

# Witch World Short Guide

## Witch World by Andre Norton

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# Characters

The main character is Simon Tregarth, an "outlander" who flees his own world.

He is a stranger to Estcarp and as such not really part of it. Instead, he becomes an observer who tries to fit into this new and different world. Repeatedly, he expresses his wish to understand—yet such alien aspects as their magic are difficult for him to accept. As a result, there is a curiously detached quality to him, and this detached quality carries over into the descriptions of Witch World. It is almost as if one, looking through Simon's eyes, sees the land and its people through a mist. Ironically, those seen most clearly are the Kolder, those terrible results of a scientific age gone wrong. Their world is close to the modern world of Simon, and he can appreciate as well as fear them, having seen in his own life the terrible acts his contemporaries have committed during World War II. On the surface, Simon is all action hero, whose emotions and feelings are tightly controlled or hidden. Yet when, at the beginning, the mysterious Dr. Petronius offers to send him to a refuge from his world, he also tells him that the new world would be one "in which his spirit, his mind—his soul if you wish to call it that—is at home." Alien as the magic world may appear, Simon belongs to it on a deeper level, as references to his Cornish origin and later the manifestations of magical power in him reveal.

Simon Tregarth, like most of Norton's heroes, is a misfit and outcast in his own time. He is the classic hero who, against great odds, accomplishes important deeds that benefit his society. While he is a fighter and adventurer, he has a moral core and is essentially a kind person, and he is always concerned about those who are the underdogs. In the end, true to romantic tradition, he gets his princess, although here she is a witch. Yet emotions are completely understated. When the young witch says: "Simon, my name is Jaelithe," he tacitly understands that by giving him her name she is putting herself completely in his power and that she fully trusts him: "What such a surrender had meant to her he could guess, but only dimly and that he knew also, awed . . .

Yet he moved forward, and his arms went out to draw her to him . . . Now he was part of a growing design." The act of naming becomes a declaration of love, and nothing further is said. Norton's male heroes are the strong and silent type.

While Simon, the main character, has a detached quality, the other characters are even more shadowy. Koris, the young warrior from Gorm, is physically misshapen but emotionally sound, and a true friend to the Outworlder. We see him mostly in action, and emotional bonds with his comrade are understated and more hinted than spelled out. Jaelithe, the young witch who accompanies Simon through most of his adventures, is even less defined. Before the conclusion even her name is not disclosed. After the initial encounter when Simon saves her from the hunters, she becomes simply one of the powerful witches.

The remainder of the characters lack individuality and are seen more as representatives of their nationality or race. The people of Estcarp are quiet, dark haired, and belong to an immensely old race, one so old that it is threatened by a natural decadence and lack



of strength. They, along with the Viking-like traders of Sulcarmen, live in a medieval society. The Falconers are primitive mountain dwellers, good fighters and comrades, but at a primitive stage of social development.

Citizens of Alizon and Karsten are soft city dwellers that have lost their moral core—they are greedy, tyrannical, and selfish. And then there are the Kolder, mysterious, evil, and just a step away from being totally mechanical monsters.



## Social Concerns

Simon Tregarth, a disgraced American army officer whose black market dealings have unwittingly driven him outside the law and made him into a hunted man, is saved by a mysterious stranger who offers him an escape to a world where his "spirit would be at home." Passing through an ancient gate between worlds, he finds himself in a landscape of moor and heather, belonging to a universe quite different from his own. The idea of time travel, interdimensional gates, and parallel worlds is a favorite device of Andre Norton, and allows her the juxtaposition of the hero's cultural background with an alien civilization. The confrontation adds mystery as well as room for social commentary to her science fiction novels.

At the time of Simon's arrival, a hunt is going on, and the quarry is a young woman. Saving her by using the gun he has carried with him into the new world, he becomes her ally and follows her to Estcarp, an ancient country of massive strongholds, and a medieval looking city.

Although he knows nothing about them, Simon is drawn to the proud, dark inhabitants, especially to a young warrior Korik, and agrees to serve in their army as a guard. The country is governed by a council of witches, powerful women who can wield magic. As an "outlander," Simon is accepted, but never quite part of his new people, and he becomes a silent chronicler of the wars between Estcarp and its neighbors. The world the author has created is reminiscent of ancient Britain. Like the early Celtic occupants of the British Isles, the people of Estcarp are continuously threatened by invasions and are fighting a losing battle for their very existence. Like Simon, they are looking for a place to be free. To Norton, freedom of the individual or nation is a very important issue, especially the threat of an aggressive technology that ruthlessly destroys humanity. In the case of Estcarp, the enemy are the Kolders, a monstrous robotlike people who have already conquered the neighboring city of Gorm. Many rumors circulate about the Kolders, whose science can turn men into automatons without feelings and free will. The ensuing struggles draw Estcarp as well as its neighbors into a confrontation which becomes one of technology against ancient culture. Science as a power without conscience, confronting the natural world of humans and animals, is one of the major concepts in most of Norton's science fiction novels, and only stubborn human courage, compassion, and perseverance can defeat it.

As a member of the Guard, Simon is sent to a neighbor of Estcarp, which is threatened by Kolder invasion. The people of Sulcarkeep, a Viking-like race of seafaring traders, are brave and courageous, but when Simon and his troop arrive, they can only witness the destruction of the seemingly unbreachable fortress. Yet in pitting the medieval-type cultures of the Sulcarkeep and Estcarp nations against the futuristic Kolders, Norton is not simply demonizing modern science. To the surprise of Simon, there are electric lights in Sulcarkeep, as well as other modern conveniences such as running water and indoor plumbing. Science can be useful, but Kolder power is science without humanity. The impregnable fortress is destroyed by something Simon recognizes as aircraft, and



he and a handful of comrades, including the young witch woman he had rescued on his arrival in Estcarp, barely escape by ship.

Shipwrecked, Simon, Korls, and the witchwoman disperse among other coastal nations where they confront again and again the cruel power of Kolder. Finding refuge with a Spartan mountain tribe of the Falconers who have developed a communication system with their birds, and escaping from the unscrupulous inhabitants of Karis who make a living salvaging stranded goods and killing survivors from shipwrecks, Simon witnesses the corruption the alien race of the Kolder is spreading among the people of Witch World. Eventually, he is stranded in the dead city of Yitis, the stronghold of the Kolder, who had massacred the original population and then set up their headquarters. Himself a product of the twentieth century, Simon understands Kolder technology more than the medieval magic power of Estcarp, which he does not trust. But as a World War II soldier, he also has seen firsthand the inhuman atrocities science can produce, and has no sympathy with the Nazi-like invaders, especially when he witnesses the reducing of prisoners to empty, mindless shells. Against such horrors, only the mutual support of the comrades, representing the better values of the various nations, serves as protection. The small group of Simon's comrades succeeds because each is willing to sacrifice himself for each of the others as well as for their common goal. The protagonist is never alone—he is part of an entity that is stronger than any of its members.

Another social element in this as well as other novels of the Witch World series is the role of women. Norton's novels have a strong feminist touch. The Falconers, for instance, are noble and brave, but their total disregard for women except for propagation characterizes them as savages. And Loyse, the strong-willed heiress of Kargis, refuses to be "sold" into marriage by her father for political purposes. Yet the female witches of Estcarp, whose power lies in their virginity, are also seen as sterile and faceless people who do not achieve individuality unless they break their bond. They are angry and distrustful when it appears that Simon, a male, has a magic of his own. In the end, only cooperation between male and female can lead to a harmonious balance between men and women as human beings.

# Techniques

Norton's stories are notable for a distinctive use of motifs. She links many of her tales by echoing objects, names, and settings. Certain institutions such as the Patrol or the Free Traders appear repeatedly. The stories are also interwoven through the use of a distinctive geography. This novel, the first of the Witch World series, introduces nations and settings that appear throughout the later books, adding continuity.

Another unifying aspect are the motifs derived from Norton's personal interests.

Mental telepathy is common among the natives of various planets. It is a feature among the ruling witches of Estcarp. It can also be found in a negative manner among the Kolders; in fact the head of this nation is literally the Head—when he is destroyed by the witches' use of a small figurine, his head is melted, and the entire Kolder people die. They are in some way linked to him as to a computer.

Archeology and history are other interests of Norton, and she carefully equips each of her worlds with a detailed past.

Colorful primitive societies such as the Falconers are modelled on such ethnological groups as the Spartans or the American Indians. There is a strong feeling of historic cause and effect in Witch World. Often, a simple act in one dimension may create an alternate course of events in another. Time portals and parallel universes are distinctive devices of Norton.

Animals are favorite figures in Norton's fiction—the faithful falcons in this novel aid and even sacrifice themselves for their masters with whom they live on an equal basis. But animals also act as symbols of a healthy, natural world. Corruption and mechanized evil can distort the balance between man and beast.

# Themes

Power in all its aspects is a major theme of the Witch World novels. There is the power wielded by the scientific strength of the evil Kolders, but there is also the power of magic that is handled by the witches of Estcarp. Simon, the outlander, is much more familiar with the former, while even the thought of magic makes him uneasy. Yet the author hints that he has his own share of the old magic, due to his Celtic background. And during his most threatening encounter with the head of the Kolder he instinctively employs a magic symbol that he has seen the witches use and is saved by it.

There is plenty of evidence that power corrupts in the insidious rot that enters any country that is touched by the Kolder, and Simon uneasily wonders about the effect that even simple inventions such as the light globes of Sulcarkeep might have on their ancient way of life. Seeking power for its own sake is evil, whether it is power of magic or of science, and the temptation to abuse it is always close.

After their victory over the Kolder, Koris is impressed by their modern innovations such as an elevator. Thinking on how his people might profit from some of them, he is warned by Simon and by the witch Jaelithe: "Yes, we in Estcarp shall be tempted [by the knowledge]; that is why I am here. There are two edges to this blade, and we may cut ourselves on either if we do not take care."

There is another aspect to the problem of modern technology. Simon explains it when he is asked by the witch Jaelithe whether knowledge of scientific power would be dangerous to Estcarp. "Lady," he replies, "no matter what decision is made, I do not think that Estcarp shall remain the same. She must come fully into the mainstream of active life, or she must be content to withdraw wholly from it into stagnation, which is a form of death."

A secondary theme that is related to the first one is harmony between man and other creatures. The Falconers are closely allied with their birds, and there is mutual assistance and understanding between them. The Kolders, on the other hand, are frequently referred to as "unnatural," and in their battle with the Falconers, they introduce mechanical birds to destroy the real birds and camouflage their zombie warriors. Only those who are not abusing power can be in a harmonious relationship with the natural world.

Abuse and efforts to impose power in order to enslave other creatures leads to a loss of equality and balance.



# Adaptations

Licenses have been granted by Norton for items such as Witch World maps, stationary, and acrylic sculptures.



## Key Questions

All the Witch World books deal with a struggle of old orders and some tentative new social balances. Power in the form of modern technology as well as power of ancient magic is responsible for much of the upheaval, which takes on apocalyptic proportions. The fear of technology as inimical to human beings is a current one in our society where science is not only seen as a benefit but also a danger. The dangers of science are of great interest to the author, and this topic allows a wide range of discussion.

1. When Simon is sent out of the ordinary world, the mysterious Dr. Jorge Petronius assures him that he will find the world he had always unconsciously sought. In what way does the world of the witches fit the character of Simon?

What are the aspects of his personality that it reflects?

2. Does his twentieth century mind create an advantage or a disadvantage for him?

3. All the power of Estcarp lies in the hands of women, the witches. Is the author a feminist in creating such a world, or does she feel that this exclusively female reign is a negative quality? Why?

4. Norton has stated that she is not a friend of machines, and the clash between technology and a more magical world appears in many of her novels. Yet she is also an avowed science fiction writer, and science fiction usually deals with future technology and achievements.

How does she handle this seeming paradox? Why is she so strongly set against "machines"?

4. In Witch World, the power of magic and the power of technology collide.

Which is more destructive? Simon fears and does not understand magic. Why?

5. What is the solution Norton offers about power? Or does she have one?

6. Simon's marriage to Jaelithe combines the modern and the magic world.

How is this possible? What are the implications?

7. What is the role of Loyse of Verlaine in the novel? Is she a positive character?

Does her characterization make Norton a feminist?

## Literary Precedents

Simon is part of the action hero tradition that goes back to medieval romances. Like an Arthurian knight, he follows a quest, vanquishes evil, and emerges victoriously. In fact, there is an early reference in the novel to his Cornish/Arthurian blood which explains his affinity for magic, and he enters the world through an Arthurian gate. Like Lancelot, Gawain and Parsifal, he rights wrongs, is compassionate with the weak, and meets demons and villains. Being an archetype, his character can be found in almost every adventure novel, from Joseph Conrad to Rudyard Kipling. A striking modern use appears in the Star Wars movies of George Lucas. Luke Skywalker is an excellent example of the pure young champion who fights the demonic technical monsters of the Empire.



## Related Titles

Witch World is the first of a series of Witch World books. Web of Witch World (1964) completes the Kolder wars and ties up loose ends. Three Against the Witch World (1965) is the story of Simon and Jaelithe's children, who come in conflict with the ruling female witches who cannot accept that Simon is a male with power, and who are angered that Jaelithe has given up her witch's vows in marrying him. Warlock of the Witch World (1967) is the story of one of the three children, Kaththea, who almost becomes a victim of an evil magician. Sorceress of the Witch World (1968) continues Kaththea's story as she attempts to return to Estcarp but is captured by savage and primitive Vupsall. The same planet is also the setting of a related cycle containing Dream Smith (1972), the love story of a crippled silversmith and a crippled girl. Dragon Scale Silver (1972) is set in Alizon and is a variation of the "Beauty and the Beast" myth.

Amber Out of Quayth (1972) takes place after the Kolder wars, featuring a heroine who frees herself from a forced marriage and helps the rightful rulers to get back their castle and land. These three novels have strong fairy-tale characters and themes but are related to the Witch World series through their setting and history.



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