



## Gods of Riverworld

*Philip José Farmer*

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The fifth installment of the Riverworld series--which features a ten-million-mile-long river and the resurrection of Earth's 35 billion dead. Again the resurrected heroes include explorer Richard Burton, Alice (of Wonderland fame), sf writer Peter Jairus Frigate & Chinese poet Li Po. They have now occupied the tower of the Ethicals (the mysterious, puissant beings who set the whole system up), with its computer & miraculous powers. The renegade Loga, having murdered the other Ethicals, is directing things to private ends....

## Gods of Riverworld Details

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# From Reader Review Gods of Riverworld for online ebook

## KayMac says

### Riverworld series (books 1-5) Review

An “IMO” review, if you’re looking for a description of the Riverworld or plot summary Wikipedia does the trick.

I enjoyed Riverworld (1-4 at least), though its not the kind of series that left me scrambling for the next book. The premise is unique and very interesting, the author does a lot with it. However, as the series progresses the pacing and narrative quality declines with an almost geometric exactness. If the first book is “five stars” the last book is “one star”.

OK, so the series starts out strong and declines over time. As a reader I have zero patience for filler or fluff. That is, expository digressions that have little or nothing to do with advancing the story. If these narrative departures serve to fill out a character that’s one thing, but if I find myself 20 pages into a meandering trip down some nobody’s memory lane I start to get frustrated. That’s the primary weakness of the later books in my opinion, and what made the last book “Gods of Riverworld” all but unreadable.

I can overlook impossible technological leaps (of which there are many), nonsensical economics, or improbable motivations because, hey, its science fantasy! But I cannot stand filler! The whole story comes to a standstill for dozens of pages at a time (40+ pages in one case I bothered to count in “Gods”) because a trivial character who does nothing important gets demented-old-lady-on-the-bus levels of exposition. Filler! Fluff! Aimless boring irrelevant drivel! That’s why the last book gets only 1 star, it’s a poor conclusion to a series that started out so strong.

Nearly all the characters with dialog are genuine historical figures. Some of these characters behave true to their historical selves (Burton, Rotten John), some undergo intriguing changes (Herman Goering becomes a pacifists after years of spiritual/moral anguish), and others seem to have a cartoonish quality or just plain retarded (such as Sam Clemens aka Mark Twain).

I’m not familiar with all the historical characters, but I do know a thing or two about Clemens and Burton. Burton was a sort of real-life Indiana Jones, only much much cooler. He’s one of those larger than life people for whom the saying “you cant make this stuff up” seems to have been invented. His character is the backbone of the five-book series, making most of the important discoveries, outwitting or fighting the antagonists etc., which is fitting.

But then we also get Mark Twain/Sam Clemens... Clemens is perhaps the second most important protagonist, and one of the book series’ greatest weaknesses. Clemens is portrayed as a dithering, avaricious, childish man who seems to run his own advanced eponymous nation (Twain-land in Esperanto) on the Riverworld just because the author wanted it to be so. In fact, he is far less interesting or likeable than Rotten John with whom he shares power for a time.

Clemens makes all the wrong moves, alienates all the wrong people, snatches defeat from the jaws of victory so many times I nearly gave up the series because of him. While the author’s prose are seldom elegant, Clemens’ lines and actions make him appear to have brain damage, which is frustrating since the actual historical Clemens was justifiably famous in his own lifetime for wit and human insight. In the books, he is

thoroughly unlikable and not in a rascally Southern way either. Eventually he dies for good, to the reader's indescribable relief...

Riverworld is a passable five book series that could have been made great if heavily abridged into a two or three book series. Don't bother with the last book "Gods of Riverworld" at all, just don't...

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### **Tatiana says**

We finally learn the reason behind this "experiment" and also why some people were not resurrected (such as very nasty world leaders and mass murderers). We also learn that no matter what, human qualities and defects will manifest themselves even if everything else in the equation changes. Some people will still be religious even if God is now a dispelled concept, some people will be killers even if their victims were to be resurrected and so on.

In fact, this exercise in imagination helps explaining that humanity is a very mixed bag that is deserving of many labels except predictability.

I was quite fond of this book and its characters, though their feelings were mostly on the primitive side without a lot of refinement, partially brutish, still, they fulfilled their purpose of leading us to the Ethicals. A bit disappointed on the fact that even them, had rogues and misunderstandings and were trying to understand the nature of sentience and so-called intelligent life forms.

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### **Natasha Hurley-Walker says**

This is where it should all come together, and instead all falls apart. No, not man's hubris as he tries to take on God-like powers, but the awful writing, stereotypical characters, and uneven, juddering plot. I had this horrible, dawning realisation that after wasting five books trying to get invested in this world, DESPITE the misogyny and plot holes, I was going to be rewarded with the least climactic and interesting explanation for the universe, EVER.

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### **Dave says**

When I decided to make another pass through the Riverworld series, I was excited to see what I thought was a new-to-me book, Gods of Riverworld. I could clearly recall four books from the first time I'd read the series, but couldn't remember whether or not I'd read the fifth. As it turns out, there was a good reason I couldn't remember.

Reading the very first sentence, I got the feeling that I had, in fact, read this book at least once. I thought it was odd that I couldn't remember anything in advance, but could only recall passages as I read them ... but as I made my way through the book, I made a good guess as to why.

Gods of Riverworld was, in a sense, an afterthought: Farmer had originally intended to write only four books, but ended up penning a fifth, and for good reason: there was so much more that could be told about the Tower. After all, we really only knew that the Ethicals had a computer, that it was dying, and that Alice

saved it. Farmer hinted at some of the technology within the Tower, but not very much. What else could the Tower hold?

As it turns out, what it could hold is clichés and poorly-tied-up plotlines. (view spoiler)(view spoiler)(view spoiler)(view spoiler)(view spoiler)(view spoiler)(view spoiler) Also, there's the occasional slang error ... who ever referred to heroin as snow?

Of course, with this being the fifth book in the series, there was yet more Expospeak, in some cases to lengths that forced me to skip ahead several paragraphs. I don't think many readers really care that much about what these made-up versions of real people (in most cases) actually "think" about things. We want to know about the Tower and what's going on there. We certainly don't want to read page after page of what Farmer thought these people actually thought. Some amount of this is probably just Farmer trying to tell us what **he** thinks, which we actually aren't interested in either. GET ON WITH IT.

By the time I was nearing the end, I was basically just plowing through to see what happened. I really wasn't that interested in how it played out, especially as I passed through scene after uninteresting scene that I remembered. Oh yes, here's where so-and-so appears. Oh that's right, this is what happens in those rooms. Yes, I remember, this wasn't really this, it was actually that. yawn.

It's really hard to tell a decent story that involves a magical computer that can create anything you want. It's essentially another form of Superman: you make it omnipotent, but then realize that there is no drama in a story like that, so you make a vulnerability for it, but realize that it looks really foolish, so you make a counter for it, but realize it's invulnerable again ... and when you're done, you realize you should have just scrapped the whole idea. Unfortunately for Farmer, it really would take magitech to create Riverworld, so he doesn't have any choice. (view spoiler)

I think you might almost be better off not even reading this book. Just stop after Labyrinth and imagine the ending for yourself. It might be more enjoyable.

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### **Florin Constantinescu says**

It's sad to see this series end, and it's sad to see it end with a rather modest novel. My guess is the author intended originally to end the series with book #4, and had it written in that way, then, suddenly 50 pages before ending that book, he decided to leave it ambiguous, and continue to add a fifth book to expand on the final explanation offered.

Just like the first book was different in tone from the next three, this fifth is also different. Yea it offers more details on some things left unanswered, but also a kind of alternate explanation of others. The characters are as suddenly possessed by different motivations, and the reasoning behind their actions in book #4 now appears forgotten.

Overall can't go below 3\*, as the entire series has been exceptionally good. Let's indulge the author's few oops moments for the quality of the prose, for the pleasure of having to walk around in Mark Twain's or Richard Burton's shoes, or for the grand idea behind it all.

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## **Orlando says**

Bien, con esto termino la saga del mundo río (no voy continuar con los otros, creo que siguen 2 volúmenes). En general es una buena historia, pero se me hizo necesario saltar algunas páginas que se me antojaron de "filosofía barata", y lo mismo sucede con la narración de la "vida pasada" de personajes secundarios en los que, creo, no venía al caso que el autor se explayara tanto. Resumiendo las experiencia de todos los libros... buena historia, original y necesaria de leer para los amantes del sci-fi; pero demasiado larga, algunos libros me parecieron estar de más, bastaría leer un buen resumen de ellos o sencillamente obviarlos.

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## **Genia Lukin says**

Man, this series did not age well at all.

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## **Tanya says**

No ending could possibly be satisfactory with 36 billion stories to tell from the Riverworld, but still, decently done and true to the author's form. Ironically, the very day I finished this book, Farmer's theory that souls could be re-attached to bodies was theorized on Morgan Freeman's Through the Wormhole episode that aired for the first time that evening. Serendipity! If only Farmer himself was only alive to see it. I emailed the professor with the theory and told him of the Farmer series and asked if he's ever read it -- no reply, lol -- so probably not - probably offputting to find out a sci-fi author beat his theory by 40 years.

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## **Wanda says**

What a bleak view of humanity this book presents! The only semi-believable emotion portrayed is anger and there is a LOT of violence, especially since these are supposed to be the new & improved humans who finally made it to the mysterious tower on Riverworld. They soon prove themselves to be as self-involved and poor of judgement as Humanity 1.0.

Good things about the book? Farmer's version of Sam Clemens does not appear, nor does King John. He only gives measurements in metric (rather than metric & Imperial, as in previous books). And it really does finish the series.

Bad things about the book? Still too much description of what people are wearing and eating which is completely unrelated to the plot. Too much fighting and too little cooperation. All the characters are cardboard cut-outs, very one dimensional and over the course of 5 books they have not grown or changed or deepened.

Weird things about the book? A strange aside as Burton attempts to solve the Jack the Ripper mystery. And then all the people involved in that sad situation are mysteriously resurrected causing chaos and distrust. And a creepy party given by Alice (of Alice in Wonderland fame) with android versions of Lewis Carroll's characters as party favours.

There is no doubt that Farmer dealt with big issues in this series—the nature of the soul, the role of religion in society, the question of free will vs. determinism. Unfortunately, I didn't think the quality of the writing did these big issues justice. Better characterization, tighter plotting, more realistic emotions—all these would have contributed to a much superior product.

I am relieved to be finished this series—thankfully I'm not entirely unhappy to have read it, as it is one of the seminal science fiction works of the 20th century.

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### **David says**

This is, at once, a satisfying and frustrating book. It answers most all of the questions that remained open after the fourth installment of the Riverworld series, but had an unsatisfying ending. I still admire the overall premise of the series: the rebirth of humanity on another planet where death is not final. I enjoy Farmer's use of actual historical figures - even obscure ones - to populate his stories. I really enjoy the philosophy, sociology, and psychology Farmer deploys in the stories as well. All of this holds true, and then some, for number 5, but for that ending...

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### **Nicholas Bobbitt says**

It's not usually a good sign when the cover bears little resemblance to the source material. It's less of a good sign when an author feels they have to remind their audience of the characters and plot of the previous installments. This, thankfully, is the last book in the series. It has little of the good that the original book had. Farmer writes well but it's clear the well of ideas has run dry for him in this setting.

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### **Brian says**

I love the premise of Riverworld, and enjoyed the earlier books, but the last couple feel like either the authour, the reader or both have lost interest. It's just meandering along to an finish, any finish will do. The endless possibilities of the Tower are expressed in bursts of mindless creativity with almost no logic at all, and some of the most intriguing ideas are picked up and dropped after only cursory examination. Serious Riverworld fans only I'm afraid.

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### **Piper Tallis says**

The previous negative reviews cover the plethora of problems with this book. I have only read this book of the series. So while I cannot agree or disagree as to whether the characters have grown or evolved from the first, I believe those that have observed a distinct lack of growth. The author's style along with lack of any interesting plot or creation characters that I can care about, means that I will not be seeking out any of the author's other works. I think he had a desire to make people think more deeply about significant issues. Unfortunately, he delivers the message is such a heavy-handed pedantic manner that I doubt most readers were open to listening.

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## **Mark Oppenlander says**

The Riverworld series stumbles to the finish line in a handful of painful, limping steps. Farmer was not originally planning to write a fifth book in this series, but, by his own admission, he left a few loose ends after the fourth book and needed to tie them off. I wish he hadn't done so.

Starting a few weeks after the conclusion of "The Magic Labyrinth," the survivors of the trip to the tower are faced with a new mystery. Loga is speaking with Burton on a video call when he is apparently murdered or destroyed. The survivors of the journey to Riverworld determine that there must be someone else in the tower with them and that that person - dubbed "The Snark" - is their enemy. A portion of the book deals with the hunt for the Snark and the rest describes the politics of the humans in the tower. They must decide how they will allocate power, who can use the resurrection machinery and for what purposes, how space will be shared and so forth. At the end of the book, there is another big revelation in which everything we know changes.

I found all of this a bit depressing. Much of what Farmer tackles in this book can be summed up in the old axiom, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." The humans are clearly not capable of handling the God-like powers they've been afforded. There is a lot of violence and pettiness and, as usual, Farmer spends way too much time on the nitty-gritty of combat, murder, arguments and rapes. OK. We get it. People aren't moral or ethical or ready to lead each other with civility and kindness.

The final section of the book essentially undermines much of what was defined at the end of the fourth volume. This may be what Farmer had intended all along, but it reads a bit like a false ending in a movie where the second ending is not as satisfying as the first. Farmer's dim view of human nature and potential, coupled with what felt like unnecessary plot complications made this an unsatisfying read. I just don't think I am a Farmer fan. But hey, I finished the series, so the completist part of me has been pacified.

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## **Frederick Bodine says**

I really enjoyed this book. There were Plot Twists that kept me interested. Having read the first four I took a break and read a couple other unrelated books. So coming back to the fifth had me excited and ready to get started. The book has an appendix that helps you remember what took place before, which is nice. I would recommend this book!

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## **Marts (Thinker) says**

Philip José Farmer - Riverworld series #5, The Gods of Riverworld

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## **Ensiform says**

After the non-ending of the last volume, I had to get the fifth of the series. In this convoluted tale, Burton,

Frigate and the others enjoy their newfound powers in the Ethicals' tower, and begin resurrecting people... and then some folks start becoming power-mad. Despite some annoying internal inconsistencies and the usual complaints about awkward dialogue (though the latter is much improved from the first and second books), this was a page-turner. And I did not, believe it or not, guess the ending (although I guessed the identity of the renegade Tower-dweller). It was really an exciting story, and while there remains one anthology of Riverworld stories I haven't read, I'm sorry that Riverworld won't continue in other novels, especially by other authors.

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### **Paul says**

So that was disappointing.

I read the first two Riverworld novels and then jumped straight to this, the fifth one, so it is probable that I am missing more than a little context. But I seriously doubt there is enough context to make this book any better than okay.

What we have is a bunch of characters left with an all-powerful, but easily manipulated, computer exchanging exposition with each other, with the occasional bit of (often implausible) action to keep things moving along.

Gods of Riverworld is certainly an easy read, but it isn't in any way gripping. And the cod-philosophy and dated metaphysics being endlessly spouted by the characters left me cold.

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### **Gerald Kinro says**

This is the conclusion to the series where the secrets of the Ethicals who created the Riverworld and who resurrected every human who lived there up until 1982. It did have some mystery to it as those surviving—Burton and Alice Hargreaves, among them, must pry deep into their own minds to solve the problem and to survive.

The central theme of this and the entire series, for that matter, is about power, about what humans would do when they have it. It also forced me to question that if resurrection is possible, who has power and what are the criteria for being a candidate? As in the third and fourth volumes of this series, the pacing is slow. It still is a good read. Be forewarned, reading this takes much concentration and focus.

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### **Robert says**

I will say this of all 5 books in the series... Philip Jose Farmer is a literary genius! I fell absolutely in love with Riverworld and couldn't put it down to save my life. I read all 5 books at the same time within a few days. I was completely entranced. I loved every character and felt like I was a part of the struggle to figure out the mystery of Riverworld. When I finished reading I was left with so many thoughts and my mind couldn't stop racing. **MUST READ!**

