

searching out mention of possible descendants of a Joseph Tully. He never gives any hints as to why he does so, although he is relieved at every line which proves to have no issue. The whole thing is apparently terribly important to him—dead ends in his research throw him into a state of “panic,” and the author goes to some trouble to make sure these dead ends eventually resolve. (Although it seems quite likely that at least some of them would, in real research, remain insoluble, he manages to dredge up information that teams with study grants have previously decided was untraceable.)

There are one or two other failures of fact. It is likely that the nightclub artiste would see “a brown-haired, blue-eyed professor” in a particular Tarot card (particularly when she has met her subject’s husband), but it is infinitely less acceptable that a serious occultist would reaffirm such a clearly over-specific interpretation. Also, no explanation is ever given of why the sound of a swinging golf club is a definite and incredibly frightening precursor of a horrible death—even if this is simply intuition on Richardson’s part, that should be made clear.

Most of the serious flaws in the book, however, lie with Matthew Willow. His research is fully believable and is, in fact, a good picture of the drudgery of searching out obscure genealogies. (The reason Hallahan has to resort to deus ex machina techniques to get Willow out of his dead end appears to be that Hallahan is aware of how likely dead ends are to crop up.) The real problem is that, unlike Richardson’s panic, Willow’s drives and motivations are simply not convincingly presented. We do not believe that Willow is forced on this search against his will, nor that he is desperately hoping it will fail, although Hallahan often tells us so.

While Hallahan seems a competent writer, and the book has several well-developed characters and some excellent descriptive passages, particularly those of the neighborhood being demolished, his work needs a great deal of polishing and refining before he will be successful in a genre which is dependent on the consistent and continual build-up of suspense. In this novel, even the least sophisticated reader will realize that the two plot threads and the Roman interlude are going to tie together, and many will guess how. If the suspense were stronger, we might wait for the denouement, biting our nails and shivering; as it is, the strongest motivation for finishing the book is to see if our guesses were right and how he resolves it—and, for me, the resolution was incomplete and didn’t justify my curiosity.

—Debbie Notkin

**THE WHITE JADE FOX** by Andre Norton  
New York: E. P. Dutton, 1975, \$7.95, 230 pp.  
ISBN: 0-525-42670-1 LC: 74-23871

Andre Norton is one of the most underrated authors in the field of fantasy and science fiction, or one of the most overrated, depending upon who one



is reading as a guide. I find her an interesting but annoyingly uneven writer. **The Beast Master** was a fine novel, one of her best, but she followed it with several imitative works that were, at best, weak. **Witch World** was a fine fantasy, but the sequels deteriorated progressively, each succeeding work more noxious than the one which preceded it. Had she never written any sequels, **Witch World** could only gain in stature.

Norton’s influence is also greater than her mixed critical reception would imply. She is probably responsible for the introduction of more young readers to science fiction than any other writer (with the possible exception of Robert A. Heinlein). Norton has not confined herself to one field, however. She has also written historical novels (**Shadow Hawk**) and recast old legends (**Huon of the Horn**).

**The White Jade Fox** is Norton’s first gothic, and is so well handled that one wonders why she hasn’t written in the genre before.

The 19th century story is that of a young woman, Saranna Stowell, whose mother has recently died. Saranna is sent from her home in England to her half-brother living in Maryland, who is suddenly forced to exit to Brazil on business. He leaves Saranna to the untender mercies of his daughter, Honora, who is several years Saranna’s senior. Honora is a widow whose father-in-law left an estate named Tiensin to his granddaughter by his son’s first marriage. Since Honora wants the estate for herself, this generates friction between herself and her step-daughter, Damaris.

All this may sound confusing, but Norton lays the plot out as deftly as a seamstress with a pattern and the story moves quickly.

Tiensin is almost a part of old China, closed within the bounds of a mansion and its grounds. Captain Whaley, founder of Tiensin, lived in China for years and had brought back Chinese artisans to build the estate. He had stocked the mansion with a treasure trove of Chinese artifacts, and had decreed that no fox should ever be hunted or mistreated in any way at Tiensin.

The villains of the piece are the overbearing and deceitful Honora, Mrs. Parton, the housekeeper, and her oafish son, Rufus Parton. Rufus contributes heavily to the air of physical danger and brutality, while Honora and Mrs. Parton are ruthless schemers. Damaris, the under-age heiress, is suggested by Honora to be erratic and possibly insane, and the reader's first introduction to her is not reassuring. More tension is added by the fears of Tiensin's black slaves.

The book is a gothic, not sf, and its vague fantasy elements are those of a gothic; but Norton has paid her dues to the sf field and her name on a book cover guarantees the interest of her devoted readers, the book's "category" notwithstanding.

I have two small objections. One wishes, just once, that Norton would create a character capable of telling the antagonists to walk till their hats float. Norton also devotes inordinate time to describing clothing. The first objection won't really wash for this novel, since the character must be bullied and deceived into the situation. Given the time and place, any other behavior would seem unnatural, and the character *does* develop during the course of the story. The second objection is, one suspects, a problem common to gothics and/or romances.

This book should hold readers' attention throughout, and libraries which find Norton's books popular with their readers should have it. It is a bit of an experiment for the author, but her fans should find the high quality and change of pace intriguing.

-Eamon Morgan



The Hutt River Province Principality is a 27 square-mile farm in Western Australia. It declared its independence following a dispute between owner Leonard George Casley and the Western Australian state wheat board. The government had cut Casley's wheat quota back to an amount he claimed would not allow him to meet basic farm expenses. Casley felt that the bureaucratic regulation, which contained no provision for appeal or compensation for financial hardship, violated the basic social contract between government and citizen, leaving him with both the right and the necessity as head of his household (pop. 20) to assume the sovereign management of his property.

Independence was proclaimed on April 21, 1970 in a registered letter to the Governor-General. Casley dubbed himself a reigning prince and ennobled his family and loyal employees. Australian officialdom felt its wisest course was to ignore him until he lost interest in his eccentric quixotry.

Instead the Principality has flourished. It became a subject for humorous newspaper articles throughout the world, which attracted the curious. An article in the June 16, 1975 issue of *Time* magazine indicates that tourism has soared to 40,000 a year, the original farm revenue is being nicely supplanted by sale of Hutt River postage stamps and currency to collectors, a modest capital city is under construction, application for United Nations observer member nation status has been filed, Prince Leonard is speculating upon turning the Principality into a resort paradise similar to Monaco, and the Australian government is on the verge of exasperatedly abandoning its policy of non-interference.

*The Birth of a Principality* is the attractively-printed tourist brochure and government position paper on the tiny "nation." The events leading to secession and the legal justification of the act are explained in detail, though of course only the Casley side of the dispute is presented. The Principality's "early history" is related--this consisting principally of establishing an ambiguous *modus vivendi* with the Australian govern-

## MISCELLANEA

**THE BIRTH OF A PRINCIPALITY** by R. C. Hyslop, in collaboration with Prince Leonard for the Administration Board.

Hutt River Province: Administration Board. 1973, \$A1.75, \* 52 pp.

A popular sf theme is the political fantasy. The world in which the Axis Powers won World War II, the Confederate States of America became a major power, or the Armada reduced England to a Spanish province. Alternately, many fantasies set in fictitious lands owe part of their appeal to detailed imaginary histories and geographies. Wright's *Islandia* and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* are notable examples.

Political fantasies occur in real life, too. The U.S. continues to recognize the independent governments of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania which were dismantled by the Soviet Union in 1940. The eldest daughter of Aztec emperor Moctezuma II was carried by the Conquistadores to Spain, where she married a nobleman; a descendant today claims the succession to the Mexican throne.

\*\$A1.75 + 60cA airmail postage = \$3.20 U.S. U.S. cheques are acceptable. Make payable and address to: I. Casley, Hutt River Province, via Western Australia.