-six she leads the way, riding on a horse with Colin while Dunworthy rides on the donkey Kivrin had planned to take on her trip to Scotland. As they ride, Colin relates the events since Kivrin's departure, including some things that had happened while Dunworthy was unconscious. They arrive at the drop and wait, Colin periodically suggesting that perhaps they've missed the net for one reason or another until Dunworthy hears the distinctive peal of the American bell ringers and Colin can see Badri. As the net opens, Kivrin reaches for Dunworthy's hand and says that she'd never doubted that he would come.

## Chapters Thirty-two through Thirty-six Analysis

Colin is very resourceful and is necessary to the success of the rescue mission. Dunworthy knows this to be true and his reason for declining to take Colin along is because of his concern for Colin's safety. Though Dunworthy agrees he must go in search of Kivrin, he's old enough and experienced enough to realize that there are significant dangers involved. However, he draws from a story Mary had told him when he was so worried about Kivrin. Mary told the story of having traveled through war-torn Egypt, of having just missed being caught up in a quarantine, and of barely escaping death, when she and her sister took a trip that they'd been warned against taking. Mary told Dunworthy that the trip was absolutely worth the danger and that she'd had no idea of the true extent of the danger at the time. Now Dunworthy draws on that story, admitting that sometimes a person can go into a dangerous situation and come out unscathed and better for having had the experience.

One of the paradoxes of the time travel is that a person can't step back in time to prevent something from happening. Though it is barely mentioned, Badri tells Dunworthy that he's done "parameter checks" and that there is a minimum amount of "slippage." Dunworthy has explained that the time travel cannot be undertaken to change some aspect of history and that the fact that there is minimal slippage on the checks Badri performs means there is nothing that can be changed. Dunworthy assumes this means there is no one left in the area, that the Black Plague has already wreaked havoc and there are no survivors. He does note that this means there are no "contemporary" survivors and seems to hold onto the hope that Kivrin survived.



# Characters

## Kivrin Engle

A historian and student at Oxford University in the year 2054, Kivrin wants to travel back in time to the Middle Ages and finally gains permission from Mr. Gilchrist. Kivrin has the tenacity and determination of youth and departs on the journey with optimistic hope. When she arrives and falls ill, she remains optimistic for some time but eventually realizes she's in serious trouble. When Kivrin realizes she is unable to understand the words of those around her, that she's too ill to make her way back to the drop site and that she doesn't know where the site is to get there on her own, she makes a note on her recorder that she wishes Mr. Dunworthy would come get her. Kivrin's faith in Dunworthy is eventually rewarded and it's he who does come to rescue her.

While Kivrin has prepared for everything she can imagine, there are many aspects of her assignment for which she is simply not prepared. She interacts with the "contemps" of the time period and quickly becomes fond of two little girls of the household that cares for her while she is recovering. When the plague comes to the village, Kivrin takes on the responsibilities of nursing those who fall ill. She greatly admires Father Roche who believes Kivrin to be an angel and dislikes Imeyne for her hateful, selfish ways and attitudes. When Kivrin is unable to save anyone who falls victim to the plague, she helps bury them. While some might have been bitter about the experience, Kivrin notes she is glad she was there to witness the lives and deaths and that it has become her job to tell their stories.

## James Dunworthy

A historian and teacher at Oxford, Dunworthy is Kivrin's unofficial tutor and worries greatly over her decision to travel into the 1300s and of Gilchrist's decision to allow it. Dunworthy tries in vain to reach the head of the college to prevent the trip, but is unsuccessful and so goes to see Kivrin off. While he tries to convince himself that nothing will happen to Kivrin, problems begin in his own time, and Dunworthy spends hours dealing with an array of issues, ranging from angry American bell ringers to purchasing gifts for the great-nephew of his good friend, Mary Ahrens. When Dunworthy himself falls ill, he is put in the hospital where he remains unconscious until past time for Kivrin to have returned.

When Dunworthy realizes Kivrin has been abandoned, he is angry but comes to accept the situation until Colin talks about the unfairness of the situation. Apparently buoyed by Colin's enthusiasm, Dunworthy plans to mount a rescue attempt aided by several faithful friends and colleagues. Though still unwell, Dunworthy travels to the time of the Black Death and eventually finds Kivrin. As he waits with Kivrin and Colin for the net to reopen to the year 2054, Dunworthy realizes that even if they never return to their own time, they'll survive.



## Colin

Mary's twelve-year-old great-nephew and the son of Mary's niece, Deirdre, Colin is on his way to spend Christmas with Mary when the quarantine is put into effect. Colin is believed to have returned home but actually cons a taxi driver into taking him to the edge of the quarantine line and then slips through the line and into the city. He tells Dunworthy and Mary that the police weren't particularly interested because their job is to keep people in, rather than out. Colin's indomitable spirit keeps him busy during the epidemic and is eventually the catalyst that prompts Dunworthy to mount a rescue attempt when everyone else has given Kivrin up for dead.

## Agnes

Agnes is the youngest daughter of the household where Kivrin is taken after her arrival in the 1300s. Agnes is a bit indulged, probably because she's the youngest and is headstrong. She seems to be about five or six, though Kivrin says she appears small for that age. Agnes is the first of the immediate family to die from the plague, though she is not the first to fall ill.

## Mary Ahrens

A physician and good friend of Dunworthy, Mary is on hand when Badri passes out and is the first to realize that Badri is suffering from a viral infection. When the second case comes in, Mary calls for the quarantine. Mary dies, one of the many victims of the virus in 2054, and Dunworthy notes that she was probably caring for her patients until her last moments of consciousness.

## Lupe Montoya

An archaeologist who is overseeing a dig in which the church yard at Skendgate is being excavated. Montoya isn't a particular fan of Dunworthy but does provide him a map to help him find his way when he mounts a rescue attempt in search of Kivrin.

## Rosemund

The young daughter of the household that cares for Kivrin after her arrival in the 1300s, Rosemund is apparently about thirteen years old and is betrothed to an older man named Sir Bloet, who owns lands adjoining Rosemund's father's holdings. Rosemund tries to act mature but is still just a child at heart. She is obviously upset about the approaching marriage, which is slated for the following spring but tells Kivrin she knows her father would never allow anything to harm her. Rosemund is the first to fall ill, having come into direct contact with the clerk who has the plague, but is among the last to die.



## Father Roche

Father Roche is the priest for the small village where Kivrin stays during her time in the 1300s. Father Roche seems to care for all those of his village, though he gets criticism and threats from Imeyne. Father Roche tells Kivrin that she was sent to help them, but it's only after he falls ill that he reveals that he'd seen her come through the net and because of that had believed Kivrin to be an angel. Father Roche continues to help nurse those ill with the virus and takes on any job necessary, putting to rest Kivrin's notions that priests ran away from the illness. Roche is the last of the village to die.

## Imeyne

The grandmother of Agnes and Rosemund, Imeyne is a hard woman who claims to be devout but who finds fault with everyone and almost every situation. She criticizes Father Roche and wants nothing more than to have him replaced with someone she finds more suitable. Imeyne sends for a cleric of her own choosing, and when the bishop's envoy arrives and then quickly leaves, the cleric left behind has the plague. Imeyne should have felt some guilt for having prompted that situation but never expresses it as such. She blames the sins of everyone else, including Eliwys and Gawyn, for having brought God's wrath on them.

## Eliwys

Mother of Agnes and Rosemund, Eliwys nurses Kivrin after Father Roche finds her in the 1300s. Eliwys is somewhat ineffectual in some areas and is in constant conflict with her mother-in-law.

## Badri

The technician who oversees the transport of Kivrin into the past, Badri is already suffering confusion from the virus on the day of the transport. Badri is the first to show signs of the virus and is listed as the "index case."





## Objects/Places

### Oxford

The college where the time travel lab used by Kivrin is located.

### The Lamb and Cross

A pub near the university lab where Dunworthy and Mary go to wait for Badri to get the fix.

### Headington

The location of the dance where it's initially believed that Badri and the others were exposed to the virus.

### Skendgate

The name of the village that is Kivrin's destination for her trip to 1320.

### The Lab

Where the time travel net originates.

### Scotland

Where Mr. Basingame is supposed to be on a fishing trip, though he's never located.

### The Net

The term used for the mode of time travel.

### The Drop

The spot where the time traveler is "dropped" into a historic setting. The drop site is also where the traveler is to be picked up for the return.



## **The Rendezvous**

The time and place where the time traveler is to be picked up.

## **The Fix**

A determination of the exact time and place where a time traveler is dropped, the fix is necessary so that the traveler can be picked up.



# Themes

## The Optimism of Youth

When Dunworthy is warning Kivrin of all the things that could go wrong, Kivrin is thinking only of the experiences that await her and that Dunworthy is only trying to keep her from those experiences. Kivrin's thinking on this point is the same as many other young people, and it's Mary Ahrens who reminds Dunworthy of this fact. Mary tells Dunworthy that she herself, as a young woman traveling with her sister, had barely missed a quarantine and traveled through a war-torn country in order to reach a specific destination. She says that looking back, she can see the danger, but at the time she saw nothing but the ultimate goal - and she reached it safely. Mary points out that Kivrin is in this same frame of mind and that she, like Mary, will likely return unscathed.

To a lesser degree, this same mindset is seen in Rosemund, who is betrothed at the age of thirteen and who is to be married the following spring. Though Rosemund is obviously upset when her future husband arrives, she refuses to say so to Kivrin. Rosemund says only that she knows her father won't allow anything bad to happen to her. In this way, Rosemund is like Kivrin, though she has less control over her own life than Kivrin.

Kivrin's love of adventure and optimism is seen in Colin, who manages to slip through the net with Dunworthy and who tells Kivrin as they are re-entering the net that he wants her to help him prepare for his own trip into the time of the Crusades. Kivrin, with the sudden knowledge that things can go wrong, tells him it's far too dangerous.

## History Repeats Itself

Kivrin has no intention of going to observe the time of the plague when she leaves but takes down all her observations when she finds herself there. The plague ties the two times together, though not through the time travel as some people initially believe. It's actually the fact that the church yard is being excavated that causes the virus outbreak in 2054, which occurs at the same time Kivrin is in 1348, helping bury some of the victims of the Black Death in the same church yard. Not only is there this tie that binds the two time periods together, there is a similar reaction of the people in both eras to the plague.

In the 1300s, people hurriedly left anywhere the plague occurs; the same sort of isolation occurs in 2054, except that the police enforce the quarantine. In the 1300s, people look for something to blame for the sickness and death, and the perceived causes range from the supernatural to the unbelievable. Some believe God is cursing the people, which is what Imeyne believes, citing the love of Gawyn for Eliwys, a married woman and wife of Gawyn's employer. Of course, Imeyne's fears prompt her to blame Maisry's laziness for bringing down the wrath of God as well, indicating the lack



of comprehension about the causes of the plague. The general public goes so far as to burn some as witches in an effort to appease God and to end the suffering. In 2054, there are pickets calling for the termination of time travel when some believe the virus comes through the net. Others come up with equally ridiculous ideas that mimic those of the people of seven hundred years earlier.

## Human Nature

The human capacity for compassion knows few bounds as is evidenced by the fact that Kivrin and Father Roche work so hard to save the people or to at least keep them comfortable in their final hours. Kivrin says she had read about priests who ran away and people who had abandoned family members believed to be coming down with the plague, but she never sees any signs of that in the village where she remains for the duration of her stay in the 1300s. In that place, the people help each other and Father Roche, rather than running away, willingly takes on any job that he can perform. There are counterparts in the 2054 setting in that Mary Ahrens cares for others until the moment she is too ill to function, as does several members of the nursing staff. Even Dunworthy and Finch help care for the sick who are forced to remain at the school for lack of space in the infirmary.

There are also those with an unkind, unforgiving nature as evidenced by Imeyne. Imeyne criticizes everything Father Roche does, and Kivrin wants to tell him that he's much better than any of the clergy Imeyne prefers. When Imeyne falls ill, she refuses to give her confession to Father Roche. Her counterpart in 2054, is William Gaddson's mother, who spends her time reading scriptures that promise hellfire and pestilence to those already suffering.

# Style

## Point of View

The book is written in two distinct styles with the majority of the book written in third person with a limited omniscient perspective. This is necessary as there are multiple characters, and the story focuses on various characters at different points in the story. The perspective is split fairly equally between Kivrin and Dunworthy, the two main characters of the story. This division is necessary because the characters are in the same physical location but are there at two different dates.

There are sections of the book that are reportedly taken from Kivrin's recordings during her time in the 1300s. These are presented as "transcripts" and are written in first person from Kivrin's point of view. This is necessary as her assignment is to record her observations. These transcriptions are her words, recorded at specific points of time, and inserted into the third-person accounts.

## Setting

The story is set in and around Oxford in two distinct time periods. The "present" is the year 2054, and Kirvin is sent back in time on December 22 of 2054. The goal is for her to arrive in 1320, but she actually arrives in 1348, a fluke of the time travel that is not discovered until she has been on location for a while. Kivrin herself doesn't discover the mistake until she encounters a clerk with a case of the plague known as "Black Death."

The settings vary greatly, as can be expected of the time differences. The futuristic setting of Oxford in 2054, is very different from what is generally expected of settings in the future. There are references to the technology being used in that time frame, but the technology seems somewhat limited in some respects. For example, the communication devices include video and audio feed, though the two do not function under the pressure of increased demand during the epidemic and resulting quarantine. In that aspect, the communication technology seems reasonable. However, there is no evidence of cellular telephones or mobile communications, which seems somewhat unbelievable.

There are some references to technology that are never explained, such as the fact that books come with "holos," which could be assumed to be "holograms," though this technology is never explained. The use of time travel is an important part of the futuristic setting. While there are specific points that are detailed to some degree, the workings of "the net" and the "paradoxes" of time travel are vague enough that most readers will likely have questions. The vague descriptions serves a purpose in that it allows the reader to imaginatively fill in whatever gaps exist so that the time travel and other technologies seem feasible.



The second distinct setting is 1348, also in the vicinity of Oxford. There are significant details of this setting and most seem realistic. Marriage practices, the lack of sanitation, and the response to the plague all seem historically correct. It's noted that the author spends several years doing research for this book and the resulting history is reasonable and believable. Some readers may find the historical correctness lends additional credence to the futuristic sections of the story.

## Language and Meaning

The story is written in a fairly straight-forward style that most readers should understand. There are several passages that include old English wording and some of those are never translated, though the story moves on without explanation. Some readers may find this distracting, but the lack of translation in those cases does not significantly detract from the story.

The overall tone of the book is divided between hopefulness and hopelessness. Readers will quickly come to realize two plots going on at the same time - that of Kivrin trying to survive in the 1300s while the Black Death runs across the land and claims thousands of lives, and that of Dunworthy fighting to bring Kivrin back to the present. Kivrin's story has a hopeless tone, and the reader soon realizes that there will be few, if any, survivors. Kivrin feels helpless as she realizes that there's nothing to be done for the virus but hope that some survive. She wants to find her way to the drop, take some for medical treatment and bring back medicines for the others, but the paradoxes of the time travel do not allow this even if Kivrin could form a plan to get those who are ill to the drop at the appropriate time.

On the other hand, the sections of the story devoted to Dunworthy's rescue attempt are hopeful, though there are periods of despair when he fears he won't be able to bring Kivrin home. There seems to be little doubt that the author will bring Kivrin back to her own time, though Dunworthy accomplishes this at great personal cost.

## Structure

The book is divided into three parts; these parts are further divided into thirty-six chapters. There are, in addition to these chapters, many sections that are meant to represent transcripts from Kivrin's recordings, done while she observes in the 1300s. Kivrin has a recorder embedded under her skin, which is activated when Kivrin holds her hands together, as in prayer. The recordings she makes in this manner provide the transcripts. It's from Kivrin's words that the title of the book, "Doomsday," is taken. She notes that Dunworthy is skeptical of her ability to survive the experiment, prompting her to title her transcripts "Doomsday."



## Quotes

"And what disease could it be? Smallpox and typhoid had been eradicated back in the twentieth century and polio in this one. Bacterials didn't have a chance again antibody specification and the antivirals worked so well nobody even had colds anymore."  
Chapter 5, Page 65

"Transcript from the Doomsday Book, (000740-000751) Mr. Dunworthy, I think you'd better come get me." Chapter 6, Page 86

"She had understood what they were saying because of the language lessons Mr. Dunworthy had given her, not because of the interpreter, and perhaps she was only deceiving herself that she understood them. Perhaps the conversation had not been about who she was at all, but about something else altogether - finding a missing sheep or putting her on trial." Chapter 11, Page 151

"You should have gone with Kivrin. Quarantines in the Middle Ages were far more exciting than this one's likely to be, with only four cases and a vaccine on its way from the States." Chapter 13, Page 191

"She had been wrong about not recognizing anything - she knew these woods after all. It was the forest Snow White had got lost in, and Hansel and Gretel, and all those princes. There were wolves in it, and bears, and perhaps even witch's cottages, and that was where all those stories had come from, wasn't it, the Middle Ages? And no wonder." Chapter 16, Page 248

"I know the paradoxes aren't supposed to let my presence here have any effect on what happens to the contemps, but I couldn't take that chance. I wasn't supposed to be able to catch anything either." Chapter 18, Page 297

"'What was in the woods?' Agnes asked, nestling against Kivrin. Kivrin pulled Rosemund's cloak up over her. Cutthroats and thieves, she thought. And lecherous old men and their shrewish sisters. And illicit lovers. And husbands. And judges. 'All sorts of dangerous things.'" Chapter 19, Page 316

"No, I think it's much more likely that Badri caught it from someone at that dance in Headinton. There may have been New Hindus there, or Earthers, or someone else who doesn't believe in antivirals or modern medicine. The Canadian goose flu of 2010, if you'll remember, was traced back to a Christian Science commune." Chapter 21, Page 339

"And Sir Bloet had said that the trial had been delayed because the judge was ill. That was why Eliwys hadn't wanted to send word to Courcy and why she had been so angry when Imeyne sent Gawyn to the bishop. Because the plague was in Bath." Chapter 23, Page 385



"There had been no knowledge of germs in the 1300s, no knowledge of how diseases spread. The comtempers believed the Black Death was a judgment from God. They had thought it was spread by poisonous mists that floated across the countryside, by a dead person's glance, by magic." Chapter 26, Page 418

"We can hear the plague. The villages toll the death knell after burial, nine strokes for a man, three for a woman, one for a baby, and then an hour of steady tolling. Esthcote had two this morning, and Osney has tolled continuously since yesterday. The bell in the southwest that I told you I could hear when I first came through has stopped. I don't know whether that means the plague is finished there or whether there's no one left alive to ring the bell." Chapter 27, Page 451

"God didn't know where His Son was, Dunworthy thought. He had sent His only begotten Son into the world, and something had gone wrong with the fix, someone had turned off the net, so that He couldn't get to him, and they had arrested him and put a crown of thorns on his head and nailed him to a cross." Chapter 29, Page 475

"No one could have lived through this, watching children and infants die like animals, piling them in pits and shoveling dirt over them, dragging them along with a rope around their dead necks. How could she have survived this?" Chapter 34, Page 557

"'He thought I was St. Catherine,' she said. 'He saw me come through, like you were afraid would happen. He thought I had been sent from God to help them in their hour of need.'" Chapter 36, Page 575





## Topics for Discussion

What is the "net?" The "fix?" The "rendezvous?" What are the paradoxes of time travel as explained in this story? What is it that Gilchrist believes can be done if Kivrin gets into trouble? Why is this not correct? Why does the rescue attempt not fall into these rules of time travel?

What does Kivrin hope to accomplish by her time travel? What is the intended date of arrival? What is the story she has concocted to tell those she encounters on her trip? What story does she actually use? Why?

Who is Gilchrist? Dunworthy? Montoya? Mary? Colin? Finch? William Gaddson? Badri? What role does each play in Kivrin's trip? In her rescue?

Who is Agnes? Rosemund? Imeyne? Eliiwys? Father Roche? Gawyn? Maisry? How does Kivrin meet each of them? What is her opinion of each?

How does Kivrin realize that she's in the wrong time period? How does Dunworthy make that discovery? What are the reactions of each upon making that discovery? Kivrin believes Dunworthy will come to rescue her. Why does she seem to have faith in Dunworthy but never refers to Gilchrist?

While Kivrin is enduring the Black Plague of the 1300s, the people of Oxford are enduring a recurrence of a virus in 2054. List similarities and differences of how the people of each time cope with the situation.

Kivrin spends many days believing Gawyn discovers her in the woods when it was really Father Roche who found her. Why does Gawyn take the credit? Why do you believe Father Roche allows that to happen? What is it that Father Roche believes about Kivrin's presence? What does Kivrin say about her brief time with the people?