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ANDRE NORTON had already written 21 books and edited four others when she began *The Time Traders* in 1957. Born Alice Mary Norton, she was a librarian in her native Cleveland until 1950, when she became an editor at Gnome Press, a New York specialty publisher. It was during this eight-year period as an editor that she published her first science fiction novel, *Star Man's Son* (1952), wrote and published eight other SF stories, and started work on *The Time Traders*.

Readers today may find it difficult to understand why Alice Mary Norton first chose to write under a masculine pseudonym and then had her name legally changed to "Andre Norton" (in some libraries today, "Andre Norton" is still shown as the pen name of Alice Mary Norton, even though this has not been true for years). The truth is that a woman (and a librarian) who wanted to write and publish action-adventure fiction in the period 1930-1960 had to write under a man's name to be taken seriously. It has only been in the last 20 years in this country that women have been able to get into the male-dominated action-adventure field under their own names. And even today, to write for children and young adults (as Andre Norton does), one must still face the problem that boys will not read books that seem to be written for girls, even though girls will read books intended for boys. By using a man's name for all of her books (she also used the name "Andrew North" for three of her Solar Queen novels), Andre Norton was able to establish herself as a writer of first-rate science fiction adventure and fantasy, and, in so doing, has inspired and entertained countless

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readers of all ages over the years. To date she has written and published nearly 80 books of fiction and two dozen short stories, edited six anthologies, and collaborated on three other books. Three of her works have been nominated for the coveted Hugo Award of the World Science Fiction Convention (*Star Hunter*, 1961, reprinted by Gregg Press in 1978; *Witch World*, 1963, reprinted by Gregg in 1977; and "Wizard's World," 1967), and in 1977 she won the Gandalf Award for lifetime achievement in fantasy writing from the World Fantasy Convention. She is now one of the most popular science fiction writers of all time, in the select company of writers like Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke and Robert A. Heinlein. For the past 12 years she has lived in Florida, where she still writes at least three pages a day.

Even though *The Time Traders* was Andre Norton's 22nd book, it was only her 10th book of science fiction. Her first book, *The Prince Commands* (1934), was a romantic adventure story set in a mythical kingdom. The second, *Ralestone Luck* (1938), was a mystery novel set in the Louisiana bayou country of the 1930s. She also wrote another mystery (*Murders for Sale*, 1954, under the pseudonym of "Allen Weston" in collaboration with Grace Allen Hogarth), two books retelling old legends (*Rogue Reynard*, 1947, and *Huon of the Horn*, 1951), a series of three espionage novels dealing with an agent of the Dutch Underground during and after World War II (*The Sword is Drawn*, 1944; *Sword in Sheath*, 1949; and *At Sword's Points*, 1954), and four adventure novels based on history (*Follow the Drum*, 1942; *Scarface*, 1948; *Yankee Privateer*, 1955; and *Stand to Horse*, 1956).

These early non-science fiction books reveal several

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interesting facets of Andre Norton. First of all, her chief interest is in telling stories, particularly stories of action, suspense and adventure centering around one individual. Secondly, they reveal a love of history and legend, a strong interest in the past and how people have acted out their lives in distant, even mythical times. And finally they show a preference for creating fiction from fact, for taking what is known or believed to be true (the bare bones of history) and imaginatively reworking these materials into something that *could* be true.

Given this background, it is not surprising that Andre Norton moved almost exclusively into the writing of science fiction and fantasy. Both science fiction and fantasy begin with a simple human question: what if? Both reach out from what is known and familiar (the present, or the past as it is recorded in history and legend) to what cannot be known (the future, a greatly different past or alternate present). Many people prefer to call what is commonly termed science fiction "SF" instead, because SF can also mean "speculative fiction," which may have very little to do with science or technology as we know it, and can also include fantasy, where science is usually replaced by magic. Andre Norton's first SF novel, *Star Man's Son* (also published as *Daybreak — 2250 A.D.* in paperback) is a classic piece of speculative fiction by these terms: it asks what would happen to mankind in general and one young man in particular after a nuclear war that virtually destroyed the human race. In 1952, when this novel was published, a nuclear war seemed like a real possibility: how would humanity survive if its civilization, its technology and its cities were wiped out?

In order to ask questions like this intelligently and to write a successful SF novel (and many consider *Star Man's Son* to be Andre Norton's best novel), one must

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make assumptions about human nature and develop an understanding of human nature that is as independent as possible of present circumstances. For Andre Norton, this understanding grows out of the reading of history and the basic materials of human history — anthropology, archaeology, folklore, studies in magic and occult religions, travel narratives and, yes, historical novels. She reads widely in these areas and draws inspiration and not a few plot developments and details from them; she feels that to imagine man as he might behave in different circumstances, one must understand and be faithful to how he has behaved in the past. As she wrote in one of her few essays, "On Writing Fantasy" (first published in 1871 and reprinted in *The Many Worlds of Andre Norton*, 1974, and *The Book of Andre Norton*, 1975, both edited by Roger Elwood): "So history is the base, and from there imagination, rooted in fact, sun-warmed by inspired fiction, can flower into new patterns."

In a recent conversation, Ms. Norton disclosed that *The Time Traders* grew out of her reading of *Conquest by Man: The Saga of Early Exploration and Discovery* by the German historian Paul Herrmann, published in an English translation in 1954. She received the book from England, she recalls, and quickly became fascinated with Herrmann's investigations into the Beaker Traders of the Bronze Age (ca. 3500-1400 B.C.). Herrmann's study demonstrated that these resourceful traders had ranged far more extensively in Europe than historians had previously thought and that, because of this broad scope and their ability to pass among mutually hostile tribes in selling their wares, they were greatly responsible for the spread of civilization and knowledge in the West.

Norton had already explored the idea of "free traders" as a civilizing force in the first two novels in her Dane

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Thorson-Solar Queen series, *Sargasso of Space* (1955) and *Plague Ship* (1956), both written for Gnome Press under the name of "Andrew North" (and reprinted by Gregg Press in 1978 with the third Solar Queen novel, *Voodoo Planet*). In the Solar Queen series, Free Traders were the small businessmen of interstellar commerce, independent of the giant trading corporations who carried freight to established markets on settled outposts or colonies. The Free Traders went where no other traders wanted to go, and, as a result were usually the first Terrans to establish trading relations with alien civilizations. The Beaker Traders, then, were the Free Traders of the Bronze Age. What was it like to be a Beaker Trader in that distant age, when there were no major cities and no regular means of communication among the scattered tribes of mankind? What would modern man see if he went back? Here was the germ of a story.

Something else took place in 1957 that helped shape Andre Norton's development of *The Time Traders*: the successful launching of Sputnik, the first artificial satellite, by the Russians on October 4, 1957. Americans reacted to Sputnik with both outrage and astonishment. The outrage was directed at the American scientific community and the government for allowing the Russians to beat America into space. The astonishment was directed at the Russians: how could a country that appeared to be so technologically backward produce the rockets and systems necessary to make such a large breakthrough into space? No one in the West was prepared for such a major achievement, and some people refused to believe that Sputnik was circling the earth, despite the evidence. Others were convinced that the Russians had stolen the technology from the U.S. aerospace industry and simply developed it faster. How did the Russians move ahead so

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quickly? In 1957 this was a burning question in the popular consciousness.

Andre Norton took this question one step further. If the Russians did steal the technology of space flight from someone, why assume that they stole it from American scientists, who were still years away from putting a satellite into orbit? What if they stole it from someone else, such as alien visitors from space? Even before the publication of Erich von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods: Unsolved Mysteries of the Past* (1970), writers such as Charles Fort had attempted to link such strange and apparently unrelated mysteries as the circle of Stonehenge and the design of the pyramids by presenting them as evidence of an earlier alien presence on earth, the scattered remnants of an alien influence on humanity that have survived the destructive forces of war and geologic change. What if the Russians had stumbled upon some useable relics of alien technology in the frozen wastes of Siberia?

Better still, what if the Russians had discovered a way to go back in the past and recover the products of alien space technology intact, from the aliens themselves? The concept of time travel was not new to science fiction in 1957. Travel to the future by some means exists in some novels published before H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) introduced the idea of using technology in time travel. Andre Norton had already used another form of time travel — travel across time into alternate worlds coexisting in time and space with our own — in writing *The Crossroads of Time* (1956, reprinted by Gregg Press in 1978), which was inspired by the Paratime Police stories of H. Beam Piper. However, the idea of time travel into the *past*, combined with the drama of East-West confrontation and contact with an alien culture is

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typical of the unique fusion of influences to be found in Andre Norton's best writings.

The Time Trader novels were not planned as a unified series of books. (Only the Dane Thorson-Solar Queen series was planned as a series, according to Ms. Norton.) The success of *The Time Traders* in 1958 and large quantities of mail from fans encouraged Andre Norton to write a sequel, *Galactic Derelict* (1959). The favorable response to the second book led to another sequel, *The Defiant Agents* (1962), and finally to the fourth and last book, *Key Out of Time* (1963). Though she has often been urged to continue the series, Andre Norton does not plan to write another Time Traders book. "It's too late to go back," she says.

Although the Time Traders novels were not written from some well-defined master plan and each of the four novels can be read independently of the others, the series does develop a chronological narrative of its own. *The Time Traders* introduces the reader to Operation Retrograde, a secret American project undertaken in the 1980s. Its aim is to discover where the Russians have travelled in the past to uncover the alien technology they are using in the space race, and to destroy the Russian base of operations before some particularly deadly piece of alien hardware can be brought forward into the present. Ross Murdock is inducted into the Project against his will and, together with his trainer, archaeologist, Dr. Gordon Ashe, travels back in time to Britain in the year 2000 B.C. in the guise of a Beaker Trader to discover the Russian base of operations. Very quickly Murdock gets involved in adventures that test him severely, as he finds himself locked in struggles with the natives of the time, the Russian agents, and finally, the cold and malevolent aliens themselves, who seek to bend him to their will.

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In *Galactic Derelict*, Murdock and Ashe add another agent to their team — Travis Fox, a full-blooded Apache a time probe project and, like Murdock, is inducted into Operation Retrograde against his will. In this book, members of the Project attempt to locate an intact alien spaceship in the past at a desolate point in the American Southwest. Through a complicated series of events not to be revealed here, the team finds itself aboard an alien ship on a strange journey to the ruins of the now vanished alien race.

The Defiant Agents describes a special project that grew out of discoveries made in *Galactic Derelict*. Travis Fox is sent off on a journey to the uninhabited planet Topaz with a carefully selected team of Apache settlers. Their objective is to colonize the planet before the Russians can. Everything goes wrong with the American plan, and Travis Fox finds himself and his tribe stranded on a hostile world confronted with an established Russian colony, and only two coyotes as allies.

In *Key Out of Time*, Murdock and Ashe journey to another uninhabited world, the sea planet of Hawaika, with a team of pure-blooded Polynesians. They are led by anthropologist Kara Trehern of the Alii and supported by two dolphins who respond to her telepathic communication. Their aim is to discover the alien bases located in the island world's distant past. They find the aliens, but lose their way back to the present when their time gate is destroyed. Like Travis Fox and his Apaches on Topaz, they find that they must join forces with the natives of the planet to face the aliens in order to survive — even at the risk of changing history.

What binds these four novels together most effectively is not the narrative continuity or even the time-travel concept (which is altogether absent in *The Defiant*

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Agents), but the characters and themes developed by Andre Norton. In many ways, Ross Murdock is the typical Norton hero: a loner whose past is uncertain, a social misfit proud of his independence and utterly self-reliant. In the course of these adventures he comes to discover that he can belong to a team and that he needs to rely on others for his well-being and survival. Dr. Gordon Ashe appears at first to be a model Establishment figure, but proves instead to be nearly as independent as Murdock. He is a true leader who brings out the best qualities of the members of his team. Travis Fox and Karara Trehern are both pure-bred members of vanishing minority groups who discover that their racial inheritances and unique powers of communication can make a crucial difference when they are forced to fight for survival in alien environments.

Three powerful interrelated themes emerge in all four books. First there is the spectre of emotionless aliens themselves, who succeeded in producing a civilization of enormous power and technological achievement, but who lost the ability to accept differences in individuals and to communicate with feeling and understanding. Despite their powerful advantages, they fail to survive into man's future, perhaps because, lacking the diversity of races and individuals found in humanity, they could not adapt to survive.

The second theme is the conflict between the individual will and a group will imposed on the individual. At several points in these stories the aliens attempt to control Ross Murdock's mind and force his will to theirs. He survives because his passion for independence is too strong for alien domination. In *The Defiant Agents*, both the Russians and Americans attempt to impose mind control on their colonists to the point that their survival is

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threatened. Only freely given cooperation among individuals succeeds in these novels.

Finally, throughout these stories there is a constant comparison made between a simple, humanistic past and a complex, dismal future. At the extremes, the aliens represent the darkest of all futures — grey, emotionless, evil, and destructive — and the Beaker Traders and Apaches represent the brightest of possibilities — independent, resourceful, humane, and family centered.

In between these extremes, the future and the past, lies the present. Is that dark future unavoidable? We can't go back to the past — or can we? In these four novels Andre Norton holds us outside of time, removed from but keenly observant of our own alternate human possibilities.

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