

Ogre, Ogre Short Guide

Ogre, Ogre by Piers Anthony

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Contents

Ogre, Ogre Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Overview.....	3
About the Author.....	4
Setting.....	5
Social Sensitivity.....	6
Literary Qualities.....	7
Themes and Characters.....	9
Topics for Discussion.....	11
Ideas for Reports and Papers.....	12
For Further Reference.....	13
Related Titles.....	14
Copyright Information.....	15



Overview

Ogre, Ogre, like all of the books of the Xanth series, is a fantastic quest romance in which the main characters, only some of whom are human, encounter a series of adventures. While the adventures, mostly comic-heroic, are independent of each other, the internal quests of the principal characters structure the main action. For the halfnymph, half-human Tandy it is rescue from a demon who wishes to ravish her; for Smash, the ogre Good Magician Humfrey has provided a destination and a goal of finding something important without saying what it is.

Self-development or growth is the real objective, but the characters, Smash and Tandy, who must journey together, see this goal only dimly. Other characters join Smash and Tandy with quests of their own—a dryad for her tree, a brass woman for her people, a comely goblin for a mate, and a Siren for a pond and a merman. As one would expect in such quest romances, difficulties are overcome and the action ends happily.

What makes Anthony's Xanth series more enjoyable than the average sword-and-sorcery book is that neither brawn nor mysterious forces answer the threats to the group's existence.

Self-control, Tandy's learning how to use her tantrums, for example, and intelligence, or Eye-Queue, in Smash's case, often provide answers to problems facing the group. Cooperation is also important; each character has a special talent that comes to the aid of the others on the journey. Each character initiates action based on a talent that might appear a fault but which actually assists the others. Anthony's Xanth novels require thoughtful adventure, and readers may find much pleasure in figuring out how to deal with perils facing individual characters and the group during the journey.

Anthony has much fun with language in Ogre, Ogre and the rest of the Xanth series. Puns, Smash's silly couplets, and play with parts of words occur throughout the text. Such creatures as snapping alligator clamps, carnivorous tangle trees, and bottle flies live in Ogre, Ogre's pages, but so too do centaurs, basilisks, and dragons.

Even Dr. Seuss would be tickled by such masterpieces as "cattails growing in catsup where cattle grazed, fattening up in case some cataclysm came."

Anthony's environmentalism is everywhere present in the book, as many characters are concerned with balance and the effects of change. Even intellect's victory over wasteful brawn is a part of Anthony's message. Although the humor is ridiculous, it is still effective and enjoyable. Probably the nicest treat, however, is the prospect of reading other books in the same series.

Characters one enjoys do not die or fade away but appear as minor characters in other novels of the Xanth series.

About the Author

Piers Anthony Dillingham Jacob, born on August 6, 1934 in Oxford, England, was sent to the United States during World War II, when he was six years old for safe haven. Anthony's experience of education in America was not happy. Adolescence found him deeply depressed about school, his own physical frailty, the death of a favorite cousin, and his own family's frequent moves. To ease his inner turmoil Anthony began to write.

Success in writing led to success and happiness at Goddard College in Vermont, where Anthony graduated in 1956, the same year he married Carol Marble. His creative writing thesis at Goddard eventually led to the publication of the novel, *Sos the Rope*, but over a decade elapsed before it appeared in print. After graduation, Anthony tried to support himself and his wife in various ways, but neither the army, teaching, technical writing, nor free-lance writing proved satisfying. After many rejection letters, however, "Possible to Die" was published in 1963 to be followed by other science fiction stories.

Once his first novel *Chthon* was published in 1967, Anthony turned more to longer narratives such as the novel, a form he has used over eighty times.

Ethical concerns dominate Anthony's fiction and life. His vegetarianism is not simply a matter of healthy eating but is an expression of his environmentalism, a value that dominates his fiction. Frequently in his novels Anthony explores restraints on liberty to promote the greater good, even to the point of examining who is fit for knowledge as in *Macroscope*. While the use of worlds is the focus of many novels, Anthony is also interested in psychological health, an inner environmentalism. Symbiosis or cooperation in *Omnivore*, *Orn*, and *Ox* is the only way the heroes and heroines manage to live without suffering loss, a loss easily provided by conquest.

While much of Anthony's work is science fiction, his fantasy series of *Xanth*, which is currently in its fifteenth book, is probably his most popular series with all ages. *A Spell for Chameleon* even garnered critical praise when in 1977 it won the British Fantasy Award. In a series directed to adolescents, where delight more than instruction reigns, the balance of nature is still an issue from novel to novel. Anthony has threatened to end the series several times, but readers keep asking for more magic, fabulous creatures, and outlandish puns, so the series continues.



Setting

Xanth is a magical country shaped like Florida whose northern border touches Mundania, a place without magic. Some of Xanth's significant places, such as Lake Ogre-Chobee and Ogre-Fen-Ogre-Fen, both in Florida, are suggested by the real Lake Okeechobee and the Okefenokee Swamp.

The quest taken by Tandy and Smash runs south to north in Xanth's magic kingdom and south to north in a dimly perceived Florida. The imaginary creatures encountered and the magical places sometimes spring from myth, as do the griffin and harpy, but more often than not creatures and places spring from language itself, as does the loan shark, who tries to take a bite out of Smash and the rest of the company.

Not surprisingly, considering Anthony's interest in science fiction, many of his creatures have the same relation to their environments that aliens do in science fiction. Each of the adventures of Tandy and Smash on their mutual quests of self-development requires more brain than brawn to succeed. In part the value of intelligence is tied to the environmentalism in Xanth. As Smash perceives with the benefit of his Eye-Queue, "The entire jungle was a cohesive unit, functioning compatibly with its environment. All over Xanth, things were integrating—in his new awareness."

Social Sensitivity

While *Ogre, Ogre* is sensitive about environmental issues and the use of force, feminists have been angered by Anthony's work. Some note a harem instinct in Smash, who leads a caravan of females through Xanth, while others point to language and situations that seem sexist. Phallic humor, concern whether Medusa will turn her husband, Good Magician Humfrey, to stone, for example, bothers some, while others note remarks such as Smash's about Irene's desire to show off her legs. Still others are irritated about Smash's picking up Blythe by her brassiere, or Smash's early interest in Tandy as food.

Perhaps Anthony's problem with women's reaction to his work arises from misreading third-person narration summarizing a character's consciousness. Crombie, Tandy's father in *Ogre, Ogre*, judged the distaff to be good for only one thing. Nymphs were good for that one thing. Human girls could be good at it, too, but they really had to work at it; they fouled it up by assigning far more meaning to it than the nymphs did, so they were unable to proceed with sheer delighted abandon.

Some readers might attribute these sexist thoughts to Anthony, not realizing that the author is summarizing the thinking of a character, someone other than himself.

On the whole *Ogre, Ogre* is a wholesome book. Smash is a reluctant lover, who, like Tandy, loves more through service and concern for the other than through sex. Anthony's distrust of force and reverence for nature should more than make up for occasional bawdy puns and situations.



Literary Qualities

Like *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) or *Don Quixote* (1605-1615), *Ogre, Ogre* is a picaresque novel, although the fantasy in it may obscure the book's essential form. Such books usually give a cumulative picture of a culture, as the author builds his society or world from the details of episodes stitched together by a journey. While Mark Twain gives a picture of the antebellum South in *Huckleberry Finn*, Anthony creates a portrait of an imaginary Xanth in *Ogre, Ogre*. The development of the hero Huck in *Huckleberry Finn* or Smash and Tandy in *Ogre, Ogre* helps to unify the action of such narratives.

The fantasy in *Ogre, Ogre* is developed through imagery and feeds off of traditional tales and myths. The carnivorous tangle trees in the novel, for example, are created by a combination of images. Most likely Anthony had in mind the peculiar look of Spanish moss growing on trees, but what he does to create the tangle trees for readers is to combine images of a multibranch tree with the squid or octopus, thereby creating something new that does not exist. The fantastic world of *Ogre, Ogre* is created in just this way.

Anthony also uses many figures from myth rich with cultural associations such as the basilisk, harpy, centaur, ogre, nymph, dryad, and fairy.

While Anthony would be happy to have readers who are familiar with these creatures, he creates each one anew, such as the Siren's longing for a merman or the dryad's longing to be connected to her tree. For the reader familiar with myth and folk tales, another layer of pleasure is created through the resonance of past reading.

For the reader unfamiliar with these myths and folk tales, Anthony provides the psychological plausibility for the genre. The Siren, a water creature in part, gets younger in contact with the water; her former songs of romantic longing make sense in terms of her awareness of love. The dryad's connection to her tree is so profound that Ovid would be pleased by Anthony's story.

Other symbolic harmonies to the action have even more resonance in *Ogre, Ogre*. The soul bartering that Smash and Tandy undergo has echoes of *Faustus* in it, yet instead of bartering for pleasure or power, Smash barter his soul for love and loyalty to his friends. The Night Stallion's temptations, while they have echoes of *Faustus* and *Mephistopheles*, also have echoes of Satan's temptations of Christ in the desert. Christlike virtues of selfsacrifice through love provide additional parallels to Smash's decisions.

Ogre, Ogre also abounds with more frivolous cultural relations. Fiant, the demon, and his attempted rape of Tandy, comically repeat images from *Rosemary's Baby* (motion picture version 1968). The Diggle Worm that Tandy's mother rides is a playful nod to the powerful worms of Frank Herbert's *Dune*, and the Dragon Lady resembles a character by that name in the comic strip, *Terry and the Pirates*. Like a jazz musician who quotes a popular song while improvising from the chords of another song, Anthony enjoys



cultural 3766 Ogre, Ogre allusions. Anachronisms such as "freeze dried ogres" or "hypnogourds like computer games" comically abound in the novel. Such jarring details cause the fantasy to seem artificial, but that may be part of Anthony's ploy to keep readers aware that the story is a created thing; he does not simply want readers to ride through the pleasures of vicarious action.



Themes and Characters

Smash the ogre and Tandy are the two most important characters in *Ogre, Ogre*; however, a host of other characters contribute to the action. Some, such as Chem the centaur; Blythe, a brass woman; John, a female fairy; a Siren; Fireoak, a dryad; and Goldy, a female goblin appear in several episodes because they join Tandy and Smash on their journey. All of these characters have quests similar to Tandy's and Smash's; however, their quests for mates or to rescue a tree seldom involve a change in character, whereas the quests of Tandy and Smash require internal changes and inner development.

Few real villains exist in Xanth, and dealing with them never involves conquest through annihilation. Surely the Gap Dragon, a huge dragon who patrols the valley dividing Xanth, is more of a dumb beast demanding intelligent handling than a horror to eliminate.

Even Fiant, the demon who seeks to rape Tandy at the beginning and end of the novel, whose actions precipitate Tandy's quest, is a menace to control imaginatively, and he is the most evil character in the novel. The Night Stallion, the ruler of the Night Mares, who initiates the struggle of Smash for the soul he lost in protecting Tandy in a deal which has more in common with Christ than Faustus, is an ethical being.

Even though Smash loses in the fantasies the Stallion projects, the Stallion honors Smash's intelligence, loyalty, and self-sacrifice. As an antagonist who rules bad dreams for moral ends and the ruler of the hypnogourd, a fruit that provides fantasies within the fantasy romance of Xanth and the Void, the Stallion is wise and just, despite providing fantasies of survival that Smash cannot handle.

Although the middle episodes of *Ogre, Ogre* deal with the quests of minor characters such as Goldy and Blythe, these usually join the group when Tandy's sympathy leads Smash to rescue them. Smash, as the guide and protector of Tandy and other members of the group, has the largest role to play. Once he loses part of his soul in the hypnogourd, he is weaker as he faces new conflicts and threats to those he protects, so other characters step forth to help. Usually a character's weakness is also a talent. Being brass is not an asset that helps Blythe deal with others, yet her metallic nature comes in handy when the Smash-led party is attacked by dragons too many and too big for Smash to handle. Blythe defeats the dragons by asking to be eaten; several dragons try to oblige her only to lose several teeth. As Tandy says, "We never know whose skill will be useful."

The core of *Ogre, Ogre* explores the relationship and development of Smash and Tandy. Tandy, with a nymph for a mother and a human father, has to come to terms with her nature. Her tantrums are her vice and her talent; she needs to learn how to use them rather than attempt to suppress them.



Tandy's nymph heritage, a part of her that she suppresses early in the novel, proves useful when she assists a weakened Smash by giving him half her soul to give him strength. Instead of collapsing as a human being would, Tandy uses her nymph background to function. While Tandy rejected her inheritance from her mother, so too did Smash suppress the humanity inherited from his mother. Smash imitated his ogre father, but he negated his human inheritance. The Eye-Queue vine which temporarily attaches itself to Smash helps Smash come to terms with his humanity. He expects to have intelligence and does; he expects to have social desires and does. The quest that Smash and Tandy undergo, with each the answer to the other's need, liberates the repressed selves of both, as they choose a responsible humanity to share. Selflessness, generosity, courage, and intelligence are the primary virtues demonstrated by each of the characters on the journey.

Anthony's stress on environmental issues arises in a number of ways. Occasionally it arises from a character's meditation on changes. Early in the novel Tandy thinks, "It was generally best not to interfere with the natural order." Even the Siren, whose dulcimer was destroyed by a centaur, understands the justice of the motivating act.

"I was doing a lot of damage, uncaringly. It was a necessary thing." On several occasions characters think about population in relation to environment, worrying about too many or too few in relation to the land. Several characters concern themselves with an ecology of the body; probably Smash's responses to the use of intelligence are the most telling. Early in the novel Smash realizes that the Eye-Queue was useful to "ponder the meaning of the things he did, and so it helped to have a little meaning present." Saving trees and trying to avoid conflicts that might injure a species or place are part of Smash's new environmental awareness.

Principles of symbiosis and doing no more than should be done are demonstrated again and again by the characters of Ogre, Ogre.

Topics for Discussion

1. Smash and Tandy both appeal for direction from Good Magician Humfrey. Why does the Magician send Smash and Tandy on a journey together to the home of the ancestral ogres?
2. Judging from the encounters of Smash with the Night Stallion, what seems to be the purpose of nightmares?
3. Intelligence seems new to Smash.

What uses does he see for it? How can it be a substitute for force?

4. Tandy falls in love with Smash before Smash falls in love with her.

What does she appreciate in the ogre?

5. What enables Smash to love Tandy? What does he appreciate about her?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Environmentalism is everywhere present in *Ogre, Ogre*. Write a paper attempting to define Anthony's notion of environmentalism.

2. The encounter with aliens is one of the staples of science fiction writing.

Anthony's *Ogre, Ogre* is a fantasy; however, many of the fantastic beasts are similar to science fiction aliens. Write an essay or report about what human beings can learn from such encounters.

3. Critics such as Northrop Frye have written a great deal about the quest romance. Define, in an essay or report, the literary type and argue the extent to which *Ogre, Ogre* fulfills the definition.

4. Anthony has attempted to end the Xanth series several times, but a tremendous reader following has prevented him from doing this. What seems to be the basis of reader fascination for a book such as *Ogre, Ogre*. Why are children, adolescents, and young adults attracted to it? Are they attracted to different aspects of the book?

Discuss this matter in a report.

5. What is the relationship of force and knowledge in *Ogre, Ogre*? Explore the relationship in a report.

6. Is *Ogre, Ogre* sexist? What is offensive in the book? Does Anthony treat female characters with dignity? Explore this issue in a report.

For Further Reference

Barrow, Craig and Diana Barrow.

"Piers Anthony." In *Twentieth Century Science Fiction Writers*. Edited by Curtis C. Smith. 2d ed. Chicago and London: St. James Press, 1986.

Though this essay is short, some attempt is made to themetize about thirty of Anthony's works, series by series when possible.

Biggers, Cliff. "An Interview with Piers Anthony." *Science Fiction Review* 23 (November 1977): 56-62. Since Anthony rarely gives interviews and tends to live an isolated life in Florida, the Biggers' interview is a rare trip inside Anthony's mind revealing his history, writing ambitions, and environmental concerns.

Nicholls, Peter, ed. *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday-Dolphin, 1979. This short entry analyzes Anthony's science fiction, although many of his probing fantasies had not appeared when the entry was prepared.

Searles, Baird, Martin Last, Beth Meacham, and Michael Franklin. *A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction*. New York: Avon, 1979. This mostly focuses on major science fiction titles such as Anthony's *Macroscope* and the *Battle Circle* series of novels.

Related Titles

With thirteen titles in the Xanth series, there is no shortage of books similar to *Ogre, Ogre* for those who love it.

The Xanth series began with the winner of the British Fantasy Award for 1977, *A Spell for Chameleon*. Like *Ogre, Ogre*, *A Spell for Chameleon* focuses on conserving the environment and is in the form of a quest romance. Bink's quest in the first novel of the series is to discover whether he has magic, and he uncovers an unusual trait, resistance to the harm magic can cause. In *The Source of Magic*, Xanth learns conservation when the country loses its magic. In *Castle Roogna*, Dot, son of Bink, is on a quest to restore a zombie to a ghost. Nearly the same characters appear in *Centaur Aisle* as in *Castle Roogna*, although the action is four years later. The quest is a rescue of King Trent and Queen Iris who are held captive in Mundania, at Xanth's northern border. *Smash of Ogre, Ogre* first appears in *Centaur Aisle* as a friend to Dot, Bink's son. Similarly, the *Night Mares of Ogre, Ogre* appear in *Night Mare*. In part, this book is an answer to Anthony's feminist critics, since the females play the leading roles in the quest. *Dragon on a Pedestal* picks up the fortunes of the Gap Dragon from *Ogre, Ogre*. *Crewel Lye*, *Golem in the Gears*, and *Dragon on a Pedestal* explore environmentalism from the perspective of Taoism's balance of yin and yang, which actually appear as evil magicians in the books.



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