

## Introduction

Witch World has grown little by little; it was never carefully defined, mapped, given a formal history. In other words, it remains still wide open for voyages of discovery to this day. The map, which was at last drawn, in part shows little knowledge of the North, the South, and the western continent beyond the barrier of the Waste.

Not only does it lie historically and geographically open to exploration, but it also has inhabitants who vary widely—there are many strange pockets of peoples hidden away in the countryside, the mountains, the islands, and the marshes of illfame.

For there is one ever-present fact: the Gates. Certainly the adepts, who opened these for their own information and recreation, never thought (unless that was also a matter of experimentation on their part back in the far mists that have swallowed a great part of history) that the Gates would indeed work two ways. The adepts may have sauntered, or fled,

through these, away from a world in which they had wrought much damage, but, also, there came through from other space-times unfortunates caught by the force of some one of those concealed doors, exiles fleeing the worst and believing that what lay before them might give them some small change in fortune for the better, also dabblers in powers they did not wholly understand, drawn, by their rash disturbance of the Law, against their will into Estcarp, High Hallack, Arvon, and Escore—there to be faced with what was totally strange, to try both courage and strength.

Witch World is a tapestry still in the weaving, with a most intricate patterning that alters as one weaver and then another puts hand to the shuttle and begins the *clack-clack* of a busy loom. Perhaps because of this never finished state it attracts those who see new vistas, who pick up this or that hank of thread before sitting down to add a bit here, some edging there.

To me there are still unreckoned discoveries ahead. I cannot say this is a world I have created, rather it in itself is a Gate, on the other side of which a Falconer rides on some duty unknown to me as yet, in which a Sulcar ship battles waves and sails seeking a new port as yet uncharted, in which a lady of the Dales must grasp the hard rod of rulership, in which the finding of a fragment of an ancient artifact may change life in an instant.

Because it remains an ever open land with many stories for the telling, I have asked others to fill in some of those uncharted spaces, to create people who wrought both ill and well, to make clear some point of history, or to illumine a corner of the unknown as yet secret.

I have been so very fortunate that those I summoned have been ready to add so richly to all the patchwork of former tales. I am grateful for all gates they have opened in turn. For now the Witch World ever widens. So many pebbles in which the magic of others (who have their own cherished worlds of

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wonder) is embedded have been thrown into a pool that has widened into a sea, sending ripples out and out to wash shores I never knew existed. I can believe now that, while I have but little Power, I can summon new adepts for the opening of Gates. Time and space are no barriers for such as seek with their own art for keys—that they have used these to enter Witch World is an honor and a joy.

To Estcarp and Escore, High Hallack and Arvon, I dare now to hope there will never come a new scaling, that Gates will not be forgotten and that this world will be enriched by other chroniclers.

So is offered further tales for those old friends to Witch World lore and those others new come . . .

—Andre Norton