

Star Gate Short Guide

Star Gate by Andre Norton

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Characters

Norton's characters are clearly perceived in the reader's imagination, and not as a result of detailed descriptions and exposition by the author. The characters become lifelike through their actions, through their approaches to problem-solving, and through brief physical description. Kincar, for example, is introduced in the third paragraph and is described as dressed in "soft suard fur"; he is not a giant but "well muscled" and endowed with sixfingered hands. From there on his personality, the quickness of his mind, emerges through his actions and his words.

Norton also deftly handles the characterization of Jord, Kincar's rival for stewardship of the "Holding"; Wurd, the ruler who is near death; and people whom Kincar meets on his journey such as Lord Dillan, Jonathal s'Kinston, and Vulth s'Marc. The believability of the characters facilitates the reader's acceptance of the strange names and languages invented by the author.



Social Concerns/Themes

StarGate, the story of a world called Gorth, contains a strong folk epic flavor in the tradition of Beowulf (10th century). The struggle between good and evil is a continuing theme represented in the adventures of her hero, Kincar. He must leave his world to avoid seeing his followers slaughtered by those who are determined to rule Gorth. By chance he comes upon a fight between bandits and a group of men called Star Lords. He is accepted by them and joins their adventure, passing through a "gate" into a "parallel world." As Kincar leaves Gorth he is given a mysterious stone by the dying old chief, Wurd. The stone glows at certain moments and can become quite hot. While he does not understand its mysterious powers, it seems to serve as a protecting force for Kincar. Those who dare to touch the stone while he wears it end up with a hand reduced to a cinder. With the Star Lords, Kincar activates space ships that had been grounded and built onto a fortress of stone, and sends the enemy — gathered in one ship — hurtling into space. Kincar and the Star Lords free slaves being transported to the fortress and befriend others who had been forced to live underground. The sense of justice and the determined battle against evil never slacken, and in the end good prevails.

Before she devoted full time to science fiction and fantasy, Norton's themes were varied but generally incorporated the good struggling against the evil, and her young protagonist would eventually overcome great obstacles to achieve a goal even though he would start out uncertain, if not bewildered by the abruptness of events. In her science fiction writing, certain themes run through many of her stories. These themes address subjects such as a relationship between men and animals (usually a direct mind-to-mind communication); one or more galactic empires in a "space-opera" setting; an ancient race or culture with mysterious power; time travel; the nature of existence after an atomic war; parallel universes and the occult.

In Star Gate the dominant issues are parallel universes, an ancient race, the mysterious powers of a strange stone that glows and is called a "Tie," and the exploits of a young protagonist who sets out on an adventure with no clear cut purpose only to gain confidence and skills as he proceeds to join forces with a group of men and becomes deeply involved in fighting evil.



Techniques

Many of Norton's plots set the protagonist out on his own with little or no clear mission. In *Star Gate*, Kincar is asked to leave his homeland and rightful inheritance to avoid the useless bloodshed his stay would surely cause.

There is no clear alternative goal for him to achieve. Where his path will take him is almost fortuitous; he might find a new world and a new adventure, or come full circle to regain his inheritance.

In Norton's science fiction stories, the hero possesses some mysterious object of ancient lore, as the "Tie" stone which Kincar carries. Although it glows when danger threatens, he does not readily understand its powers. In *Star Gate*, as well as in other of Norton's stories, the protagonist is capable of communication with animals who prove useful in warning him of danger as well as in helping to combat evil forces. Norton's ability to make the characters of other worlds believable is an aspect of her technique that is not so easily assessed. Perhaps some of her success in this regard is due to the fact that, although nothing is outside the bounds of possibility in her otherworldly settings, a thread of traditional values can always be discerned in Norton's most imaginative works.

Literary Precedents

The influences that Norton acknowledges — Beowulf and books on folklore, legends, archaeology, anthropology, and the occult — are evident in most of her science fiction works. Also, one cannot be unmindful of the material Norton culled through her extensive reading of history. The times when people believed in witches, fairies, elves and trolls are significant to the substance of her writing. One critic contends that Norton is "re-enchanting" readers with her creations, and that her literary precedents are folk tales and legends as they were told around campfires by traveling storytellers.

The influence of specific legends and works may be seen, as well, in some of Norton's writing. For instance, the story of the Roman Emperor who ordered a legion to march to the end of the earth is a partial model for her *Star Rangers*. *Warlock of the Witch World* (1967) is strongly influenced by Robert Browning's poem, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came." The folk tale "Beauty and the Beast" is the origin of *The Year of the Unicorn* (1965). Certainly her *Dark Piper* (1968) has its precedent in the tale of the Pied Piper. William Hope Hodgson's *The Night Land* is a viable precedent for *Night of the Masks* (1964).

Related Titles

Many of Norton's science fiction novels deal with strange planets, and are related to one another by other elements as well. Operation Time Search (1967) concerns breaking into an alternate world and bears a certain relationship to Star Gate. The Zero Stone (1968), to some degree, is related to the "Tie" stone in Star Gate. Their respective powers are different but the mystery behind these strange objects is an element Norton finds worthy of repeating.

A prolific writer, since 1963 many of her books have dealt with the occult and parallel universes.



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