

Pilgrims of the Upper World

Jamieson Findlay

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A grieving antiquarian chases after a Kabbalistic manuscript in Jamieson Findlay's absorbing mystery novel *Pilgrims of the Upper World*.

Zarandok, a secretive Jewish man, asks Tavish, a bookseller in Geneva, to revive his Aramaic skills and help translate a page copied from an old manuscript that includes anachronistic equations by Erwin Schrödinger. Tavish is skeptical but intrigued. He doesn't know if the manuscript is authentic; he wonders about its origins—and about how quantum mechanics figured into it. When an excerpt from it reveals a sixteenth-century conversation between a student and his master about other universes, Tavish is hooked.

Then Zarandok vanishes.

Tavish is an observant but impressionistic narrator. In poetic sequences, he covers Switzerland's elegance (garden chess boards, painterly light, and manicured cemeteries), which exists in beautiful contrast to his untamed sorrow over the long-ago death of his daughter. Meanwhile, his zigzagging search for Zarandok, who is presumed to be holding onto the full manuscript, along an old pilgrimage route leads to encounters with beguiling personalities, including an uncanny young woman, a monk, and clandestine book club members. All the while, Tavish grasps at cryptic clues and follows his hunches. Danger mounts when others who seek Zarandok make threats against Tavish, leading to instances of surveillance and a double-cross. Heartbreaking, subtle hints about people's desire to believe in the missing book's promises ramp up the urgency, culminating in a dreamlike elegy.

As much a tale about a midlife reawakening as it is about hope for an afterlife, *Pilgrims of the Upper World* is an eloquent, atmospheric mystery novel set in the rare book world.

KAREN RIGBY (November / December 2023)

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