



To Your Scattered Bodies Go

Philip José Farmer

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To Your Scattered Bodies Go is the Hugo Award-winning beginning to the story of Riverworld, Philip José Farmer's unequaled tale about life after death. When famous adventurer Sir Richard Francis Burton dies, the last thing he expects to do is awaken naked on a foreign planet along the shores of a seemingly endless river. But that's where Burton and billions of other humans (plus a few nonhumans) find themselves as the epic Riverworld saga begins. It seems that all of Earthly humanity has been resurrected on the planet, each with an indestructible container that provides three meals a day, cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, a lighter, and the odd tube of lipstick. But why? And by whom?

That's what Burton and a handful of fellow adventurers are determined to discover as they construct a boat and set out in search of the river's source, thought to be millions of miles away. Although there are many hardships during the journey--including an encounter with the infamous Hermann Goring--Burton's resolve to complete his quest is strengthened by a visit from the Mysterious Stranger, a being who claims to be a renegade within the very group that created the Riverworld. The stranger tells Burton that he must make it to the river's headwaters, along with a dozen others the Stranger has selected, to help stop an evil experiment at the end of which humanity will simply be allowed to die. --*Craig E. Engler*

To Your Scattered Bodies Go Details

Date : Published June 30th 1998 by Del Rey (first published 1971)

ISBN : 9780345419675

Author : Philip José Farmer

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From Reader Review To Your Scattered Bodies Go for online ebook

TK421 says

Let's say you died in 2005. You wake up on a beach (I am simplifying here for those of that have not read this—the book does not start off on a beach), next to a river that is endless. You have no recollection of this place. You know this can't be possible because next to you are a man dressed in 16th century attire and a bit further down from him is what looks like a Neanderthal. But, hey, you're in a Philip Jose Farmer novel, so anything's possible.

I love the concept that when we die (regardless of what time period we died in) we are all sent to a world with a massive river cutting it in half and are dependant upon mystical orbs to get food and other necessities.

But what really works for me is the realization Farmer had that in some way man will still try to develop a power structure. Add the fact that war and politics and everything associated with the two are still present and you get what could plausibly be best described as earth.

And who doesn't want to read about Richard Burton or Mark Twain in the afterlife?

Though I do have issues with Farmer's writing style the story more than makes up for this.

VERY HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Althea Ann says

Usually, the Hugo Awards are a good recommendation for entertaining literature.

Not in this case. I really don't understand how this book could have been given an award of any kind. Were there NO other sf novels published in 1971?

Farmer uses historical figures as his characters as an excuse to not bother writing any characterization of any kind. Every character in the novel is completely two-dimensional. It's pretty hard to make such an interesting and multi-dimensional character as the historical Richard Burton dull and flat - but Farmer manages it.

Moreover, the book is offensively, insidiously sexist. By which I don't mean that, in the grand tradition of adventure stories, that lusty buxom babes abound! (if only!) Rather, I mean that not one female character in the book displays any initiative, independence, or intelligence. Men regard them as property, and women's only instinct seems to be to find a male "protector." The stereotypes of women as "prude," "nag," or "whore" are found in abundance. Women are only an accessory to a man, to be admired physically, used sexually, and then tired of.

Here's one direct quote: "She was the product of her society - like all women, she was what men had made her."

One cannot excuse this attitude in writing as being a product of its time - check out what Ursula LeGuin was publishing in the late 60's and early 70's!

Sexist stereotypes are not the only ones found... they're practically incidental to the ethnic and cultural

stereotypes! In a world supposedly populated with people of all cultures, time periods, and places, everything seems to run in a remarkably Eurocentric manner. To regard cigars as a universal luxury item is particularly bemusing.

Still, all this would be excusable, if only the story was fun, exciting and interesting. Not so. For such a short (222p.) novel, the plot was inexcusably meandering and dull. I fell asleep on it last night, and finished it this afternoon out of some sort of sense of obligation.

I think I'll be sending the copy of World of Tiers on my to-read shelf straight to the recycle bin.

Maggie K says

The one sentence version: Great idea, bad execution....

I LOVE the idea of a world where everyone who ever existed is suddenly reesurrected and given a second chance...if that is what's really happening...

However, it seems like it never gets too developed from an idea into a story, and using real-life people as characters...well, it can be sometimes disconcerting. When the main character Richard Burton goes after Alice Hargreaves (Alice in Wonderland) it seems more like a peek at the author's own Id than anything else...kinda creepy.

and for some reason, I kept thinking about the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen while I was reading this...I do like to read about historical figures, but if too many 'liberties' are taken with their personalities, well, it rankles the reader.

It did end up becoming a story in the last couple chapters, definitely set up for the next in the series.

Bria says

Mayyybe 2.5

Some real character building here - there's Burton, who, realistically, is almost the only person out of 36 billion intent on figuring out how the world works. There's Alice, who is a bit of a stickler for Victorian morals but has a great figure. Frigate, who wikipedia claims is a stand-in for the author. Wilfrida, who has a great figure. Herman Goering, who eventually works his way toward salvation. Luga, who would be pretty if only her lips were better, but has a great figure. The subhuman, Kaz, who is smart enough to mostly adhere to 19th century morals. Lev Ruach, a prop to work against the real Burton's possible anti-Semitism. I think there may have been two or three other women with great figures, I can't remember.

There's this strange utter disbelief in the possibility of progress that underlies the conflict between Burton and the other resurrectees and the Ethicals. It's OBVIOUSLY wrong and bad for this advanced civilization to play with all these poor humans in this way, and Burton is so enlightened that he knows better. It couldn't possibly be that in tens of thousands of years a species makes any sort of philosophical or moral

advancement. Because we certainly have done zero in three thousand years. So clearly the person from thousands of years ago has a clearer idea of what's right and wrong. Damn those future people for not having the exact same moral assumptions as the 19th century!

And here's one more thing that irritated me horribly:

Why wouldn't the slaves just want to be killed?!! The only effect it would have would be freeing them! Why would Burton be so reluctant to release them from their suffering? GOD that made me so mad, there wasn't even a throw away line giving a weak excuse why he wouldn't, it just was never MENTIONED.

Zoe's Human says

I can't even continue with this book. The premise is moderately interesting, but the sexism is just too much. Prudes and whores and nags and every fucking stereotype of woman you can think of, but god forbid there be a woman who serves any purpose other than sex object or victim. Yet another "genius" who can imagine a world without religion or oppressive sexual mores, but can't imagine competent women with purpose and agency outside of a man.

DNFed at page 78.

Bettie? says

Revisit 2015 is via audio file 07:42:33

Description: *To Your Scattered Bodies Go* is the Hugo Award-winning beginning to the story of Riverworld, Philip José Farmer's unequaled tale about life after death. When famous adventurer Sir Richard Francis Burton dies, the last thing he expects to do is awaken naked on a foreign planet along the shores of a seemingly endless river. But that's where Burton and billions of other humans (plus a few nonhumans) find themselves as the epic Riverworld saga begins. It seems that all of Earthly humanity has been resurrected on the planet, each with an indestructible container that provides three meals a day, cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, a lighter, and the odd tube of lipstick. But why? And by whom?

That's what Burton and a handful of fellow adventurers are determined to discover as they construct a boat and set out in search of the river's source, thought to be millions of miles away. Although there are many hardships during the journey--including an encounter with the infamous Hermann Goring--Burton's resolve to complete his quest is strengthened by a visit from the Mysterious Stranger, a being who claims to be a renegade within the very group that created the Riverworld. The stranger tells Burton that he must make it to the river's headwaters, along with a dozen others the Stranger has selected, to help stop an evil experiment at the end of which humanity will simply be allowed to die. --Craig E. Engler

Burton's battle with the F-icles is a fantastic adventure story and the excitement stood the test of time with this re-visit. Looking forward to the second book where Mark Twain is a major player, if my memory serves me right.

How lucky I was as a young woman, there was so much to grab and follow - this series, Donaldson's, Eddings's and the beginning of PTerry's oeuvre.

It was this very book that introduced me to Burton, and I've enjoyed reading about the lives of the explorers ever since.

Richard Burton
Alice Liddell
John de Greystoke
Hermann Goring
Tullus Hostilius

From wiki: ***Peter Jairus Frigate** is a fictionalized version of the science fiction author Philip José Farmer, which appeared in his Riverworld series of novels.*

Confusingly, it is only towards the end of the series that the true Peter Jairus Frigate appears – the one in the earlier volumes was in fact an impostor

5* To Their Scattered Bodies Go
The Fabulous Riverboat (Riverworld, #2)
The Dark Design (Riverworld, #3)
The Magic Labyrinth (Riverworld, #4)
The Gods of Riverworld (Riverworld #5)

Mike Moore says

Here's the premise: all of mankind is reborn, all at once, on a planet custom made for the purpose. If you think about this for a few minutes, you'll probably come up with all sorts of possibilities: anthropological exploration, meeting famous historical figures, fights with savages from various time periods. Give it a few minutes more and you'll probably start thinking about your personal interactions: folks you might want to settle a score with, or even people long dead who you'd like to take to task for some reason or another. Stop right there, and you know everything there is to know about this book.

Of course, there are particulars. The main character (19th century explorer and ethnologist Richard Francis Burton) is a personal hero of Farmer's. A lot of the book is the two of them talking about Burton's life and character. There are several action sequences and some (slightly weird) love connections. There's also an over-arching plot about the creators of this experiment, but it was frankly incoherent. Farmer has a strange and (I think) not-entirely-intentional contradiction in his construction of themes, in that he has brashly declared his setting to be purely rational (no divine powers please), yet infused the execution with theological concerns. Most notable among these is Manichaeism, which rears its head about two thirds through the book and effectively subverts the possibility of viewing the novel as anything other than a theological thought-experiment.

I have no problem with thought experiments, far less when they're theological or philosophical in nature. My complaints about the novel are not the issues it raises, but what it fails to consider. I hope a guided thought experiment will explore ideas in, if not an unexpected way, at least a way that is consistent and fruitful. Farmer doesn't lack for conclusions, actually he's pretty moralistic. But his morals are delivered anecdotally, with no connection to the thought experiment. He'll have someone from 2008 (his distant future) declare "of

course, the only people in our enlightened times who still held to the nudity taboo were hopeless neurotics", or have all the admirable characters from a half dozen eras agree in a blase fashion to some principle. The actual thought experiment of people from different eras cohabiting goes nowhere. If anything it regresses, as inexplicable behaviors (everyone has enough food, all their needs are provided for, there's no such thing as luxury, so why is greed still so prevalent?) are accepted without a second thought and even the ramifications of his own explicit parameters are ignored (shouldn't they all be waist deep in corpses by the end of the first week? If they're constantly forced into other cultures, why do the ethnic barriers remain so rigid? What happens to all those children?)

But the novel lurches along well enough until Farmer starts trying to explain the motivations of the creators. The final chapters are so nonsensical that I can only assume that he had gotten to the point of throwing ideas onto the page and seeing what would stick. Every explanation makes less sense than the one before, and I was left with the distinct impression that the author was hoping one of the characters would tell him what was happening in his own story.

Nancy Oakes says

First, a word of warning: do NOT expect to know the answers to the questions you're going to have by the end of this book. They aren't there. So if you read this book, get to the end of it and say "this stinks! There's no resolution! I hate this book," don't say I didn't warn you! The book isn't about finding the answers...it's the journey that counts. And if by the end of the book you don't have any questions, you need to go back and read it again because your curiosity should be absolutely on fire!

Second, if you are a hardcore Christian, this book just might bother you enough because of the subjects it deals with. Remember: it's Fiction!

This novel is the first of the Riverworld Series, in which the reader is introduced to the Riverworld, so called because its main feature is a continuous river that doesn't seem to end. The main character is a real character, here in his fictional garb, the explorer Sir Richard Burton. One moment, he's laying in the arms of his wife, dying; the next moment, he's floating among countless numbers of sleeping people, the only one awake until he sees a canoe with strange markings floating toward him, carrying humans in it, who put him back to sleep. Shortly thereafter, he wakes up, buck naked, his mustache (his pride and joy) gone, along with all of his hair in fact, with only a cylinder attached to him. As he awakens, he realizes there are others there as well, all in the same condition. Eventually he comes to realize that they have all at some point, died, either before him or after him. All told, every single human being that ever lived on the Earth at any moment in its history are there in the Riverworld, resurrected, it seems. At first the main problems are seeking shelter and safety; afterwards, Burton is not content to simply accept his fate, but the explorer in him wants to get a boat onto the river and follow it wherever it leads and to see what lies beyond. What he finds is not pretty: it seems that people are just repeating their old bad human-nature habits. His real quest, however, is to find the who, the how and the why behind this massive resurrection.

I guess what amazed me about this book was the idea that humans are humans no matter what the situation, time, place, whatever. And while I didn't always like Burton's character, the author did an amazing job with the creation of this guy. I cannot wait to read the rest of the books in the series, although I've heard that none of them can top this one. I have to say that this is probably true, considering how well done this book was.

I would recommend it to sci-fi readers who aren't in to all the techno aspects of sf; this is more like a fantasy type thing. Also, if you are a reader interested in the questions of the soul as spirit or physical entity, you might also be interested.

read: October 2005

Amy says

Imagine that you wake up and the last thing that you remember is dying. You're lying on a riverbank surrounded by strangers who are naked and hairless just as you are. As you explore your surroundings, you find that you are no longer on Earth and the people around you are all the people from the beginning of time who have lived and died on Earth. Furthermore, there are no animals or insects, but there are plenty of fish in a river that seems never never to end. Meals and wants like cigarettes, alcohol, and clothing are provided daily from unseen benefactors.

The main character of the story is Richard Francis Burton, a famous British explorer from the last half of the 1800s. He's the perfect character to follow around in such a world because of his wide acquaintance with various cultures and ability to speak 29 different languages. Joining him (wanted or unwanted) are characters such as a caveman, an alien (responsible for the destruction of most of the human race in 21st century), the real life Alice who was the inspiration for the fictional Alice in Wonderland, Nazi leader Hermann Göring, and a well-read American.

When my husband mentioned the premise of this series to me, I knew I had to read it. He also said that it's going to be a 4-hour movie event on the SyFy channel. Unfortunately, Richard Burton isn't going to be the main character because they were worried that Americans would think of the wrong Richard Burton -- the one that was an actor and Elizabeth Taylor's husband. Are we really so dumb that we couldn't differentiate between a little-known actor and a well-known explorer? Some other things that I bet won't make it into the series are people waking up naked and hairless, marijuana and hallucinates, lots of suicides, lots of love and war, and people's questioning of their religion since the afterlife is different than they were told. Oh, what am I talking about? I'm sure they'll show war. That at least is socially acceptable on television. *rolls eyes*

I'm giving this 5 stars because I actually want to read the next book in the series when I'm usually not a reader of book series. The next book in the series *The Fabulous Riverboat* features Mark Twain as the main character rather than Richard Burton. While the first book gives a small idea of who created Riverworld and why everyone is there, it still leaves enough questions unanswered that I'm curious about. For one thing, there's the end/beginning of the river and a fabled Tower to reach. As for the television series, I'm not nearly as optimistic about it. I'm sure Philip José Farmer would roll over in his grave to see the changes they'll surely make.

Manny says

A very Kilgore Troutish book. Farmer comes up with a phenomenal idea: a world where every human being who's ever lived has been resurrected, to spend the rest of eternity coming to terms with each other along the banks of a gigantic river. Unfortunately, after a few chapters it becomes clear that the author has no real plan

about where to go with his concept. I remember some reviewer expressing similar disappointment with "The Matrix". It starts with a metaphysical revelation, and ends with a shootout... what went wrong?

But even so, this is the best book of the series - the Riverworld is entertaining enough in itself to keep things moving along for a while. My recommendation is to read it for the atmosphere, and not bother to find out what the "explanation" is when that is duly produced in one of the later volumes. Trust me: you'll be disappointed.

Shawn says

There is really a lot to love in this book. First--the inventive idea of coming back to life on a foreign planet with everyone else who has ever lived. Second--now all the characters must live with each other and other historical figures, how does one get along with so many different people displaced from time. Third--just survival on a foreign planet. There is a lot to wrap your mind around in this book, especially when it comes to social interaction with various kinds of people and characters. I found it fascinating and really got to thinking about how it could really be and what if you met some of the true heroes and villains throughout history. Written in 1971, this book does show its age a bit around the edges, but for the most part holds up well.

Bradley says

It's 1972 and the Hugos just named this one best novel, and why?

Because it's actually 2016 and this novel has just been optioned by both HBO AND Showtime for an ongoing series noted mostly for it's all nude cast, all the time, celebrities and historical personages all coming back to their most perfect forms, and, of course, senseless war and violence. (When they're not expounding on philosophy, of course, because philosophy and religion always leads to a cave-man's club and a bunch of grabbing of blond hair.)

Don't get me wrong. I'm actually having a great time with this book. I can ignore the constant nudity, because, after all, the main characters are Sir Richard Francis Burton and Hermann Goering. What I'm most fascinated by is the deeper questions.

Like Why? Come on, SF, you know you want to ask it. Why are we having the tale of the bodily resurrection in an ostensibly heaven-like world complete with Holy Grails for every single person who had ever lived? And why does chewing gum bring out the very worst in us all? And why do we always, always, always have to degenerate to our very worst selves whenever the outcome just doesn't matter? Huh? Why?

Tune in for the next novel! Maybe? I don't know! This is my first Farmer, and it's definitely not going to be my last. I'm getting great vibes off of this. It's too graphic for Netflix, but I think it has practically unlimited possible mileage for HBO and Showtime. We can do ANYTHING! Murders don't even count. That eviscerated person will just pop up somewhere else along the nearly infinite world of rivers among yet another random population of... ANYONE WHO EVER LIVED.

Okay... why aren't All the Authors Who Ever Lived turning this idea into a franchise and filling all our bookshelves with better versions of what I just read? The potential is glorious. I loved the conversations between all these famous people. They have the most respectful and interesting ways of saying WTF. :)

Beyond just a couple of dumb blond preferences, I think this novel has held up extraordinarily well over the years. I think it could gain a whole new audience in today's readership, especially in the realm of slash fiction, fan fiction, and whatever it is that Stephanie Meyer and E.L. James does.

Kat Hooper says

ORIGINALLY POSTED AT Fantasy Literature.

After he died, the famous 19th century explorer Sir Richard Francis Burton wasn't surprised to find that what the Christian priests had taught about the Resurrection wasn't true. But he was totally bewildered by what actually happened. He woke up young, hairless, naked, and turning in midair (as if on a spit) in the middle of 37 billion other young, hairless, naked and rotating humans. Soon after waking, the bodies — all the people over the age of five who had ever lived — plunged to the ground and began their new lives together in a giant river valley... Is this Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, or is it some huge social experiment being run by aliens?

Most of the humans, happy that their basic needs are being met, are content to just be living again. Some people see this as an opportunity to seize the power and wealth that they had, or never obtained, on Earth. But Sir Richard just wants to know what's going on. He seems to be the only person who got a glimpse behind the scenes of their new home and, not only does he resent being manipulated, but his curiosity is insatiable. So, he and a few companions set out to explore the Riverworld and, they hope, to discover the source of the river and find some answers.

Richard Francis Burton, a fascinating and scandalous man in real life, is the perfect character to explore the Riverworld. Philip Jose Farmer's depiction of Burton, and several other real historical figures, is superb, though occasionally teachy when Farmer periodically interjects an encyclopedic-sounding aside about a character's life (this minor bit of clumsiness is the reason for my 4.5 instead of 5-star rating). I won't tell you who else shows up in the Riverworld, because I'd spoil the fun, but I'll say that it's hilarious to watch Burton learn about 20th-century history and interact with some of its denizens.

The best aspect of *To Your Scattered Bodies Go* is its original premise — the idea of all of humanity spread out, generally in chronological order, along a giant river which can be traveled, like a human timeline. There is some “scattering” of bodies (hence the title) so that a 21st century American could end up in a tribe of Neanderthals. If someone dies in the Riverworld, they are resurrected at random somewhere along the river.

To Your Scattered Bodies Go, written in 1971, is creative, exciting, fast-paced, and totally absorbing. I was completely enthralled from the first page to the last. I listened to Recorded Books' version read by Paul Hecht and I had a hard time removing my earbuds for long enough to pay attention to my real-life duties. By the end of the story Burton has managed to get a few answers, but there are so many questions left and I can't wait to learn more about Riverworld. Therefore, I'm already reading the next installment: *The Fabulous Riverboat*.

Stephen says

4.0 stars. Excellent novel by one of the under-rated masters of science ficiton. Great, original concept and a well-written plot. Recommended.

Winner: Hugo Award for Best Science Fiction Novel (1972)

Nominee: Locus Award for Best Science Fiction Novel (1972)

Gregory says

The first PJF novel I ever read. His short stories from sci-fi magazines had impressed me but this novel went way beyond that. This novel has one of the most memorable opening sequences in all of sci-fi literature. Even 20+ years since I read this novel, I can still recall the fascinating opening of it with the suspended bodies and our protagonist coming awake. The mix of sci-fi and religion is always fascinating to me but in the hands of PJF, it was doubly fascinating.

Meg Powers says

I don't know if this book actually deserves a four star rating, but it has been haunting the back of my mind since senior year of high school, when I had to read it for my "Literature of Science" class. Haunting me not because it is an amazing piece of literature (I recall it being awkwardly written) but because it is so WEIRD. It's weird in that way that certain low budget movies you catch on t.v. late at night are weird. The progression of events and the unfolding of the story is weird. The character choices are weird (everyone in the "Riverworld" is a resurrected historical figure). It's just WEIRD.

There is a lot of macho male wish fulfillment, what with all the naked babes running around and having sex with all the "ugly" guys, wooed by brute force (it would be like *Heavy Metal* if it weren't set in such a sterile environment with such polite historical figures) . And I'm not pointing that out in a negative way-the macho factor is like every factor in this fucking weird interplanetary afterlife pastoral dystopia-everything contributes to this crazy-man mentality you take on when you get sucked into it.

Unfortunately, this is the first in a series, and when my science class ended, I couldn't find the rest of the books (or the first,for that matter) at the library. Now I'll never know what happens to the protagonist after he encounters the drag-queen overlords in their sterile sci-fi Mount Olympus. I'M NOT EXAGGERATING.

Matt says

Philip Jose Farmer's strangely Hugo winning novel "To Your Scattered Bodies Go" is mostly notable in that it serves as a perfect example of how exactly not to write a science-fiction novel. The only thing I can think of is that all of the Hugo voters the year of its winning decided they were going to be ironic and vote for the worst sci-fi book released that year, as some kind of post-dada critique on the awards process.

Farmer starts with a great idea: everyone who dies wakes up on a mysterious world where food is provided,

everyone is naked, and there is a big river. Through this, Farmer is able to toy around with all sorts of interesting characters that have died. Unfortunately he doesn't toy around with all sorts of interesting characters: he toys around with all sorts of boring ones. The characters are overwhelmingly stale and one dimensional. Even if you have never heard of the characters, from one sentence of back story you could create a generic person of that time and place in your head and it would be exactly like the character in Farmer's book.

Perhaps the weirdest thing about the book is the prose. For about the first 60 pages, it is written about at a four graders level. The sentences are choppy and short, without a comma in sight. Its unbearable to read, and this is the EXCITING portion of the book. By the time you get about a quarter of the way through, Farmer clearly has entirely run out of ideas, but somehow remembers how compound sentences work. The prose gets better, but it screeches to a halt with no more story to be had--it seems like all ideas were exhausted with the first excruciating quarter.

Worst and most infuriating of all is the ham-fisted way Farmer does all of his exposition. It is a glistening example of the fatal mistake of telling, not showing. A character is introduced, then the narration goes off on a tangent about his back story in consecutive paragraphs, the writer dusts off his hands and says "DONE," this character will never again need any further explanation or back story because I got that all out of the way in one page. Woohoo! The problem with this is that it is a TERRIBLE idea. If I am introduced to a character on one page, and know everything there is to know about that character by the end of the next, SOMETHING IS AWRY.

I will never understand why Farmer was a well-liked sci-fi author. I have seen people claiming that this is the strongest book in the series. If that is true, the subsequent books much reach a level of awful that is reserved for things like Twilight and Gossip Girl. I am having trouble deciding if this was worse than "Dune," but I'm going to say this is slightly better because it is, thankfully, half as long. I won't be reading any more PJF books, that's for sure.

Tony says

TO YOUR SCATTERED BODIES GO. (1971). Philip Jose Farmer. ***.

According to the jacket cover, this is the first book of the legendary "Riverworld" saga. It also lets you know that this novel was the winner of the Hugo Award (1972). It looks as if there were a total of five books in the Riverworld series by the time Farmer quit, but this first one is likely to be enough for me. The concept was clever: all the people on Earth who died (which included all the present population up to 2008 because of an alien attack which killed them all off) from pre-history on are resurrected at the same time and deposited by the banks of a great river. When resurrected, they come back as twenty-somethings in perfect health, but lacking all body hair. The first person we meet is Sir Richard Francis Burton, the great Victorian explorer, linguist and poet. When he awakes he takes on the challenge of finding out where the river came from and where it went. He'd also like to know who created it and for what purpose. He eventually gathers a group of like-minded people around him and takes off on his quest. His group includes Alice Hargreaves, the mythical Alice of "Alice in Wonderland" fame, a Neanderthal man, and a variety of other people from various walks of life and various time periods. This first book never really allows Burton to answer any of his questions. He goes from adventure to adventure with no obvious purpose or plan, and keeps repeating himself in his actions. All of the characters other than Burton are mere stick figures with no depth. Even Alice turns out to be a simpering woman totally dependent on the men around her for her personality. There is very little science here. There are a few tricks as to how these people get food and how they obtain their various

necessities, but that's it. The river is surrounded by unscaleable mountains – at least they are without professional climbing tools – so that all actions are confined to the river. It turns out that this is just another quest book, but the quest is never truly defined. At the end of this book, we are urged to move on to Book 2 of the series, in which Samuel Clemens looks for iron, finds it, then uses it to build a river boat named “Not For Hire.” Sounds like more of the same to me. Bottom line, I found this novel to be boring and full of tangential story lines that were never followed up by a cast of characters I could not find it in me to care about.

Lyn says

To Your Scattered Bodies Go was author Philip Jose Farmer's 1971 novel that went on to win the 1972 Hugo Award for Best Novel.

About as inventive as a great science fiction novel from a very good writer can be, this describes a world where everyone who ever lived is reincarnated into a river valley environment. Filled with philosophical and theological metaphor, this is an excellent vehicle for the author to explore various subjects revolving around sociology, human nature and group dynamics.

Also entertaining is Farmer's selection of historic characters to illuminate for the narrative, somehow he chose Sir Richard Francis Burton and Hermann Goering as central figures. I have always seen Farmer as a kind of rogue element amidst the Sci Fi grandmasters, a loose cannon comic genius. This idea is his masterpiece, a solid and unique exploration in a fantastic situation with a buttressed scientific, albeit mysterious, foundation.

I am also led to believe that the producers of The Matrix films were inspired by Farmer's setting. However, one criticism is the same that often comes to such writers as Poul Anderson and Theodore Sturgeon; great idea, but an incomplete story. And of course this leads me to my most frequent criticism of science fiction novels, it is inherently incomplete when you are invited to tune in next year for the sequel. This is book one in the River World series. Having criticized (justly) a very good book, let me end on a high note and say that I will probably read the other books in the series, it's that good.

J.G. Keely says

For me, the appeal of Speculative Fiction is the breadth and depth of its scope. An author is free to explore the most difficult questions and imagine worlds vastly different from anything we have ever experienced. Though all literature is concerned with what it means to be human, few outside of Sci Fi go to such lengths to ask what it means to be capable of thought and self-knowledge

However, there is a drawback. Often, authors succumb to the temptation to create a world so new, so different, so complex, and so vast that it becomes almost impossible to write it. Farmer has selected too vast a canvas, too great a scene, and so the small (if engaging) story he paints upon it seems a far cry from the overarching premise.

Farmer creates an artificial afterlife, one containing every human being ever born. By using the old Sci Fi trick of 'science did it', he avoids the knee-jerk response many people would have to a book making overt spiritual claims. Since everyone was just recreated by aliens, Farmer is not technically a blasphemer.

Everyone is there; even, as the book jacket likes to point out, 'you!'. Farmer has the grandest possible cast of characters, and does not waste it. His protagonists, their friends, and their enemies are plucked from the greatest and most notorious men in history (as well as Farmer himself). However, we are struck with an immediate difficulty: Farmer is trying to write some of the most remarkable people in history.

Unfortunately for Farmer, many of his characters' real-life counterparts were brilliant, eccentric men. Since they are more brilliant and eccentric than Farmer himself, we end up with fairly standard protagonists saddled with famous names.

For example, he chooses one of the most remarkable men of a remarkable period, Sir Richard Burton. In a time of colonial adventurers, he was one of the greatest and most notorious. He was one of the most adroit swordfighters of his day and braved and escaped death numerous times over his remarkably long career.

He was also a polyglot who knew some thirty languages, making him an extremely convenient hero for a book taking place on a world where every culture was rubbing elbows with every other. He also nearly discovered the source of the Nile, giving him a thematic connection to this 'Riverworld'.

In short he was a real-life hero, straight out of an adventure story. However, he was also a refined and educated man who made a full and unabridged translation of the 1,001 Arabian Nights. Though Farmer's version of Burton is as capable and impressive as we might expect, he does not have Burton's singular and remarkable personality.

Perhaps it was wise of Farmer to pick a man so clearly suited to play the role of the adventure hero. Many authors have tried to create adventure heroes out of small and inexperienced men. However, in this case, Farmer has thrown his net too far, and caught too large a fish for his dinner.

Farmer experiences a similar problem with all of the myriad cultures he writes. Since he is not a historical expert on any of these cultures, their portrayal tends to be rather unremarkable, such that as we travel along the river, we find Victorian Gentlemen, Dakota Indians, and Chinese Marauders are more or less interchangeable.

Beyond this, their interaction with one another becomes likewise simplified. It would be a remarkable feat for any author to be able to write such interactions as might occur between Sumerians and Olmecs, but this hardly excuses Farmer; after all, he was the one who chose to write this book.

Farmer took his inspiration from Edgar Rice Burroughs, who also had a mysterious and mystical river in his John Carter of Mars series. However, Farmer might have taken another lesson from Burroughs. When Burroughs wrote of strange Martian cultures, he could create as he liked without any need for research or knowledge. However, we can see by the wild inaccuracies of his 'Tarzan' that he probably should have stuck with aliens.

Likewise, if Farmer's book had been about his own made up cultures, there would be little to fault him. However, since he chose such a difficult path himself, I feel no compunction in stating that he was unequal to the challenge. The book is exciting, adventurous, and the writing is not without grace, but it is certainly not what it would promise to be.

The next book in the series is worse, with a hackneyed, unfunny Mark Twain taking center stage.
