



The Wind Whales of Ishmael

Philip José Farmer

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Ishmael, lone survivor of the doomed whaling ship Pequod, falls through a rift in time and space to a future Earth—an Earth of blood-sucking vegetation and a blood-red sun, of barren canyons where once the Pacific Ocean roared.

Here too there are whales to hunt—but whales that soar through a dark blue sky....

Hugo Award-winner Philip José Farmer has spun a fascinating tale of whaling ships and seamen of the sky in a bizarre future world where there are no seas to sail and no safe harbor to call home....

The Wind Whales of Ishmael Details

Date : Published January 1st 1979 by Ace (first published January 1st 1971)

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Author : Philip José Farmer

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From Reader Review The Wind Whales of Ishmael for online ebook

Jeffery says

I haven't read a whole lot of the late Philip Jose Farmer's vast output. I've read through Riverworld twice, and I'm familiar with his Wold Newton alternate literary history. I've always heard that the World of Tiers was his high point, so I've been promising myself to read those in the near future. I've always taken him to be a high concept writer – I mean, it doesn't get much bigger than resurrecting the entire human race along the banks of a world-spanning river, right? So when I picked up a copy of *The Wind Whales of Ishmael*, saw that it was the Ishmael from Melville's *Moby Dick*, I had to read it. Had to.

Being a fan of Melville's masterpiece, I couldn't wait to see how Farmer would continue Ishmael's story, let alone plop him into the middle of a science fiction story. I was honestly expecting to read a tale of the Wold Newton family. For those not familiar with the concept, it's basically a linking of a vast array of literary characters (Tarzan, Doc Savage and Sherlock Holmes, just to name a few) to the meteor strike in Wold Newton, England in the late 1700's. Even though it wasn't a part of that universe, the story was a wild, exhilarating ride. It picks up right after Ishmael's rescue by the Rachel at the end of Moby Dick. Five pages later – bam – Farmer has him a billion years or so in the future, trying to not only stay alive, but also to understand what's going on around him.

As I was reading, and after I'd determined this wasn't part of the Wold Newton universe, I kept trying to figure out why have Ishmael as a character. He could have created any other John Carter-style hero fit the bill. Brave guy from our world transported to a strange world, becomes a hero, saves the known world, marries the princess – how many times have you read that? I guess if you wanted to, the comparison between the setting here and Jack Vance's Dying Earth are pretty evident. There's no super-science or sorcery here, but the alien landscape and the ever-present bloated, red sun is. Farmer, however, is not copying anyone. His fading earth has regressed. Cities are isolated and rivals, and people "fish" the skies in boats that are not too unfamiliar to the protagonist's time. Then it struck me, why Ishmael? John Carter types are doers. Ishmael is a scholar, a thinker, an observer. We see this future earth in some detail through his eyes, we speculate about its origins with him, and by the end, we will have pondered the follies of Captain Ahab battle with the white whale to identify the nature of mankind's ultimate enemy.

Do you have to have read Melville to get it? Definitely not. The astute reader will understand Ishmael in the end. Does it help? Definitely. There are references to Queequeg and his coffin, Ahab, even Typee. That was just like icing on the cake for this reader. In the end, there's even a Moby Dick equivalent. From start to finish, *The Wind Whales of Ishmael* is an exciting, fun read.

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Jens Rushing says

Shortly after the events of "Moby-Dick", Ishmael is flung forward in time to 1000000000 AD. Now whales fly and he hunts them in flying ships. But he must beware the Purple Beast of Stinging Death! The rare sequel that surpasses the original.

Webcowgirl says

This is not my kind of science fiction. That said it may inspire me to read Moby Dick.

Wol-vriey says

Similar to 'The Stone God Awakens,' in that the hero is transported to an unbelievable future, but without the former's evolved-from-animals humans.

Still a crazy ride though. One of those books where the sheer adventure is justification enough.

Gwen says

The worldbuilding in this is fascinating. An Earth scraped clear of metals, with the oceans boiled away and much of life taking to the sky. A culture of creating and trading gods, where women on ships bring good luck.

Pacing varied, but when there were airship battles I was all in.

J.P. says

Well, I've got to give Philip Jose Farmer points for creativity, if nothing else. In **THE WIND WHALES OF ISHMAEL**, the guy creates a world in the relatively brief space of 157 pages. He breathes new life into a classic character (Ishmael, from **MOBY DICK**). At the tail-end of this book, he even brews up a good old-fashioned adventure. But somehow, the overall effect here is. . .sadly pear-shaped.

Long story made short: Farmer's story picks up where Melville's left off. Ishmael, having survived Ahab's mad quest for the white whale, is headed home on the good ship *Rachel*. But somehow, the *Rachel* slips through some kind of worm-hole in time. Sea level has dropped hundreds of feet below its present level. The moon is closer to the earth. Whales have sprouted wings and taken to the skies, where they are pursued by whalers in flying ships. Much of the remaining wildlife likewise resides in the skies. The *Rachel* literally falls from the sky, crushing a sky-ship and killing all on board both vessels---except two.

Those two are Ishmael and a woman named Namalee. Namalee takes up with Ishmael and teaches him her language and the ways of her people. Ishmael takes up with Namalee's people, whose city has been

destroyed by a rival city; those foreign invaders have stolen Namalee's people's sacred idols. Ishmael leads Namalee and a band of her people to this other city in an attempt to steal back their sacred idols. There's a great swipe-and-chase involving a "Stone Beast" and an ensuing airship battle. Namalee and Ishmael become lovers. Ishmael declares that the two rival peoples should unite as one. The end.

If my review seems a bit . . .rushed, it's because **THE WIND WHALES OF ISHMAEL** reads like a "rushed" novel. Farmer has crammed 10 pounds of info into a 5-pound bag. He describes wondrous characters, creatures and places at a breakneck pace. Some are merely alluded to and never mentioned again. He takes a truly intriguing character, Namalee, and develops her back-story to a fascinating point---then shoehorns her into a stereotypical 'damsel-in-distress' role and leaves her there. I know one has to suspend disbelief with fantasy fiction, just go with the flow. But this book doesn't have a flow---it has white water rapids. At times, I felt overcome by a storm of information.

THE WIND WHALES OF ISHMAEL is an almost schizophrenic book. The first half mirrors the glacial pace of Melville's novel. Then, around page 100 or so, the speed picks up with the 'stealing back the idols' segment. It's almost as if someone spliced a few chapters of an Edgar Rice Burroughs pulp serial into the middle of **MOBY DICK**. The result is a bizarre hybrid---not unpleasant, but not wholly satisfying, either.

My two main criticisms are pacing and content. I believe this book could've been improved drastically if Farmer had doubled its length, taken a bit more time to fully explore the world he created in it. Either that, or he should've left out some of the myriads of details he stuffed between these two covers. Closer focus on Namalee and Ishmael as a couple would've been better, too.

Philip Jose Farmer is rightfully known as a visionary among science fantasy writers. But vision requires focus and structure. this novel doesn't have those things. Farmer has written a shelf full of s-f classics. **THE WIND WHALES OF ISHMAEL** is not one of them.

Aqsa says

It's been a while since I read this kind of sci fi, where with the main character you're thrown deep into a changed world. This one is a future world with a dying red sun, dried up oceans and where much of life has taken to the air. It's an epic adventure, and really imaginative in terms of the plant life and predatory creatures of this world, which feel more developed than the characters themselves. The mechanics of the wind whales was also really unique, and I wished I understood more about ships as some of the terms were lost on me.

As it's not a long book it felt a little jarring having the main character adapt to the language so quickly, and as he took charge it felt like the characters who had lived in this world all their lives were less useful than they should have been. But I still enjoyed the story. Especially because I got this free while shopping at Forbidden Planet :)

Rachael says

It started off really strongly - if a bit slow. Excellent world building, full of great detail. But after plodding along at a slow pace, suddenly in the last third of the book it switches to a breakneck pace and feels like some sort of pulp action novel. Also, I was more than a bit disappointed to see the whole thing turn into a white savior type story. The female character of Namalee was excellent and strong, but as soon as the novel switched into action-mode she became a damsel in distress with not much to do other than fall down stairs and scream. It was interesting to read one of Farmer's lesser known works, but maybe it's lesser known for a reason?

Jose says

I have never read a Farmer book before but the world building was incredible. However he kept the fiction light with sparse dialogue. The foreword indicates this book was written as a 'sequel' to Moby Dick. Going to have to read that now.

Monique Snyman says

Before you read The Wind Whales of Ishmael by Philip Jose Farmer, it's probably best to dust off your copy of Moby-Dick by Herman Melville, in order to understand where this book is coming from. The protagonist, Ishmael, is the lone survivor of the Pequod and as he floats adrift Ishmael finds himself falling out of our time and into the distant future where things are no longer the same. The Earth has blood-sucking vegetation and a blood-red sun, there are barren canyons where the Pacific Ocean once roared! Oceans have nearly evaporated completely and man finds himself in air balloons hunting the leviathans of the air. However, if Ishmael thought his adventures are over, he has another thing coming, because they take to the heavens in a pursuit of a beast that is more fearsome and deadly than he has ever known... Screw Moby-Dick! Moby-Dick was simply child's play in comparison to what's in store for our dear Ishmael...

The Wind Whales of Ishmael by Jose Farmer is a fantastic, alternate reality that will keep you on the edge of your seat from the beginning to the very end. In a lot of ways this is a steampunk novel in a sci-fi world, before steampunk even existed as a genre, so it's definitely somewhat of an intriguing read, yet for many it will be a little bit outdated as far as pure sci-fi goes. Nevertheless, Farmer has an excellent ability to pull the reader into the story and when it comes to defining what a word-smith is, well Farmer definitely convinced me, even though The Wind Whales of Ishmael is a little short. Not to mention that the editing is first class, the formatting is adequate and the cover is just absolutely gorgeous!

First published in 1971, Titan Books has acquired the rights to republish this novel and better it in my opinion. Farmerphiles all over the world may be doing flips of ecstasy due to this new print run, which has a foreword by Michael Croteau and an afterword by Danny Adams, and people who are not familiar with Philip Jose Farmer will find The Wind Whales of Ishmael an excellent introductory novel to his work. So it's definitely worth a look if you're aching to get your hands on a true and proper science fiction novel that will take your breath away.

Of course, I would be lying if I said that the book was without fault. Here and there it becomes plainly obvious that the novel was written in a whole other era, back in the 1970's when science fiction was still

somewhat localized – if that's the right word to use – and at times you wonder whether it is worth stepping back in time just to fast-forward yourself to a place that doesn't seem to thrill readers as much anymore. Science-fiction has grown as a genre to include different sub-genres, which mainly pushes the boundaries of the final frontier, instead of staying on Earth. It's difficult to imagine, and I could go on for hours explaining my side of the argument, but frankly when you just need a good read that isn't long and which will help you reminisce about when the genre was young and pure, *The Wind Whales of Ishmael* is perfect.

So, the verdict? Well, Farmerphiles will adore this re-published version and science-fiction nuts will have a splendid time on a rainy day. It's a good book to familiarize yourself with the author and Titan did a really good job when they breathed new life into the Grand Master Novel Series.

(Review originally posted at <http://www.killeraphrodite.com/2013/0...>)

Velvetink says

Really liked it when I read it growing up. Have to read it again to comment though.

Tom Bechtel says

When I first started reading this book I thought to myself, "This guy is on acid or something just as wicked". But after reading it, I thoroughly enjoyed the story and still occasionally replay of some of the events that took place in this book. Wildly imaginative and fun adaption/abstraction of *Moby Dick*.

Dan Sihota says

This book, *The Wind Whales of Ismael*, was given to me by a work colleague of mine who is a huge fan of science fiction.

My one star rating may seem a little harsh, but I really did not enjoy this book, and had it been a little longer in length, I doubt I would have finished it. However, this is not to say this is a bad book or it is badly written, the simple fact is I just couldn't get into it.

Although this book is categorised as science fiction, it is really a fantasy story, one where we follow the adventures of the main protagonist, Ishmael, a whaler, who gets transported to a different world (a future earth) where flying ships hunt flying whales. But this world also contains many strange insect-like beings intent on killing everything in their path. Our hero finds himself rescuing a damsel in distress, who turns out to be the daughter of a local chief, and then he helps this group wage war against their enemies. I know this book is sort of a sequel to the classic, *Moby Dick*, and it's possible if I had read *Moby Dick* then I might have been a little more interested in following the adventures of Ishmael.

I think my main problem with this book is that the story seems to be told from a distance, as a result, it's very difficult to get close to any of the characters and fully understand them. And as the story is set in a world full of all kinds fantastical things, it's not easy trying to visualise what's going on at times, a little more description may have helped. Without any kind of explanation, it's difficult to understand how someone

could get transported to a world which couldn't be more different than his own, and yet he managed to adapt so easily and so quickly. Had the story been told in the first person narrative then it might have provided a little more insight into what the main character was thinking, allowing the reader to better understand him. The story could have benefited from a little more dialogue between the main characters to help the reader better understand them. I might have enjoyed the reading experience a little more had there been an attempt to include any elements of humour, and given the cultural differences the main character is faced with this seems like it would have been such a natural thing to include in the story.

I completely understand that I am not a member of the target audience this book is aimed at, and someone who enjoys fantasy adventure stories may enjoy this book a lot more than I did.

My final thoughts on this book, I just didn't get it.

Joshua says

The 2 star rating may be a bit harsh, as my expectations were probably too high. What I wanted from this book was Moby Dick set in the distant future. What I got was what most Melville readers thought they were getting when they read him in the 1800's - a ripping adventure tale. Ishmael is the protagonist - but he is definitely not the same Ishmael we see in Moby Dick. It felt like there were a lot of anachronisms as well, though I didn't bother chasing them down. While Farmer makes clear that his natives are like Melville's "natives" (reflections of and commentary on the white man) they are far more superficial. Readers looking for a fun Sci-Fi novel will still enjoy it. Fans of Melville's rich allegory who are looking for a new twist or extension of the novel will be disappointed.
