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Piers Anthony

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1. Sos the Rope (1968)
2. Var the Stick (1972)
3. Neq the Sword (1975)

The novels take place on a post-apocalyptic Earth. The history is not given in detail, but the landscape is filled with the ruins of the previous civilization, and large areas (referred to as the "badlands") are still deadly because of radiation, presumably from nuclear war. In North America, there are three main civilizations: the crazies and underworlders, and the nomads who are the main focus of the novels.

Battle Circle Details

Date : Published September 1st 1986 by Avon Books (first published 1978)

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Author : Piers Anthony

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From Reader Review Battle Circle for online ebook

MBybee says

As a kid, I really liked this series.

Re-reading it as an adult - all I can say is "what was I *thinking*"

I really regret going back and re-reading this series. I'm bummed, because I went to great effort to track it down this year.

James Beach says

Thoroughly enjoyed this post-apocalyptic trilogy. Make no mistake, this is straight-up pulp; late 1960s - early 1970s science fiction/fantasy in all it's greasy glory. It's focused on hand-to-hand action, speckled with alternately insightful and heavy-handed exploration of human nature and ethics vs. survival. It also brings to life an entire and rather creative background world for why such a culture of fighting would even exist in an apocalyptic aftermath.

I thought the trilogy reads well as one pulp novel in three acts. I also love this particular edition's cover in all its 70s magnificence. The cover illustration continues on the inside flap like the gatefold to a Hawkwind album. For all I know it was airbrushed on the side of a van.

Tom Liotta says

Strange book. Others have said 'guilty pleasure' and I can't think of a better description.

I started reading it one evening and didn't put it down until finishing the first book of the trilogy. The next evening I read the second book, and the evening after I read the third. I had three straight days of work in a slightly foggy state of mind.

It's been fifteen years since then. I still can't explain why I let myself get so absorbed in it.

How do you rate a book from an experience like that? I guess by calling it a 'guilty pleasure'.

Jim says

A friend of mine told me that this was the worst book he had ever read. I decided to read it myself, because I was certain that no book could be as bad as what he had described to me. I was wrong. This book is absolutely terrible. Every Piers Anthony cliché is here, from the puerile sexuality to the flaccid attempts at social commentary. And the finale of the book involves the sword-swinging hero replacing his hand with a glockenspiel. Seriously. Simply a wretched book by any measure.

Levi Muller says

I really loved the concept of a barbaric culture being supported by a group of intellectuals hiding in a mountain. I've been told by Piers himself that this book is nothing like his other work.

This book lead me to the Conan stories by Robert Howard because I loved the fighting and reading about the barbarian culture.

Thomas says

Specifically, I didn't read the entire book, since I'd already finished *Sos the Rope*. I just picked this up with *Var the Stick* and trundled on through the rest of the series. Well ... I guess "trundled" is a bit of a loaded word, and one that really belies how much I sped through the last two books. I finished them in three days, and actually felt some eagerness to finish them. *Var the Stick* actually developed a bit more than I would have expected from Mr. Anthony, based on the sexism of the first book and the *Apprentice Adept* series, but then he had to descend into the depths of statutory rape and ruin it all. And dammit, up to that point, he had actually been making a case for women as individuals, even in the setting of the novel! So that was a little disappointing.

Neq the Sword is the book of the trilogy that I remember most, because it had a heart-wrenching scene near the start. I remember it devastating me when I first read it; this time around, I recognized it for its pathos, but it didn't have the same sort of effect on me. Maybe I'm more jaded now; maybe my sensibilities for that sort of thing are more mature than they were 27 years ago; or maybe it just wasn't as good as I thought it was. Regardless, it was a bit of a let-down, and a reminder of why you shouldn't revisit the stuff that you treasured when you were younger.

Story-wise, I liked the development of *Var the Stick*, as the character development felt more sincere, and the plot started to feel more substantial. There was a lot of travel in the book, enough for the characters to go halfway around the world, and it started to feel a little silly when they got to China. There was a rather gratuitous and overly-descriptive section where the characters encountered a group of Amazons (no buxom misses here; no, instead Anthony presents the assertive women as gross in body and sexuality, with a group of mutilated-but-not-castrated men to keep the female bloodline alive), and from there it just kept going downhill. *Neq the Sword* was too scattered of plot and motive, and I had a hard time finding much satisfaction from the story. By the end, the scattered remnants of the previous society was pulling back together to recreate itself, but by then Anthony was back in his form, where the eight women in that society would be passed among the forty men to keep the population alive. Yawn.

Despite all my complaining, I did find the storytelling gripping and compelling. As I mentioned above, I finished the book over three days, even as I found myself thinking it wasn't going to get much better. It's not the stupidest or worst book I've ever read, but having re-read the entire series, along with the *Apprentice Adept* series, I find myself having to come to terms with the fact that I've simply outgrown Piers Anthony. I think I had already known that, but now I don't have to wonder about it anymore.

Jrossi says

I am not sure what I learned from this book except that I can like a book enough to read it twice cover to cover.

Post apocalyptic Earth where tribes of survivors meet in the "circle" to determine anything from who gets what woman to who gets the top bunk. They only use six different kinds of weapons (Sword, staff, sticks, daggers, club, or morning star) and never fight outside the circle.

Until along comes a warrior that no one can beat. He builds an empire and everything changes.

I read it once in high school and then again in my twenties. Really enjoyed it both times.

Kelmain says

I fun quick read or reread.

I reread this book recently more than thirty years after I read it originally. I occasionally experiment to see which books create a completely different impression today than they did when I was a teenager in the fairly early days of fantasy and SciFi. Many books I really enjoyed back then, don't hold up too well. Somewhat surprisingly, this one did. It's no master work by today's standards and there are some significant problems with the believability of the setting which would normally be a big problem for me, but these issues are countered by some nice human issues and interactions and some thought out plot development and balancing of the characters and their interactions across the three stories. Anthony doesn't spend gobs of time delving into the psyche of the characters but somehow the pace of the storytelling allowed me to fill in my own sense of the characters personalities and qualities while I was comfortably taking in the next bits of the storyline.

Anyway, it is worth a look if you are interested in sampling what SciFi was like in the late sixties and seventies through one of the more popular authors of the time.

Rhys says

When I was in my teens I read a lot of science fiction. It never occurred to me that there could be a science fiction author I wouldn't enjoy. Then I read *Rings of Ice* by Piers Anthony and I disliked it intensely. I read it all the way through, because I didn't realize that abandoning a book halfway was an option, but I remained wary of Anthony's work from that moment...

Much later I was tempted by the look of his BATTLE CIRCLE trilogy, so I began to read the first few pages, assuming they would be enough to make me not want to read more. The opposite happened. I found that the story drew me in. The opening of the first volume in the trilogy, *Sos the Rope*, is good. The entire novel is good, in fact, apart from the ending, which feels rather rushed. I was forced to modify my previous view of Anthony. He wasn't such a bad writer, after all! The second and third parts of the trilogy, *Var the Stick* and *Neq the Sword* are almost as good as the first, and they certainly move the story along rapidly in unexpected directions.

The world that Anthony has created for this book is a post-apocalyptic society where honourable barbarians fight each other in the 'circle' using only six approved weapons (though actually it's acceptable to use certain other weapons too, such as the net, although very few do). They fight for various stakes, including mastery (the right to use the loser as an unpaid worker), women, sheer fun and to keep fit. This is an intensely masculine world. Even though a couple of the strongest characters in the trilogy are women, even they never question the set up, which is that man is the warrior and the weapon exists to give him children. One of the best characters is Tyl of Two Weapons, who comes over as one of the most reasonable of the men in every way.

Anthony is good at describing combat. He also has a grasp of complex emotions and politics. If there is one aspect that makes me uneasy as this story progresses, it is the young age of some of the women treated as sexual objects. True, this is a tough society where life is short and children must mature quickly if they are going to survive. Nonetheless, I winced a little when the character Vara, who rejects the advances of a man when she is eight years old, is considered by the author ready for sexual relations at age eleven. This seemed somewhat unnecessary and unpleasant.

I can't say I am ready to rush out to read any more of Anthony's books, but I am not closing my mind to them. *Tarot* looks the most interesting.

Laura says

Battle Circle is a trilogy of science fiction novels by Piers Anthony. Originally published separately, the trilogy was later combined into a single volume.[1] The three novels are: 1. *Sos the Rope* (1968) 2. *Var the Stick* (1972) 3. *Neq the Sword* (1975) The novels take place on a post-apocalyptic Earth. The history is not given in detail, but the landscape is filled with the ruins of the previous civilization, and large areas (referred to as the "badlands") are still deadly because of radiation, presumably from nuclear war. In North America, there are three main civilizations: the crazies and underworlders, and the nomads who are the main focus of the novels.

Andrew Neal says

I got this book by trading a stick or a honey bun wrapper or something on swaptree.com.

I then left it in the bathroom and read it there over the course of several weeks. [It's important that you now check out the cover of this book by clicking on it. There are several editions, but the one I have pinned this review to is the one that was sitting on the toilet. Go ahead, click on the cover.:]

Two wonderful things happened because of this:

1. Anyone who visited our house and used the bathroom inevitably came out with a stunned expression on their face and said, "Whoa, what's up with Battle Circle?" Instant conversation!
2. My wife and I adopted the best euphemism ever for voiding: "Yo, I'm heading to the Battle Circle!" AWESOME.

One less wonderful thing happened because of this:

I read *Battle Circle*. I enjoyed it, but make no mistake, it was dumb.

Dave says

Xanth fans, be warned. This is not a book full of colorful magic, bosoms, and puns.

If all you've read of Piers Anthony is the Xanth series, you may not know this, but Piers hates his protagonists. He enjoys hurting them, and then hurting them some more, and then hurting the people they love just for good measure. Sometimes it's hard on the reader. Or at least it was on me.

That said, this trilogy is excellent. The titular *Battle Circle* is the foundation of a postapocalyptic society where victory in the Circle earns you respect, property, and leadership... at least until someone else beats you.

Into this setting are cast three characters, Sos the Rope, Var the Stick, and Neq the Sword. Between them they will change the world- whether for the better or the worse remains to be seen.

Hold on tight, it's a bumpy ride.

Conspiracychic says

When I began reading the *Battle Circle* series, I knew not to start off with preconceived notions of a Piers Anthony novel. My introduction to Piers Anthony was through his *Xanth* series as a pre-teen, but since then I had read bits of his *Adept* series, *Firefly*, and even the lesser known *Pornucopia*. That said, I wasn't expecting the style or tone of his post-apocalyptic *Battle Circle* books.

The series centers around a formal weaponized ritual duel, whether for honor, for women, or for practice. Anthony writes the martial arts action in the series rather well, casual but filled with tension, not bogged down with so much detail that you have to reread a paragraph to imagine what happened. All-in-all, I'd recommend this book people who enjoy a good post-apocalyptic story and possess a perverse or deviant sense of humor and/or people who don't normally read books. Warning to all those who haven't read a Piers Anthony book outside of Xanth: IT GETS WEIRD.

Danny says

When I was in grade school, someone gave me *A Spell For Chameleon*, and I thought it was awesome. I proceeded to spend the next couple years reading any Piers Anthony novel that I could get my hands on...including *Battle Circle*. I thoroughly enjoyed his work back then.

Fast forward 30 years, and I recently came upon a stash of his books that I had packed away. I broke out *Battle Circle* and a couple others and reread them. I'd say this novel in particular stands up to the test of time for some YA post-apocalyptic novel. It was probably a little ahead of its time back then, so it still is a pretty

fresh take on things.

That being said, I'll never read another Piers Anthony novel again, and I plan on chucking the novels I do have into recycling. Rereading some of these as an adult, I've come to one conclusion...the dude is a pedophile. I know it's not just me, because when I googled my thoughts, all kinds of things came up by people who agreed...and I'm not talking about some holy rollers or ultra-conservatives. I'm a pretty liberal guy, and even I was feeling pretty icky reading thru some parts.

So, draw your own conclusions, but this reader is out.

Stuart Parr says

Another example of things you remember from your youth which are, in reality, a bit crap and you only realise this when you come back to them when older (and perhaps wiser). This book is fantasy/sci-fi pulp from the late 1960s replete with slightly dull characters, unbelievable plot twists (and not in a good way) and uncomfortable sex references (again, not in a good way). Anthony's post-nuclear holocaust world of wandering warriors bound by honour to settle everything in the battle circle, a society perpetuated by pre-holocaust science, is not very convincing to begin with and only becomes less believable as you read as a man named Sol becomes Sos then nameless building an empire of nomadic warriors. The three books follow different stories but all have some common characters so is structurally interesting but my interest waned swiftly as the pages turned. My advice: let the past lie; if you read this in the past, remember it fondly but don't follow that little voice in your head wondering whether or not you recall it properly and seek to re-read it, you'll only be disappointed. If you've not read it, there are plenty of better books out there to try instead.
