

CONVERSATIONAL NOTES ON THE WORK OF ANDRE NORTON, at the Nov. 8, 1963, meeting of the Little Men

It is a real pleasure to talk about Andre Norton and her work; I've long enjoyed her science fiction--I hope to share that enjoyment with you.

First, a few words about her background. She is a native of Cleveland, of colonial and pioneer stock with, according to Current Biography, a strain of American Indian. Perhaps this last accounts for her remarkable ability to bring other cultures, especially Amerind, alive for us in her writing. In the early years, she worked as a children's librarian; I suspect her personal delight in science fiction made her more readily aware of its potential value as a field of writing for young readers. She is a valiant champion of science fiction--witness her article "Living in 1980 plus" in the Library Journal of Sept. 15, 1952. This article, by the way, includes her own selection of SF for young readers; I wonder what additions she would make now? I would certainly include all Andre Norton titles, good reading for young person and adult alike.

Before I turn to the books themselves, I want to read a few extracts from the letters I have received since we began corresponding about the Invisible Little Man's Award. "As a former librarian I know what you mean about waging a mock war over the inclusion of s-f works--the unknowing public seems to judge them all by the former covers of the pulps--a beautiful damsel in very light attire being menaced by a bug-eyed monster--which is extremely unfair to the field at large. A vast amount of research goes into every one of my books--ranging over archaeology, anthropology, native magic, travel, animal material etc. And I am always hoping that some readers will be so led to further reading in the non-fiction field as the result of the bait I try to offer." This meticulous research supports all her work--mysteries, historicals and sf. I had hoped to bring either RIDE PROUD, REBEL or SHADOW HAWK tonight so that you might become acquainted with the historicals; not a one was in and I haven't yet my own copies.

But to go on with the letters: "I am sending you this week a copy of my new pb original--the first "adult" I have done--this is of the sword and sorcery field and at present I am working on a sequel to it. But once this one is done, I am going to take a vacation from s-f for a while since I am afraid of getting in a rut. For some four years now I have been collecting reference books on China as I want to do a romantic novel based on the true story of the Lady Chao in the Han Dynasty--a companion volume to my SHADOW HAWK in a projected Romance of History series--This will require a vast amount of research and will probably occupy me for the rest of the year. But since all of my publishers will have an s-f for publication in 1964, I will feel free to do this." WITCH WORLD, from which I shall not quote tonight--you go buy copies!--is the portrayal of a matriarchy of witches into which is thrown a male who, unknown to himself, is a warlock. She handles the possibilities in this firmly, surely, deftly. It OUGHT to be in hard cover. SHADOW HAWK I urge you to read; you will enjoy it--as much as her sf, for it has the same exciting strength and movement.

I'm sure you'll enjoy the next bit: "Mundy and Haggard and Ganpat are the old favorites--I am trying to pick up missing copies for my shelves from collectors' lists. Still think THE PURPLE PIRATE is one of the best adventure historical things I ever read. I do NOT care for nor read modern novels--my reading for pleasure being mysteries, s-f, historical or westerns (I find the latter very relaxing--the same as on TV--I am a western fan--however else, I ask you, can one situated as I am learn how to describe a good piece of fighting?) TV westerns have given me a great deal more confidence in battle scenes." Well, isn't she right? There's nothing timid in her writing of men and battles.

This last one I know you'll be pleased to hear: "I did enjoy so much the visit of the four wayfarers on their way to the Disco--only sorry that their stay had to be so limited. Mr. Pelz was kind enough to let me see the picture of their winning costumes--So thoughtful of him. And the Invisible Little Man is my prize possession and on display now, I assure you. Also--the redwood burl is growing nicely and I do enjoy it.

QUEST FOR KOLDER was my title to the WITCH WORLD sequel, but had a letter from ACE yesterday to the fact that they had renamed it WEB OF WITCH WORLD--should be out next year, I guess. I have had some small glimmerings of thought about a third Estcarpian chronicle--this to be the adventures of three Tregarth children--an elder son and twins--boy and a girl--but so far that is all it is. Just a glimmer.

The Chinese research has been so interrupted and goes so laggingly that I feel very frustrated and now am seriously considering sheiving the whole project and starting another s-f at the first of the year if a really good idea pops into mind. Will just have to wait and see."

Now the books. I can't possibly quote from every one, much as I'd like to, so I've made a selection, of which some, I hope, will be new to you. There is one quality in Andre Norton's work that, for me, stands out impressively: her ability to depict realistically, credibly, compassionately human relationships--with other humans, with animals, and with aliens. Most readers are aware of the human-to-human relationships in her stories; I think of the moving and warmly real ending of BEAST MASTER. Tonight I want to talk a little about her human-animal and human-alien companions. STORM OVER WARLOCK provides good examples of both; I want to read you a passage about the mutant wolverines: "Survey teams had early discovered the advantage of using mutated and highly trained Terran animals as assistants in the exploration of strange worlds. From the biological laboratories and breeding farms on Terra came a trickle of specialized aides-de-camp to accompany man into space. Some were fighters, silent, more deadly than weapons a man wore at his belt or carried in his hands. Some were keener eyes, keener noses, keener scouts than the human kind could produce. Bred for intelligence, for size, for adaptability to alien conditions, the animal explorers from Terra were prized.

Wolverines, the ancient 'devils' of the northlands on Terra, were being tried for the first time on Warlock. Their caution, a quality highly developed in their breed, made them testers for new territory. Able to tackle in battle an animal three times their size, they should be added protection for the man they accompanied into the wilderness, and their wide ranging, their ability to climb and swim, and above all, their curiosity were assets.

Shann had begun contact by cleaning their cages; he ended captivated by these miniature bears with long bushy tails. And to his unbounded delight the attraction was mutual. Alone to Taggi and Togi he was a person, an important person. Those teeth which could tear flesh into ragged strips, nipped gently at his fingers, closed without any pressure on arm, even on nose and chin in what was the ultimate caress of their kind. Since they were escape artists of no mean ability, twice he had had to track and lead them back to camp from forays of their own devising."

All of us are interested, I think, in the possibility of man gaining some surer communication with animals; Andre Norton develops this possibility in the form of an empathetic, intuitive relation. You will find the dolphin in KEY OUT OF TIME, coyotes in the DEFLIANT AGENTS, cat and eagle in BEAST MASTER and LORD OF THUNDER, horse in SIOUX SPACEMAN,--even the alien mard, Verken, in STAR GATE. The association is never servile for the animal--rather it is a rewarding companionship.

STORM OVER WARLOCK also shows how modern understanding of human mind and emotion can be used as a sort of sorcery--by aliens. Shann, traveling through cave and fog to reach his goal, finds that this alien "magic" requires that he face his past. After a particularly brutal hallucination, "Shann shivered, trying not to think

what might lie before him. ... How did they know just what dreams to use in order to break him? Or did he himself furnish the actors and the action, projecting old terrors in this mist as a triid-ee tape projected a story in three dimensions for the amusement of the viewer?

Dream true--was this progress through the mist also a dream? *Dreams within dreams* . . . Shann put his hand to his head, uncertain, badly shaken. But that stubborn core of determination with him was still holding. Next time he would be prepared at once to face down any resurrected memory.

Walking slowly, pausing to listen for the slightest sound which might herald the coming of a new illusion, Shann tried to guess which of his nightmares might come to face him. But he was to learn that there was more than one kind of dream. Steeled against old fears, he was met by another emotion altogether.

There was a fluttering in the air, a little crooning cry which pulled at his heart. Without any conscious thought, Shann held out his hands, whistling on two notes a call which his lips appeared to remember more quickly than his mind. The shape which winged through the fog came straight to his waiting hold, tore at long-walled-away hurt with its once familiar beauty. It flew with a list; one of the delicate tinted wings was injured, had never healed straight. But the seraph nekkled into the hollow of Shann's two palms and looked up at him with all the old liquid trust.

'Trav! Trav!' He cradled the tiny creature carefully, regarded with joy its feathered body, the curled plumes on its proudly held head, felt the silken patting of those infinitesimal claws against his protecting fingers.

Shann sat down in the sand, badly daring to breathe. Trav--again! The wonder of this never-to-be-hoped-for return filled him with a surge of happiness almost too great to bear, which hurt in its way with as great a pain as Logally's lash; it was a pain rooted in love, not fear and hate.

Logally's lash . . .

Shann trembled. Trav raised one of those small claws toward the Terran's face, crooning a soft caressing cry for recognition, for protection, trying to be a part of Shann's life once more.

Trav! How could he bear to will Trav into nothingness, to bear to summon up another harsh memory which would sweep Trav away? Trav was the only thing Shann had ever known which he could love wholeheartedly, that had answered his love with a return gift of affection so much greater than the light body he now held.

'Trav!' he whispered softly. Then he made his great effort against this second and far more subtle attack. With the same agony which he had known years earlier, he resolutely summoned a bitter memory, sat nursing once more a broken thing which died in pain he could not ease, aware himself of every moment of that pain. And what was worse, this time there clung that nagging little doubt. What if he had not forced the memory? Perhaps he could have taken Trav with him unhurt, alive, at least for a while.

Shann covered his face with his now empty hands. To see a nightmare flicker out after facing squarely up to its terror, that was no great task. To give up a dream which was part of a lost heaven, that cut cruelly deep. The Terran dragged himself to his feet, drained and weary, stumbling on. "Don't worry--he does win through! This shows so well Andre Norton's power to stir the heart; it is a beautiful and heartbreaking sequence.

Time also interests this author. TIME TRADERS is the first of a sequence; men have discovered an apparently abandoned alien space ship in a past time, journey tapes have been taken from it--by both U.S. and Russian agents--and the aliens of the past have discovered the human occupation of the ship through the accidental activation of the ship's communications system. The alien here described is not the enemy, but this passage shows how the indescribable alien can be suggested by the clever assembling and distorting of terrestrial characteristics: "He returned to the lever and moved it back two notches, standing open-mouthed at the immediate result. The cream-and-brown streaks were making a picture! ... Only, he was also looking into a face! Ross swallowed, his hand grasping one of the strings of chair webbing

for support. Perhaps because in some ways it did resemble his own, that face was more preposterously nonhuman. The visage on the screen was sharply triangular with a small, sharply pointed chin and a jaw line running at an angle from a broad upper face. The skin was dark, covered largely with a soft and silky down, out of which looked a curved and shining nose set between two large round eyes. On top of that astonishing head the down rose to a peak not unlike a cockatoo's crest. Yet there was no mistaking the intelligence in those eyes, nor the other's amazement at sight of Ross. They might have been staring at each other through a window."

For a description of the enemy alien--the Baldy--and remember that communication with the truly alien will be difficult if not impossible--I suggest you read the book!

In GALACTIC DERELICT our time traders are following a journey tape; here is another of those meaningful descriptions: "'But it is a work of art.' That they could all recognize, even if the subject still puzzled them. The figure was posed erect on two slender hind limbs, both of which terminated in feet of long, narrow, widely separated, clawed digits. The body, also slender but with a well-defined waist and broad shoulders, was closer to the human in general appearance, and there were two arms held aloft, as if the creature was about to leap outward into space. But it would have a better chance of survival in such a leap than those now passing the statuette from hand to hand. From the arms supported skin wing-flaps, extended on ribs not unlike those possessed by the Terrans' bats.

The head was the least human, almost grotesque in its ugliness to the time agents' eyes. There were sharply pointed ears, overshadowing in their size and extension the rest of the features which were crowded together in the fore-part of the face. Eyes were set deep within cavities under heavy skull ridges, the nose was simply a vertical slit above a mouth from which they vestiges of lips curled back to display a usable and frightening set of you fangs. And yet its ugliness was not repulsive, not horrifying. There was no clothing to suggest that it represented an intelligent being. Yet all of them were certain, the longer they examined the figure, that it had not been meant to portray an animal."

Difference in shape or color, neither need be a matter of distrust, neither need cause fear or withdrawal. The hero of THE DEFIANT AGENTS, another time trader title, is an Apache. In this, as in KEY OUT OF TIME, the time traders are trapped in a distant place and time, no immediate hope of return. And in KEY OUT OF TIME is succinct statement of man's place in the universe: "'Those ape-things we found on the desert planet.' Ross thought back to their first voyage on the homing derelict. 'Maybe they had once been men and were degenerating. And the winged people, they could have been less than men on their way up--'

'Ape-things . . . winged people?' Karara interrupted. 'Tell me!'

There was something imperious in her demand, but Ross found himself describing in detail their past adventures, first on the world of sand and sealed structures where the derelict had rested for a purpose its involuntary passengers had never understood, and then of the Terrans' limited exploration of that other planet which might have been the capital world of a far-flung stellar empire. There they had made a pact with a winged people living in the huge buildings of a jungle-choked city.

'But you see'--the Polynesian girl turned to Ashe when Ross had finished--'you did find them--these ape-things and the winged people. But here there are only the dragons and the burrowers. Are they the start or the finish? I want to know.'

'Why?' asked Ashe.

'Not just because I am curious, thought I am that also, but because we, too, must have a beginning and an end. Did we come up from the seas, rise to know

and feel and think, just to return to such beginning at our end? If your winged people were climbing and your ape-things descending'—she shook her head—'it would be frightening to hold a cord of life, both ends in your hands. Is it good for us to see such things, Gordon?'

'Men have asked that question all their thinking lives, Karara. There have been those who have said no, who have turned aside and tried to halt the growth of knowledge here or there, attempted to make men stand still on one tread of a stairway. Only there is that in us which will not stop, ill-fitted as we may be for the climbing.' (Italics mine.)

As I have said, I can not read from all the books, but you should look for the other Indian titles as well as THE DEFIANT AGENTS; SIOUX SPACEMAN—with the imported horses ~~breaking~~ loosing new riders to freedom (as the Spanish-brought horse loosed the Indian); BEAST MASTER and its sequel LORD OF THUNDER—the Navaho with his mutant cat and eagle. The backgrounds of these have reality, ring true; Andre Norton shows sensitive understanding of the Amerind and his culture, just as, in VOODOO PLANET, she makes the witch doqâr's magic and Medic Tau's mastery of it credible.

THE STARS ARE OURS and its sequel STAR BORN are interesting accounts, first of the struggle of a small group of scientists to escape a new anti-science tyranny on earth, the escape, and the founding of a colony on a far world, Astra—no man knows where or when; second of a later generation on Astra coming in contact with both the native hostile people and a scout ship from a re-vitalized Terra. The young hero of the second tale is a telepath logically, since friendly natives are telepaths and man, deprived of machines, is forced to develop this ability; he must decide if the scout ship should be put in touch with his Elders. "Dalgard squinted at the sun sparkling on the waves. Where now? To the north, where the space ship waited? If what he read in Raf's mind was true the other wanted to leave Astra, to voyage back to that other world which was only a legend to Dalgard, and a black, unhappy legend at that. If the Elders were here, had a chance to contact these men from Terra—Dalgard's eyes narrowed, would they choose to? Another chain of thought had been slowly developing in his mind during these past hours when he had been so closely companioned with the stranger. And almost he had come to a decision which would have seemed very odd even days before.

No, there was no way of suddenly bringing the Elders here, of transferring his burden of decision to them. Dalgard cupped his chin in his hand and tried to imagine what it would be like to shut oneself up in a small metal-walled spacer and set out blindly to leave one world for another. His ancestors had done that, and they had traveled in cold sleep, ignorant of whether they would ever reach their goal. They had been very brave, or very desperate men.

But—Dalgard measured sand, sun, and sky, watching the seamen sporting in the waves—but for him Astra was enough. He wanted nothing but this land, this world. There was nothing which drew him back. He would try to locate the spacer for the sake of the stranger; Astra owed Raf all they could manage to give him. But the ship was as alien to Homeport as it now existed as the city's globe might have been."

At the end Dalgard sends Raf on his way without regret, knowing that in time man from Terra and man from Astra will meet as equals despite the difference in cultural developments.

One of the earlier titles, STAR MAN'S SON (published in paper as DAYBREAK 2250 AD), has an absorbing description of ruined Chicago and radioactive wastelands with curious mutant plants and animals. This story shows especially well Andre Norton's concern for sound human relationships; Fors, the human mutant, and his dark hunter companion, Arskane, hope to join the three groups of humans left in the central United States—plains and mountain areas—into a cooperative

fellowship. "Arskene propped his chin on his hand and stared out over the tangle of bush and vine. 'It seems to <sup>me</sup>, he said slowly, 'that we are like the parts of one body. My people are the busy hands, fashioning things by which life may be made easier and more beautiful. The Plainspeople are the restless, hurrying feet, ever itching for new trails and the strange things which might lie beyond the sunrise and the sunset. And your clan is the head, thinking, remembering, planning for feet and hands. Together —'

'Together,' Fors breathed, 'we would make such a nation as this land has not seen since the days of the Old Ones!'

'No, not a nation such as the Old Ones knew!' Arskene's answer was sharp. 'They were not one body—for they knew war. And out of that warfare came what is today. If the body grows together again it must be because each part, knowing its own worth and taking pride in it, recognizes also the worth of the other two. And color of skin, or eyes, or the customs of a man's tribe must mean no more to strangers when meeting than the dust they wash from their hands before they take meat. We must come to one another free of such dust—or it will rise to blind our eyes and what the Old Ones started will continue to live for ever and ever to poison the earth.'

From STAR GUARD, patterned on the famous March of the Ten Thousand (the Anabasis of Xenophon), I want to read one bit to show how subtly alien-ness can be suggested: "Kana eyed the slit speculatively. It was too narrow for the length if it were fashioned to accommodate a humanoid. It suggested an extremely thin, sinuous creature. He did not feel any prick of man's age-old distaste for the reptilian—any reminder of the barrier between warm-blooded and cold-blooded life which had once held on his home world. Racial mixtures after planet wide wars, mutant births after the atomic conflicts, had broken down the old intolerance against the 'different.' And out in space thousands of intelligent life forms, encased in almost as many shapes and bodies, had given 'shape prejudice' its final blow. The furred Ller and Cos were 'man-shaped', but it might be that they shared from with another race, evolved from scaled clans. ... Kana, remembering the Zaeenthans he had known and admired, viewed that padded cushion with no aversion, only curiosity. What did it matter if a body was covered with wool or with scales, or with soft flesh which had to be protected by clothing? The Venturi he had met had not been in any way terrifying or obnoxious creatures—once one became used to their constant concealment of their faces and forms." Also, in STAR RANGERS, its crew are investigating the extent of damage, and "Zinga climbed up and went to work with Reith. They had Mirion free and flat on the plating before Kartr asked his next question.

'How about the Captain?'

Zinga turned his head slowly, almost as if he were unwilling to answer that. His agitation, as usual, was betrayed by the quiver in the pointed neck frill of skin, which would not lie flat on his shoulders when he was worried or excited."

STAR RANGERS is one of my favorites. The survivors of the ship have no idea where they are—except that this is an "earth" type planet; the Empire, breaking apart (like the Roman Empire), has ordered this scout ship to a remote, barely mapped part of the galaxy—these, at least, will not embarrass the Empire with rebellion. The first clue to the planet slips in neatly: "What Fyhl had discovered was easy to see. And that prick of excitement stirred again far inside him. For that ribbon of vegetation WAS green! But the green! It had no yellow tint, and none of the blue cast it would have held on his own vanished Ylene. It was a verdant green such as he had never set eyes upon before—running in a thin line across the desert country as if it followed some source of moisture." There are more hints to the alert reader; I was furious with myself not to have

caught on sooner when I read this one for the first time.

A meeting of the ranger-patrol ship crew with the survivors of another Empire ship crash, in an operable city, brings to the fore the struggle between those who find brotherhood among all shapes, colors, kinds, and those to whom human stock is superior and "pure" descent most superior. The crew of the patrol ship is itself divided. Separation becomes inevitable after an intra-city battle, the rangers, Beammy-levers, and some of the patrol from the first ship leave to live off the land as best they may. They can not live with such natives as they find; they carry diseases fatal to native stock—and no longer have the medical treatments to combat such disease. But they follow the tribes; they discover that a great meeting is assembling around the ruins of very ancient buildings—tribes of all colors, white, red, brown, black—come from far places, obviously. Our little band of survivors waits, watches, and—when the natives finally leave—goes to investigate the intriguing ruins. I want to read you the high point of discovery here; perhaps it captures my imagination so strongly because I am as stirred by it as I was and am by the roll call of the United Nations!

Time continued to drag for the watchers until the last of the natives departed. They even waited another five hours after the last small clan left, making sure that there would be no chance of being sighted by lingerers. And then, in the middle of an afternoon, they came down the slope at last, picking their way through the debris of the campsite and around still smoldering fires.

At the foot of the stairs which led to the portico of the building they left their packs and bundles. There were twelve broad steps, scored and pitted by winds of time, with the tracks of hide sandals outlined in dried mud where the natives had wandered in and out. Up these steps they climbed and passed through lines of towering pillars into the interior.

It would have been dark inside but the builders had roofed the <sup>center</sup> section with a transparent material so that they could almost believe they still stood in the open.

Slowly, still in a compact group, they came down an aisle into the very middle of the huge hall. Around them on three sides were sections of seats, divided by narrow aisles, each ending at the floor level in one massive chair on the back of which was carved, in such high relief that time had not worn it away, a symbol. On the fourth side of the chamber was a dais supporting three more of the high-backed chairs of state, the center one raised another step above the other two.

'Some type of legislative building, do you think?' asked Zisti. 'The presiding officer would sit there.' He pointed to the dais.

But Kartr's torch beam fastened on the sign carved on the nearest of the side chairs. As he read it he stood incredulous. Then he flashed the light to illumine the marking on the next seat and the next. He began to run, reading the symbols he knew—knew so well.

'Deneb, Sirius, Rigel, Capella, Procyon,' He did not realize it, but his voice was rising to a shout as if he were calling a roll—calling such a roll as had not sounded in that chamber for four thousand years or more. 'Betelgeuse, Aldebaran, Pollux—'

'Regulus,' Smitt was answering him from the other side of the hall, the same wild excitement in his voice. 'Spica, Vega, Arcturus, Altair, Antares—'

Now Rolth and Dalgre began to understand in turn. 'Fomalhaut, Alphard, Castor, Algor—'

They added star to star, system to system, in that roll call. In the end they met before the dais. And they fell silent while Kartr, with a reverence and awe he had never known before, raised his torch to give more light to the last of those symbols. That bright one which should gleam in this place was there!

'Terra of Sol' He read it aloud and the three words seemed to echo more loudly down the hall than any of the shouted names of the kindred stars. 'Terra of Sol—  
Man's beginning!'