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Microworlds: Writings on Science Fiction and Fantasy

Stanislaw Lem , Franz Rottensteiner (Editor)

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In this bold and controversial examination of the past, present, and future of science fiction, Lem informs the raging debate over the literary merit of the genre with ten arch, incisive, provocative essays.

Reflections on my life --

On the structural analysis of science fiction --

Science fiction : a hopeless case --

with exceptions --

Philip K. Dick : a visionary among the Charlatans --

The time-travel story and related matters of science-fiction structuring --

Metafantasia : the possibilities of science fiction --

Cosmology and science fiction --

Todorov's fantastic theory of literature --

Unitas oppositorum : the prose of Jorge Luis Borges --

About the Strugatsky's Roadside picnic

Microworlds: Writings on Science Fiction and Fantasy Details

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From Reader Review Microworlds: Writings on Science Fiction and Fantasy for online ebook

Printable Tire says

An extremely dense and provocative collection of essays on science fiction by one of the masters of the genre. Lem's insights are always on the spot, and his criticisms of such sub-genres as the time-travel story are scathing. In the final analysis, the only other science fiction writer besides Lem himself he seems to appreciate is Philip K Dick, specifically his novel Ubik, and perhaps Lem only likes him because he hasn't read enough of Dick's work.

More often than not, I feel Lem has the tendency to not see the forest from the trees (or perhaps the other way around). He criticizes science fiction for falling into the routine of individuals being confronted by science fiction phenomena, and is critical of the fact that the genre pays too much attention to the individuals than with the universal consequences of the phenomena (this is his main bone to pick with Roadside Picnic). It's certainly a valid point, especially when the plot in questions resolves around an unnecessary romantic relationship or something like that, but there would be no science without people, and no people without individuals confronting science. The only novel I've read by Lem, Solaris, is an excellent example of good science fiction precisely because it tackles both the universal and the individual affects of unexplained phenomenon. Apparently Lem would like us all to read some sort of platonic, dry form of science fiction totally devoid of personality, a science fiction that is simply science-fiction, of scientists experimenting in a vacuum. Such work wouldn't be very interesting or entertaining, and this goes a long way to explain why later in life Lem went on to write books that were catalogs of fake books, as if he realized that such science fiction stories would only work as synopsis, that as richly developed concepts they wouldn't be able to breathe.

An extremely intelligent book that shows Lem's well founded embarrassment with the genre of science fiction.

Williwaw says

The full title is "Microworlds: Writings on Science Fiction and Fantasy."

The book contains critical essays on the topics just mentioned, including essays on Philip K. Dick, Jorge Luis Borges, the Strugatsky brothers, and time-travel.

I just read the essay on Dick; some time ago I read the autobiographical essay that opens the book. This is definitely challenging stuff, not beach reading.

Paola says

- sulla mia vita
- per un'analisi strutturale della fantascienza
- fantascienza: un caso disperato con qualche eccezione
- le disarmonie prestabilite di philip k. dick

- viaggi nel tempo e altri temi di fantascienza applicata
 - congiunzioni metafantastiche
 - fantascienza e cosmologia
 - lo scienziato immaginario: tzvetan todorov teorico del fantastico
 - unitas oppositorum: la prosa di j. l. borges
 - strategie fantascientifiche: arkadij e boris strugackij
-

Matthew says

Critical essays rather than fiction, not bad so far. It turns out there are a few interesting things to say about science fiction.

Shaun says

My head hurts. Or is it spinning? I can't tell...

Lolotehe says

Not short-stories, but essays by a master. His monograph on "Roadside Picnic" is a good look at alien invasion tales and should be required reading for any sci-fi author.

Vince says

Interesting book as it is more about the author, what he thinks, and why he writes the why he writes. Good insight. I would recommend this to folks who not only love Science Fiction but want to see into the mind of an author.

Melanti says

Interesting; though admittedly I just skimmed a couple of the essays - Neither a PKD nor a Borges fan nor am I familiar with Todorov's literary theories, so those essays weren't particularly meaningful to me.

I enjoy the occasional Eastern European sci-fi book for the reason that they tend to be incredibly different from mainstream English Language sci-fi, so reading Lem ripping into them for being too formulaic and building off each other's tropes was rather amusing.

However, hearing him dismiss every story that wasn't 100% scientifically and logically accurate nor innovative or creative as "trash" was rather depressing; I have bad memories of a particular literature teacher calling my sci-fi books "trash" so, that brought up some rather unpleasant associations.

Which isn't to say he isn't correct in his criticisms - he completely is.

But he seems pretty set on getting rid of all "trash" books to pull sci-fi up out of the genre gutter, and that, I can't agree with.

I don't always want "great" books. Sometimes I just want Horatio Hornblower set on a spaceship... Is it innovative? No. Is it logical? No. Does it do things you can't do with other genres? No. Is it fun? Oh, yes!

(This is a pretty hypocritical review for me to write cause I'm always nit-picking books and the easiest way for a sci-fi book to earn a low rating from me is for it to have bad science... At least I'm admitting my hypocrisy, though I don't think it makes it any more acceptable.)

Riversue says

Fascinating but intense and sometimes difficult to follow - Lem is one of the classic science fiction writers and here he writes about writing sci fi.

Bill says

This is the book that killed my interest in Science Fiction. The reason this book was so important is because Lem dissects the genre without mercy - it's absolutely important for anyone who is interested in reading a scathing (and in my opinion correct) critique of science fiction.

Spacewanderer says

If you don't like literary criticism, this isn't the book for you. So, you can just stop reading this review now (or you can just keep going because it isn't that long anyway). However, if you do like literary criticism, and science fiction, I recommend "Microworlds." Aside from a few essays that seem unnecessarily dense and overdrawn, which is relatively common in literary criticism since people who write it are generally egotistical asses, it's quite an enjoyable read. Hell, I finished it in two days and I am world renowned for my slow reading!

What's most interesting is Lem's overall hatred for most science fiction, which he repeatedly refers to as market-driven trash...which I agree with. He does see the brilliance in Philip K. Dick, though, which is good as I don't think I could handle it emotionally if he didn't like Dick (double entendre not intended). At times, though, he is so critical it's as if he's trying to iron all the fun out of the genre. But, overall, it's easy to see his point. On the occasions where I don't agree with him, I still believe he's right and I'm wrong; he was, after all, much smarter than I.
