

# The Past Thru' Today

Steve  
Souza

Welcome to the second installment of this column. After sort of getting my bearings last time out, and seeing what sort of package in which the first installment was included, (with which I was very pleased), it's time to take great strides forward.

The lady's name is Andre Norton. Looking at the bibliography (on the following page), one is immediately struck with the obvious--she is rather prolific. The list of 57 books is only of the science-fiction books, and it is certainly not complete. There are also early "anthologies" referred to by Lin Carter in his profile on Andre Norton. Also, she's dabbled in other fields such as murder-mysteries, fantasy romances, Westerns, and others.

In Secret of the Lost Race (Ace #75830, 1959), is "Andre Norton: A profile by Lin Carter", which contains the usual basic biographical data, accompanied by comments and observation, which we'll get back to. There are several themes evident in her work. Probably the most recurrent one is psychic relationship developed between man and animal. Her animal characters, (invariably warm-blooded), range from partially to fully sentient and often times are used to point out the foibles of greedy calculating humanity (#s 2, 7, 5, 53 in the index). Often in crisis situations, the animal is the agent of action and is logical and direct, while the human characters mill around like sheep.

A great number of her stories employ the use of psychic abilities above and beyond communication with animals. However, none of her characters ever possess fantastically tremendous powers; they aren't superman. Also, many times, the character's abilities are not specifically labeled as telepathy, psychokinesis, etc., but are identified as "inner power or force of will. Because of the handling, her characters never lose their humanity. They always have to strive to their utmost ability to win. She seems able to depict male and female main characters with equal depth. However, almost all of her main characters could be classified as "lower types". They are often withdrawn from the societies they live in. As such, they tend to be individuals that develop powerful inner resources. Her characters are heroic, not in the robust sense of Conan, but in their strength of will and determination in the face of adversity. They survive by their wits and courage, and not over heaps of dead bodies.

A favorite source of hero characters of Norton's is the American Indian. Detailed background of Indian folklore indicates a strong interest in the subject. Another favorite source of characters is the Medieval age. In the Howard tradition, Norton constructs her own complete feudal-type societies as settings in which to move her characters. Again, there is a richness in detail and attention to consistency and depth. Her Lords, Ladies, and chieftains exist in realms as complex as any that ever existed in "olde" English Earth.

An interesting note here is the way she handles her lead female characters in novels having that basic feudalistic setting. Women were treated like chattel in the Mid-Ages, and she remains consistent with her source somewhat. But, she gets around the idea of woman being second class citizens by a clever device--she endows them with special abilities not possessed by men, be they king or serf. The device is witchcraft. So, although men are warriors and titled, the women are manipulators of forces that make them equal, and in some cases, (the "Witch World" series), the ruling caste.

A link that runs through nearly all her stories is the idea of Forerunners. Basically, her universe had not one star-faring race before the advent of man, but dozens of different types and times. The discovery or use of some ancient Forerunner artifact is used often to stir the pot of a story-plot.

The temptation of writing sequels is there for any author who goes to the trouble of creating a universe for his hero to play in. Norton is no exception as few of her characters star in their own series of novels. The best series to date is the "Witch World" series, now up to 8 books. The first few novels of the series have an undeniable epicness to them, although the later novels are actually novelettes set in the "Witch World" stage (at least the ones I've read). The sequels

continues...

read for the most part like continuations of the original tales (ie part twos' and threes'), and hence avoid the pitfall of just ripping off the original idea because it was successful.

An interesting item to note in several of her novels is the image Norton paints of the authorities of the future. They are often not shining knights, but corrupt individuals lusting after power and control, a sort of galactic Watergate. A far cry this is from something like EE Smith's benign Galactic Patrol. As noted earlier, Lin Carter states several observations in his review. He divides her work into three parts: early work as fairly straight forward adventures in science fiction, a middle period of science fiction with fantasy overtones, and finally, straight out-and-out fantasy. This is true to an extent, but Carter suggests that her approach and style seem to be the theme of the future (his as the 1960's). It didn't quite turn out that way. Norton's incorporation of fantasy elements in her stories did not spawn a host of imitators or students of the field. In fact, there are probably more of that ilk around now than in the sixties. Anyway, I maintain that that is not her best feature. Her stories have always been first concerned with the people involved. What they experience and how they progress has always been the rest of her work. Norton never was a hard-science science fiction writer in the sense of an Asimov. The hardware in her works is not dwelled upon, other than how the characters interact with it. Her contributions to the field include that she was one of the few people who showed that stories could be written in an adventure vein and still be good SF, appealing to more than a juvenile audience. She also showed that Tolkien was not the last word in fantasy, but was in fact an opener of gates through which she has traveled with great success.

To summarize, her work is very entertaining and occasionally startling in its complexity. It will be appealing to adults as well as juvenile audiences, especially those who enjoy other-

worldly adventures. Oh, I have not read all the books listed in the following index (bibliography, if you prefer), and I went so far as to asterisk the books I haven't. A quick count will show that I have read more than half of that sizeable list. For information purposes, all titles followed by a "D" are Dawn books, those by an "F" are Fawcett Crest books, and all others followed by nothing are Ace books.

A final note. The Buyer's ~~USA~~ Guide #243 sported an ad for a fanzine called QUONK. This zine lists an Andre Norton interview amongst its contents. I've not received my copy, hence no review of its contents, but its availability from Fred Ramsey, 622-C West Beaver Ave., State College, Pa. 16801. Its \$6 for third class mail and 75¢ if you want it mailed first class.

Next time--

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\* PILLER STUFF \*

a film review by the editor! ! !

I had the opportunity to see the remake of the classic chiller, INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS. I hope the original film was better. This was so silly and pointless. But I was never much of a BEM (Bug Eyed Monster) fan anyway. Each of the actors did a fine job with their roles. Both Leonard Nimoy and Donald Sutherland were very good. The direction by Philip Kaufman was alright also. But the screenplay by W.D. Richter was so ridiculous and unbelievable that the actors came out looking foolish. Picture this, Sutherland sleeping on his porch in his unteenth floor apartment, and this green thing produces a flower that gives birth to several naked people in Glad Wrap. Frightening, huh? The ending is predictable and more of a relief than a fright. The relief is that the damn thing is over. All the "horror" spots are pure shock value, things bleeding and being cut open with garden tools, and the film says nothing.

Take my word for it. Skip this film, its a loser. Catch the original if you must, or better yet go see MAGIC. Its a truely fine, fine film. As a matter of fact, Fats is going to be nominated for the Academy Award for Best Supported Actor. Excuse the pun.