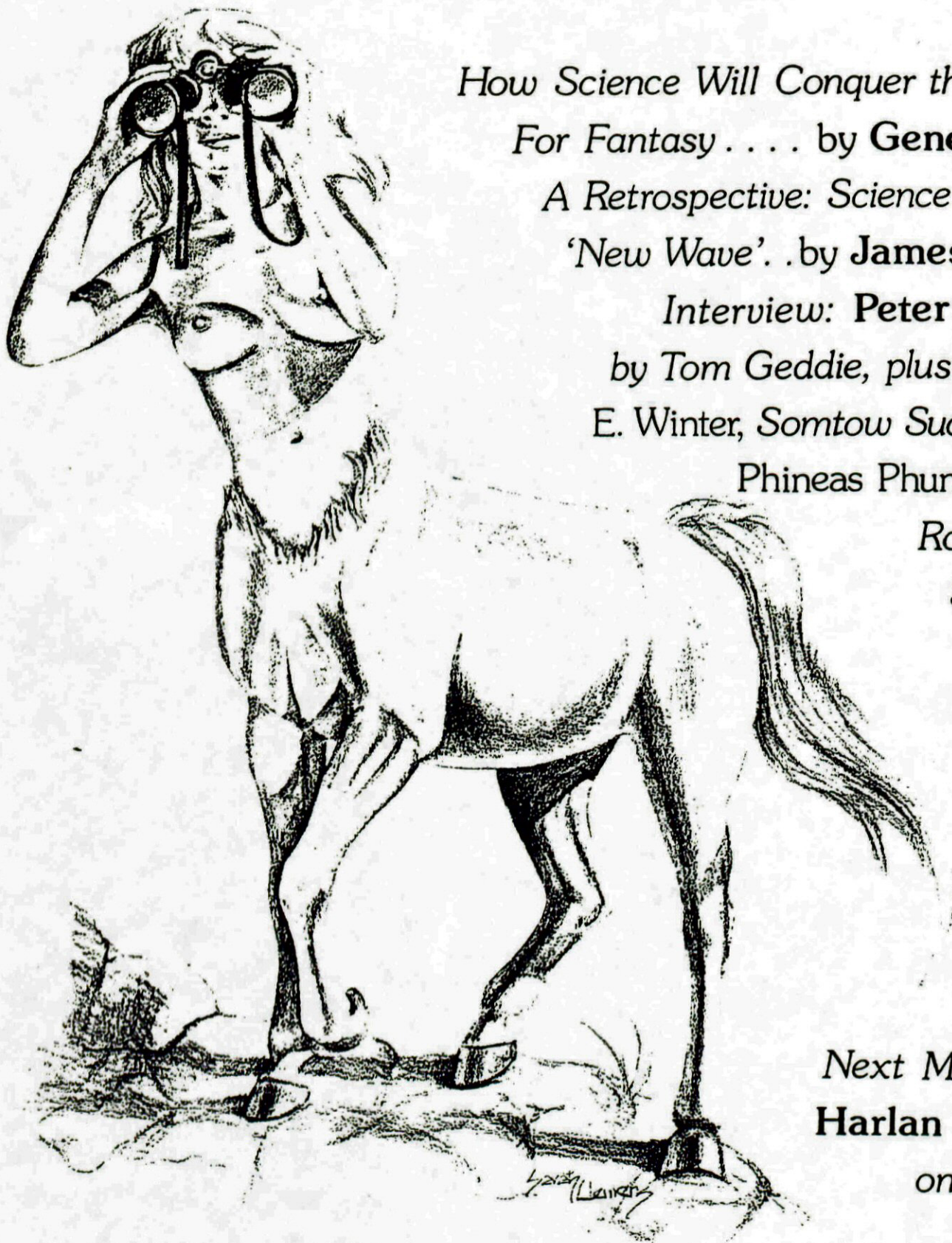


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How Science Will Conquer the World

For Fantasy by **Gene Wolfe**

A Retrospective: Science Fiction's

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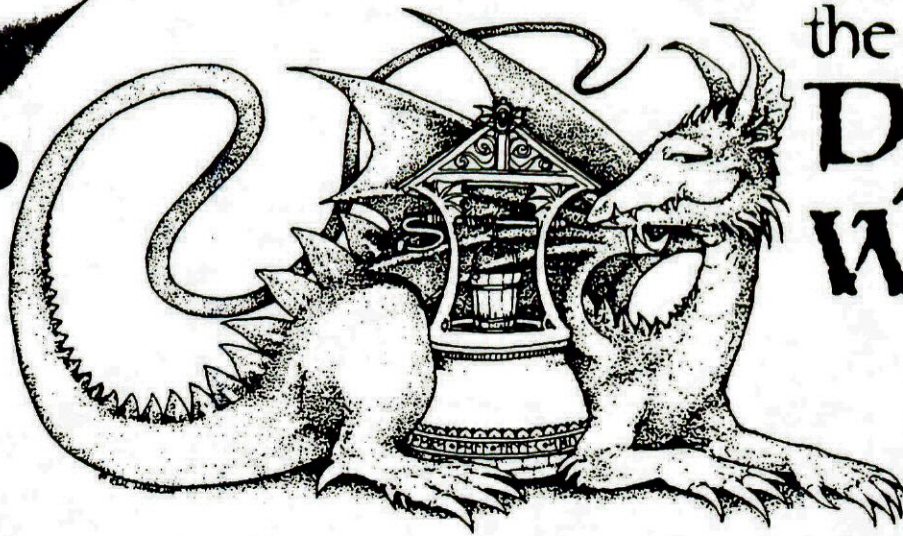
Schlobin

Next Month:

Harlan Ellison

on writing

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the DRAGON'S WELL

By Roger C. Schlobin

SCIENCE FICTION FOLK have been raising tumult over new women writers recently. In some quarters, at least, readers are supposed to believe that the E.R.A. and feminism have given rise to new, vigorous fiction. However, fantasy advocates will observe sagely that this phenomenon is hardly new or unique. Perhaps, like the science-fiction readers who are not unnerved by world-ending holocaust because they have read about it over and over again, fantasy buffs have paid homage to effective women writers for so long that this "new" movement is just wonder-as-usual. Sara Coleridge's *Phantasmion* (1837) is generally acknowledged as the first work of modern fantasy, predating George MacDonald's *Phantastes* by almost twenty years (1858). Hope Mirrless' *Lud-in-the-Mist* (1926) returned to enliven Lin Carter's Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series in 1970, and what more can be said of Catherine L. Moore and Andre Norton than they stand as visions in the memories of readers and authors beyond counting. In recent years, such authors as Tanith Lee, Patricia A. McKillip, Moyra Caldecott, Joy Chant, Jane Gaskell, Vera Chapman, occasionally Ursula K. Le Guin, and the ever-productive Ms. Norton along with many others have continued to be at the very heart of fantasy fiction.

Thus, in the second installment of the *Dragon's Well* (note the sustained and responsible behavior), four novels, three by women and one with a female master, are a momentary recognition of a great tradition.

Certainly, Andre Norton is one of the major figures and wellsprings of contemporary fantasy. Her multi-volume *Witch World* series, which began in 1963 with Ace Books' publication of *Witch World*, is the star of

a cosmic career that began in 1934, includes over one-hundred books, and continues to this very moment. Two new *Witch World* novels appeared in 1981, and they reflect Norton's compelling ability to mystify and attract simultaneously. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the series' sustained success. "Old Ones," remnants of the *Witch World*'s original race, rise from their sorcerous sleeps to continue their sorcery and enigmatically help or threaten the characters. Women assume awesome, arcane powers and are constantly embroiled in agonized self-examination. Strange beings flit in and out of the action, often with soul-shaking effects. Protagonists suffer very human dilemmas. Jewels and animals assume importance far beyond the normal.

All of these characteristics are in full array in *Horn Crown* and *Gryphon in Glory*. *Horn Crown* is the lone-awaited background novel to the *Witch World* series. In its largest sense, it chronicles the coming of Human clans to this strangely empty, ruin-haunted realm. The clans arrive just as Simon Tregarth did in *Witch World*, through a magically-induced portal, and scatter to establish their own keeps. However, as it is in all of Norton's fiction, the great sweeps of history are incidental to more human, more intimate interactions. Thus, like the epic, her tales have a bond between the personal and the cosmic. In *Horn Crown*, Gathea the young Wise Woman and Elron the Clanless must endure rites of passage and trial to discover their personal destinies and their own union. If they are unsuccessful, all the human colonists will be in dire peril. Struggling against their own shortsightedness and weaknesses and attempting to deal with the mysterious pools of

light and dark "Power" that linger from the *Witch World*'s past holocaust, the two protagonists are constantly attacked from within and without. Elron is seeking his par amour, who has imprudently and prematurely sought the power of "Moon Magic." Gathea, joined by a telepathic and very large feline, looks for her own union with a goddess. Elron must fight the sexual compulsions of a beast-god, and he reluctantly appeals to Kurnous the Horn Lord, Norton's version of the British Herne the Hunter and the Celtic Cernunnos, the god of the underworld. Both protagonists, as a result, are drawn into a struggle between two divine trinities, one dark, one light. In fact, one of the major strengths of *Horn Crown* is its use of a variety of mythologies. Gathea becomes linked to Gunnora and Dians, dual aspects of the Moon goddess Diana, one a generous mother, the other a virgin huntress. Her agony comes when she must choose between the goddess's gifts and her own humanity.

Gryphon in Glory is the direct sequel to *The Crystal Gryphon* (Atheneum, 1972) and is part of the Wereriders/High Halleck subsection of the *Witch World* series, which also includes *The Year of the Unicorn* (Ace, 1972) and *The Jargon Pond* (Atheneum, 1974).

If *Horn Crown* is good Norton, then, *Gryphon in Glory* is superb Norton. It too is an excursion into human introspection and awesome power. It continues the agonizing, arranged axe-marriage of guilt-ridden and hooved Kerovan and the power-touched Joisan from *The Crystal Gryphon*. With stylistic skill, Norton alternates the narrative between male and female characters, creating an androgenous perspective. As the two move haltingly toward the

union that Joisan desires and Kerovan fears, Joisan longingly reflects on another relationship in the novel and, in doing so, describes the focus of many of Norton's female-male interactions: ". . . he accepts her for what she is. He is not the less in her eyes, nor she the greater in his. They are two halves well-fitted together to form something stronger than either" (p. 180).

Once the gryphon is released from its crystal shell, the two protagonists must join together for the final confrontation. Kerovan's cloven hooves are finally explained as they are surrounded by a group of good and evil Old Ones, including one winged being and Pan-like creature. However, despite revelations and resolutions, Norton leaves the reader with final mysteries, which is part of the reason why so many keep returning to her works.

Soul-Singer of Tyrnos seems to be stylistically influenced by Andre Norton, and those who have read Orson Scott Card's **Songmaster** (Dial, 1980) will notice some plot similarities. Yeleve is a newly ordained soulsinger, one of an order of magical minstrels who can sing up visual images of other people's souls. Using their skill, they are able to keep their country peaceful and lawful. Not even the most august king can refuse the soul-singers' magic, and the public display of an evil soul brings either healing from the soulsinger or the suicide of the malefactor. Yeleve is told that she is the one soul-singer selected in each generation for an awesome and unknown task by the gods. In a struggle reminiscent of the battle between the Witches and the Kolder in Norton's **Witch World**, Yeleve must defeat a technological abomination, one of the inhuman Ethras, who has possessed the emperor and the head of the Order of Soul-Singers. She is joined by a young knight, who has been tortured by the Ethran and who seeks his lady-love, and by the Beast, a sad-eyed, snow cat who is far more than she first appears to be.

Mayhar's **Soul-Singer** of Tyrnos, which possesses much of the wondrous action that has long been associated with Norton's fiction, is another example of fine fiction by female authors from Atheneum's Argo series of adult books frequently bearing the "Margaret K. McElderry" endorsement. In the past, Atheneum's editors have distinguished themselves by publishing the fantasies of Susan Cooper, Jane Louise Curry, Dianna Wynne Jones, Patricia A. McKillip, Shirley Rousseau Murphy, Ruth Nicols, and Josephine Rector Stone.

For those who may find Atheneum's offerings a bit on the juvenile side, J. N. Williamson's **Queen of Hell** clearly offers adult fare. Known primarily for **The Hounzan** (Leisure, 1980) which won the West Coast Review of Books' Bronze Medal for the best fantasy of 1980, Williamson has also recently published **The Tulpa** (Tower, 1981) and **Horror House** (Playboy, 1981). Unfortunately there are two reasons why **Queen of Hell** might go unread and unnoticed. One is the sensational cover — a nude woman with a serpent's tongue — that certainly will appeal to the prurient and offend the liberated. The second is Williamson's peculiarly sanctimonious afterword, in which he explains that the book was inspired by a story in the Los Angeles **Times** concerning a non-credit course called "The Great Goddess Reemerging" at the University of California

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at Santa Cruz. Allegedly part of the course involved pagan dancing by bare-breasted female students. Williamson deplores this "attack on the Almighty" by "an embryonic return to polytheistic or pagan worship" as abominable. Since horror literature is characterized by fearful maiming or destruction of the natural order (which may be why so few women write it) it seems hypocritical for someone who makes his living from the genre to pretend offense at deviations from Christian tradition, especially since most of the activities in horror novels run counter to Christian precepts.

However, before you get the idea that the book is some sort of "Moral Majority" tract, let me say that the novel itself is very effective as horror literature. Set on a California campus, it centers around a course called "Reemergence of the Goddesses" (ROTGOD). The narrator is a troubled female professor, Carolyn Lord, whose daughter has been brutally raped and is in a sanatorium as the novel begins.

The action focuses on Diana Stoker, a supernaturally athletic young student who comes to suspect that she is the promised reincarnation of the goddess Hecate, the loathsome Queen of Hades and fell aspect of the goddess Diana. Needless to say, professor and students get far more out of this course than was listed in the catalog.

It will be interesting to see what feminist critics make of Williamson's **Queen of Hell** and its women (there are no important male characters) and of Professor Lord's final return to male deities. The novel might provoke them to elemental rage, but that's a reaction that horror is supposed to provoke.

* * *

Had there been space for 500 more words, my discussion of women and monsters would have included James Patterson's **Virgin**, recently reprinted by Bantam. It presents a different approach to the Second Coming and Demon Birth themes. Also, Suzy McKee Charnas' **The Vampire Tapestry**, now out in a Timescape paperback, takes an original approach to the vampire — a delightful, psychological thriller. For those who like mystery combined with fantasy, and like to identify with a normal mortal in a magical realm, Randal Garrett's **Lord Darcy Investigates** is a must experience. This is the third collection of stories presenting the adventures of the Chief Investigator for the Duke of Normandy and his sidekick, the forensic sorcerer, Sean O'Lochlain. It's set in an alternate present in which the British Empire still rules much of the world and struggles against the Polish Empire.

The Science Fiction Book Club has just released **Flashing Swords 5**, the latest in Lin Carter's series. Of particular note are "Tower of Ice," another Dilvish the Damned story by Roger Zelazny, and Diane Duane's "Parting Gifts," which concerns a conflict between the Shadow and an aging agent of a fire goddess, a bedraggled kitten, and a young braggart. Also included are stories by C. J. Cherryh, Craig Shaw Gardner, and Tanith Lee. Since the book club edition is by arrangement with Dell, a paperback should follow soon. Bantam has finally released the long-awaited American paperback of Robert Nye's **Merlin** (See FN 44). This outrageously funny, pornographic fantasy is based on the Arthurian legends of Merlin's life. It beats the hell out of Mary Stewart's **The Crystal Cave**. Finally George R. R. Martin's new collection **Sandkings** is a fine mix of striking horror, fantasy and science fiction.

— Roger C. Schlobin