

## BREED TO COME

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Reviewers, especially in the frequently merciless fanzines, have complained about the sameness of Andre Norton's plots. I have to agree, but she embroiders her stories with such marvelous detail that, to me, the bones of the plot don't really matter. To invoke a most inappropriate quotation, what matters in a Norton story is not who will do what and to whom, but how it is done. Younger readers seem to find this irrelevant.

Here we do, indeed, have "Norton Plot A" again, and not as cunningly embellished as sometimes in the past. It is the Ancient Ones theme: a planet has been dominated by a mysterious and powerful race, some time in the distant past. The Ancient Ones—the "Demons" in this case—have vanished into space or time, leaving the relics and ruins of their civilization to puzzle and enthrall those who eventually succeed them. The science of the past is almost magical to the people of the present; they struggle to use it without being used by it. And there is always the threat that the Ancient Ones may return.

Same plot again, but this time the planet is Earth, the Demons are ourselves, gone into space after war, pollution and madness have nearly shattered the race. The "People" whose fortunes we follow are the descendants of the laboratory cats on

whom men experimented with genetic tinkering and selective breeding, so that their intelligence has expanded, their toes have grown into stubby fingers, and most of them live the kind of hunting-and-gathering existence that mankind lived before the development of agriculture. A few of the more evolved, led by the venerable and inquisitive Gammage (who predicts that the Demons will return) have moved into the ruins of an ancient city and are trying very hard to rediscover the secrets of the past.

Our hero, Furtig, a young warrior of Gammage's own line, is not quite good enough to win a mate in the tribal contests. He goes to the "lair" in search of his near-mythical ancestor, finds him, and is shortly deeply involved in his research. There are rivals, the Rattons who consider themselves the Demons' true allies. There are possible allies in the fairly intelligent Barkers and the plodding Tuskers. There is savage warfare with the rats . . . discovery of new secrets and new powers of the cats' own . . . and finally the return of a scouting party of humans from another world.

Somehow, the Norton magic doesn't cast quite its usual glamor. The book is dedicated to her own People—her own cats—but it only rarely catches the spirit of catkind (something I've tried myself, and failed miserably to do; it isn't easy). I guess I feel that Andre Norton's place is among the stars and ages.