

AN INTERVIEW
WITH
PIERS ANTHONY

**FOR THE 2006 MUSE ONLINE
WRITERS' CONFERENCE**

THE FIRST VIRTUAL CONFERENCE OF ITS KIND

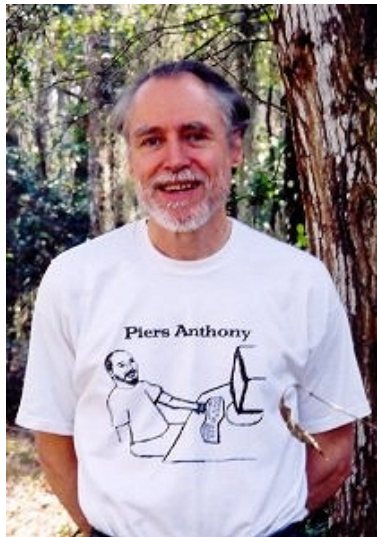


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**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS SUPPLIED BY MEMBERS OF
THE MUSEITUP CLUB
AN ONLINE CRITIQUE GROUP FOR WRITERS**

EDITED BY KATHE GOGOLEWSKI

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About Piers Anthony – a (very) brief history



Piers Anthony, born Piers Anthony Dillingham Jacob on August 6, 1934, is best known for his science fiction and fantasy series, Xanth, and has published an inexhaustible number of books, over 130 to date. This includes the Xanth series and his collaborations, making him one of the more prolific science fiction and fantasy authors. The Xanth series comprises 30 of those books. He published the first in the series, *A Spell for Chameleon*, in 1977, and the latest, *Air Apparent*, is due in 2007, thirty years later. Many of his books have appeared on the New York Times Best Seller list.

A Spell For Chameleon

Piers' arrived with his family as a child to live in the USA from Great Britain. He served in the United States military for two years, and taught high school English for a short time before turning to writing as a full-time occupation. Today, he lives with his wife in a remote area on a tree farm in Florida. He is a vegetarian, an agnostic, a liberal and a workaholic. He professes to dislike travel, and therefore appears only rarely at conventions.*

In the interest of helping aspiring writers, he maintains a website with an Internet survey on electronic publishers and related services. His site won the 2003 Friend Of Epic award for service to the electronic publishing community. On his website at www.hipiers.com, he hosts an informative, bi-monthly newsletter, which won the Special Recognition for Service to Writers award from "Preditors and Editors" circa 2000.

Along with Random House and others, Piers is an investor in Xlibris, an online book and manuscript publishing service.

* Editor's note: Organizers of the Muse Online Writers' Conference are pleased to offer Piers a writer's convention where he does not need to make a physical appearance.

The Interview

The Museitup Club members, Kathe Gogolewski, and Lea Schizas, club founder, would like to thank Piers Anthony for graciously agreeing to this online interview. The Museitup Club members emailed their questions to Kathe, who in turn, emailed them to Piers. His answers are below. Please enjoy.



Piers Anthony at Oasis 19, May 27, 2006

Questions about Piers and his writing:

1. Question: You have published so many books. How many hours a day do you write? Or do you write a certain number of pages or words before quitting for the day? Do you take scheduled breaks from writing? How long does it take you to produce an average-sized novel, from idea to completed draft? How many rewrites does that usually include?

Piers: I write in whatever time I have available. Because of my wife's incapacity, so that I take time for making meals, washing dishes, and shopping, this now amounts to about 6 hours a day, from which is subtracted the time it takes to answer letters, and catch up on chores. So a more realistic estimate is about four hours a day. I am now completing Xanth #32, titled *Two to the Fifth*, and it is taking me about three months following a month making notes for it part time. So call it three to four months. I normally write the first draft, make any spot revisions that occur to me, and edit it from the beginning. In effect, two drafts. But I should say that I have had a lot of experience writing novels, so am very efficient; other writers would have difficulty doing it on my schedule.

2. Question: Do you ever experience writers' block? If so, what do you do about it?

Piers: I don't experience writer's block, because long ago I worked out a solution to that problem. I have a text file where I write my narrative, and a parallel file where I make notes relating to it. Essentially, when my text stalls, I go to the notes file and write something like: "John just took Marsha into his arms. What happens next? My mind is blank. Maybe he asks her for a drink of water? No, I don't think he's thirsty. Oh - maybe he kisses her. Try that." Then I resume writing, having figured it out. Sometime I have pages of notes before I find the answer, but eventually this system always comes through for me. At the end of the day I print out my text and my notes, because sometimes, maybe weeks

later, I have forgotten why I wrote the scene the way I did, and the notes will remind me.

3. Question: Do you have techniques for coming up with new story ideas, or do they simply come to you?

Piers: New story ideas come to me all the time. Where technique comes into play is developing them to fit actual stories. It's like making a stone wall; constantly necessary to fit the irregular stones into a regular pattern. The finished wall may look straightforward, but putting it together can be a challenge.

4. Question: How do you form your characters? Do you plan them before you start writing?

Piers: Characters tend to form themselves. I start with what amounts to a template - a standard man, standard woman, standard child, etc. - then let them expand into their roles. Sometimes I am surprised. For example back in the 1960s when I was writing *Omnivore* I had three men. One was a vegetarian, another ate nothing but meat, and the third was in between, the omnivore. It was a bit dull. So I changed the omnivore into a beautiful woman. That single change transformed the whole project. I didn't see it coming.

5. Question: Have you ever killed off a favorite character or thought about it?

Piers: Yes, on occasion I kill a major character. I hate doing that.

6. Question: Do you outline or plot as you go, or a bit of both?

Piers: I summarize without using a formal outline. Then I figure things out as I go, as described in Question #2.

7. Question: Do you have any favorite novels (from those that you wrote)? If so, which one or ones and why? Are some more fun to write than others?

Piers: The older I get, and the more I read, the harder it is to have favorites. Sometimes I reread a favorite of my youth, but they seldom stand up well to my more critical present assessment. As a youth I loved Clifford Simak's *City*, which is actually about talking dogs, and Isaac Asimov's *Second Foundation*, and J R R Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. But I fear I would not, today.



Piers practicing archery

Oops, I misread the question, and thought it said not those I wrote. Yes, my favorite is *Tatham Mound*, a historical novel, because it is relevant to American History. Xanth is fun, but more like pure entertainment. My favorite recent Xanth is *Pet Peeve*. I just love that irascible bird!

Editor's note: We're glad to have both responses! 😊

8. Question: When you write a book, do you have a sequel in mind?

Piers: Sometimes I have a sequel in mind, sometimes not. Sometimes I never write the sequel, and sometimes a singleton novel develops sequels. An example is *A Spell for Chameleon*, which I wrote as an individual novel. Then the publisher wanted more fantasy from me, and I realized that there was more of that story to tell. I am now completing the 32nd Xanth novel, as mentioned in #1.

9. How much does the Hero's Journey play into your plotting either consciously or unconsciously?

Piers: Hero's Journey - I'm not sure I've heard that term before. But it is true that most fantasy is framed with a lead character who travels, discovering wonders and challenges as he goes, and my fantasy generally fits that pattern.

10. Question: What kind of books do you read for pleasure? Any favorite authors?

Piers: I read nonfiction for pleasure. I love learning things. I am about to read *An Inconvenient Truth* by Al Gore, which I suspect relates to the movie that never made it to this neck of the woods.

11. Question: What is your next writing project? What do you see yourself writing five years from now?

Piers: Once I complete the novel I'm in, I expect to write a few stories. I wrote a collection of stories *Relationships*, published by Venus Press www.venuspress.com. It is selling hardly any copies, but I didn't do it for money. I wrote a second collection that I haven't marketed. Still story ideas come to me, so I'll be writing them, hoping that eventually there'll be a market. This is of course the fate of most writers.

12. Question: If you could have done anything different in your writing career, what would it have been?

Piers: That's hard to say, because sometimes disaster has a silver lining. For example, my wife and I lost three babies, stillborn, in the first decade of our marriage. (We have now been married 50 years with two grown daughters.) We would have saved them if we could. But it was that lack of children that allowed my wife to go to work to earn our living while I stayed home to try to make it as a writer. Had those children survived, we could not have done that, and probably I would not have made it as a writer. So if I had a chance to change the past and save those babies, would I do it - and destroy my career?

Editor's Note: Had Piers the power, I'm sure many of us would like to think that he would have found a way to make it all happen – the career and the babies. As it is, it remains one of the mysteries of life.

Below: Piers with his granddaughter



Questions about writing in general:

13. Question: If you could distill one, vital key component to a good story, what would it be?

Piers: Clarity. If the reader doesn't understand what's happening, it hardly matters how good the story is in other respects.

14. Question: In general terms, what skill do you think is needed to become an author with longevity in the craft? Is there a quality or character trait that you think is critical for the committed writer or author to have?

15. Piers: A genuine love of writing. I have it, so I write constantly, though only a fraction ever sees print. Consider Theodore Sturgeon, perhaps the finest science fiction stylist ever and some wonderful imagination. But he hated to write, and seldom did it. If you surveyed a panel of genre-knowledgeable critics, chances are they would rank Sturgeon at the top, and Anthony won't even make the list. But chances also are that you have read and remember a fair amount of my fiction, and very little of Sturgeon's, if you know of him at all. So what do I have that he did not? I love to write.

16. Question: How much does luck or good timing and fortune play into securing a big name publisher?

Piers: Oh, thanks for this question! Luck is perhaps the biggest single element in getting well published. Folk think I'm being falsely modest when I say how much of my success I owe to luck, but I'm not. For the record, I regard myself as a fully competent writer, and the Critics as jerks. But luck is huge. Consider Xanth, the series that put me on the map. I was cheated by a publisher, protested, and got blacklisted for it by several publishers and even badmouthed by a writer's organization that was getting free books from that publisher. Well, six years passed, and then the wrong-doing editors got booted and new ones came in. They knew what had happened and invited me back. How about writing a fantasy novel for them? I wanted to work for the editor, whom I knew from when he edited magazines, so I wrote a fantasy novel, though I knew that fantasy was a drug on the market. That was *A Spell for Chameleon*. None of us knew that fantasy was about to become the hottest new thing on the market. So I rode Xanth right into best-seller-dom, when it was mainly ill-chance that got me into it. Luck? Tell me about it!

17. Question: It seems like in the past decade science fiction and fantasy have been broken down into ever more specific sub-genres. For example, you see it combined with horror, mystery, action-suspense and even romance. I've heard writers argue about what can be included in epic fantasy, and whether fantasy with romantic elements belongs in fantasy or fantasy romance. How do you think these trends will affect readers? For the writer, do you think these labels tend to spur creative ideas or not?

Piers: I see it as evolution and natural selection. When a species gets successful, it takes over the environment and radiates into subspecies. (If you don't believe in evolution, please consider this a fictional analogy to make my point. I'd hate to lose you as a reader.) Mankind is an example. So when the SF/Fantasy/Horror genre got successful, it split into three types, and now those are subdividing and crossing boundaries, forming new crossbreeds. That's fine with me. It means that both writers and readers can better find their true interests.

18. Question: What new directions do you foresee in science fiction and fantasy stories?

Piers: For all my interest in stories, the fact is I haven't been reading them. I'm too busy writing my own. So I can't comment here. You'll have to go to a reviewer with long-range experience and vision for this.

19. Question: What qualities do you think make for a good ezine by an author?

Piers: And I'm even more at a loss here. I haven't read author ezines.

20. Question: How do you select which books to review for your newsletter?

Piers: Chance and interest. Writers ask me, and I consider and decide. I'm a slow reader, and I don't like taking the three days or so that a novel takes me, while my own writing languishes. But I do try to support beginning writers. I don't enjoy killer reviews, so if I don't think I'll be able to give it a favorable blurb - that is promotional comment (one reader thought "blurb" was name-calling), I am unlikely to read it. But you know, there are more good novels out there now than I could ever keep up with.

21. Question: Do you find that science fiction and fantasy books fare just as well as ebooks as their print counterparts?

Piers: My impression is that they don't. The big sales and money remain with traditional print publication. The big exception is erotica, which is suppressed by traditional print. My erotic fantasy *Pornucopia* is doing well with electronic and small press editions, but of course it never got big publisher treatment.

22. Question: What is your personal view on bookstores shunning authors who are either self-published or published as a small POD house?

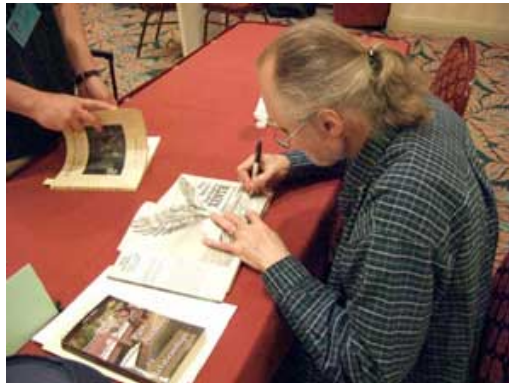
Piers: Traditional print publication is pretty much a closed shop that tries to stifle competition. I am disgusted. That's why I do my best to promote electronic and self publication. It is truly open to everyone.

23. Question: Do you think there is a better future for electronic publishing?

Piers: Yes.

24. Question: Would you advise new writers to work in more than one genre, or stick with one until they have perfected it?

Piers: Try different genres. I was a straight science fiction writer until I got into fantasy for serious reasons, as described in #15. I turned out to be far more effective in fantasy. You just can't know until you try.



Piers at Oasis, May, 2006

25. Question: Do you think new, unpublished writers should put more energy into seeking an agent, or should they submit directly to publishers?

Piers: Don't even try to get an agent until you have some published credits. You'll have to go directly to publishers, starting with electronic ones. It's a catch-22 situation; you can't get an agent before you are published, and you can't get traditionally published without an agent, as a general rule. I had half a dozen novels published before I got an agent.

25. Question: Is there anything we haven't asked you that you'd like to say?

Piers: General advice for aspiring writers: you should write because you want to write, rather than from any hope of money or fame. If you have trouble finding the time, as can be the case if you are home with children - well, I've been that route. I took care of our hyperactive daughter while my wife worked. I couldn't stay at the typewriter, because my little girl could fall or crash into furniture at any time. Once I paused to change stations on the radio, turned back, and she opened her mouth and it was full of blood. She had banged her face in that brief time. So I learned to write first drafts with pencil and clipboard, so I could literally drop them to catch my daughter. I learned to write interrupted, picking up in mid-word where I had left off. This worked. In fact I wrote that way for 17 years, until I computerized. So don't let fragmented time stop you.

Members of the Museitup Club who contributed questions:

John A.; email: califwriter2005@comcast.net

Christina Barber, website: <http://www.Christinabarber.net>

Rhobin Courtright; website: robinlee@ctec.net

Kay Erickson; email: phenila@gmail.com

Barbara Ehrentreu; email: Lionmother@aol.com

Kathe Gogolewski; email: kgogolewski@sbcglobal.net, website: www.TRI-Studio.com

Patricia Harrington; website: www.patriciaharrington.com.

Katie Hines; email: katiebug57@nctv.com

Charles Mossop; website: <http://cmossop0.tripod.com>

Donna Omo; email: greenwillow@gmail.com

Lea Schizas; email: museitupeditor@yahoo.ca website: <http://museitupclub.tripod.com>

Pamela A. Shirkey; website: <http://museitupclub.tripod.com/id13.html>

Jan Verhoeff, Marketing Guru; website: <http://janverhoeff.com>

Hi Piers The official homepage of
Piers Anthony and Xanth

PIERS ANTHONY'S WEBSITE: www.HiPiers.com Piers Anthony maintains a website that includes his books, an informative bi-monthly newsletter, as well as a lengthy list of publishers complete with commentaries for writers. In his introduction to the publisher survey, he writes:

This survey has no authority other than my own ornery wish to help hopeful writers make progress; I'm really a writer, not a surveyor. I am Piers Anthony, known primarily for my Xanth fantasy series, though I also do serious writing. I've had a

good deal of experience in the publishing school of hard knocks, hence my interest in making it easier for others. Updates directly from publishers are welcome, and so are comments about those publishers from those who use them. I have no agenda other than reasonable clarity, accuracy and relevance. I take publishers' claims on faith until learning otherwise; then I tell truth without much concern for consequences. I do not check with publishers before running positive or negative feedback on them; this survey is of the nature of a review, and anonymity of sources is maintained.

A Complete List of Piers Anthony's books as of 9/06:

BOOKS:

The Unstilled World 1956 (unsold novel)

Anthonology (collection: stories from 1963-85) Tor hc 1985, pb 86

Alien Plot (collection: stories from 1963-91) Tor hc 92, pb 93

Macroscope Avon pb 69, Gregg hc 86 (Audio cassette from Newman), Mundania Press 03

Prosth Plus Berkley pb 73; Tor pb 86, 2001

Race Against Time Hawthorn hc 1973; Tor pb 85

Rings of Ice Avon pb 74; reissued 87

Triple Detente DAW pb 74; Tor pb 88

Steppe (England 1976) Tor hc 85 pb 86

But What of Earth? Laser pb 76; Tor pb 89 (corrected edition)

Hasan Borgo hc tpb 77; Dell pb 79; Tor pb 86

Mute Avon pb 81, Xlibris 2001

Shade of the Tree Tor hc 86 pb 87

Ghost Tor hc 86 pb 87

Bio of an Ogre (Autobiography to age 50) Ace hc 88, pb 89 OP

Total Recall Morrow/Avon hc 89; pb 90

Hard Sell Tafford hc 90 Ace pb 93

Balook Underwood-Miller hc 90 Ace pb 1-97

Firefly Morrow/Avon hc 90; pb 92

MerCycle Tafford 91 Ace 92

Tatham Mound Morrow/Avon hc 91; pb 92

Killobyte Putnam/Ace hc 93 pb 1-94

Letters To Jenny (nonfiction) Tor hc 93, pb 94

Volk Internet 1996 and <http://www.Xlibris.com> 1997

Realty Check pulpless 99, Xlibris 2000, Write Way 2001

How Precious Was That While (memoire) Tor hc 01, pb 02

Relationships (collection) Venus Press <http://www.venuspress.com> 1/2006

SERIES:

Chthon Ballantine pb 67, Berkley pb 75, Ace pb 87, Xlibris 2000

Phthor Berkley pb 78, Ace pb 87, Xlibris 2000

Battle Circle Avon pb 78 (Sos the Rope, Var the Stick, Neq the Sword)

OF MAN AND MANTA Series (England)

Omnivore Ballantine pb 68; Avon pb 75; Mundania Press

Orn Avon pb 71; Mundania Press

OX Avon pb 76; Mundania Press

CLUSTER Series

Cluster Avon pb 77 (out of print)

Chaining the Lady Avon pb 78

Kirlian Quest Avon pb 78

Thousandstar Avon pb 80

Viscous Circle Avon pb 82

Tarot Ace 1987 (God, Vision, & Faith of, in one volume)

XANTH (fantasy series)

1 A Spell for Chameleon Del Rey pb 77

2 The Source of Magic Del Rey pb 79

3 Castle Roogna Del Rey pb 79

4 Centaur Aisle Del Rey pb 82

5 Ogre, Ogre Del Rey pb 82

6 Night Mare Del Rey pb 83

7 Dragon on a Pedestal Del Rey 83 pb

8 Crewel Lye Del Rey 85 pb

- 9 Golem in the Gears Del Rey 86 pb
- 10 Vale of the Vole Avon pb 87, TOR 2000
- 11 Heaven Cent Avon pb 88, TOR 2000
- 12 Man from Mundania Avon pb 89, TOR 2000
- 13 Isle of View Morrow hc Avon 90
- 14 Question Quest Morrow Avon 91
- 15 The Color of Her Panties Avon 92
- 16 Demons Don't Dream Tor 93
- 17 Harpy Thyme Tor 94
- 18 Geis of the Gargoyle Tor 95
- 19 Roc and a Hard Place Tor 95
- 20 Yon Ill Wind Tor 96
- 21 Faun & Games Tor 97
- 22 Zombie Lover Tor 98
- 23 Xone of Contention Tor 99
- 24 The Dastard Tor 2000
- 25 Swell Foop Tor 2001
- 26 Up in a Heaval Tor 2002
- 27 Cube Route Tor 2003
- 28 Currant Events Tor 2004
- 29 Pet Peeve Tor 2005
- 30 Stork Naked Tor 2006
- 31 Air Apparent Tor 2007
- 32 Two to the Fifth
- 33 (more to be written)

ADEPT Series

- Split Infinity Del Rey hc 80, pb 81
- Blue Adept Del Rey hc 81, pb 82
- Juxtaposition Del Rey hc 82, pb 83
- Out of Phaze Putnam/Ace hc 87, pb 88
- Robot Adept Putnam/Ace hc 88, pb 89
- Unicorn Point Putnam/Ace hc 89 pb 90
- Phaze Doubt Putnam/Ace hc 90 pb 91

INCARNATIONS OF IMMORTALITY Series

On a Pale Horse Del Rey hc 83, pb 84

Bearing an Hourglass Del Rey hc 84 pb 85

With a Tangled Skein Del Rey hc 85 pb 86

Wielding a Red Sword Del Rey hc 86 pb 87

Being a Green Mother Del Rey hc 87 pb 88

For Love of Evil Morrow hc 88, Avon pb 90

And Eternity Morrow hc 90, Avon pb 91

BIO OF A SPACE TYRANT Series

Refugee Avon pb 83, Gregg hc 86 Xlibris 2000

Mercenary Avon pb 84, Gregg hc 86 Xlibris 2000

Politician Avon pb 85, Gregg hc 86 Xlibris 2000

Executive Avon pb 85 Xlibris 2000

Statesman Avon pb 86 Xlibris 2000

The Iron Maiden Xlibris 2002

MODE Series

Virtual Mode Putnam/Ace hc 91; pb 91

Fractal Mode Putnam/Ace hc 92 pb 92

Chaos Mode Putnam/Ace hc 93 pb 95

DoOon Mode TOR hc 01, pb 02

GEODYSSEY Series

Isle of Woman Tor hc 93 pb 94

Shame of Man Tor hc 94 pb 95

Hope of Earth Tor hc 97

Muse of Art Tor hc 99, pb 01

Climate of Change (unfinished)

EROTIC FANTASY (adults only):

Pornucopia Tafford hc 89 tp 91, Mundania Press 02

The Magic Fart Mundania Press 03

CHROMAGIC:

Key to Havoc Mundania Press

Key to Chroma Mundania Press

Key to Destiny Mundania Press

Key to Liberty Mundania Press forthcoming

COLLABORATIONS:

The Ring w/Robert E. Margroff Ace pb 68, Tor pb 86, Xlibris 02

The E.S.P. Worm w/Margroff Paperback Library 709, Tor 86, Xlibris 02

DRAGON'S GOLD Series

Dragon's Gold w/Margroff Tor pb 87; Mundania Press

Serpent's Silver w/Margroff Tor hc 88 pb 89

Chimaera's Copper w/Margroff Tor hc 90 pb91

Orc's Opal w/Margroff Tor hc 90; pb 91

Mouvar's Magic w/Margroff hc 92 pb 93

Pretender w/Frances T. Hall Borgo 79; Tor pb 85

Dead Morn w/Roberto Fuentes SF Tafford hc 90; Ace pb 94

Uncollected Stars w/Malzberg/Greenberg/Waugh (anthology) Avon pb 86 OP

Visual Guide to Xanth w/Jody Lynn Nye Avon tpb 89 OP

Through the Ice w/Robert Kornwise Underwood/Miller HC 89; Baen pb 92

Caterpillar's Question w/Philip Jos, Farmer Putnam/Berkley hc 92 pb 95

If I Pay Thee Not in Gold w/Mercedes Lackey Baen hc 93 pb 94

Tales From the Great Turtle w/Richard Gilliam (anthology) Tor hc 94 pb 95

The Willing Spirit w/Alfred Tella Tor hc 96 pb 98

Spider Legs w/Clifford Pickover Tor hc 98 pb 99

Quest for the Fallen Star w/J R Goolsby and Alan Riggs Tor hc 98, pb 99

Dream a Little Dream w/Julie Brady Tor hc 99, pb 99

The Secret of Spring w/Jo Anne Tausch Tor hc 2000 pb 7-2001

The Gutbucket Quest w/Ron Leming Tor hc 2000 pb 5-2001

Jason Striker Martial Arts series Vol. 1 w/Robert Fuentes: Xlibris 01

Kiai! Berkley 74

Mistress of Death Berkely 74

Jason Striker Martial Arts series Vol. 2 w/Robert Fuentes: Xlibris 01

Bamboo Bloodbath Berkley 74

Ninja's Revenge Berkley 75

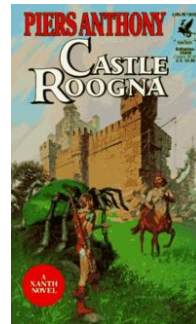
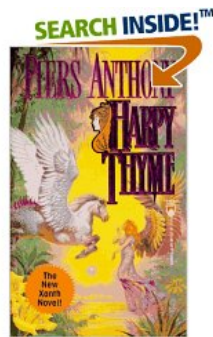
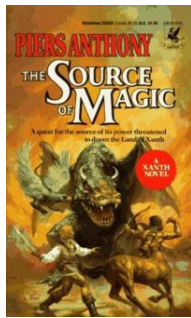
Jason Striker Martial Arts series Vol. 3 w/Robert Fuentes: Xlibris 01

Amazon Slaughter Berkley 76

Curse of the Ninja (first publication)

several short stories and articles

BOOKS PUBLISHED THROUGH 2005: 128



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September 12, 2006

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END

