



Macroscopic

Piers Anthony

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Macroscope Throughout history, man has been searching for better ways to gather information about his universe. But although they may have longed for it, not even the most brilliant minds could conceive of a device as infinitely powerful or as immeasurably precise as the macroscope, until the twenty-first century. By analyzing information carried on macrons, this unbelievable tool brought the whole universe of wonders to man's doorstep. The macroscope was seen by many as the salvation of the human race. But in the hands of the wrong man, the macroscope could be immensely destructive-ininitely more dangerous than the nuclear bomb. By searching to know too much, man could destroy the very essence of his mind. This is the powerful story of man's struggle with technology, and also the story of his human struggle with himself. This novel takes us across the breathtaking ranges of space as well as through the most touching places in the human heart. It is a story of coming of age, of sacrifice, and of love. It is the story of man's desperate search for a compromise between his mind and his heart, between knowledge and humanity.

Macroscope Details

Date : Published November 30th 2003 by Mundania Press LLC (first published 1969)

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Author : Piers Anthony

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From Reader Review Macroscope for online ebook

Gary says

I agree with Stephen.... nuff said.

Stephen says

In case my 5 star rating is insufficient to persuade you to try this book, I prepared the following comparison scale to chart the exact amount of awesomeness contained in the story.

5.0 Stars. I think we all have those books that we absolutely love that just never seem to get the attention that we are feel deep down in our giblets they deserve. I call these my literary babies. Well this is one of my babies**.

*** I have previously reviewed two others Liege-Killer and Heroes Die which I am mentioning again because my babies need all the exposure they can get as I want them to be well-liked and popular with the other books.*

While this novel was nominated for a Hugo Award when it was published in 1969, it has not remained in the collective consciousness of the SF world in the intervening years. This is something that constantly frustrates me because this book is a serious, complex, mind-expanding tour de force that seriously deserves to enjoy a wider audience as well as a spot among the towering works of the field.

I see two reasons why this might be. First, I did not find this an “easy” read and some of the plot elements and concepts are thrust upon the reader only to be explained further in the book (see my reference to Ancient History below as an example). This may be a turn off for some.

A second reason may be that it is written by Piers Anthony. I think most people who have read Anthony's work will agree that the man can come up with some brilliant ideas. I think most people would also agree that most of his books take a great idea and surround it with a significant amount of “MEH.” Even worse than the MEH component is the “SKEEVE” factor which afflict far too many of his stories. Not to worry here folks. There is very little in the way of “skeeve” in this book and it is free from MEH. It is, however, chalk full of Anthony at the top of his brilliant, mind-blowing best.

I consider this book the poster child for “BIG IDEA” science fiction. However, because so much of the magic of the story is in “out there SF concepts” and the slow unfolding of the central mystery as the various cosmic pieces are gradually layered in one on top of the other, I am not going to give a traditional plot summary. Instead, I have done a breakdown of what I consider the “components” of the story and will leave you to discover the details for yourself.

MIND-BLOWING SF CONCEPTS:First, the Macroscope which is one of the truly great SF concepts ever. For those who have read Robert Charles Wilson’s Blind Lake, I think you will see the inspiration for the technology Wilson used in that book. Add to the Macroscope nuggets like: (a) omnipresent information

storage; (b) traveling through the creation of singularities and (c) galactic evolutionary criteria and you will have barely scratched the surface of the myriad of “WTF” concepts in this epic novel.

ASTROLOGY: It’s real, it’s predictive, it’s science, it’s a fact....Accept it and let’s move on shall we. Seriously, watching Anthony weave astrology as a central plot device in the midst of all of the hard science concepts was fascinating and deftly handled.

EVOLUTION OF HUMANITY: Yes, humanity is still a child race and the question is whether or not we have the potential to assume a place in the great galactic community. Place your bets people.

PIERS ANTHONY SKEEVE FACTOR: Unfortunately, I can’t say it is completely absent from the work, but I did estimate it at only 3% of the total story which may actually be a bit high. There was one 3 page sequence that I had significant “skeeve” present and a few casual statements throughout the rest of the book. However, for the most part, Piers kept himself under control (I don’t think at this point he had truly developed his inner skeeve).

UBER COOL GALACTIC-SPANNING PLOT: Uh, we are talking our whole galaxy and beyond playing a part in this plot and this is where the truly brilliant, multi-layered narrative really begins to shine.

ANCIENT HISTORY: In Chapter 8, one of the main characters, Ivo, ends up in ancient Damascus. You are going to be WTFing all over the place. I am writing this to let you know....GO WITH IT...all will be explained in the end and you will say (hopefully)...NICE!!!

PSYCHOLOGY: At the heart of the narrative there is a significant amount of psychology involving the main characters and what defines them as people and how their strengths and weaknesses become a necessary aspect of the cosmic drama to which they have been thrust.

For fans of intelligent science fiction, I give this my HIGHEST POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATION!!!

Zach says

One of the worst science fiction books I've ever read. Hard to follow, clumsy language, ridiculous dialogue, long and interminably boring tangents into astrology... there isn't much to like here. The central mystery of the book was just compelling enough to get through to the end, but the revelation wasn't all that satisfying and the denouement was very bland.

Lorelei says

More than thirty years after I first read this book, the exposition and environmental lectures at the beginning are a bit dull, but otherwise it is just as wonderful as when I first read it. So much for people who claim that you can't write technology-based sf anymore - you just need to have enough imagination to come up with something new and different.

Richard Friedericks says

I first read this Macroscopic in the 1970s when it came out. I was intrigued and its ideas and images stayed with me all these years. Finding my copy again, I read it again and loved it even more. It combines astrology with Type II and Type III technology in the context of a personal and human development.

Jeremiah says

I am giving "Macroscopic" by "Piers Anthony" which I really loved and so am giving a 8/10...

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I really enjoyed this book it had some amazing concepts that just kept giving me all these cool theories about space and time and the whole universe! It was very well done and the entire time I was reading it I just kept wanting to find out what was going to happen next.

The different themes in this book from psychology, to the ethics of what we try to do to advance ourselves, who is really doing the correct thing in the end, who is right or wrong, and so on down the line really was amazingly done, now you may enjoy the book a little more if you are into or know more about astrology as there are quite a few themes dealing with it but even that just made me more interested and want to go look it up for myself.

If you like Science Fiction (and possibly be interest in astrology) I highly recommend you check this one out, it is extremely well written and you actually feel like all the characters are a part of the story and you really want everything to work out in the end even if you don't know if that's even how it should be.

Austin says

My father has been asking me to read this book for ~30 years. Finally got around to it... interesting book, awesome exposure to astrophysical concepts, i think perhaps some of the ideology and philosophy is a bit dated/misogynistic which can at time get in the way of relating to any of the characters. I don't know if i'd read it again, or recommend it to a lot of people. Potentially a decent primer on astrophysics and intergalactic/extra-galactic philosophy if you've never experienced it before (as it will all seem new, and the long explanations will feel less like the characters "mansplaining" concepts to you). I'm conflicted, there are parts I really enjoy, and other parts that really annoy me.

prcardi says

Storyline: 2/5

Characters: 2/5

Writing Style: 2/5

World: 4/5

How did so many good ideas turn out so abysmally? I admit, at the beginning I was a little dispirited. *"Oh, another mysterious character on the run from shadowy organizations..."* I had no need to revisit one of those

novels again. But then it turned out to be a poorly constructed hook, a badly envisioned starting point designed to get the reader elsewhere - to the macroscope. And the macroscope was very much a place worth going. There's a place in the middle where we get the novel's best: it is hard science fiction from someone in awe of the universe, it is speculative fiction proposing wondrous possibilities, it is technological gadgetry made plausible and revolutionary. Sure, far into the work there's this hokey aura leftover from that beginning conspiracy story. And, yes, Anthony's placed about a dozen soap boxes in an unrecognizable pattern (if it was that at all) from which he jumps seemingly randomly. And, you're right, that whole psychoanalysis portion was, at best, completely unnecessary and at worst a burning wound. But - *but!* - one could get caught up in the possibilities of the macroscope. One can see how later writers were influenced by this and had their visions of space and time formed by this very novel. There was something here very much worth encountering in that been-there-done-that-science-fiction-merit-badge sort of way. And then it all fell apart. Moments where I was completely at a loss as to what was going on. Even learning what was going on I couldn't find a plausible reason for sending us that direction. Disorientation and confusion with revelations tardily made and with little reward. More of all the worst of the elements - too much of what was an awful character quirk, too much astrology posing as hard science fiction, too many hops on the soap boxes, too many uses of the deus ex machina, too much awful dialogue. Those last chapters were some of the most excruciating science fiction storytelling I've ever encountered, and it was sprinkled with the awesome resolutions that - despite having more than 300 pages to prepare for - Anthony never got around to setting up. I don't know that I've ever read a science fiction work so packed with good ideas and so utterly ruined by failings of execution. One could pick up on Anthony's ambitions to greatness: to artistry, to significance, to deepness and richness. It was plain for all to see, unfortunately, that the book didn't remotely come close to achieving any of these. Leaving you embarrassed for the macroscope, for the book, for Anthony, for science fiction.... just embarrassed.

Manny says

There's this trope you come across every now and then in science-fiction books which annoys the hell out of anyone who's actually interested in language. You have some supergenius type who's supposed to know everything, and the way the author chooses to show you how clever they are is to have them demonstrate their knowledge of a word in some more or less obscure language.

There was a fine example in *Babel-17*, which I reread last month. Rydra Wong, the gorgeous supergenius poet and linguist, has ended up on this huge spaceship which turns out to be called Jebel Tarik. Now what's that supposed to mean? The lovely Rydra soon figures it out. *Jebel*, she says, means "mountain" in Old Moorish, so they're on Tarik's Mountain. All well and good, but *jebel*, as I recently discovered, also means "mountain" in Arabic, a rather less exotic language than Old Moorish.

Macroscope contains a similar example. They've just received the cryptic message

SURULLINEN XPACT SCHON AG I ENCAJE

and another hot supergenius chick is going to figure it out. It's Polyglot! she exclaims. A mixture of languages! Blah, blah, blah, the last word is Spanish, the first one is Finnish, blah, blah, what's the "I"? Oh yes, she says, Polish! It means "and"! Well, that's right, but it's the same in Russian, a less dramatic choice.

One rather suspects that both Samuel R. Delaney and Piers Anthony composed their examples by flicking through a few dictionaries. Moral: you can't fake what you don't got.

Joseph Carrabis says

When I read *Macroscopic* as a teenager it took my breath away. I reread it as an adult and wondered what originally impressed me so much. I suspect I'll read it at least once again to make a final decision. Could be that I lost something as I grew older. Perhaps I'll find it again.

Patrick Scheele says

The setup had potential, but there were so many problems with this book that I never got a chance to enjoy reading it.

* Several times the writer pretends to answer a logical problem he has created in the story by spouting a bunch of real science and then assuming the problem answered. That really gets on my nerves. This also means the whole concept of the *Macroscopic* became too hard to believe in. Ironically, if he had simply not given any (lengthy) explanations of how it worked, it would have been much easier to suspend my disbelief.

* I first started hating this book when the heroes try to escape the space cops from the UN and the protagonist randomly comes up with a new use for the *Macroscopic*. It's not just a telescope on steroids and a receiver for alien radio, the signal it receives is so magical it can even solve their problem for them. To outrun the space cops, all they have to do is activate a beam from the alien radio signal, which turns them all into a pool of goo and magically activates again later to turn them back. Oh, and the hot girl is too scared to do it, so she asks the protagonist to fondle her for a few pages, which makes her existential angst go away. Of course this makes no sense at all, but I guess the writer was horny when he wrote it or something.

* Astrology plays a big part in this book. At the risk of spoiling some of the most boring fiction ever written: at one point near the end, one character discovers a very advanced alien. This alien uses astrology to find out that the character's wife is dead...

* By the end, Piers Anthony must have run out of whatever he was smoking when he wrote this book, because nothing gets resolved. The coming disaster due to overpopulation that started the whole quest is just ignored in the end.

Phil says

Ever read a 20 year old sci-fi book in 1989 at the age of 19 while under the influence of hallucinogens on a regular basis, then spend the next twenty plus years remembering it as this mind blowing experience? No? You're lucky. I came across a copy of this at an estate sale and was so excited to read it again, remembering it as this amazing book that had so much to say about the universe and how it worked. While I respect other novels by Piers Anthony, the reality is that this was a rambling, sexist, unbelievable piece of tripe that also managed to argue that astrology is somehow legitimate science. I trucked through it waiting for the revelation to come, only to remember that it was only going to come to someone coming down from a three day acid binge. Live and learn.

Greg Frederick says

I was told that Piers Anthony writes silly sci-fi, which I've never read before. Then I ran into a couple of his works at a thrift store and thought I'd give them a try. This is the first one I started reading, and boy was it surprising! This is not a silly book, and ended up becoming one of my all-time favorite sci-fi reads. *Macroscope* is so creative, well spun, and perfectly paced that once the ball got rolling it was really hard to put it down.

So apparently Piers Anthony deserves some serious respect, and though I look forward to reading the next book (which just has to be silly based on the title), I also hope to dig up more serious works by him of this ilk. I can't say enough good things about this book.

One warning - it is a product of it's era, and includes sexism throughout that is not tolerated in this day and age. But unless you're easily offended, the story is worth looking past that.

Marianne says

The world is in decay with only a few decadent people on top. A few top scientists have created a 'macroscope', allowing them to deeply observe things at great distance, even peer through solid objects. But something is wrong, the technology is boobytrapped. ...and then they go romping through space.

There are parts that I enjoy in this book: discussions of science, exploration into different alien cultures couched from a human perspective, ways in which other civilizations might interact based on direct contact versus message only.

However, the book didn't bring me any feeling of suspense, after the initial foray into the wilds of space. Looking back at it, I know they should have been there, but perhaps the different areas explored just didn't gel together enough for me.

Galen says

Here is a review that I posted on Amazon.com in Dec. 2004:

"I am rereading this book after a number of years, having first read it some time in the mid 1970's. Again I find that it is one of those books that changes how one thinks about things, and a work that can be appreciated on multiple levels.

First, it can change one's view of what's possible within the genre of science fiction. It impressively weaves a tapestry from such diverse threads as music, mathematics, classic American literature, philosophy, psychology, and sheer imagination, just to name a few. To a degree I've seldom seen equaled, the combination of these elements after all these years still create in me a sense of wonder at the grandness and richness of Creation. Anthony's work here is truly a microcosmic reflection of the very universe of which he writes.

That leads into something else I've kept noticing on this re-reading. I've been constantly struck by way the story suggests the interrelationship of things ranging from tiny (like the macron particle) to immense (like the universe); and by the synergy possible between people with diverse and seemingly disparate gifts. Ranging from the "ordinary" Beatrix to the "super-genius" Schön, each of the central characters is vital to the story, though each stands out as truly individual. The plot shows each of these characters as vital to the group's success, despite what appear to be huge differences in intellectual or personal development.

The "hard" science fiction elements at first glance today might appear a bit dated, given a nomenclature that dates from the late 1960's. But then hard science and technology are not really central themes of this novel. These elements of the story are for me a necessary "window dressing" arrayed around more central themes like personal responsibility, the grandness of the Universe, and interpersonal dynamics. In that respect it's easy to overlook the book's roots in the technology of the 1960's."
