

BEST WAY TO BLOW \$500,000

Ahab's Wife

William Morrow and Company

Call Me Fishmeal. First: "Call me Ishmael. Some years ago—never mind how long precisely—having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world." Now compare: "Captain Ahab was neither my first husband nor my last. Yet, looking up—into the clouds—I conjure him there: his gray-white hair; his gathered brow; and the zaggy mark (I saw it when lying with him by candlelight and, also, taking our bliss on the sunny moor among curly-cup gumweed and lamb's ear)." That's *Ahab's Wife* or, *The Star-Gazer*, by Sena Jeter Naslund. See the difference? If not, you may have a future at William Morrow and Company. They paid a purported one-half million dollars for *Ahab's Wife*, and that does not count the money spent in producing and hyping the book. When submitted it was more than 1000 pages and was chopped to 668. It hits bookshelves this October and discount bins shortly thereafter.

What's it about? The world according to Captain Ahab's wife, of course. And who was she? Well, she was this nondescript person mentioned in passing in *Moby Dick*. And why should we care about her? Well, it's because she is a "modern" woman in the Upper West Side sense of word: She had several husbands, sought self-actualization, humped Frederick Douglass and crossdressed as a cabin boy. Oh, and she felt bad about slavery.

Ahab's Wife is the gross offspring of a heaving bosom novel and the self-absorbed, lefty-damning-the-past crap one gets from folks with PhDs in creative writing. Not surprisingly, Naslund is a Distinguished Teaching Professor at the University of Louisville and is on the MFA faculty of Vermont College.

BEST ONLINE MEDIA IPO

Salon

Souffle. Maybe it's a sign of the times that in 1998 *Salon* got itself noticed through politics and scandal, and in 1999 *Salon's* been best known for its unconventional, and unspectacular, initial public offering. In a year when every two-bit dot-com operation imaginable was selling stock to the public and making a killing at

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