



Bearing an Hourglass

Piers Anthony

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When life seemed pointless to Norton, he accepted the position as the Incarnation of Time, even though it meant living backward from present to past. The other seemingly all-powerful incantations of Immortality--Death, Fate, War, and Nature--made him welcome. Even Satan greeted him with gifts. But he soon discovered that the gifts were cunning traps and he had become enmeshed in a complex scheme of the Evil One to destroy all that was good....

Bearing an Hourglass Details

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From Reader Review Bearing an Hourglass for online ebook

Stephen says

3.5 stars. A good sequel to the excellent On a Pale Horse. I love the premise of this series and I thought the first book was original, well written and a lot of fun. This book, while not up to the level of the first is still pretty good and I will certainly read more of the series at some point.

Chak says

Bearing an Hourglass was a disappointment. On a Pale Horse was a hard act to follow. Hourglass was off to a quick and compelling start, but once Norton became so downtrodden that he was easy to manipulate into accepting the Office of The Incarnation of Time, the book started to unravel for me. He was a well-developed protagonist who was easy to root for, and the idea of Time living his life backward was a good one (in fact, it was this idea that got me to pick up the first three books of this series) but I was annoyed by the clunky explanations of the physics behind it all (though I appreciated the effort) as well as the transparently elementary nature of Satan's tricks and how Norton's playing a part in them was insulting to the intelligence of his character. Also, Norton's debates with Satan paled in comparison with Zane's debates with him in On a Pale Horse, which were more thought-provoking and morally ambiguous.

I will go on to the third book in the series, however, because I'm still intrigued by the story and love the fact that these novels can be read as stand-alone books and probably can be read in any order (except that On a Pale Horse does establish the reality of Earth a little bit in the beginning, but it would be easy to pick up no matter where you started). I forgot to mention in my review of On a Pale Horse that I LOVED the Author's Note at the end (and loved it in this book as well). Anthony lets you into his entire world - the personal world of his family, his life, his writing process, the publishing business, pretty much everything that went on in his world while he was writing the book. That was even more fascinating than the book for me. The Note at the end of each book is long, but very worth reading.

Juan Valera says

Time is a complicated concept. Humans have known this ever since we first began to entertain the idea of time travel and of paradox. So it should come as no surprise that "Bearing an Hourglass" is a seriously complex novel, with storylines crisscrossing each other at every opportunity. I mean this in a good way; "Hourglass" is a great book if you're looking for a plot that begins as an indecipherable mass of intrigue and slowly (Very. Slowly.) introduces the reader to it, even as the plot itself races onward. One thing to keep in mind; this book would be approximately 12 pages long if not for all the time traveling going on. The story twists and weaves within itself such that the reader will return to a point in time that happened in chapter 1 sometime around chapter 15, but with the perspective of someone that now knows exactly what's happening. At that point in chapter 1, nobody, not even the protagonist, and definitely not the reader, knew what was going on.

Being a writer myself, there's always a little something to be learned from the books I read. Anthony is a favorite author of mine, especially because his writing style seems subtly different in every story, as if he

changes his writing to match the mood of the story, rather than all his work "sounding" the same. It dawned on me that writers don't need to maintain the same voice throughout their books, even through a series like this one. Throughout the Incarnations of Immortality series, Anthony has sounded more and more like the characters that star in the books; in Upon a Pale Horse he sounded depressed and pensive to match the Incarnation in that book (Death). In Hourglass, he develops a knowledgeable (wise, even) tone as the story progresses, sounding more like my idea of Father Time than anyone has a right to. I've learned to do the same in my writing: put enough of yourself into your characters that readers can recognize you in it. At this, Anthony is a master.

Sarabeth says

I read this book in Middle School and thought it was amazing. I just had the chance to re-read this and found myself asking, "What was I thinking?!"

Norton's story was interesting at first, but then somehow the story goes to hell! He ends up in a space western, then randomly in a fantasy thread, all of which take pages and pages that just seem like filler. There is no relation between these "adventures" and the main plot line of the story. When the plot DOES decide to make an appearance, it proceeds agonizingly slowly. Have you ever seen shows/books where people stand around and TALK about the scheme rather than just IMPLEMENTING IT? That's what we have here. Most of the book is Anthony entertaining strange ideas about time paradoxes that belong in a physics textbook, not a story. He doesn't even bother making everything tie in together. In other places there are logic questions that are clearly Anthony showing the readers how intelligent he thinks he is.

However, the most egregious sin of this book was its objectification of women. Every single women sounded the same- big breasted, thin, nice rump, shining hair, etc. "These kinds" of women were the ones Norton found attractive. Others were characterized as stout or heavy-set, the worse case being when the author describes Lyla as having "flab" on her chin and thighs and Norton's reaction of disgust. Truly, it seems that Anthony's ideas of beauty and what women should look like are as flawed as his plot. Why not just take Barbie and replace her hair color, then you'd have each "heroine" in this absurd book. The only way I survived this novel was by skimming most of it. The Author's Note is also incredibly pompous, with Piers Anthony claiming he doesn't allow for writers block and considers those who have it to be lazy and 'not really there to work.' I salute his efforts to make his process transparent to fans, but in the end he just comes across even more full of himself.

Sabrina says

As a fan of the Fantasy and Sci-Fi genres, I felt an obligation to like Piers Anthony's novels. I have tried time and time again with this book, Wielding a Red Sword, Isle of Woman, and the Xanth series. In every book, I keep coming back to feeling like I'm reading a dirty old man's wildest fantasy.

Xanth is the most lighthearted and easiest to read of the Anthony books I've read. At least I'm not as offended at the shallowness of the characters as I am in Anthony's other books.

Isle of Woman really upset me. As an Anthropologist, I was looking forward to reading a novel about characters set in the early days of human civilization, but it quickly devolved into a caveman sex-romp. No, that wasn't as interesting as it sounds.

But this book, oh wow. This was all I could stand. Every female character was introduced from the standpoint of her sexual appeal and there was not a single brain between them all. Bare-bosomed, giggling, freshly-bathed, soap-slippery, sex-starved, brainless bimbos were all over this book. I got physically very angry at the countless descriptions of Orlene and her decolletage and Clotho's lithe suppleness.

Speaking of Clotho, why was it that Norton was only in love with the Clotho aspect of fate? If he were truly in love with the woman who was all three aspects, shouldn't he be equally as pleased with Lachysis? Especially since Lachysis was probably much closer to Norton's own age. This is about as stereotypically shallow as possible.

In a word: Disgusting. In two words: Absolutely abysmal.

Finally, this book is an intellectual vacuum. I got this one from the library in order to entertain myself while on the treadmill. This book actually made me dread working out EVEN MORE than I already did.

I no longer feel obligated to like Piers Anthony. I'm far too offended by this book to ever think about reading another one of this old man's sexual fantasies. I felt the need to shower all the filth off of me after reading this book, but then I thought about how much that would have pleased Anthony and I decided against it.

Yuck, Yuck, YUCK!!! :P

Diana says

This isn't my favorite in the series, it definitely suffers from second in a series syndrome. However, it's a definite must to read because if you skip it you'll miss seeing how the incarnations and their stories are intertwined. There are multiple things in the series you'll miss out on if you don't read this one. Which is why even though it's not a favorite I still give it a 3-star rating. Just remember when these were written there weren't many strong women in the Fantasy genre.

David Staniforth says

Well here's a book I read around thirty years ago and, upon joining Goodreads some years back, awarded in retrospect a five star rating. Having just reread it, I can't justify those five stars and now feel it is more like a 3.5. Obviously the book has not changed, but I have, and thinking about how we react to a text in these circumstances has proved to be a rather interesting exercise. I am more educated as a reader than I was back then and, as such, am more aware of glaring faults in the narrative that would previously have gone unnoticed. The tale is a complex one, as one would expect any story about time to be, but the author makes it unnecessarily complicated and is then forced into a need for over explanation, pushing the style towards much telling rather than showing. I also found some of the dialogue clunky and unrealistic, as that too tried

to shoehorn further explanation. For example, Chronos meets a different incarnation for the first time and this incarnation says, "of course you live backwards while I live forwards." Both characters already know this fact, so it is only there to remind the reader, despite already having been established several tens of times. There are also several chunks of chapter-long text that I had to skip, because as a more informed reader, I just found them to be unnecessary, laboured, and boring.

Sarah Jane says

Despite my indifference (and at times annoyance) with *On a Pale Horse*, I went ahead and plowed through *Bearing an Hourglass*. I won't rant at length about this one, but suffice it to say that I'm equally unimpressed. I'll reiterate, for the sake of those I know who swear by this series, that I probably would have enjoyed it when I was younger (read: less discerning). Piers Anthony's writing is just...well...not great. I think this series suffers from a flaw I've found in many fantasy books: when an author attempts to apply too many powers and too many limits to power simultaneously, it's very hard to prevent contradictions and loopholes in the story.

For anyone that isn't familiar with the series, it's seven books long and each book focuses on a particular "incarnation of immortality." They are the incarnations of Death, Time, Fate, Nature, War, Evil, and Good. The general basis of the series, as near as I can tell, is Satan attempting to gain power and the other earthly incarnations (meaning those other than God) attempting to prevent Satan's rise to power. Pretty straight forward.

The plots of the first two books have been interesting, although I found many drawbacks. Most notably, as I said before, the writing is just so-so. Anthony is very redundant. Dialogue is mediocre. For example, characters tend to say exactly what they're going to do and what they think. To give you an idea of what I mean, a moment in the book might go something like this:

Zane saw the girl falling from the roof. "Oh gosh! She's falling! I should save her. Don't panic. What can I do? Maybe I should catch her. Yeah. I'll catch her. I should move under her." Zane moved forward to catch the girl. "Look, I caught you!"

Obviously, that's an exaggeration, but not by much. Needless to say, after 300 pages, it gets a bit old.

Many parts of the book are contradictory, too. Others just don't make sense. For example, people moving backwards in time don't usually say, "emit ni drawkcab gnivom m'I." They say, "time in backward moving I'm." Although, sometimes they do the latter. It's not consistent. Also, some people moving backward in time are aware of said movement, but can't do anything about it (that's acceptable) but other people can. In general, I just find things like that frustrating.

Finally, both *On a Pale Horse* and *Bearing an Hourglass* had deus ex machina endings. Super lame.

Basically, my opinion is the same as before: if you're ever stuck in an airport and your flight is delayed for eight hours and one of these books is available, go ahead and check it out. They're not awful. They're just not that great.

Charlotte English says

The underlying premise of this series is that concepts such as Death, Time, Nature, Fate and War each have an immortal incarnation: a mortal man or woman who takes on the role for a given period of time, and whose job is to take care of all worldly matters pertaining to that concept.

The first story introduced Death to us. Bearing an Hourglass is the second book, and as might be guessed from the title it's about Time. Norton is an ordinary man who agrees to take on the role of Time after a series of misfortunes and disappointments in his mortal life – specifically, the loss of the woman he loved.

As Chronos, he is obliged to live his life backwards, which makes interaction with other people confusing and difficult. This is merely one of a number of mind-bending ideas set forth in this story. Mr Anthony's grasp of complicated time-based paradoxes is considerably better than mine, I admit, but I enjoyed the challenge of keeping the convoluted plot straight as Chronos does increasingly weird things with the flow of time.

Learning his new job is difficult for Norton, as might be expected, but this is further complicated by the activities of Satan, the Incarnation of Evil. Norton may be brand new on the job, but he's launched into the thick of things right away as Satan tries to use Norton's inexperience for his own ends. This portrayal of Satan wasn't that original, I suppose: he's a sharp-suited, urbane, smooth-talking businessman. But I didn't mind that; he was fun to read about, and his plots are suitably fiendish.

Which brings me to an interesting point about this series. Satan's latest plot relates back to the tricks he was pulling in book one (On a Pale Horse). Having previously read that book I could see some of it coming; if I hadn't it would have been a different experience, as most of it would have been a surprise. Knowing what Satan was trying to pull somewhat earlier than Norton didn't at all ruin the experience though; it was interesting, and a clever way to connect the two books.

I had mixed feelings about Norton himself. He is a bloke with a one-track-mind. Even after he loses the one woman he sincerely loved, he's so easily distracted by an attractive female (of which there is always a very ready supply). He lets go of the aforesaid former love rather easily in the end, and this supposedly driving motivation just fades away. He came across as a rather flimsy hero, then, whose love isn't worth much.

All told though, this was an enjoyable read. The first book was more fantasy than science fiction; this one was more science fiction than fantasy. I'm looking forward to the third book: I'm sure there are some more surprises in store.

Joan says

This is the one I dislike the most in this otherwise wonderful series. Anthony mentioned in his author's note that he had to do a fair amount of research for this title. It shows. Instead of it being incorporated more easily there are large infodumps in this title which are mostly confusing rather than interesting. He also mentioned Asimov in his note. He needed to leave the hard science to Asimov in my opinion. Another problem is that a substantial amount of the book is simply Norton trying to figure things out in a logical manner. Again, it was not terrifically interesting. I suspect Anthony was trying to show his audience how to reason things out but it was not a well done lesson. Finally, Satan seems more two dimensional in this title than in "On a Pale

Horse". Luckily I know I loved the rest of the series so I'm willing to take a chance on it since otherwise I dislike this title enough I doubt I'd read the rest of the series. I was rather hoping I'd like this title better now that I have more time but time didn't seem to help me understand Chronos any! Recommended to those who loved Pale Horse enough to want to read the entire series. I promise you it gets better.

Dj says

2.5 stars really. Unsatisfying ending. Sections are standalone short stories with the main character, but unrelated to overall plot in every but the vaguest sense. These sections are bad sci-fi, extremely shallow and fun. The meat of the book is mediocre. Overall a forgettable book. The shining light are several 30 page stretches of shallow fun. This being the second book of his I've read, I now am saddened by the thought that adolescents (and please not adults) would become introspective by Piers Anthony's implicit statements on the human condition. I hope that doesn't sound uppity, but he's really not good for that purpose. I heard that this is the low point of the series, so I'll continue on.

Lyn says

The second in Piers Anthony incantations of immortality series, this was as imaginative as On a Pale Horse, maybe even more thought went into the story, but it seemed bogged down by the time travel eccentricities.

I have since found that most time travel stories fall quickly into complicated storytelling but this one was especially convoluted. It could be that Anthony was ambitious in his design, but I think the story would have been improved by a more linear approach.

Barry says

This book's unusual concept of the main character living his life backward in time is interesting and makes the book worth reading as a learning experience if nothing else. Being the second book in the series, it could stand alone though I wouldn't recommend reading it without reading On a Pale Horse first. Sometimes the character's interactions with others are hard to follow, but it is an enjoyable book.

Matt Guion says

Book two in the Incarnations of Immortality series is about the Incarnation of Time. Now, if you know me, you know that I love stories about time and time travel. My favorite book is The Time Traveler's Wife, my favorite movie is Back to the Future. This storytelling idea holds a great deal of fascination for me. Bearing an Hourglass features the Incarnation of Time, someone who can travel to any point in time, can bend time to his will, and who freaking lives backwards. This should be a book of endless fascination, one of my favorites in the whole series.

This book bored the ever-loving snot out of me.

Even as a kid, when I first read these books, this one was my least favorite. 1, 6, and 7 were favorite, I liked 3 and 5, 4 was okay, and 2 I read because it was part of the series and I felt like I had to. Many series suffer from what I like to call “Second Book Syndrome,” where the first book sets expectations so high that the second book is just a complete disappointment, either because the first book was just too good, or because after achieving the publishing success he needed with the first book, the author doesn’t feel the need to try as hard on the second book. And I’ll admit that the expectations set by *On a Pale Horse* do factor into my opinion of *Bearing an Hourglass*.

On a Pale Horse used the personification of Death to give us a deep, multi-faceted, and unique look at the concept of death and dying, helping us see it in ways that we, perhaps, hadn’t considered before. Anthony’s intentions at the time, stated pretty early on, was to do a book for each of the five incarnations (Death, Time, Fate, War, and Nature), so my expectation was that this would be another idea-driven book like the first one, this one exploring the nature of time, the perceived passage of time, cause and effect, and many of the other things that are usually pretty deeply explored in time travel stories like *The Time Traveler’s Wife* and *Back to the Future*. Unfortunately, the only things that were really explored were the technical details of how the hourglass--Time’s magical artifact which allowed him to travel--worked, which were mind-numbingly boring, and the fact that Time, or Chronos, lives backwards, which Anthony tried to explain so often and so thoroughly that not only did it leave nothing to the imagination, but it ended up making the idea way more confusing than it needed to be. In short, rather than exploring time from a philosophical perspective, Anthony just explained and explained and explained and (my God, shut up already!) EXPLAINED! how time worked in his own particular universe.

In lieu of an idea-driven story, I would have settled for a character-driven one. Those I will always accept. But if Anthony’s writing has one weakness (and it doesn’t. It has several. But this is one of them) it’s his characterization. He has one male protagonist and one female protagonist that he writes about constantly. Yeah, he’ll change the names and appearances (kind of) and maybe add a few personality quirks, but that’s all they: quirks. Fundamentally, they’re the same. And Norton, the man who becomes the Incarnation of Time, is no different. He’s bland, boring, and absolutely forgettable as a character. Yeah, he has this tragic romance at the beginning that he has to come to terms with, but even that’s just glanced over, just this little side story that doesn’t really go anywhere. None of the characters left any impression on me whatsoever. Even the office of Time itself is uninteresting, which is really something coming from me. The first book gave us quite a bit of detail on what exactly the Incarnation of Death does, how he does it, and why it’s important. But even after reading this book at least twice, I have no idea why the Incarnation of Time is even needed or what exactly he does, aside from travel through time and sleep with Fate.

Finally, given what an interesting story Anthony set up in the first novel with the war between God and Satan, and given that this story is taking place twenty years after the first, when some major blow is supposed to be struck against Satan, I would have been perfectly fine with a purely plot-driven story. But even though I can tell that Norton defeated Satan and won the day, it really feels like absolutely nothing was accomplished. So little happens in this story, because when it comes right down to, there IS NO PLOT. There are a bunch of little subplots, but absolutely no main plot. There are whole chapters in this book that contain nothing but pure distraction, offering only minimal connection to the story. In fact, the story in this book offers only minimal connection to the overall story of the series. There is no reason why you can’t completely skip this book. You would lose nothing in the overall story.

I really feel like this was a book that Piers Anthony felt obligated to write, but he had no idea what to do with it. I think this really illustrates that Anthony’s strength lies in fantasy, not science fiction. The sci-fi elements

he does have in here are either poorly explained or overexplained . . . or in many cases, both. There is nothing driving this book, not ideas, not characters, not plot, and it really shows. I'm willing to admit that my expectations were set pretty high by the first book, but it really feels like Anthony wasn't even trying on this one. It's just a bad book, plain and simple.

Worth rating: Worthless

Krissy says

DNF 63%
