

A tangible new chapter in Witch World fantasy

By Nancy Pate

SENTINEL BOOK CRITIC

It is a place of enchantment, an ancient land where magic is power, where witches rule. Created by Winter Park science-fiction and fantasy writer Andre Norton more than 20 years ago, it is known to her legion of fans as the Witch World.

Until recently, Witch World existed only in Norton's imagination and between the pages of 14 of her books. Now it is expanding beyond the printed word.

Norton has produced a limited-edition audio-cassette of the first book in the series, *Witch World*, and more audiocassettes are planned. Video projects are still in the talking stage, but an artist is at work on designs for stationery, greeting cards and calendars. Within a few months, fans will be able to wear silver Witch World jewelry, including a falconer's talisman and a witch's jewel.

"It's quite exciting," Norton said. "All the designs are clever and beautiful, and everything is connected to my books."

Although Norton has gained international recognition within the science-fiction and fantasy world with her more than 100 books, the 71-year-old author has maintained a low personal profile. For many years, her fans didn't even know whether Andre Norton was a man or a woman. She refuses to fly and she doesn't know how to drive, so she rarely makes public appearances.

"The fans love her when they get to see her, but that's not very often," said Ingrid Zierhut, Norton's assistant. "We're hoping that with these spinoffs we can reach more people. And there's also a lot of gen-



The witch's jewel . . . pendant designed by Vic Martine.

GEORGE SKENE/SENTINEL

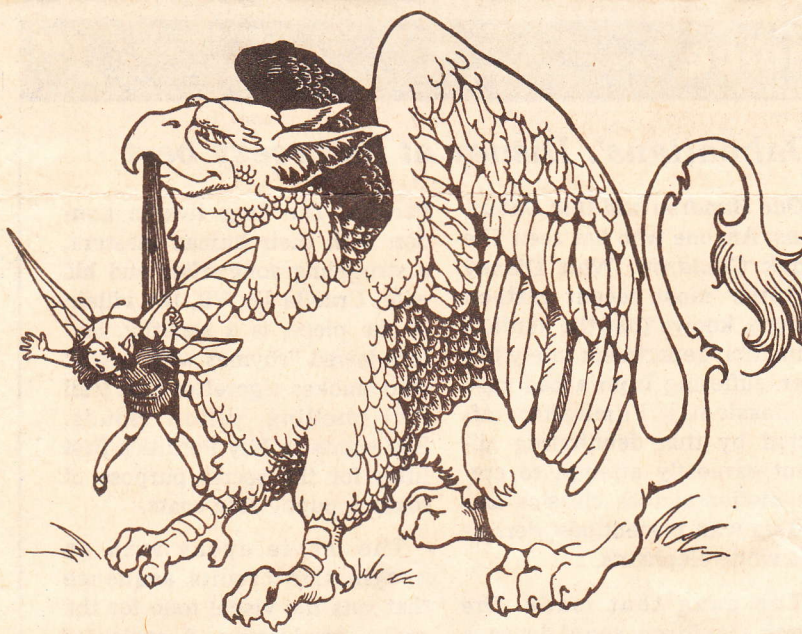
eral interest now in science fiction and fantasy." She and Norton initiated the projects several months ago.

Norton recently signed a contract with producer John Cummings, who has offices in Cocoa Beach and New York City. He is editing a videotape he made of the author talking about her books.

"The idea is to show it around to television and film people and get some interest going in developing some projects based on her books," he said. "We're talking to animation people, the networks, the cable market, looking at every angle."

One of Norton's books, *Beast Master*, Please see WITCH, E-4

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Stationery artwork
... the illustration is by Orlando artist Mary Hanson-Roberts.

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served as the basis for the 1982 film *The Beastmaster*.

"Basically, they butchered the book and used the title," Cummings said. "That's the kind of thing we're going to be guarding against."

Norton also has chosen to personally produce unabridged audiocassettes of the *Witch World* books. The first, *Witch World*, takes up four 90-minute and two 60-minute tapes. The story is narrated by Hal Kent, a classical music announcer for WPRK-FM (91.5) in Winter Park.

Only 1,000 copies of the tapes are being produced. Each set will sell for \$39.50 and will include a signed photograph of Norton and cover artwork by Mary Hanson-Roberts of Orlando.

Hanson-Roberts, a free-lance illustrator who specializes in fantasy artwork, also was commissioned by Norton to develop designs for a line of stationery.

"She had seen some of my work at the last science-fiction convention," Hanson-Roberts said. "I was delighted to get involved. I had read all the books and liked them very much, but I just went back and re-read them again. They were even better the second time."

Although Hanson-Roberts portrayed four of the characters from *Witch World* on her cover art, she

is concentrating on two other popular Norton motifs for the stationery — cats and griffins.

The two images are also taking on three-dimensional shapes in sterling silver. Last week, Norton approved custom jeweler Vic Martine's designs for several pieces.

"It usually takes three to five years to develop a line of jewelry," said Martine, whose home base is in Woodbridge, Va. "We're going to do it within six months."

Among the rings and pendants that Martine has designed for the *Witch World* line are a cat's face with a crescent moon on top of it that is inset with a moonstone; a griffin holding a small crystal in its paws; the jargoan pard, a panther ring set with an untreated zircon; the falconer's talisman, a pendant of a falcon grasping a garnet in its claws; and the witch's jewel, which features a silver witch's face atop a large Austrian-cut crystal.

The pieces probably will be priced between \$30 and \$75, Martine said, and he hopes the first ones will be available by summer.

"We want to keep them relatively inexpensive," he said. "A lot of people out there love her work. I love her work. It was a real escape for me when I was growing up. That's why I'm so glad to do this for her. I want to make her dreams come true."

Norton's fans also can count on a dream coming true in the near future: The author is planning to write a 15th *Witch World* book.