

science fiction news

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THE JULY CHOICE PILGRIMAGE— The Book of the People by Zenna Henderson

THE leading sf magazines, *Galaxy* and *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, have published many of Zenna Henderson's stories about 'the People'; they are known to all sf enthusiasts. This is the first full-length novel which she has written about these strange and likable beings, and it is certainly a welcome event. *Pilgrimage* is remarkable, even among the best sf, for its theme, its characterization and, above all, its atmosphere. It has broken free from the convention of violence without any sacrifice in tension or excitement.

The People came originally from another planet. Generations before the story begins they had fled from some terrible natural disaster; the ship in which they had escaped blew up before it landed on the Earth, and the scattered groups of survivors had to make their own way in lifeboats.

The descendants of some of these survivors have settled in the American West. They appear to be an ordinary, rather isolated rural community. They do not have much contact with the Earth people, but they enjoy their life and follow it quietly and peaceably. But gradually they realize that there are other survivors of their race, and cautiously they begin to search for them.

With each new contact the People find that the special gifts they once possessed return to them again. They grow more and more aware of the differences which separate them from human beings, and they begin to long for the home that they once had. The main group of survivors have settled on an unoccupied planet and made it into a new 'Home'. They send a messenger ship to the People on Earth, and at first there seems no doubt that they will all journey to the new planet.

But in the end many of them decide to stay behind on Earth, and those who leave plan to return when they have re-learned the arts which have been kept alive in the new 'Home'. The People have come to care for this planet, for its land and, above all, its people. They have no thought of using their special gifts for gain or conquest; they are contented with their life, and they see that their sense of kinship with human beings is stronger than any difference.

The setting for Zenna Henderson's novel—the stern magnificence of the American West—lends the story something of its own beauty and quietness, but it is chiefly remarkable for its portrayal of the People: they have power without greed, and wisdom without fear. Their story is exciting, moving and extraordinarily hopeful.

'In *Pilgrimage* we have the complete Book of the People, deftly woven into a novel by Miss Henderson, who chronicles with a rare gentleness and evocative beauty the reassembling of the unusual talents of the People, who have become stranded on this planet on their way to a new "Home", and eventually discover, despite their differences from us, a deep attachment for Earth and its people. Recommended.'

New Worlds Science Fiction.

A new story from a reader A MOMENT OF SUSPENSE by D. E. Ellis

IT WAS scarcely light when George Carrington woke up, conscious of a giddy feeling in the pit of his stomach. The bathroom seemed the safest place.

He swung his feet out of the bed and gingerly stood up. His head whirled and the floor seemed to retreat. He clutched futilely at the bed. . . .

A moment later he was gazing down at the floor in horror. The more he tried to regain his balance, the higher he floated. He breathed a sigh of relief as the ceiling stopped him and he realized there was no danger of floating away altogether, the way it sometimes happened in his dreams. The possibilities of the situation became more apparent.

Levitation: so it was not a myth. He was as free as a bird. Making swimming motions with his arms he was delighted when his efforts propelled him across the room. He pictured himself travelling, as the crow flies, to work every morning. It had always annoyed him to have to follow two miles of twisting streets in order to reach his office, less than half a mile away. The money he would save on fares, shoes! Grandiose ideas of fame and fortune began to form in his mind.

He contemplated his next move. He would have felt safer if it had been a modern house. The Georgian rooms were large and the ceilings high, the floor seemed a long way below. The distance was not far to jump—if it had been possible to jump—with his muscles tensed for landing, but to fall without warning. . . . His heart started to pound and perspiration poured down his face as he pictured whatever power was holding him up suddenly giving way. He forced himself to breathe deeply, to be calm and think, but his agitation had pressed him tight against the ceiling.

'That's the answer!' He grasped the straw his muddled brain offered. Exertion, whether brought on by physical effort or fear, made him rise higher. Resignation to the situation made it possible to maintain an equilibrium and a certain level, but—how did one get down?

George closed his eyes and relaxed, hoping that the cessation of all effort, both mental and physical, would cause him to sink