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# Far flung worlds

**SYLVIA ENGDAHL :**  
**The Far Side of Evil**  
Gollancz. £3. (575-02024 5)

**ANDRE NORTON :**  
**Iron Cage**  
Kestrel. £2.95. (7226 5117 1)

**ANDRE NORTON :**  
**The Jargoon Pard**  
Gollancz. £2. (575 02015 6)

**MONICA HUGHES :**  
**Crisis on Conshelf Ten**  
Hamish Hamilton. £2.20.  
(241 89211 2)

Real understanding of political events generally comes long after one has reached voting age: without a brilliant teacher current affairs tends to be a non-subject, and even the grandly named Council for Education in World Citizenship has a built-in alienation technique whereby foreign politics become just another weird statistic. Sylvia Engdahl uses a more subtle approach: her thought-provoking novel tells of a young galactic anthropologist who comes to observe a Youngling world (could it be ours?) during its Critical Stage, at a period when it could either blow itself up in an all-out nuclear war or channel its aggressions and drive into space exploration. Totalitarianism, political idealism and conscience, partisanship and non-involvement are some of the subjects dealt with in what is basically a gripping psychological science fiction.

The action takes place during a protracted period of interrogation neatly interspersed with flashbacks; the relationship between the heroine and her sophisticated, unbrutish interrogator is beautifully balanced and adds another dimension to a story which is already multi-faceted. The use of telepathy and the acquired power of mind over matter make a fourth dimension entirely plausible.

Mind reading and mind control appear not as a defensive technique but as a dangerous weapon in *Iron Cage*, a more traditional science fiction which again deals in a palatable way with serious issues. Jony and his younger half-brother and sister are discovered and reared by a tribe of primitive vegetarian bear-like creatures whose simple language and gentle tradition they absorb and accept until Jony discovers the ruins of man, a city, a stock of laser-like weapons and an ancient wall painting, which shows the creatures chained and subdued to the will of the more intelligent man. Now tainted by his evil forebears, Jony is ostracized by the tribe and forced

to wear a symbolic iron collar. When a human spaceship lands, some of the tribe-creatures are caged for experimentation. While Jony's brother is seduced from the tribe's ways by machines and power, Jony redeems himself by destroying the weapons that make men omnipotent. Life continues with all animals living in peaceful coexistence, united against natural perils and the obscenity of enslavement.

Beginning and ending with the image of a pet cat dumped on a rubbish heap in a cardboard carton, this strong and vivid novel asks important questions about our interaction with the animals we so mindlessly dominate.

Like her science-fiction colleague Ursula Le Guin, Andre Norton has hats of various styles: *The Jargoon Pard* is a fantasy in the grand manner. The archaic telling, the creation of a magical world with a complex history, the epic war of good and evil, the magnificent variety that pullulates under the supernatural umbrella—all the fantastic stock-in-trade is here in this powerful story of a young man ignorant of his inherited shape-changing ability who is caught in the form and sometimes the beastly nature of a leopard. Splendid scenes of the confrontation of powers, an imaginative coding of magic and a solid medieval flavour mostly suppress the suspicion that the author is not entirely happy with this particular hat and that the archaisms are slightly forced.

Miss Norton aims high but doesn't quite touch the giants; *Crisis on Conshelf Ten* aims to be nothing more (or less) than an exciting adventure for those people unpleasantly described as young adults. Within its own limitations it succeeds admirably; copywriting clichés such as "a rattling good yarn" come to mind and belittle what is, truthfully, a fast-moving, efficiently constructed, thoroughly compelling thriller. The twist is that it all takes place at the bottom of the sea. Set in the far future, with the moon uncomfortably colonized and the sea more salubriously settled, the story deals with the interesting issue of atmospheric nationalism: the moonmen are negotiating for less crippling freight rates and the underwater men are resorting to violence, sabotage, and genetic tampering (turning them into gillmen) so that they can be free of an overcrowded filthy world. The details of life on an ocean shelf a hundred feet below the surface are most ingeniously and attractively worked out; readers who are reluctant to look at a more traditional area of children's books should be warmly recommended to make a visit to *Conshelf Ten*.

Sarah Hayes

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