

Andre Looks No Further Than Terra for Her 'Aliens'

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CINCINNATI — About nine years ago, when my son was in the first throes of reading science fiction, he introduced me to Andre Norton. (He knew her real name was Alice Mary, but he liberally overlooked that, and she, in the interim, had her name legally changed, so women of venture writers tended to do as they say, but write truth be put on.)

In the way south I asked my son what he thought we'd find in the Norton interview. "Well, I think she'll love 'my son,' he answered.

He was greatly pleased to find she had a rustic and less number than, and he had to bump over a dirt road to her house. It reinforced his view of her view of history: they are loners, madia, people who work outside the system.

"Then," he said, "she'll have more intelligent animals around. Her characters always have mental touch with animals. Probably cats."

Again his prediction proved true. A pair of pointy-eared, blue-eyed humans were definitely tapping water from a level of day lakes in Norton's living room. Their names were Frodo and Samwise, which, incidentally, was not a coincidence to Ed-ven and possibly an omen that some years later, in 1977, Miss Norton would be the winner of the Granddaddy Award for her fantasy writing. It was the first time the award's award was presented to a woman.

At the time of that first interview, Norton wasn't exactly a best-selling author in the wide new fields of SF, but she was in the vanguard — along with Fred Scherbarth, Eric Frank Russell, F. V. Coville and Lewie Sprague de Camp. Now, of course, science fiction is not only tremendously popular and respectable, but the kind of imaginative thinking it represents is easily accepted. Nobody gapes any more at the idea of lasers and radar, though they were predicted by sci fi writers long before their invention.

It seemed time again to ask Norton, author of 80 published books with four more just out, how she stayed fresh in a field now heavily fattened by authors. Were her protagonists still unearthing through galaxies and reaching creatures through telepathy?

Norton's characters in the 1960s were in touch with such creatures as the headless Nyk, and "The Beast Master" worked with a team that included an eagle, a meerkat and a deer rat.

"I've used the wolverine, the rat, the dragon, the adaptable coyote. 'Nyx' animals aren't hard to think up. I read in a natural history book about the rare Argentine masked wall. He's real, but practically unknown. A perfect 'mutant' or 'alien.'"

At that moment one of Norton's "aliens" bawled through space past me. Ping Pong, a burnt butter Staines, has four white paws and a white nose — a spot. Now, I am a rat lover, but I was inclined to sit very still while her six business and Alpacas cut through themselves into a carpet-covered stair-stepped pile at my shoulder.

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Norton has been criticized by biologists for putting animals on the same plane with humans, but her view is that people have no way of measuring animal intelligence, no way of assessing their different set of senses, like humans an arrogant, misperceptions of things for "going in the notion that everything is subject to us," and her latest book includes a great yellow-brown canine and feline that communicate with their masters through mind-see.

"I am not a hard-core science fiction writer, who takes a known scientific fact and goes with it. I am more interested in people and their reactions."

Norton, then, as a fantasy writer, lives in a loose ball, to some degree, on fantasy. If Casselberry came part of his burgeoning media and media to crossover from Disney World. But Norton's wall are considered against that kind of modern fantasy, natural history, archeology and folklore that she finds her theories — certain, nourished with imagination, that grew into books.

The dissemination of a civilization and its starting again in a favored Deme, one readily suggested by an obscure little gem she read of in ancient Pers: a 20-foot stone of giant proportions, perfectly fitted in its niche. In her new Forward paperback, "No Night Without Stars," Sander and Puzos wander through an empty land, leaving the few survivors of a massive destruction, the Before People, who remember the skills to re-start a civilizing process. That 20-foot stone — an idea seed sprouting a highly developed human race.

Norton's first sci fi novel was "Star Man's Son," written in 1932. It founded a series dealing with a world born out by nuclear war, and its re-birth. "The Stars Are Out" (1964) pictures a fleet, destroyed of Terra and the surviving adventures who dared a cold sleep to reach a more hospitable planet.

A single theory can spawn a plethora of books, if the timing is right. "You couldn't sell science fiction before the 60s," remembers Norton. For readers, that

decade of Sputnik and the earth-orbiting dog, Luna made all adventures possible in that strange new setting, Outer Space. She points to "Star Wars" as an example of the last badness of conservatism stopped.

Norton also enjoys the "what if" thinking about alternate universes. If major life styles turn on a pivotal point, what would have happened if the situation were reversed? What if Carter had been listed in Mexico and the Aztec culture had flourished? Norton ponders that possibility in "Quest Across Time." In "The House of Time" Norton picks an actual but obscure empire, Mexico, and wonders what would have happened if it had developed under its line of opium.

Oddly for a science fiction writer, Norton looks emphatically the world took the wrong alternate destiny at the Industrial Revolution. "It is in us to see our hands, but machines are taking over." Personally, she's annoyed with a computer that mucked up her property taxes. Nevertheless, she uses an computer and technology and appreciates the person who manages by his wits, his alliance with creatures.

Norton lives near Casselberry, a community of mediums, and her references to sleep, earth, mind-see, dream, transmigration, and a woman's will and soul, transferring to somebody else is a matter of great interest to her. She accepts ideas after demonstrations, the induced photos of spirits and a room worked by a poltergeist, and she uses a "sensative" when she writes on psychometry.

The sensitive told a bit of old tales in her palms and "let" its owner and history. Norton's check with a museum curator revealed the sensitive was correct. Given a pin made of ivory from a mammoth, the sensitive was revealed. "I see a big animal, missing and screaming," she said.

Norton lays no claim to sensitivity herself, but she sees the sign at a brother, an space in a uterus. "After all, we see only a very small portion of our brain. We've never known what the rest of it is for." That's another good jumping-off point for a Norton novel.

Norton recognizes the specialness of her audience. "Readers of science fiction require imagination. They are generally college-educated, in the upper reading level."

But Norton is now switching from that select readership. She is working on a gothic. She read a book on fate, found one with a dagger in it, and off she went.)

Every ancient Norton reader will want to know: Will she get back into sci fi? Maybe it would help to visit the spinner?

Absolutely not! "I stay away from there. It would make it all too precise. They say words about what you know. I never could."

The six exception animals. The female readers were still leaping about the room, turning things off tables and scattering papers and causing Norton to recall the idea of telepathy with animals, apparently, was a development of theory and imagination — not a precise fact.