



ANDRE NORTON: FOLLOWING THE HIGH HALLACK ROAD

From a portrait by Barbara Tiffany-Eginton

Andre Norton is widely regarded as one of the best-known authors of contemporary science fiction and fantasy whose unique style has fascinated millions over the years. She was born Alice Mary Norton in Cleveland, Ohio, on Feb. 17, 1912 to Adalbert Freely Norton and Bertha Stemm Norton and most probably owes her gravitation to the world of *belles-lettres* to her parents' strong literary interests.

Ms. Norton began her writing career while a student at Collinwood High School in Cleveland, Ohio. There, she edited and contributed to the high school publication, *The Collinwood Spotlight*. Being a solitary teenager, she spent much of her spare time in editing and writing. After graduating, she attended Western Reserve University (now Case Western Reserve), 1930-1931, with the intention of becoming a history teacher. Due to the Great Depression, however, she entered the workforce and continued her education at Cleveland College's evening program where she sought out courses in journalism and writing. She was employed in the Cleveland Library System

where she concentrated on children's literature and she remained in the Library System from 1932-1950. During her early formative teen years, she wrote *Ralestone Luck* which was later rewritten and published as her second novel in 1938. Her first novel, *The Prince Commands*, was accepted for publication before she was 21 and saw print in 1934. At that time she began to legally use the name "Andre." She worked as a reader for Martin Greenberg at Gnome Press from 1950-1958 and, thereafter, wrote full-time.

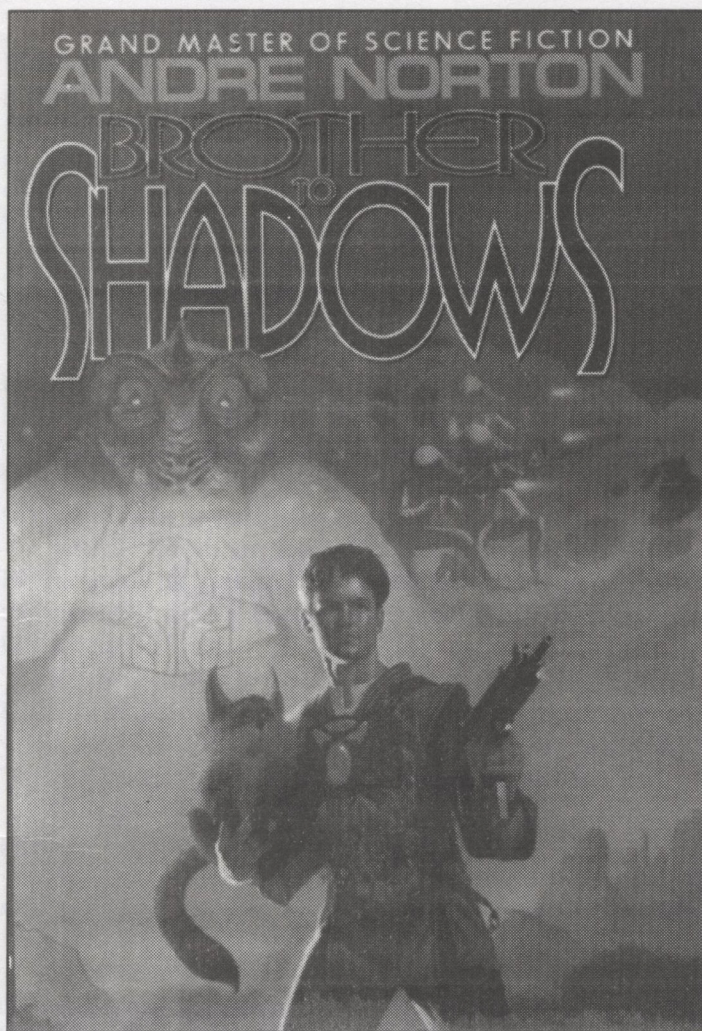
Andre Norton is an incredibly prolific writer and, to date, has authored over 128 novels alone, plus 42 collaborations, not to mention numerous papers, articles and short stories, as well as editing anthologies. Grouped very loosely, her early works were largely historical romances and adventure novels for young adults; in the 1940s she added espionage; in the 1950s and 1960s, her concentration was on science fiction (including the enormously popular science-fantasy **Witch World** series); and since the 1970s, she has produced numerous fantasies. Her first SF novel, *Star Man's Son, 2250 A.D.* (1952), sold over one million copies in the Ace paperback edition by 1970. Ms. Norton's output, however, is not lim-

ited to the genres mentioned above. Mysteries, gothic fiction, westerns, a biography, poetry and non-fiction are also included in her body of work. Her novels have sold millions of copies, remain in print for long periods and have been translated into 18 languages.

Andre credits a high school teacher of creative writing, Miss Sylvia Cockran, as inspiring her to become a writer. Authors who have influenced her include H. Rider Haggard, H. Beam Piper, Dornford Yates, Ruth Plumly Thompson and William Hope Hodgson. Authors she has admired, among others, are Edgar Rice Burroughs, Alan Garner, Susan Cooper, David Mason, C.J. Cherryh, Cordwainer Smith, J.R.R. Tolkien, Evangeline Walton, Poul Anderson, Roger Zelazny, L. Sprague de Camp and Anne McCaffrey.

Her many interests are reflected in her personal library that boasts volumes on Victorian architecture and gardens; folk tales; cats; Icelandic and Anglo-Saxon sagas; archaeology; the occult and witchcraft; general history, to name but a few. Andre, in her essay "On Writing Fantasy," underscores the importance of history to the fantasy writer:

BY S.F. WILLEMS



“But the first requirement for writing heroic or sword and sorcery fantasy must be a deep interest in and love for history itself. Not the history of dates, of sweeps and empires but the kind of history which deals with daily life, the beliefs and aspirations of people long since dust.”

Ms. Norton has received numerous awards in her long career including Hugo Award nominations (1962) for *Star Hunter*, (1964) for *Witch World* and (1968) for “Wizard’s World”; the Invisible Little Man Award (1963) for sustained excellence in science fiction; Phoenix Award (1976) for overall achievement in science fiction; Gandalf Master of Fantasy Award (1977) for lifetime achievement; Balrog Fantasy Award (1979); Nebula Grand Master Award (1984) for lifetime achievement; Jules Verne Award (1984) for work in the field of science fiction. In September 1994 she was inducted into the First Fandom Hall of Fame at the World Science Fiction Convention in Winnipeg. These are just a few of the many awards received. In July 1997, Andre Norton and Arthur C. Clarke were inducted into the Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame at a ceremony held at Kansas University - Lawrence. The Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame is under the joint auspices of the University of Kansas - Lawrence, the Center for the Study of Science Fiction, and the Kansas City Science Fiction and Fantasy Society.

Andre Norton continues to write, to collaborate with other authors, and paramount just now is the nearing realization of her long-time dream of establishing, in Tennessee, the High Hallack Library for Genre Writing and Research.

PW: *First off, congratulations are in order on your July 1997 induction into the Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame! I understand*

that both you and Arthur C. Clarke were honored as new inductees. How were you made aware of it? Were you able to attend?

AN: About the Hall of Fame Award I was given an unofficial phone call. Unfortunately, my health prevents traveling so I was not able to attend. Mr. Robin Bailey graciously agreed to read my acceptance.

PW: *You’ve received so many awards over the years. Do you have any idea what the current total is so far?*

AN: I have received every major award except the Hugo. My latest is a lifetime achievement award from Magicarpent Con.

PW: *In the interview title, I’ve referenced the ‘High Hallack Road’ — that’s an imaginary road of my creation based on one of the cycles from the Witch World series. It’s the road I picture you traveling for some years in your quest to establish the High Hallack Library. Now, that road is bringing you much closer to ‘the dream realized.’ A building appropriate to house the library has been found — please tell us about it.*

AN: Unfortunately, due to a legal entanglement we are unable to build the library-retreat on the plateau we had bought in the Tennessee mountains. Recently, the situation has changed and we have moved to a large house in Murfreesboro [Tennessee]. There will be extra room to accommodate three writers or speakers at a time. There is also a huge three car garage with land for expansion and this will be the library building. For the past ten years, I have been in the process of buying research and reference books for this. Many are out of print, a number are English, some are over a hundred years old unable to be located easily elsewhere. We have also had donated the military history library of the late Robert Adams and another library of Welsh history and Wiccan lore from the estate of Mr. Adler. We have bought a number of videos of films in each field.

PW: *Why did you decide to name it the ‘High Hallack’ Library?*

AN: Originally, the name High Hallack was chosen because we were to be situated in the mountains. However, we are retaining it.

PW: *What, more specifically, will be included in the Library? You’ve mentioned that you have well over 10,000 volumes, many rare. Are they largely from your own collection? Will you permit volumes to be checked out by mail?*

AN: The books included are early fiction and nonfiction on the following subjects: science fiction, fantasy, legends, occult, ghost material, natural history, ancient history, archaeology, anthropology, history of the middle ages, mystery including true crime, western accounts including diaries and the like. Biographies of writers, volumes of letters and the like. There is a complete library of early gothic over a hundred years old. We also have a good showing of fantasy and science fiction art and some artifacts. This began as my personal collection but has been added to over the years and we continue to buy. No volume may leave the library building at any time. Most are irreplaceable now. Anyone doing an article or working on a book must do so in the library.

PW: *You’ve said that High Hallack will also be a writer’s retreat. Accommodations, then, will be available?*

AN: We shall be able to house three extra persons at a time. It is our hope to offer “Meet the Writer” gatherings during the year with well known writers. We are in the heart of town, ten minutes from the university, close to housing and restaurants. The town has been partly restored and is of great interest because of the two well known Civil War battles fought here.

PW: *The “Meet the Writer” sessions sound great! There’ll, no doubt, be considerable interest in that. Is there any way that the public can be part of this project? Are donations being accepted to help defray expenses?*

AN: We have a tax exempt status from the IRS. All donations can be deducted from the income tax. All donations (and there have already been a number) will be acknowledged and appreciated. Contributions may be made to:

High Hallack Writers Retreat
114 Eventide Drive
Murfreesboro, Tennessee 37130

PW: *It must be enormously satisfying to you that the project is closer to being realized.*

AN: Yes. And, we shall continue to buy books and have been promised the personal libraries of several writers.

PW: *Returning to **Witch World** for a minute do you, yourself, plan to continue the saga? Or, will you allow someone else to take up the pen?*

AN: I, personally, will not be continuing the **Witch World** series. However, Lyn McConchie of New Zealand, who wrote the very popular *Key of the Keplian*, has just completed a story laid in early Karsten. Such mss are always read by me for approval. Lyn will be using new backgrounds, parts of **Witch World** I never explored.

PW: *Witch World, the first in the series, was published in 1963. How did the idea for **Witch World** evolve? Had it been building in your mind for years or did it grow as you went along? Did you envision the long-running series it has become? Or, did **Witch World** grow into a mammoth series by dint of its mass appeal?*

AN: *Witch World* was intended to be a single book. It was based on a fragment of a story I had about the Crusaders in Outremer. It simply grew and grew as readers asked for more.

PW: *As you wrote the science fiction novels, were they intended as stand-alone books? They seem, generally, not to fall into definite series.*

AN: Most of the science fiction books were intended to stand alone but in the same general universe. Others were made into series by requests of readers. The only two intended from the start to be series were the Solar Queen stories and those of the Time Traders.

PW: *Do you consider **Witch World** a blend of science fiction and fantasy or strictly fantasy?*

AN: No, **Witch World** is fantasy.

PW: *Which of your works are especially close to your heart?*

AN: I can not say that any book was my particular favorite. I found each one a challenge to be handled as best I could. In very recent years, I liked *Hands of Lyr* very much.

PW: *Since your earliest efforts were with historical romances, what drew you to science fiction?*

AN: I always enjoyed reading science fiction but when I started writing, this type of material was only published as shorts or serials in magazines and I am not a short story writer. Thus, I had to wait until in the early fifties when publishers would take a chance on a book length ms.

PW: *Backing up further. You grew up in a turbulent era WWI, the Roaring '20s, the Lost Generation (when everyone went to Paris), the Great Depression. Did any of these events have a lasting effect on you and in any way influence your later writing? Did any Lost Generation authors, such as Hemingway, have any pull on you?*

AN: I am sorry but my twenties was a very calm and peaceful era as I was raised in a family who were very close to one another. Even in high school, individual dating did not exist girls went in one group and boys in another. It was a time of 'make do' as we all were doing. There were no troubles in any classroom, teachers were revered for their work and in addition, so were our parents. This is a time I look back on now with satisfaction, that I could follow the mores and customs of that day. As for the Hemingway-type of writing, I did not care for it and I was truly contented with my time and life. To this day I detest the disorder in the field which began then and came to its horrible climax in the 60s.

PW: *Give us a flavor of what trying to get published was like at the time when you were just starting out.*

AN: I was extremely lucky when I started out selling my books. I had an alphabetical list of publishers and started at the top. To my surprise, the first one took it.

PW: *The Gods were smiling down on you! You've seen the publishing world change over the years. Where is it today and has it changed for the better or for the worse? Is it more difficult, today, for a new writer to have his/her first book published than in the past?*

AN: The change in the publishing world has been sad for all concerned. It is now exceedingly difficult for a new writer to get a chance at

publication. In the past there was not this constant selling of companies followed by sudden changes in staff. Editors stayed in charge of their departments for years. This made for a better relationship between editor and writer. The present constant degrading of quality for the sake of pandering to the lowest denomination has broken the standards of good writing. Even technique is sacrificed for the sensational and research is very poorly done. Very few of the modern juveniles, for example, or the adult historicals can be favorably compared to the books a generation back.

PW: *Please touch on pen names. Some of your early work was written under the name, 'Andrew North,' for example. Andre is unusual—what is its origin? Was any work published under your real name?*

AN: Andrew North was used only for the Solar Queen series as, at the time, I was reading mss for that publisher. Andre without the accent is English. I have never written or been published under my original name.

PW: *In conversation, you've mentioned a new series of books that you're working on—the **Senses** books. What can you tell us about this grouping? What are their titles?*

AN: I have just completed the last of the "senses" books. This also grew, though I had no original idea for it. *Hands of Lyr* touch, *Mirror of Destiny* sight, *Scent of Magic* smell (to be published early 1998), *Wind in The Stone* hearing (recently finished.)

PW: *It has been said that you've broken down doors both of genre and gender, paving the way for other authors who've followed. Did you consider yourself a crusader; in the vanguard, in particular, for future female SF-authors?*

AN: I did not go into battle in any field. It is simply that I write what I want to the type of story I always enjoyed reading myself. ▲

