

Dear Miss Norton: For Warren Williams, Steve Riley and myself, please accept our thanks for granting us this interview. (You will probably notice that there are no credits for Warren and Steve -- a terrible oversight on the part of SQUONK that will be corrected next issue. I apologize for problems in the

The SQUONK Interview:

Andre Norton

Brad Linaweaver

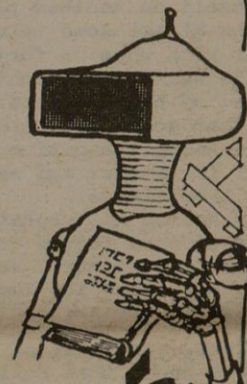
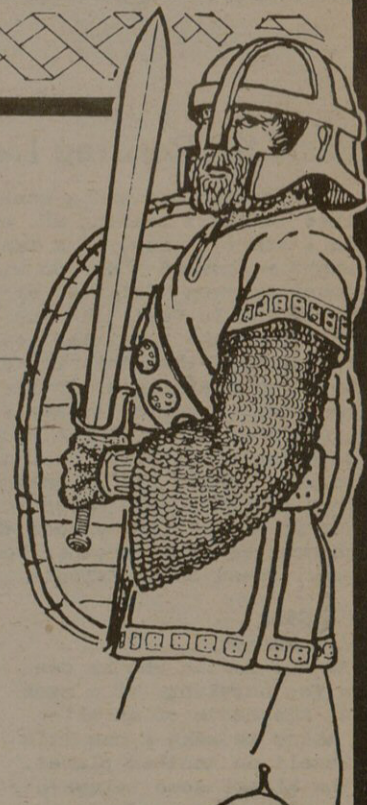
Interviewed by Brad Linaweaver

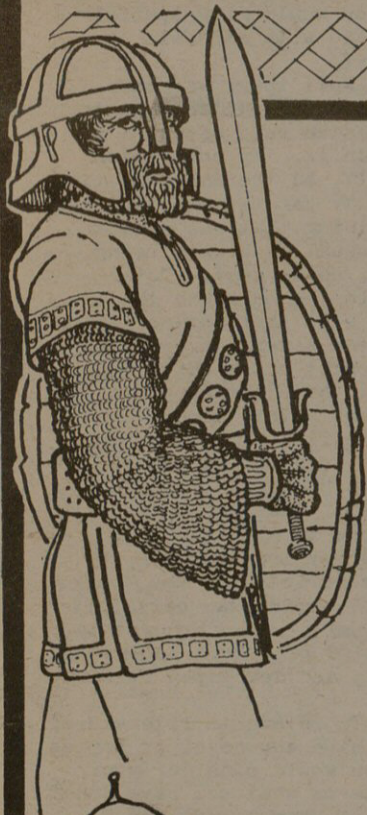
It is with particular pleasure that we bring you this interview with Miss Andre Norton. Like so many other science fiction fans, the editors of SQUONK were first introduced to SF through her works. Her creations left an indelible imprint on our memories and still bring us pleasure each time we re-read them. Her "Witch World" series, Hosteen Storm, and the animals from "Catseye" did much to shape our enjoyment of science fiction and we thank her for them.

And now, after 25 years of writing science fiction, she is finally receiving the acclaim that has always been due to her. The members of the 1977 World Science Fiction Society recently voted her the Gandalf Award for Life Achievement in Fantasy. Gregg Press has reprinted the "Witch World" series in a uniform hardback set and is planning to do more of her books in the near future. And LOCUS magazine reports that she has sold the reprint rights to 18 of her older books for a much larger sum than she received for them earlier. Miss Norton is still writing several books a year, so our pleasures will continue.

SQUONK: In your novels, like the "Witch World" series for example, the adventure element is always predominant. It seems that most of your work deals in terms of adventure. Do you consciously set out to write in terms of adventure whether it is fantasy or science fiction, or do the stories just "write themselves" in this way?

NORTON: Well, the stories don't exactly write themselves. You start out with what I call an action outline which is where you have to lift the type of thing that has come in it. Each story is the result of a great deal of research. I read anywhere from 6 to 20 books to get the background materials and in - for example - The "Witch World" which is founded almost entirely on an early English mythology, it was necessary to read a great deal of background. So you don't say this is going to be an adventure story. You start out with a set of characters and one basic idea of your plot. Now in the "Witch World" two of the stories in that are based on various old legends. "The Year of the Unicorn" is the old, old legend of "Beauty and the Beast" and the "Warlock" is the old Anglo-Saxon story of Child Roland. So you start out with a basic story of that kind, and then create. My outlines very seldom are the finished book because, maybe half way through the story, your characters will take over and just gallop away! And I know of a time when I started out with a man who was the villain and he ended up the secondary hero. This sort of thing happens--and you have to be careful about your revision--to collect these. But most of the sword and sorcery is basic legend material, and science fiction is different because of the dependence is upon the machine.





SQUONK: Most of what you write is in the novel form, is it not?

NORTON: Yes.

SQUONK: Would you care to comment on that?

NORTON: Well, the whole fact is that I can't write short stories very well! To me, they're a lot harder to write than a book length narrative. From the very start of my writing, I have always worked in book length narratives. It has only been within the past few years when I have been doing short stories about "Hi-Halik", which is the "Witch World" background, that I have been able to do the shorter thing.

SQUONK: Who are the SF authors who have influenced your writing?

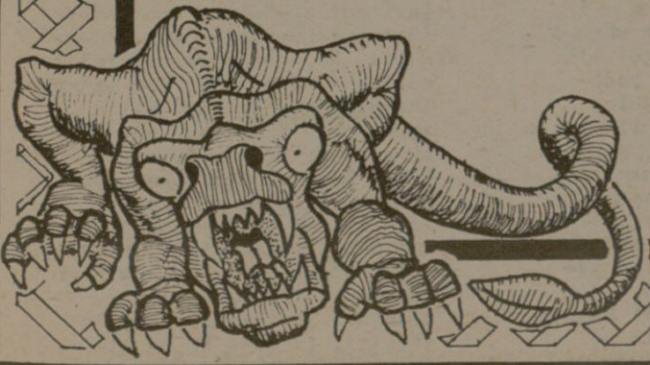
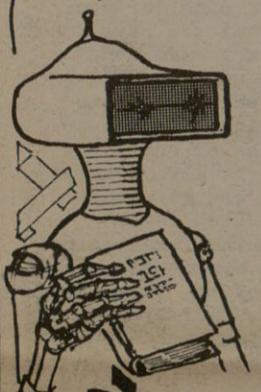
NORTON: When I started out I was very much under the influence of Meritt. Of course you may say he is more science fiction than fantasy, but to me he was a revelation! I came across one of his books in the library without knowing anything about him--and to me it was so exciting and to my mind that book is still a beautifully done piece of work...But among the regular science fiction writers of today, the ones I admire most are Poul Anderson, Eric Frank Russell, H. Beam Piper (and unfortunately we will have no more H. Beam Piper) and L. Sprague deCamp. With sword and sorcery, Dick Mason and John Jakes, and again, L. Sprague deCamp, and certainly Lin Carter's books. His anthologies show an unusual range in the field.

SQUONK: Well, I notice that in reading the "Quest Across Time" the character reappears in several other books. It is very close to a series format. Do a lot of your novels take this general trend?

NORTON: Well, I never started out, with the exception of "Witch World" to write a series. But oftentimes there is such interest shown by the fans that I do carry on the book, I mean the characters in another book. Sometimes there is a steady demand; as for example the "Time Trader" series which went four books because there was a demand from book to book of what became of such and such a character. I did the sequel to "Moon of Three Rings" because there was a demand about whether the lead character ever got a human body again. That sort of thing comes mostly because I do get a great deal of fan mail asking questions of what happened to this one and that one.

SQUONK: Science fiction has come to fair acceptance with the popularity of films like 2001. Everything seems to be conspiring to build up the image of science fiction with the public, and this has resulted in a lot more success for you! Could you give any comments you may have on science fiction since you started and the changes in it now?

NORTON: Well, I wanted to write science fiction before World War II. I had two books written at that time. Neither one of them would sell and science fiction in book format did not sell 1950. It was necessary for me to write historical or adventure stories up to that time. Since then, it has come and gone in waves and I think now really sword and sorcery is coming more to the top, over straight science in the pub-



ic interest. Machines have caught up so far with science fiction that it is very hard to imagine a machine that isn't already somewhere in process! People are more interested in people, and their reaction to certain situations than they are to a gadget story--the machine. So I think we are in another wave now, but it leans to the occult and sword and sorcery rather than straight science fiction

SQUONK: Well, perhaps I should have used the term speculative fiction in talking about SF/fantasy/horror...

NORTON: Yes. Well, just look at the regular serious interest in magic and the occult and anything of that sort. It is just a carry over of that.

SQUONK: Yes, I noticed in a good number of your books rather than going along with the trend of certain authors towards mechanization and technocracy, you tend to go with higher developed powers of mind--ESP--which is considered supernatural.

NORTON: Well, I am very interested in that myself. In the first place I do not have a science background and it has always been my duty to get my heroes away from machines as quickly as possible for fear that I would make some blooper! I never keep them in space for any length of time! I am very much interested in the experiments on communication with animals. Some of these things that are now coming out used to be considered flights of fancy not worthy of serious investigation.

SQUONK: Yes, your books seem to take a sort of humanist trend in that respect. Were you much more interested in dealing with people or were you more interested in the sword and sorcery effect?

NORTON: Well, I am interested in the people, but I am also interested in the legends and the history which is always very much in the fore and things of that kind. Archeology is one great interest. I have been interested in the past and the epic form of sword and sorcery appeals to me. It's fun to write.

SQUONK: A point that the late John Campbell made was the ESP, psychokinetics, and the other manifestations that we term "occult", for the want of the better term, actually have a scientific explanation. Of course many SF writers, like Asimov, deny the existence of this stuff, but Campbell believed the existence of the higher powers of the mind could have been the reason for a lot of our religious myth. Like Campbell, you put ESP and company in a rationalist world--in your science fiction.

NORTON: Well, I think they do have existence! We don't know how to control them. We don't know how to summon them, but there have been too many experiments in which things have happened which they cannot explain in any other way than that this sort of

thing does exist! I think we are just on the edge of learning about it. And the more we can write about it to interest people, the more it may well come in for further investigation. I myself have had three friends who had unexplained experiences in so called haunted houses. None of these people were minded or interested in that stuff--it sprang on them suddenly. So knowing what I know; there are things that do happen that we can't explain.

SQUONK: It seems that back in the 40's and 50's, a lot of adventure science fiction was written in the pulps, and a lot of the bad press with the public for science fiction seems to have come from this. What are your thoughts on this?

NORTON: Of course a great many people who talked against science fiction had never read it. They picked up a magazine that showed a more or less undressed young woman being chased by a BEM* and they considered that science fiction. They never opened the magazine to see what it was about. Now some of those books--Startling Stories, Planet Stories, Thrilling Wonder had the work of such people as Leigh Brackett and C. L. Moore-- Those people were really writing very fine things that are now being picked up and reprinted in anthologies and paperbacks. Of course, there was a lot of trash, too. But in every phase you can get a well written mystery story and you can get a very poor one. I always object to the people making those wide sweeping statements when they don't know the field! I myself have had some difficulty with some reviewers because they review my book without knowing a thing about science fiction! And it is very irritating to know what you are trying to do, and have someone simply close their eyes when they are faced by it.

SQUONK: Sturgeon's Law, right? 90% of everything is crap! Here I am sitting in your house--and all I can see are cats. Cats outside. A Cat emblem on your mailbox. So I am going to ask you a question about cats. How about cats?

NORTON: Well, I am very fond of cats. I am owned and operated by five of them. And they are extremely independent creatures - you cannot force a cat to do anything they don't want to do - not even physically. And they are very good companions if you are living alone. They are fine companions. And I am very proud of my cat family. There is a Burmese, two half-Burmese, one 3/4 quarters Persian and one ordinary what they now call domestic breed. We used to call them 'alley cats'.

SQUONK: I noticed a very big upswing in sword and sorcery, as mentioned before, and that the authors are even organizing. Could you tell me something about why they are doing this?

NORTON: Well, that's SAGA. And I am very proud because I am the only woman who has been elected to SAGA. You have to be elected by the members.

*Bug-Eyed Monster

And it stands for Swordmen's and Sorcerers Guild of America. They have no regular meetings or anything. Of course at some of the conventions they get together. You have to write a certain number of acceptable fantasy books to be elected by the other members unanimously.

SQUONK: Also, speaking of sword and sorcery, what about your so called children's books? There are a good many of these books which are not out in paperback, as mainline science fiction. They can be found in children's sections of libraries however. They seem very very close to what you write in the SF market and I've found them to be excellent books.

NORTON: You are probably referring to series that have magic in the title - the "Steel Magic", the "Octagon Magic" and the "Fur Magic". Well, those were written for a purpose, for the World Publishing Company and there is a fourth in that series under the title of "Dragon Magic" which carries on the series. I started with Steel Magic because I was very much interested in that sort of background, so I developed "Steel Magic" from it. "Octagon Magic" came from an actual historical doll house that I owned, and when I moved here to Florida it was presented to the Cleveland Public Library and is now on permanent exhibit there in the Children's Room. And of course "Fur Magic" is based on the old American Indian lore.

SQUONK: As long as we are talking about sword and sorcery, I've noticed that the film medium has tried upon occasion to do this type of thing and it is not usually done that well. There have been the exceptions when you can get a production like Jason and the Argonauts let's say, with Ray Harryhausen special effects and good direction as well. Do you see potential for unfilmed sword and sorcery material? I would include here Edgar Rice Burroughs and the entire field of swashbuckling fantasy. Do you have any interest in the filming of this material? Your books could make great movies.

NORTON: Yes, but the great difficulty! Some of my material was considered for film. And this is difficult: it requires too much background and effects for modern filming techniques. It makes it too expensive. Now if you remember STAR TREK, they use mainly the interior of the vessel and when they showed the outside, it was always a wilderness background which can be picked up anywhere. They tell me it is entirely too expensive a type of thing to produce nowadays with the proper effects and background.

SQUONK: One other thing - I sometimes notice that when a film does manage to get all the money to get the background and the spectacle, sometimes the money will be so concentrated on that, at some point the story is forgotten. And they will just take something that the public will definitely come to. Many sophisticated fantasies are never even considered.

NORTON: Yes! That will happen, but as I say, there is so much you can't reproduce at the price they are budgeted

for. SQUONK: Are there any films that you would give special credit to with emphasis on fantasy?

NORTON: Well there was one brought out -- I don't go to the theatre very often -- I can't do it. My connection is by TV, and the one objection to the TV was the constant use of anything that was strange and unusual as always being evil...never good. "Star Trek" is the only one that didn't have that sort of thing. There was a very interesting one brought out a while ago that was an adoption of an excellent gothic supernatural. It was called "Amy Come Home," in book form but it was produced as "House That Would Not Die". That was extremely well done to my mind and I want to say too that whoever did the scripts for the "Dark Shadows" series was certainly on the ball. They brought in every kind of occult background in that, and developed it very well.

SQUONK: To return to literature, do you have any novel or series that you would consider your favorite of what you have done?

NORTON: Of what I have done? No, there are some books that you consider were closer to what you had in mind because an author is never suited by his work. He is always sure there is some big gap there. I liked the "Witch World" stories - I think I came close to what I was aiming at, and I did in "Moon of the Three Rings" also. I like "Dark Piper" and "Dread Companion" because what I was aiming at I came closer to in those.

SQUONK: In your book "Icecrown" the style is a revival of a romantic style mixed with a little sword and sorcery in a fantasy format. I found it to be quite effective and I was wondering if you were planning to attempt any more books of this type?

NORTON: No. That was written as a sort of gamble. Ann McCaffery and I were both interested in the old time mythical kingdom - The Graustark novel. She and I discussed this and I said I was going to see if I can transport the Graustarkian background into science fiction. So "Icecrown" was a result of seeing if a mythical kingdom story could be written as science fiction.

SQUONK: In some of your novels I've noticed there is an interest in animals of some sort. The cat always stands out and I've noticed other animals too - like the "Storm Over Warlock" which had the wolverines. Do you find animals interesting to characterize and do they sometimes work out as better characters than the humans in your story?

NORTON: No, but they are interesting to use. Now for example, the Brothers in Fur that appear in "X Factor" grew out of a story from a friend of mine, Helen Hoover, who does these beautiful books on natural life in the wilderness. She had small weasel that would move into her house in winter and would sleep among her plants. She did not try to tame it, it came in on its own. And she told me stories

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of that and the fishers, etc. so my Brothers In Fur grew out of her stories about these animals. I enjoyed reading animal books - that is not the fictionized type but the regular natural history. I use natural history books for my backgrounds.

SQUONK: Do you think science fiction is prophetic?

NORTON: Well, I don't know - I can't really say what the future will be because right now there is a sort of seesaw in the field between the so-called new wave of writing and the type of thing that I do which is the old adherence to the straight story line. I find the new wave discouraging to me personally because if I understand it, I dislike it. Otherwise I don't understand it and it seems to me that the authors are highly pessimistic, which I don't approve of. I think that one should, even though there are a great many hardships etc., at the end there should be some sort of hope left for the people -- some way they will put themselves out of the difficulties. I think it is wrong to continually hold up the dark side of life to the exclusion of any hope or pleasure in the future.

SQUONK: I notice in your novels that you do a good job of handling both - You put your characters in some delightfully dark situations where there is total conflict and some are even destroyed by it. Yet as you say that ray of hope is there. There is that feeling that I get from reading your novels that "Yes, there will be a future, at least!"

NORTON: Well, I hope there will be a future! If you read enough history you can see that there always was a seesaw in this world and of course history repeats itself over and over again. And there was a terrible upset at the end of the Roman Empire when the dark ages arose and everything that they knew of as civilization crashed completely. I think we are in one of those times like the period after the French Revolution when there was such political upheaval that changed the face of Europe. Well, we are in a social and moral upheaval now - not a political one - but a social and moral one. But I think it is wrong to accept it all as no hope, nothing will come of this.

SQUONK: You don't have to answer this but I have got to ask - what do you think of Harlan Ellison?

NORTON: Well, I've known Harlan since he was 16 years old when he started his writing in a fan magazine in Cleveland and I think he is an extremely powerful writer. I object to what he writes. I think that he looks always upon the most degraded darkest and most unhappy side of human life and persists in pulling this to the fore. I have as yet to read anything of his that I consider shows any hope for the future. He is one of the exponents of the new wave with which as I say I can't agree.

I think as a writer he is a very powerful writer and therefore his work has even more of an impact because of the power of his writing.

SQUONK: What about Ray Bradbury?

NORTON: Well, of Ray Bradbury's writing, there are only two stories that lingered for any time in my mind. One of them is the one about the witch family where the little boy is born without powers - "Homecoming" - and the other one is about the settlers on Mars who are cut off by a war on this planet and who over a number of years develop into Martians themselves. To me those were the most finished of his stories. His stories left loose ends, flying. They were guazy, not pulled tight.

SQUONK: How about Robert Heinlein in terms of the novel?

NORTON: Robert Heinlein's great ability is to present the future in such wonderful detail that you feel this is written by a man who was there! His books have a great deal of power from that point of view. He is unable to draw a believable woman. There isn't a single one of his women characters who is believable to another woman, but his mechanics and background are marvelously well done.

SQUONK: I read your "Warlock of the Witch World" not too long after I had read the "Tolkien" series. I had much of the same feeling of the completely constructed world in terms of the ancient epic in "Warlock of the Witch World". Would you like to make any comparison with that or comments on Tolkien?

NORTON: Tolkien is the great fantasy writer of this generation. There is nobody who comes near him. Alan Garner can at times touch him. Especially in the "Moon of Goomrath" - the summoning of the old gods and certainly Ursulla K. LeGuin in "Wizard of Earthsec" comes very close to him. I think of the Witch World as a medieval type of place and as I say it is based on legendary material. In fact the first story in that - the Witch World itself - was taken largely from a book that I intended to write once about the Crusaders. The men who settled in Palestine during the Crusades and carved out small kingdoms and duchies for themselves and lived there for some 50 years until the Saracens overran the country. I had that much of a medieval background for it and it grew out of that.

SQUONK: I have always had a special preference for your time travel novels because as you say, you do so much research into history and anthropology.

NORTON: Well the "Time Traders" which is the first of them was intended to be the only one - I mean I hadn't intended to write another - came from reading "Conquest by Man" by Herman, which impressed me so with the bronze aged traders the beaker traders who went all over the early bronze age world that the book grew out of that. And then as I say I had requests for what happened next. We used the contrast finally between the Tartar of the Hordes and the American Indians in repopulating one of the worlds of the galaxy.

SQUONK: I noticed in some of your books you refer to different levels and in a good number of these you write worlds parallel to earth's history, with slight modification. I find these extremely interesting because you did so much research, and the possibilities are so frightening.

NORTON: Well of course that is the old "if" theory of history which has been very - I don't know whether you have seen the book - it's been long out of print - called "If" or "History Rewritten". It takes points where the whole history of the world depends upon the life and death of a certain man, the outcome of a certain battle, even the birth of somebody, and from that time on you have two alternate worlds you see. For example, there is the world in which Napoleon won the Battle of Waterloo. There is the world in which Lincoln was not shot. And these would all have their effects on history. So you try to visualize a world in which the history had gone the other way. I used in my Crosstime Book two points on which it depended upon the life of a single man - If Richard III had won he was a much more enlightened and better ruler than Henry VII who followed him.

And he had already given letters patent to certain merchants in London to get as far as Iceland in their trading. And we know the Icelanders already knew about Greenland and they already knew about United States. We know that now. So there is no reason to believe the English explorers might not have reached the Continental United States long before Columbus' bunch.

SQUONK: How many books have you written?

NORTON: I've had 64 published. I have a few that have just been put back in the trunk! And many more to come!

SQUONK: Thank you Miss Norton.
NORTON: Thank you.

A BASIC READING LIST

ians who just appear one day and refuse to go away. Hilarious. A good companion volume is the Best of Fredric Brown from Del Rey Books.

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