



The Followers

Rebecca Wait

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On the windswept moors of northern England, a small religious cult has cut itself off from society, believing they have found meaning in a purposeless world. Led by their prophet, Nathaniel, they eagerly await the end times. But when the prophet brings in Stephanie and her rebellious daughter Judith, the group's delicate dynamic is disturbed. Judith is determined to escape, but her feelings are complicated by a growing friendship with another of the children, the naive and trusting Moses, who has never experienced the outside world.

Meanwhile, someone else is having doubts, unleashing a horrifying chain of events that will destroy the followers' lives.

In the aftermath, the survivors struggle to adjust to the real world, haunted by the same questions: if you've been persuaded to surrender your individual will, are you still responsible for your actions? And is there any way back?

The Followers Details

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From Reader Review The Followers for online ebook

Eric says

I absolutely loved this novel.

Victoria Goldman says

As soon as I heard about The Followers, I was desperate to read it. Religious cults are a fascinating topic and I'm a big fan of the TV series The Following.

When struggling single mum Stephanie meets Nathaniel, she is sucked deep into his world, along with her 12-year-old daughter Judith. Moving into his small village in the Yorkshire moorlands, little did any of them know that life will never be the same again.

The Followers grabbed my attention from the first page, as 22-year-old Judith visits her mother in prison, one of many similar visits over the years. As the story then flips to the past (10 years ago), it slowly unravels the events leading up to the present day.

The Followers made me gasp, cry and hold my breath several times. I loved all of the characters, as they felt so authentic and passionate about what they believed in, with a vulnerability that made them all easy to control. I couldn't help but feel great empathy for Judith, whose world was turned upside down by her mother's irresponsible and rash decision to move in with a man she hardly knew.

I read the book in two short sittings, ignoring the household and unable to stop reading until I reached the final page. It's a sad, creepy, and horrifying story, in a chilling atmospheric setting - so well plotted that it flows seamlessly from beginning to end. The narrative gave me little time to breathe, as I swiftly turned the pages to see what would happen next.

The Followers is a brilliant book and left me thinking about the story and characters for a long time afterwards.

I won a copy of the book in a Goodreads giveaway in exchange for an honest review.

Blair says

The Followers centres on Stephanie and Judith, a thirtysomething single mother and her 12-year-old daughter stuck in a mundane cycle of life in a small Northern town. Stephanie is working in a drab café and struggling to make ends meet when she meets a handsome, charismatic man called Nathaniel. The impact of their ensuing relationship is life-changing for her, and so she allows herself to be manipulated into joining the Ark, a religious group he is a part of. With no belief in gods or God, Stephanie's motivation for going along with this is her love for Nathaniel and the injection of happiness and interest he has brought her: it says much about *his* motives that he doesn't care. When Stephanie and Judith go to Nathaniel's remote home on the moors, they find he is in fact the leader of this dour clique, who refer to him always as 'the prophet'. Soon

after, they also learn they will never be able to leave. While Stephanie attempts to embrace her new life, Judith rebels, but since *The Followers* opens with Stephanie in prison, we already know it's she who will pay the ultimate price for their involvement with the Ark.

While the promise of a story about a cult - an endlessly fascinating topic - is what made me want to read this (and read it quickly), I ended up being more interested in the detail than the bigger picture. Wait excels at the kind of bleak ordinariness that Jenn Ashworth does well: the horror of it, but also the beauty to be found in it, most palpable in the contrast between Stephanie and Judith's prior life and their existence in the Ark. What seem like banalities in the 'real world' become much-missed home comforts once their austere new life begins. They seem to have a lack of ties to their old home, but this is revealed as an illusion as soon as they are separated from it. Judith's life in the later sections of the narrative - now in her twenties, she's depressed and caught in a cycle of addiction, getting drunk at work and taking handfuls of prescription pills - creates a similar contrast, this time with the aim of showing how her childhood experiences and her mother's incarceration have shaped the rest of her life. (view spoiler)

Meanwhile, the Ark itself was the falling-down point for me. The sheer amount of time it's survived without anyone questioning it (there are children Judith's age who were born there and have never seen anything of the outside world) or it being discovered. How is it financed? A couple of the men go out to work, but would that really be enough to sustain a whole community, including six or seven kids? (While the adult Ark members share duties like cooking, it doesn't seem they grow their own vegetables, farm their own meat, or make their own clothes.) Have none of them ever had to go to a doctor for *anything*? The more you think about it, the more it falls apart. The years these events are supposed to take place aren't pinpointed exactly, but in the 'past' narrative, before Stephanie and Judith join the group, they're watching DVDs and buying things on the internet, so the setting, time period-wise, is obviously very up-to-date. That adds to the unlikeliness of the Ark remaining hidden; I can appreciate, though, that stranger things have been known to happen in real life.

I simply wanted to know *more* - more about the Ark's beginnings, more about Nathaniel's background and how he became the figure we meet in the main story. The children's viewpoints began to annoy me towards the end, as I longed for a more sophisticated take on the 'liberation' of the Ark. This was a good story with some really strong details, but it just felt too light to do justice to the questions raised in its examination of the mentality of cult members.

ElphaReads says

Boy oh boy do I love a good cult story. Much like true crime and serial killers, the dark psychology behind cults and the control they exert upon their members has always interested me. So when I heard about *THE FOLLOWERS* by Rebecca Wait thanks to a New York Times book article, I knew that I wanted to read it. It took a bit, but it finally came up for me on request at the library. I sat down this past weekend intending to start it, and then I ended up reading the whole darn thing in an afternoon. Yes, it is that engrossing. But along with the thrills and tension, there was another story within its pages about family, friendship, and trauma.

When Stephanie meets Nathaniel at the coffee shop she works at, she thinks that she's the luckiest woman in the world. A single mother with low self esteem, Stephanie has never thought that she'd find someone who appreciates all sides of her. So when Nathaniel starts wooing her, she thinks that her dreams have come true. Nathaniel convinces her to pack up her life and her teenage daughter Judith and go live in the English moors with him and his commune, where he is a prophet and soldier for God. While Stephanie falls deeper and

deeper under his spell, Judith becomes more and more rebellious and concerned. The tip in the balance at the commune starts a chain reaction that leads to violence and tragedy.

Like I said, this book totally sucked me in and did not let me go until I was finished with it. But it wasn't really because of the cult aspect. Well, a large part of it was, but I also really got attached to the characters in this book. It flips between the time that Stephanie and Judith were part of the group, to the life afterwards, where Judith is an adult and trying to cope with her trauma and her now imprisoned mother (for what, we have to read to find out). Both Judith and Stephanie are written in such ways that they are completely believable in their actions, and sympathetic even when they are making terrible decisions. I had a hard time with Stephanie, a woman who basically sacrifices her daughter's and her well being because a manipulative sociopath convinced her too, but at the same time I totally understand how she could do such a thing. I also liked that Judith has long lasting effects of her time in the cult, and that she isn't perfect or left unscathed. But my favorite character of all was one that I wasn't expecting, and that is Moses, the boy that Judith befriends while in the commune. He was raised in this group, and is a full on believer, but he is not immune to the abuse that Nathaniel heaps upon his followers. Moses and Judith are on complete opposite sides of the spectrum, but they both learn from each other, and forge a friendship that is lovely and bittersweet. Seeing the various levels of belief in Nathaniel within Moses (true believer), Stephanie (new believer), and Judith (non believer) lets us see how faith can affect different people. It's a slow burn to tragedy, and while you know that something terrible is going to happen, you are still kind of caught off guard by how terrible it is (no spoilers here!). I quite enjoyed how Wait built up to it and gave us insights into the human condition and the complexities of family while she did so.

THE FOLLOWERS is a dark and yet somewhat hopeful book, and I can't recommend it enough to those who are interested in the subject of cults. You will sate your interest in it, but also get a well written literary tale as well.

Fiona says

This story of a small religious cult, known as the Ark, in a remote moorland setting is interesting enough, though the inevitable ending is so clear from the start that when the 'shock' comes it isn't too shocking. Some of it felt underwritten - the writing is a bit sparse at times, and I would have liked more detail of the lives of the cult followers, more insight into how it feels to devote yourself so totally that you lose your sense of who you are, more sense of the charisma of the leader - I felt we were told that things were the case, e.g. the compelling nature of the leader, without really being made to feel them. Quite a few of the minor characters were flat, to the extent of being interchangeable, and some of them seemed to cast off the beliefs they had lived by for years rather quickly at the end. I also didn't get enough of a sense of the intense shock and terror I'd imagine would be felt by the child characters, who had been born in the Ark and had never left it, when they are finally taken away into the 'real' world, which they have been taught to fear as a hellhole of sin. Overall, I just felt this needed more colour, richness and emotional depth. But it's readable enough and the two main young characters, Judith and Moses, are well drawn.

Diane S ? says

Review soon.

Carol says

3.5 perhaps...a bit predictable and anti-climactic.

Bookread2day says

Rebecca Wait is certainly not afraid to tackle a difficult fiction topic about love and faith.

Bill Kupersmith says

There is, of course, a religious death cult that is attracting lots of followers in Britain today, but it has no connexion with Christianity. I'd have thought there was about as much need in contemporary England for warnings against Christian cults as for fire insurance in February 2014 in the Somerset Levels. But even before reading the author's afterword I'd a sense that she'd once had a brush with something of the sort, and I thought *The Followers* was an excellent depiction of the psychology not just of the victim of a cult, but of any of us who might be enmeshed in a group of true believers, even if not as bizarre & lethal as the People's Temple, the Branch Davidians, or Heaven's Gate. As the 13 year-old Judith, the only sceptic @ The Ark, finds, 'it was harder to hold on to all your normal thoughts when everyone around you believed something different.' I thought her mother Stephanie was a very believable portrait of an ideal recruit, an abandoned single mum with a poor self-image, an uncertain & unfulfilling job, & no intellectual or spiritual formation.

I'd found Rebecca Wait's previous book *The View on the Way Down* a moving but slowly developing study in what happens to ordinary people dealing with unrequited grief. Here too the story takes its time to unfold & till to nearly 1/2 way I wasn't sure I'd made a good choice. But then I was grabbed & had to stay in all day to find out how it would finish. We know from the beginning that Stephanie will commit a murder, but who will she kill & why? The book moves back & forth between the present, when Stephanie is in prison, & the past when she was a member of the cult & known as Sarah. The present 22 y/o Judith also offers a fascinating counterpoint to her earlier brash confident teenage self. I also loved the brave Jess, alias Esther.

Some reviewers had trouble believing that this story could happen in real life in contemporary Britain. Personally, I doubt practical details matter all that much. Rebecca Wait is a guide to the inner selves of her characters & knows that however unpretentious & drab they may appear on the surface, they can haunt us. I shall continue to ponder how a book that ought to make for a depressing read left me feeling so happy that I had read it.

Nicola says

I received this book for free from a Goodreads giveaway.

I read this book over a couple of days but the writing flowed so well that if life didn't get in the way it could be a one sitting book. Essentially set in a remote, religious cult the story is mainly that of a vulnerable

mother and her teenage daughter - how they become entangled in it and how they cope with the traumatic aftermath. The main characters are, on the whole, believable and likeable despite their flaws and everything about their situation seems plausible. The book deals with some dark subjects sensitively and raises big questions.

I enjoyed the read. Thanks!

Judi Mckay says

A slow start but I ended up enjoying this immensely and I'm looking forward to a great reading group discussion about it.

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Jill says

What would cause a normal person to lose all sense of individuality and right and wrong, and slavishly follow a charismatic leader? From the Manson murders to the Jonestown tragedy, we've seen the magnetic pull of the cult on those with porous boundaries, yet still, the topic is fascinating. Perhaps that's why novelists – from Margaret Atwood to Claire Vaye Watkins – gravitate to the subject.

Rebecca Wait goes back to this well in *The Followers*—vividly and convincingly spinning a cautionary tale of single mother named Stephanie, working in a dispiriting job, who falls into the spell of a messianic man with dashing green eyes. It is the mundaneness of the situation that fuels its power: Nathaniel woos her with attention, flattery, and sympathy, slowly spinning the web around her. By the time she casts her lot with him, the situation feels all too believable. Unwillingly snared into this web is her daughter Julia, a clear-eyed 12 year old, who isn't fooled by Nathaniel's charms and the zombie-like following of his cult, the Ark.

As the inevitable plot plays out (we know from the start that Stephanie winds up behind bars and we surmise that she took place in a killing of some kind), the environment sets the stage. Think *Wuthering Heights*. Here in the isolated moors, jagged rocks stand out and the wind and the rain make it even more foreboding. There's an air of tension that remains: will Stephanie completely succumb, despite her first-hand knowledge that Nathaniel is not the personal savior he appeared to be? Will Julia be worn down by the endless proselytizing of the cult members?

The prose in this novel is spare yet muscular, page-turning yet measured. The book has much to say about the dangers of misinterpreted faith and the responsibilities to others versus to oneself. And it also demonstrates how evil can masquerade as ordinary behavior. I've learned to expect fine books from Europa Editions, and this one certainly exceeded expectations.

switterbug (Betsey) says

The Followers is a not-so-subtle allegory on its surface, but the nuanced characters and telltale story by British writer Wait keeps it contemporary, fresh, and provocative. It begins now, with a young woman, Judith, reluctantly visiting her mother, Stephanie, in prison. It's evident that this is an ongoing yet uncomfortable face-to-face, where the conversation stays safe with topics of movies and books. At home, Judith isolates and chooses unhealthy habits in order to escape from the memories of childhood—specifically what landed her mother in prison. Throughout the tale of this mother/daughter relationship, the narrative goes back and forth to the past and the present. The future of their recovery is at stake, and we feel it with a brittle intensity.

Stephanie raised Judith as a single mother, protective but tired from work, trying to be mother and father simultaneously but feeling a failure at that. Stephanie's friction with her own mother is cutting enough, but Judith, a fun-loving fan of popular culture, accuses her mother of not listening to her—ever.

When Stephanie falls for an intense, inscrutable man named Nathaniel and brings him home to meet Judith, the conflicts escalate. Nathaniel convinces Stephanie to leave mainstream society and join the “Ark,” a religious cult high on the moors and devoted to God. A number of adults and children live there and Nathaniel is the charismatic leader.

A distressed Judith unwillingly joins her mother at the Ark as Stephanie is so besotted by Nathaniel, “the prophet,” she is willing to remove herself from society and follow the Old Testament mores, even though she herself is more agnostic. And then—nothing—not Nathaniel, the creed, or the lifestyle is what it seemed from the outset. The precarious equilibrium with no more substance than a house of cards, but while you're in it, you believe.

Wait does a superb job of creating the atmosphere of the Ark, archaic and implacable, with a haunting reminder of isolation from the moors. All the members must change their names to biblical ones, and the laws of the dogma require unconditional subservience. Technology is limited, and the women spend their days cooking and cleaning, while some of the men leave to work in “Gehenna,”—their name for the outside world that Judith and Stephanie have left. Judith finds solace in Moses, a boy around her age who was born with what is evident as a port wine stain on his face, but which the prophet has denoted a mark of the devil due to the story of his birth. He helps Judith to adjust to the Ark, and she edifies him about so-called Gehenna, a place he's never been because he was born at the Ark. They form a close bond and have a secret meeting place where they talk and learn a sense of real play and unrestricted dialogue.

The pacing and sense of foreshadowing is palpable and purposeful, as of course we know from the start that Stephanie is in prison. The foreboding sense of tragedy is in every shadow and in every corner of the Ark, and I was on edge while Wait brilliantly built the architecture of the story toward its cataclysmic climax. As Stephanie's hopefulness turns to despair, she realizes too late that she made wrong decisions in trying to remake herself in the image that Nathaniel demanded.

“Your thoughts are wicked from the day you were born,” says the prophet, Nathaniel. The followers live in grim sacrifice and bare necessities, ingrained with the paradigm of good and evil, blood for atonement, and punishment for violations. Being human, possessing desires is judged by the prophet and everyone else is a follower. The suspense, survival, and hope for reclamation will keep us fastened till the very last page.

Corey says

Review to come at memphisflyer.com

Blue Cypress Books says

Wasn't blown away by the story but very much appreciated the sensitivity and authenticity the author brought to what could have been an unoriginal story of cult followers and their leader.
