



The Winds of Altair

Ben Bova

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Earth is an old planet, and her teeming masses are running out of resources . . . and time. It is up to men such as Jeff Holman to discover a haven for Earth's millions. Altair VI is one such planet, and Holman is determined to transform this world into one where the human race can survive.

Star probes had long before informed Earth that Altair VI had a flourishing ecology with one very tough beast at the top of the food chain, a beast that will have to be dealt with before the human colony ships arrive. The beast is not only tough, it is as smart as a man.

Holman is faced with a soul-wrenching decision—for to make Altair VI habitable for humans, all native life must die.

The Winds of Altair Details

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Author : Ben Bova

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From Reader Review The Winds of Altair for online ebook

Amalia Dillin says

Similar to James Cameron's AVATAR film, in concept, THE WINDS OF ALTAIR is both a dated and insightful story of mankind's struggle to continue living against all odds, and what lengths we are prepared to go in order to ensure that survival. One of the biggest questions: Does humanity have the right to destroy all other life in the interest of maintaining itself?

This is the kind of science fiction I love to read, because it never stops being relevant, and it makes me, as a reader, consider the answers to the hard questions. But for something written in the eighties, it has some pretty oddly dated social issues, particularly in regard to race.

Brent says

I am so excited about finding this book!

Ever since I watched the movie *Avatar* I have been scraping my memory trying to remember the name of the book that I read in grade school with the six-legged tigers on the hostile planet and the kids that run them telepathically.

Well guess what? It's called *The Winds of Altair*

Stand yourselves by for a re-read review so very soon.

--update--

Having re-read this book now, I must say that it not aged as well as I had hoped but it was still pretty great. Here some thoughts:

This story is old school YA and as such doesn't really deliver the Hunger Game level of intensity expected of modern YA. It's kind of tame by today's standards.

The ending is rough - I remember thinking even as kid that it was a little unrealistic and anticlimactic. What surprised me during the re-read though, was that the ending that I remembered didn't actually happen. I invented it. The actual ending was even more unsatisfying than the one I remembered. Apparently somewhere along the line I imposed my own "How it Should Have Ended" upon it.

Having said all that I must add that I still really love this book. A lot. The ideas in it are fabulous. Just ask James Cameron, because he appears to have dipped heavily into it to create the movie *Avatar*.

I also cannot deny the appeal of nostalgia. This book was "the one." The story that lit up my eyes and hooked me on Science Fiction. I even tracked down the 1973 version that I had originally read and paused religiously during my re-read to inhale that old book smell. By the magic invested in it, I was able to be a kid again, racing across an alien planet as a glorious three-ton wolfcat, if only for few hours.

Which is powerful magic indeed.

Malcolm Little says

Winds of Altair is my second venture into the works of acclaimed sci-fi writer Ben Bova. I have heard from a few sources that it heavily inspired Avatar, so I was willing to take an 8-hour shot at it. Afterwards, I felt disappointed at the wasted potential, but do give credit to the story for inspiring the superior cinematic follow-up.

That's not to say there is nothing redeemable found in Winds. I would pass this with 2.5 stars, because Bova shows he is capable of grabbing the reader's attention right away, by setting up a well-described dystopic future and populating it with characters that shine through and develop adequately. Bova continues into the middle of the story strong, placing believable obstacles in the path of the protagonist, and raising the stakes just when you think they would abate. Bova's description of the technology that connects people to lion-like animals is unique and refreshing, and doesn't beat the reader over the head with jargon and massive paragraphs of vague exposition.

Heading towards the end, the story suffers greatly. There begins unrealistic character shifts, and liberal applications of deus ex machina. It's almost as if the 'winds' in 'Winds of Altair' are howling through to get the book finished, stamped, and published by a deadline. I was waiting for a unique insight into the debates between religion and science that pepper the story, but it remains a formulaic execution on philosophy.

Winds feels like wasted potential, feels like a story that could have used a grander publishing implementation, but instead was a grand idea that was relegated to a pocket book. I can sense Bova has a lot more to say about respecting nature and humankind stewarding it, but it is muddle in Winds of Altair.

Leisha Wharfield says

Clash between desperate, religious colonists and ferocious, six-legged native predators. Sketchy characters, fair-to-middling alien action (no sex), and a completely unbelievable conclusion. I can't recommend it, even as a beach read for a sci-fi addict.

Keith Bell says

A good early Bova story on its own but better known recently as a book that probably inspired the movie Avatar. Too many similarities to not be. Too many premises coincide but there is enough difference to make it a different story. Bova did not explicitly agree that it was but acknowledges the similarities and applauded the movie on its own merit.

Janet says

I first read this book in 1983, or possibly 1984. I loved it and have re-read it many times since. I have also

read other books by Ben Bova but this one is by far my favourite.

Cheryl Minekime says

Before there was "Avatar" there was "The Winds of Altair" and the wolfcats of Windsong. While not a direct correlation to James Cameron's blockbuster there were enough similarities to make me appreciate both the book and the movie a lot more.

Cesar Matamoros says

Though this book is not technical in any way it was very entertaining. It is an easy read. The premise is an interesting one. The theological aspect had much relevance. All the main characters were given enough history so that you could not only feel for them but also understand them. There was just one aspect that I could not understand but accepted; if unsuccessful there was not enough money to get back home - I could not see how money would be spent on returning to earth. Regardless, I took this story as light-hearted and just overlooked this.

A quick read and an entertaining and enjoyable one.

Azuregos says

Naive and somewhat shallow story that works great as a classic adult fiction tale about a misunderstood shy teenager bonding with a bad-ass beast and becoming a hero for his people. A somewhat oversimplified portrayal of religion, world politics, colonization and environmental problems stands in a way of some legitimately good attempts to make an interesting and dynamic story.

Steve says

Enjoyable story

Jasmine says

Loved it!

Ben Bova's eye for detail is amazing. His insight and forethought still leave me in awe. This author is what started me liking SiFi.

Not only does he draw you in, he also makes everything believable. Instead of merely reading a fictional story, its like your reading an account of someones life. If you have a love for animals, like myself, you will enjoy reading this.

Fredrick Danysh says

An advance team from Earth is sent to terraform the planet Altair VI but it is deadly to humans. Jeff Holman makes mental contact with a native beast in an attempt to get it to aid the Earthlings. But the planet fights back.

Brendan says

The re-release cover has a quote saying that this is the story the movie Avatar tried to tell. Considering that the book predates Avatar by over twenty years I was mildly intrigued, but I ultimately picked it up because I had read Ben Bova's book Orion and thoroughly enjoyed it.

The Winds of Altair does feel a bit dated. 80's sci-fi was somehow simpler than the modern version. Certainly it's more concerned with characters and concepts than it is with technical details.

The story is shockingly similar to Avatar: a lone group of humans must colonize a distant, hostile planet, but there's primitive, native intelligent life already there. And the humans are going to link minds with another body in order to accomplish their goals. Altair focuses more on religion and social pressure than it does corporate greed and the military, but otherwise the two are extremely comparable.

The writing itself is not very notable in most ways. It's a short book; the writing is terse, but effective.

It doesn't end the same way Avatar does, and for that I'm thankful. Along the way the journey kept my attention, but it wasn't that groundbreaking. There are some beautiful sentences and ideas here and there. My favorite by far was a quote that I'll leave you with:

The meek shall inherit the Earth; the rest of us are going to the stars.

Bruce McNair says

Earth is bursting with 17 billion people and the inevitable friction between that many people. A way out is presented to a lucky few who go off to colonise an alien planet around a distant star sponsored by the church. But the planet is inhospitable with unbreathable atmosphere and living creatures. The only hope is to terraform, but at the cost of wiping out all life on the planet. To help in the process, the scientists implant some of the higher order wildlife with devices that enable people to control the actions of the alien creatures. But they discover that they are not dumb brutes and the result is a struggle between the leaders of the mission and the scientists as to whether they should terraform, return to Earth or pursue some other course of action. Although written in the early 1970s, there are some parallels with the present situation. This is a good read, but not Ben Bova's best.

Kevin Olszewski says

Good detail does a great job describes the world but, the characters are flat. I mean the most important moments in story arch you just knew nothing bad would happen. I thoughg it was ok book.
