

ANDRE NORTON

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Notes from the Witch World

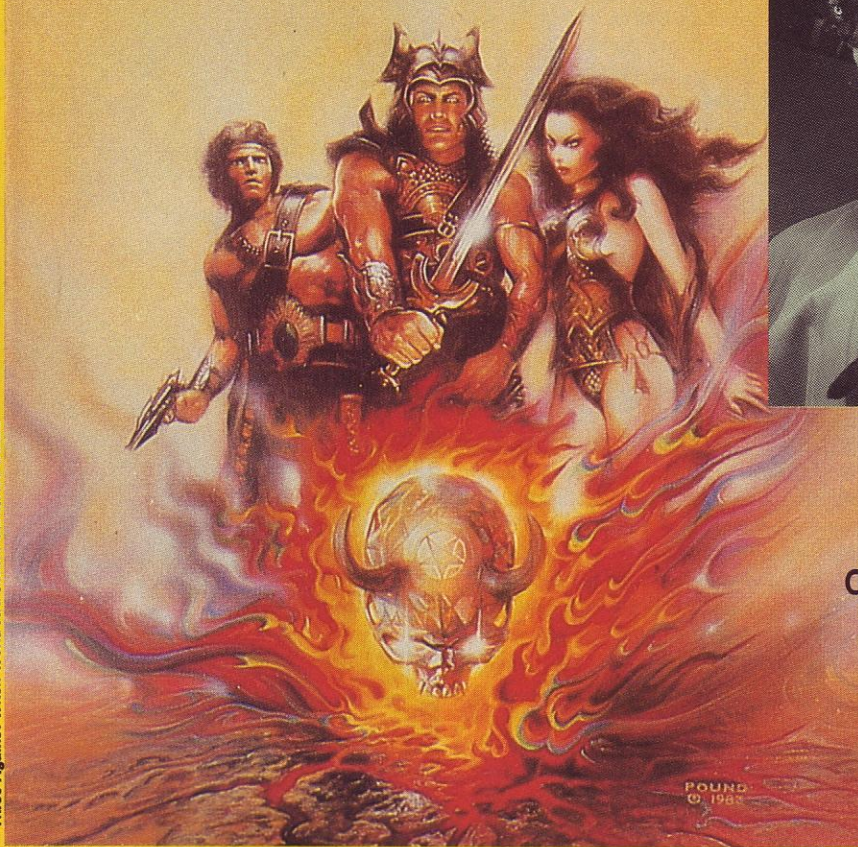


Part Two

Among her beloved cats, this grandmaster of SF & fantasy reveals the storytelling spells she has yet to weave.

By A.C. CRISPIN

Three Against Witch World Art: John Pound/Ace Books



Andre Norton is one of the foremost fantasy and science-fiction authors in the world, with millions of books sold. Her works have been translated into many languages, including Arabic and Japanese. Norton is renowned for her vividly imaginative worlds, often peopled by unusual aliens and intelligent animals.

She has been writing science fiction and fantasy since the early 1950s, and was among the first women writers to earn a reputation in the field. Her career as a writer has spanned over five decades, and she had produced more than 120 books, most of which are still in print.

Norton makes her home in Florida, in a dramatically unusual house where the front windows resemble the eyes of a cat. She resides there under the careful management of her feline associates.

STARLOG: When you write, do you plot a

whole story from beginning to end? Do you follow an outline?

ANDRE NORTON: No, to both questions. I used to try to work from outlines, but I found them very stifling and distracting. I prefer to let a story develop as the characters develop; they dictate the plot and its resolution.

STARLOG: Do you have any advice to offer aspiring authors?

NORTON: I would advise them to read as widely as they can, in every subject possible, because that's where one gets material for stories. The most unlikely sources can spark ideas. Also, I would advise them to never throw anything away, no matter how discouraged they get.

STARLOG: "Never throw anything away?" Why not?

NORTON: Because, during the period when I thought I wouldn't be able to find markets for some of my work, I discarded

several manuscripts when I moved from Cleveland to Florida. I wish I had them back, now, but they're gone.

STARLOG: Book manuscripts, you mean?

NORTON: Yes, I wrote a fourth Sword book, and a sequel to *Operation Time Search*, and two sequels to *The Prince Commands*. I also did a book on Victorian Women Writers.

STARLOG: That's really too bad, that those books have been lost.

NORTON: Yes, but it taught me a valuable lesson, which is that you can never predict what's going to happen in publishing.

STARLOG: What books do you have coming out in the near future?

NORTON: The very next thing is a Tor hardback, entitled *Imperial Lady*, that I wrote with Susan Schwartz. It will be out in September, to coincide with the World Science Fiction Convention.

Imperial Lady is a fantasy retelling of the

Witch World Art: John Pound/Ace Books

tale of the Lady Cho, who was a real person who lived during the Han Dynasty in China. Her story is very well-known in China, but almost unknown in this country except for scholars. It's a tale set in a time of great adventure—and, of course, we've added fantasy touches that we hope readers will enjoy, such as the Chinese fox-fairies—women who can change themselves into foxes with magical powers!

STARLOG: And after that?

NORTON: The next book will be a sequel to *Flight in Yiktor*, entitled *Dare to Go A-Hunting*, from Tor Books. That will also be a hardback, scheduled for December.

STARLOG: Is that a collaboration?

NORTON: No, that one is a solo book. But I've been doing many collaborations lately.

STARLOG: Why is that?

NORTON: Well, I'm not able to sit at my desk as long as I used to when I was younger, and that way the work of doing a novel is shared. I also like the idea of two writers pooling their strengths and ideas to create something neither of them might have been able to accomplish alone.

STARLOG: Who else are you writing books with at the moment?

NORTON: I'm co-authoring an epic fantasy novel entitled *Black Trillium*, with Marion Zimmer Bradley and Julian May.

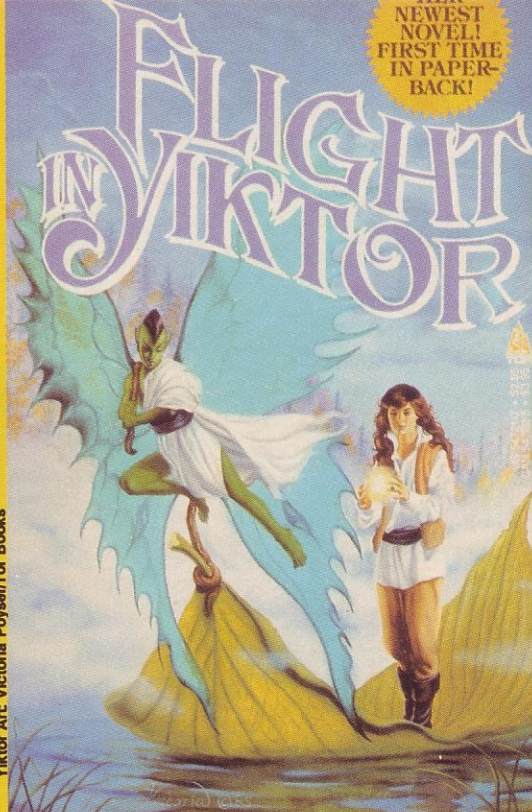
The book has three heroines, all princesses, and each of us is writing the story of one princess as they struggle to save their kingdom from evil sorcery. My princess has a quest that takes her into a strange world of the marshes, where she meets a race of aquatic people. That book will be issued in hardcover by Bantam/Spectra, probably sometime next year.

I'm also doing a book with Robert Bloch, who did one of the stories in *Tales of the Witch World*, Volume 1.

STARLOG: Andre Norton and Robert Bloch collaborating on a book—that sounds very intriguing. Can you give us any hints as to what it's about?

NORTON: Not many, I'm afraid. This book will be something completely different for me. It's a story set in the Victorian era, and I suppose you could call it a dark fantasy—though it's not magical, in the sense that the *Witch World* books have magic in them. Both Robert and I love that era—of course, he has done many stories about Jack the Ripper. But this *isn't* a Ripper story, no. This book is very unusual... something quite, *quite* different. I think my readers will be very surprised.

STARLOG: In the days when you began writing science fiction and fantasy—the so-called "Golden Age," almost everything in



NEWEST NOVEL!
FIRST TIME
IN PAPER-
BACK!

A sequel to *Flight in Yiktor*, *Dare to Go A-Hunting*, will appear in December.

the genre was *written*. Nowadays, though, more and more people are coming to appreciate SF and fantasy through films. What do you think of this trend?

NORTON: It's good that they're being exposed to it, but a lot of film is *not* of the first-class making, and they're not all of the quality of *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*. So much of it is trite, using old plots that the short story and novel writers used up long ago. When films are good, they're wonderful, but most of them are *not* very good, which is unfortunate.

STARLOG: Your health prevents you from going out to movies, but there are videotapes on your cabinet. What genre films have you seen and enjoyed?

NORTON: I saw Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, of course, when it first came out. Lately, I've seen the three *Star Wars* movies, which were quite good, and *Ladyhawke*, which I truly enjoyed. I liked *The Dark Crystal*, too. I saw *Conan*, which was *rotten*.

Nothing can match the original episodes of *Star Trek*, though. They remain my all-time favorites. But in recent years, I can't watch television much, because it bothers my eyes, and it's hard on me to sit in one place for long.

A.C. CRISPIN has written two stories for Andre Norton's Tales of the Witch World, and collaborated with Norton on a novel, Gryphon's Eyrie (Tor). They are currently working on another, Songsmith. Crispin is also the author of two Pocket Books Star Trek volumes, Yesterday's Son and Time for Yesterday. Starbridge, the first book in Crispin's Starbridge SF series, will be released this month by Ace. Crispin's interview with Andre Norton began in STARLOG #146.



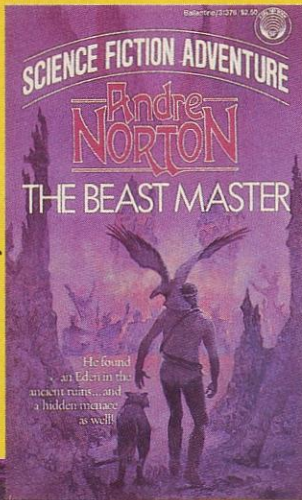
Inspired by medieval history & Arthurian legend, Norton created *Witch World*.



Beastmaster Photo: Copyright 1982 MGM/UA

about a heroine who is drawn into a parallel universe based on ancient Nubia, entitled *Wraiths of Time*. Just lately, there has been quite a bit of interest in one of my juvenile

The film version of *Beastmaster*, starring Marc Singer and Tanya Roberts, “had nothing to do with the book,” says Norton. “It was dreadful.”



Beastmaster Art: Del Rey Books

novels, *House of Many Shadows*, which I co-wrote with Phyllis Miller. It's the story of some children who stumble onto an historical mystery that also turns out to be a ghost story. I understand that Ron Howard asked to read it. He's a well-known director, though I haven't seen any of his movies.

STARLOG: He certainly *is* well-known.

NORTON: Well, these Hollywood directors and producers read things, and even a sale of film rights—which is not the case here—is *no* guarantee that a movie will ever be made. So, I'll believe it when I see it.

STARLOG: What is your own personal favorite among all your books?

NORTON: (Laughs.) With so many, that's hard to say! I can't choose... well, perhaps *Year of the Unicorn*, which is my Witch World version of the fairy tale, “Beauty and the Beast.”

STARLOG: You've been the person who quietly introduced several “firsts” into science fiction and fantasy—for example, the protagonist of *Ordeal in Otherwhere*.

NORTON: Yes, that was the first science-fiction book to feature a female hero,

STARLOG: Many STARLOG readers have seen the movie version of *Beastmaster*. What did you think of the film?

NORTON: I thought it was *dreadful*. *Awful*. I made them remove my name from any connection with it the moment I read the script and saw that it bore *no* resemblance to my book! For one thing, my story was science fiction, set in the future, and this was some kind of sword & sorcery epic, like *Conan*. Sword fights and sacrificing virgins—the *only* thing that they used from my book in that movie was the idea of a hero who is in telepathic contact with animals. And did you know that the poor tiger they used in that movie *died* because they had to tranquilize it to dye it black, and it had a reaction to the drug? I was very upset when I heard that!

You see, my agent sold the movie rights, but I didn't have script approval. So, they made a movie that had *nothing* to do with my book.

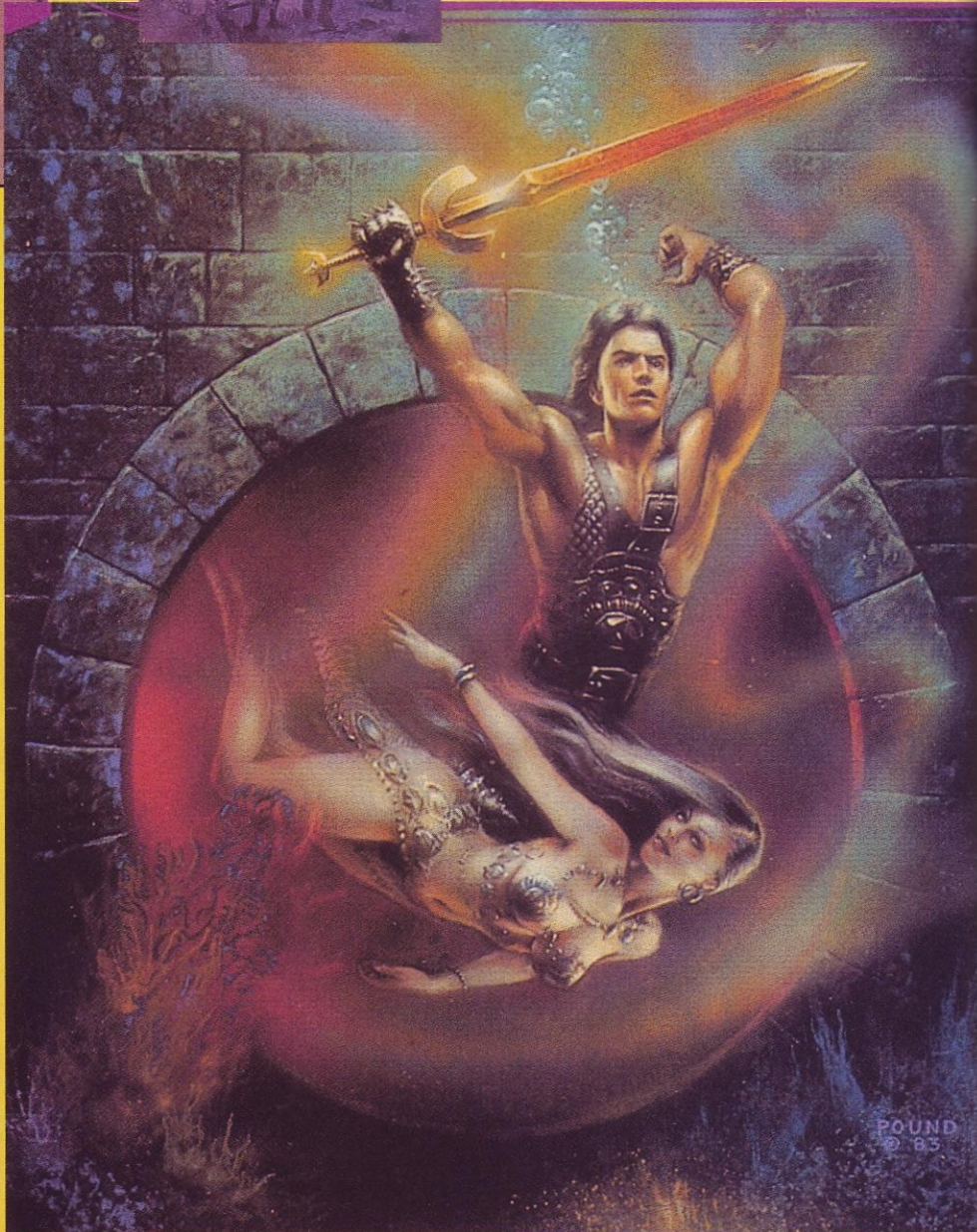
STARLOG: Has there been any interest in translating your other books into films?

NORTON: There has been discussion, but I won't let anything else go unless I have script approval, and they don't like to give that to the author. But producers continue to express interest in certain books, so something may come of it.

STARLOG: Which books?

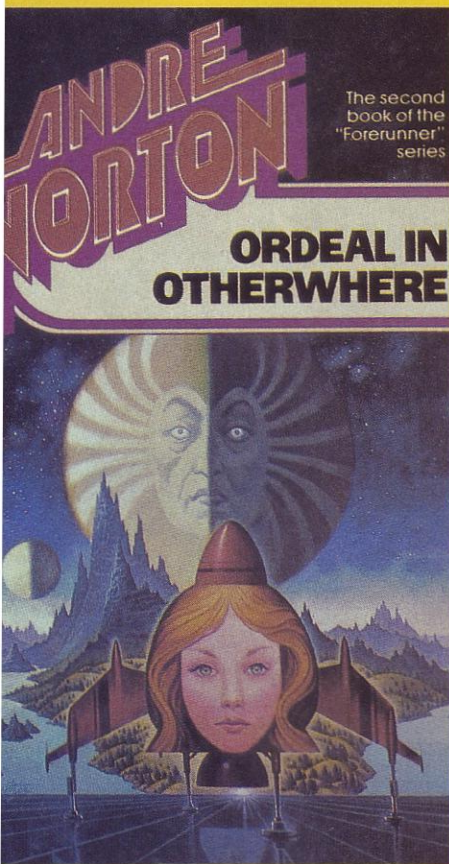
NORTON: *Time Traders*, for one. And *Witch World*, of course. Also the book I did

When the magical saga began, Norton notes, “I had no idea that people would want more Witch World stories.”



Warlock Art: John Pound/Ace Books

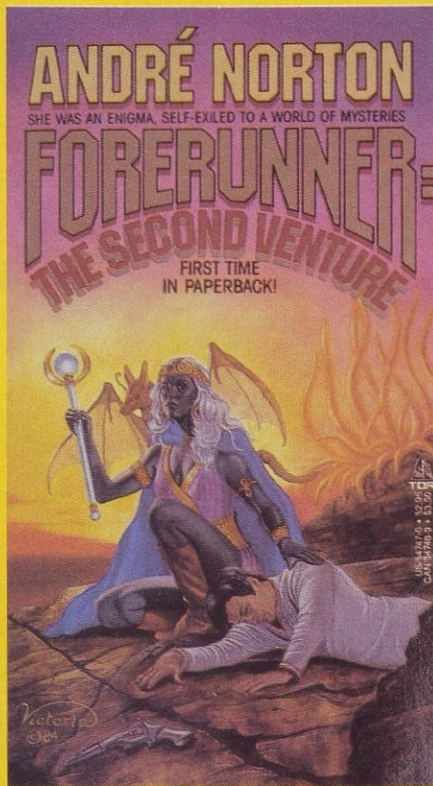
Ordeal Art: D. Meltzer/Ace Books



The publishers were surprised when *Ordeal in Otherwhere* sold well. "That was the first science-fiction book to feature a female hero," affirms Norton.

Another thing that often crops up in my stories is jewelry or crystals, often as a focusing point for extra-sensory powers. I've dealt with that idea a great deal, because it fascinates me. *The Zero Stone* was such a book, and, of course, the Witches of Estcarp use those cloudy crystals to focus their Power.

Psychometry also fascinates me. That's the ability to touch an object and discern something of its history. I've had several demonstrations of such abilities, and they were very impressive—as well as puzzling. I can't explain how it was done, but I have seen it work. I used that idea in *Forerunner Foray*.



Exotic settings—such as the unusual desert of *Forerunner: The Second Venture*—are a Norton trademark.

I often use young protagonists—teenagers and young adults, people in their early twenties. People who are coming to terms with life for possibly the first time.

Exotic settings are something else I very much enjoy creating. I am fascinated by deserts, and I invent desert settings frequently. For example, many of my Witch World books have taken place in, or mentioned, "the Waste" that lies to the west of High Hallack, which is the western continent. "The Waste" is a desert. I also invented a very unusual sort of desert in my book *Forerunner: The Second Venture*.

STARLOG: What authors have influenced your writing?

NORTON: Oh, there are many of them. Rudyard Kipling, Don Ford Yates, A. Mer-

rill, H. Rider Haggard, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Talbot Mundy, Edgar Wallace and of course, H.G. Wells and Jules Verne. I was directly influenced in my book *Night of Masks* by William Hope Hodgson's *The Nightland*.

STARLOG: Who are some of your favorite authors in science fiction and fantasy?

NORTON: H. Beam Piper, the creator of the "Little Fuzzy" stories, Sterling Lanier, C.L. Moore, Robin McKinley, Elizabeth Ann Scarborough, Ardath Mayhar, Poul Anderson—to name just a few!

STARLOG: From the size of your library here, it's easy to tell that you're a voracious reader. There are books everywhere! What do you enjoy reading besides SF/fantasy?

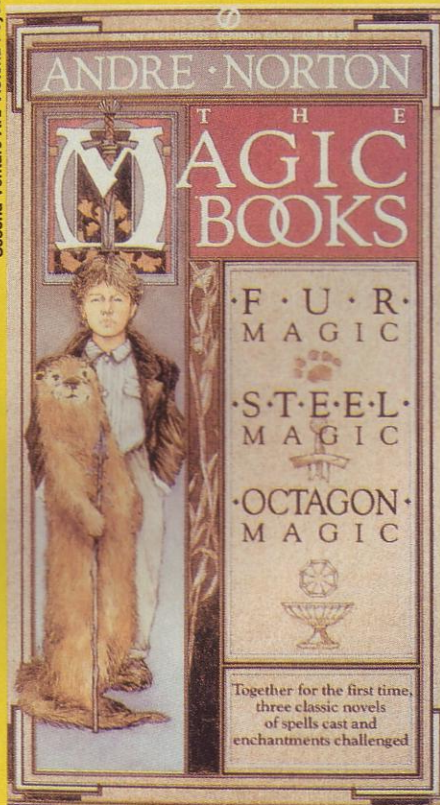
NORTON: I have a library of more than 10,000 books. As to what I enjoy reading... well, I very much enjoy reading old diaries and collections of letters. I get a great many story ideas from reading them.

I also love reading mysteries. One of my favorite mystery writers is Barbara Michaels/Elizabeth Peters. She has a lively humorous touch, particularly the books featuring Amelia Peabody Emerson, the Victorian archeologist/detective.

STARLOG: What do you think accounts for Witch World's large audience?

NORTON: Well, in the first place, like all of my books, the Witch World books feature stories about *people*. Readers can identify with the problems and situations in the books because they happen to individuals, instead of to huge nations or worlds. I receive many letters telling me that readers enjoy the Witch World books because the

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"Readers recognize and appreciate the accuracy of my use of magic," says Norton.

Norton

(continued from page 57)

characters seem real. My protagonists are facing problems that readers can relate to, such as losing their homes in a war, or having a brother or sister kidnapped, or being threatened with invasion. When readers are presented with situations viewed through a particular character's eyes, it's much more likely that they'll become very involved with what that character is doing, thinking, or feeling.

Another thing that I've done with *Witch World* is to show a world and its people that's in the process of *changing*. Both the Eastern and Western continents of the *Witch World* are undergoing a period of transition during and after the Kolder War. I believe modern readers can identify with that, because our world has also recently undergone war and its aftermath.

I also believe that readers are able to recognize and appreciate the accuracy of my use of magic in the *Witch World*. I base all my magical powers or spells on the traditional laws of magic, which I have thoroughly researched over the years. In all but a few cases, I describe "white" magic, magic that has to do with colors, gems, animals, the lore of herbs—and if I give a spell or incantation, I base it on a traditional rite, only I change the wording around. But to any student of magical lore, the ceremony itself is still recognizable, though the words of the spell are my own.

STARLOG: I understand that you're currently involved in merchandising certain authorized *Witch World* items.

NORTON: Yes, under my direction, *Witch World* maps, acrylic sculptures, an audio recording of the unabridged first *Witch World* novel, and stationery have been created. There's also a limited edition booklet containing original artwork by Mary Hanson Roberts and an original novella I wrote, "Serpent's Tooth." There is also going to be a *Witch World* game, written by Sasha Miller, released from Steve Jackson Games.

STARLOG: Of all your achievements as a writer, what makes you proudest?

NORTON: Of course, I'm proud of *Witch World*, because it became so popular. I'm also proud of *Shadow Hawk*, which was my first venture into ancient history. I think that I managed to give readers a sense of what the people who lived back in ancient Egypt were like—that they were people very much like ourselves. I did meticulous research on that book, to make sure I was being accurate about that time period. I did the same kind of research in my book *Stand to Horse*, which told the story of cavalry soldiers during the Apache War of 1859. I believe I was able to bring that period to life.

Insofar as the writing style itself is concerned, I think I did some of my best work ever in a book I did called *Stand and Deliver*, which had to wait 30 years to find a publisher (Tor Books, 1984).

My achievements are my books and I'm proud of different ones in different ways.