



Collecting
Andre Norton

by Ed
McLuckie

For many years,
I wasn't sure if A. Norton
was a man or a woman.
I was sure, however, that for
a good space adventure,
Norton was the writer
I wanted.

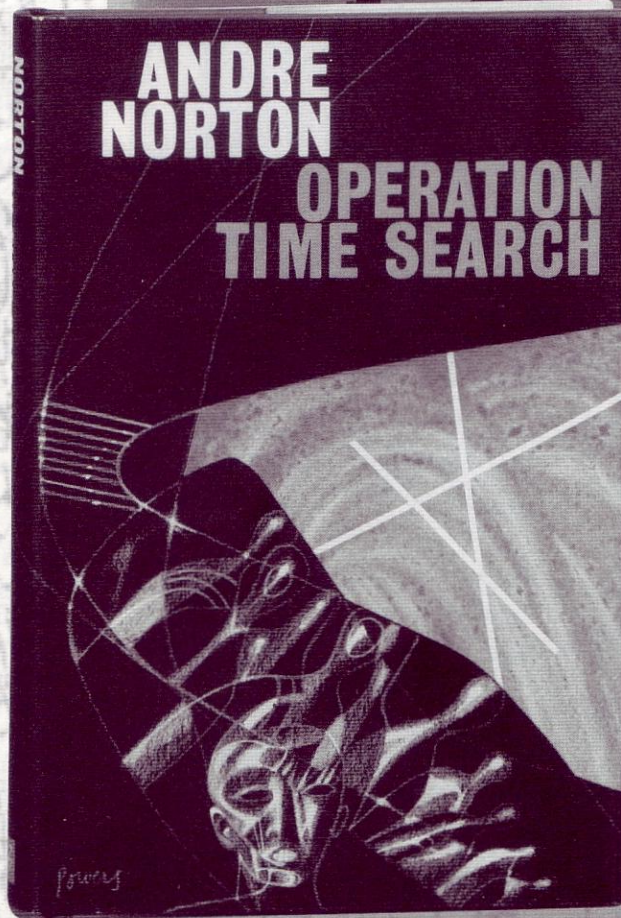
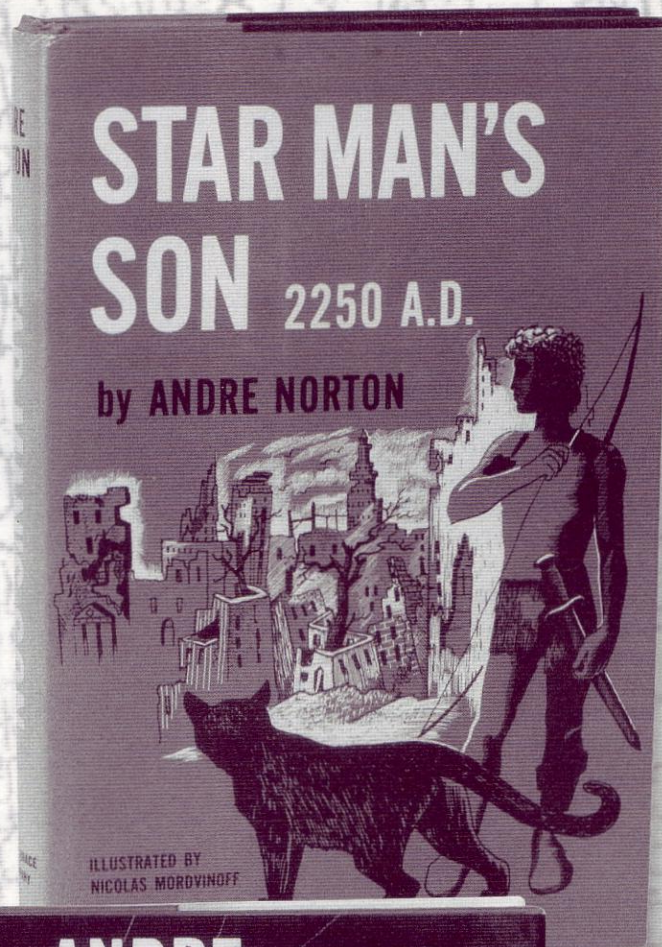
Years ago, a youngster quietly asked his school librarian if the library had any more A. Norton books. "I've already read the ones on the shelf."

At that time, and for many years after, I wasn't sure if A. Norton was a man or a woman. I was sure, however, that for a good space adventure, Norton was the writer I wanted. After all these years, there is still confusion about that name: last week a book dealer told me that he was a big science fiction fan and would certainly keep a lookout for any of *Mr. Norton's* books.

With an "A" list of more than 200 items there is plenty to keep a lookout for. A completist will stay busy developing a collection of the works of Andre Norton, one of the most important writers in the fields of science fiction and fantasy.

My own collection began innocently enough. I had not actually read a Norton book in years and owned no copies at all, but one day as I wandered around a used bookstore I decided it would be neat to pick up any paperback titles I could find. If all the pages were present, the copy qualified. As you can imagine, I quickly tired of looking at the mess this haphazard method produced and began searching only for fine first printing paperbacks. Somehow I ended up with a few real first editions. By the time I had added to them a few signed copies I realized I was an Andre Norton collector.

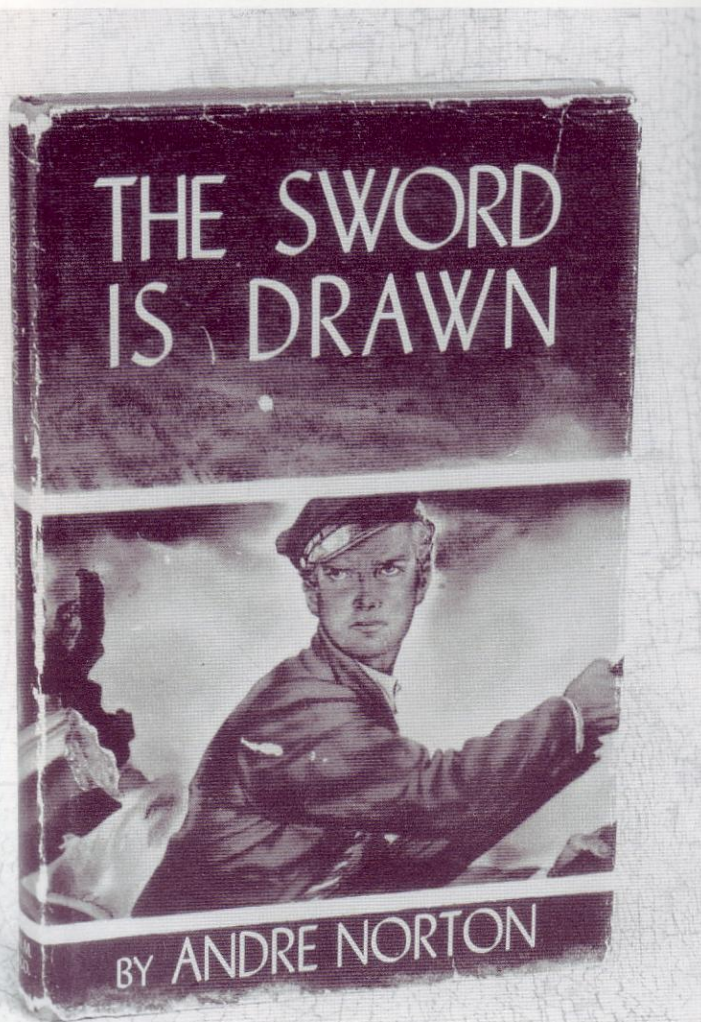
An event that took place a few years later gave real meaning to my library of Andre Norton books by way of an experience that became the heart of my collection. I wrote a letter to Norton explaining that I was one of her fans and wanted very much to meet her. Not having any idea how she might respond, I enclosed a self-addressed post card on the off chance she might actually reply. I was terribly excited when the card came



back saying she would certainly welcome a visit provided I called first. Procrastination is one of my strong suits, so it was a year before I timidly called her and introduced myself. Several days after that long-delayed call I found myself pulling up outside her home.

Anyone who has read a Norton tale knows the author loves cats, and I had brought along a large “coffee table” cat book as a “thank you for allowing me to visit you” gift. I was met on the front walk by Norton’s friend Ingrid who said, “Bring your books in with you and try not to stay more than an hour. Oh, by the way, today is Andre’s birthday.” I knocked on the door and was warmly welcomed in. I presented Norton with what had become a birthday gift, and spent a fascinating hour visiting with the author in her library.

Over the last seven or eight years I’ve been privileged to make many more visits and consider this by far the most rewarding aspect of my collecting. Norton has always been a very gracious host, discussing her current projects, answering whatever questions I could think of and signing more books than it was polite of me to bring.



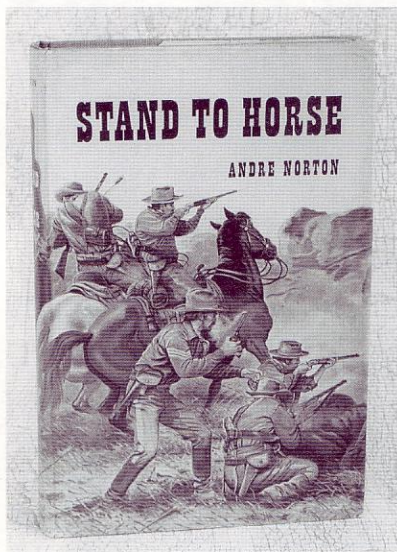
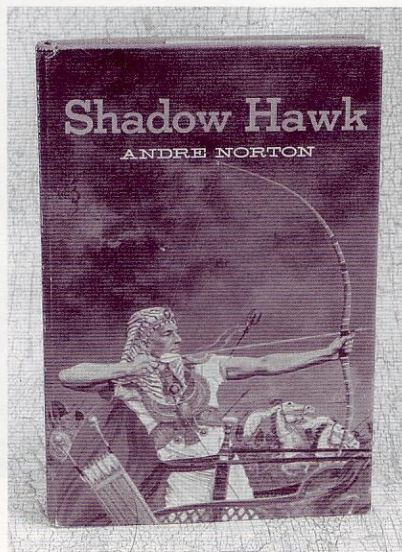
Andre Norton was born Alice Mary Norton in 1912 in Cleveland, Ohio. Her family tree was rich in history and anecdote. According to Roger C. Schlobin’s introduction to the 1980 edition of *Andre Norton: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography*, “her mother’s family had been Bounty Land settlers in Ohio. [At the end of the Revolutionary War, with the country financially broke, many men chose to receive payment for their services in the form of free western lands. The state of Ohio was largely settled this way.] Her great-grandfather had married a Wyandot, named Elk Eyes, to fully ratify his land claim. In fact, theirs was the first such union between a Caucasian and an Indian in the territory. Her father’s fascination with westerns and accounts of the early trail drives can be traced to his birth in the Indian territory that is now Nebraska, [and] to his witnessing the Indian uprising of 1866.” The Norton family’s deep interest in history would serve as a foundation for the author’s first several novels.

Norton’s writing career actually began during high school in Cleveland. She wrote constantly: in class, for the high school publication, and in her spare time. After graduation Norton went on to college—she didn’t believe that one could actually make a living as a writer, and decided that teaching history would allow her to write and to eat, too—but the Great Depression forced her to give up her full-time studies after a year. Night courses would have to suffice. Supplementing the family income was essential. She took a job as an assistant librarian for the Cleveland Library system. She would remain with the libraries for nearly 20 years, until 1950.

To quote writer C. J. Cherryh, “I’ve seen a complete collection of Andre Norton’s books and it haunts me to this day, sort of like the sight of an unscalable Everest.” That mountain of output began in 1934 with the publication of *The Prince Commands*. It was with the publication of this first novel that Mary Alice Norton legally became Andre Norton. The author anticipated that she would be writing primarily for boys and the juvenile market and that a male name would make her books more marketable. It was a sound business decision, the wisdom of which would become even more apparent when she began to move into the male-dominated field of science fiction. *The Prince Commands* was followed four years later by *Ralestone Luck*, which Norton had first written while she was in high school.

More historical adventures followed: *Follow the Drum* (1942), *The Sword is Drawn* (1944), *Scarface* (1948) and *Sword in Sheath* (1949). These novels began a trend that continued through her later works of science fiction, that of a young protagonist—usually a loner or an outcast—who must face challenges and adventures as a rite of passage and emerges on the other side as a self-realized individual.

Norton’s *Sword* adventures (*The Sword is Drawn*, *Sword in Sheath*, *At Swords’ Points*) are about the Dutch underground during and after the Second



World War. The first entry garnered Norton an award from the Dutch government for its authentic portrayal of the group's valiant efforts. A fourth book in the series, *Sword Points South*, remains today as an unfinished manuscript.

All these pre-1950 titles are fairly scarce and pricey. It is remarkable that Norton found the time to write them at all. Her work as a librarian left her little spare time for writing. After she left the Cleveland Library system in 1950 to become a reader for Gnome Press—a position she would hold for the next eight years—her literary output and its direction would change dramatically.

Prior to 1950 there was little market for book-length science fiction, but around this time World Publishing asked Norton to edit a science fiction anthology. *Bullard of the Space Patrol* was published in 1951, and Norton enjoyed the project so much that her editor suggested she try her hand at a science fiction novel of her own. The resulting book, *Huon of the Horn*, was not yet Norton's break into science fiction, but rather a fantasy novel adapted from one of the lesser-known tales of the Charlemagne saga, meticulously researched from a 1534 English translation from the French. Collectable copies of this significant Norton title now command \$200-\$300.

Star Man's Son, 2250 A.D., Norton's first science fiction novel, was published by Harcourt Brace in 1952 and is one of the high points in any Andre Norton collection. A fine hardbound first of *Star Man's Son* inscribed to Donald A. Wolheim (the onetime publisher of Ace Books who later founded DAW books) recently sold for a healthy sum.

Although the breakout from historical adventures to the fantasy and science fiction for which Norton is best known did not take place until the early Fifties,

**To quote writer
C. J. Cherryh,
"I've seen a complete
collection of Andre
Norton's books and it
haunts me to this
day, sort of like
the sight of an
unscalable Everest."**

her desire to write in these genres had been present from the beginning. One of her science fiction short stories, "The People of the Crater," written under the pseudonym Andrew North, was to have appeared in Issue Number 6 of the publication *Marvel Tales* back in 1935. Unfortunately, the pulp ceased publication after Issue Number 5. The manuscript sat in a file until 1947, when the story appeared in Volume I, Number One of another short-lived Crawford publication, *Fantasy Book*. Another Norton short story, "The Gift of Asti," appeared in the publication's third issue, in 1948.

By the late 1950s, increased book sales allowed Norton to begin writing full-time, and write she has.

Writer A.C. Crispin once asked a packed science fiction convention, "How many of you received your very first exposure to science fiction or fantasy when you took an Andre Norton book off the library shelves?" A full 80 percent of the audience responded in the affirmative.

In the period between 1952 and 1963, 34 new Andre Norton books appeared, as well as several short stories. The books included science fiction, two Westerns, the very scarce mystery *Murders for Sale* (written as Allen Weston with Grace Allen Hogarth), and some historical fiction. Norton also edited the anthologies *Space Service* (1953), *Space Pioneers* (1954) and *Space Police* (1956). These anthologies all were published by World Publishing and have beautiful Virgil Finlay dust jackets. *Space Police* is the hardest volume for Norton completists to acquire, probably because they are competing with L. Ron Hubbard collectors looking for the Hubbard story contained therein.

Norton used her Andrew North pen name for the Gnome Press publications *Sargasso of Space* (1955)



and *Plague Ship* (1956). The pseudonym avoided a possible conflict of interest, since Norton was a reader for Gnome Press at the time. Unfortunately, during this period Gnome was using cheap, acidic pulp paper in its books, and these titles are almost always found badly browned.

Norton has always enjoyed creating alien worlds, and in 1963 this resulted in her best-known fantasy work, the Hugo-nominated *Witch World*, based in part on medieval history and the legend of King Arthur. The author does not like to write from an outline, and may in any single book only partially develop her characters, leaving them open for further development later. *Witch World* was originally intended as a stand-alone novel, but both Norton and her fans wanted to know what happened next to whom. As a result there are today more than 30 *Witch World* novels and stories. The first seven novels in the series were paperback originals, the first six of them published by Ace Books. The seventh, *Spell of the Witch World*, was DAW Book #1, the title that launched Donald Wolheim's successful list of science fiction and fantasy paperback publications, now numbering more than 1,000 titles.

Collectors have a choice to make in regard to the first seven *Witch World* novels. Purists may satisfy themselves with the paperback originals; the books can be found for relatively low prices, but condition

can be problematic. Collectors who dislike paperback publications and completists may want the Gregg Press first hardback editions, issued as a set in 1977. However, there were only 1,200 of these sets and many of them went straight to school libraries. A fine set in jacket, originally issued at \$50, will today run you about \$1,000.

Norton is a very sharing person, and has invited fellow writers, several of them just starting out, to contribute stories to her *Witch World* canon in a number of books such as *Tales of the Witch World*, Volumes I, II and III; *Four From the Witch World*; *Flight of Vengeance*; *On Wings of Magic*, and the newest, the paperback original *The Key of the Keplian*. This book was written in collaboration with Lyn McConchie who in her acknowledgements wrote, "Your books were the first in the genre I ever read." The *Witch World* saga is now coming to an end with *Warding of Witch World*. This will be a very lengthy novel marking the return of many of the characters readers have enjoyed over the past 30 years.

Although her name is well known and her reputation wide-spread, Norton has not received the critical acclaim many feel she deserves. A number of reasons for this neglect have been suggested. Some feel she has been relegated to the backwater of being a "children's writer," causing her to be ignored by serious critics; others point to a lack of publication in science fiction magazines. Still others feel Norton was not able to promote herself adequately because of ill health. It has even been suggested that she is too good a writer to have been taken seriously. Whatever the reason for the lack of recognition, the author's sales have been steady, her fans legion and their appreciation warmly expressed.

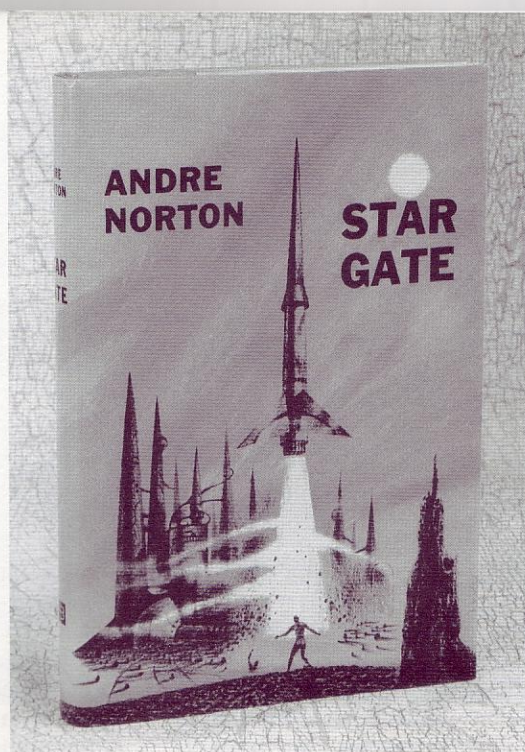
Norton was the first woman to be inducted into the late Lin Carter's Swordsmen and Sorcerers' Guild of America, and was voted the Gandalf award in honor of a lifetime achievement in fantasy writing (the award's first female recipient).

She has received many awards from those fans and her peers. She was the first woman to be inducted into the late Lin Carter's Swordsmen and Sorcerers' Guild of America (SAGA). In 1977, Norton was voted the Gandalf award by a committee of the World Science Fiction Convention in honor of a lifetime achievement in fantasy writing (and was, once again, the award's first female recipient); in 1989 she was

the guest of honor at the Worldcon in Boston. The Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America recognized her in 1984 by making her the first woman to receive their Grand Master Award.

Norton once wrote, "It has never been my intention to do more than tell a story, for it is my firm belief that that is the one and ONLY reason for writing fiction." Intentionally or not, she has done much more than that. As a trail-blazing female writer she has been the inspiration and encouragement that many young writers needed to get started. Although she has refrained from using her books as a soap box from which to launch diatribes on the issues of the day, she did quietly introduce the first serious female science fiction hero in *Ordeal in Otherwhere* (1964). Her protagonists have also included African Americans, Asians and Native Americans.

Many enthusiasts who prefer "hardcore" science fiction may have moved on to authors they consider more "mature," but they still have fond memories of their first space adventures with Andre Norton. I've had the pleasure, as have many other parents, of pulling a reading copy of a Norton title down off a shelf and handing it to a child: "Here, I think you'll like this." It's exciting to pass on to a new generation a timeless tale that will help it experience that sense of wonder so often evoked when Norton's books are discussed. My daughter has read more than a dozen Norton books; my wife and my son have been spooked by a Norton ghost story; my mother, only several years younger than the author, has read the Norton historicals I have lent her. It is also refresh-



ing to know an author doesn't have to resort to foul language, sex, or graphic violence to write a saleable book (or in Norton's case, more than a hundred of them).

Norton is still actively writing and shows few signs of slowing down. She has had some health concerns in the past but is currently in relatively good health, with some recent im-

provements in vision and mobility. She possesses a sharp mind and an incredible memory. (Norton once read a manuscript for a publisher and not only told him not to publish it, but that the would-be author was a plagiarist who had only changed the time frame of an obscure novel Norton remembered reading 40 years earlier.)

At a point in life where many would consider relaxing, Norton is undertaking a very ambitious project, a writer's retreat to be known as High Hallack, where up to four writers at a time can reside for up to a month to work on their books. The centerpiece of the planned compound is to be Norton's vast 10,000-volume reference library. (Norton's work has always been meticulously researched. Her 1960 novel *Shadow Hawk* was set in the period of the Hyksos occupation in Egypt. The historical backdrop was so well done that the book was translated into Arabic and used in the Egyptian school system.) Thousands of books will be available to the writers; more volumes are steadily being acquired to fill out weak sections. A vast collection of fiction will be on hand, as well as a large video library. The library will also house Norton's personal collection of all her work, including notes and manuscripts not previously donated elsewhere. This project will benefit many future writers and will be a permanent tribute to a lifetime of achievement by this gifted and giving author.

Rule Number One for collectors is "Collect what you like." I like Andre Norton and I like her books. I just reread one of her science fiction titles written more than 40 years ago. It was as good as when I was that elementary school kid, looking for more A. Norton titles on the library shelf. 