

Enchantress *from the* Stars

Sylvia Louise Engdahl

FOREWORD BY LOIS LOWRY





Enchantress from the Stars



WALKER & COMPANY

NEW YORK



Enchantress
from the
Stars

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Sylvia Louise Engdahl

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Foreword by Lois Lowry

Illustrations by Leo and Diane Dillon

To My Mother,

Mildred Butler Engdahl, 1897–1987

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First published in the United States of America in
1970 by Atheneum Publishers, New York.

This edition published in the United States of America in 2001 by
Walker Publishing Company, Inc.

Minor changes to text, type style, and punctuation have been made since
the first printing of the original edition. This edition should be
considered definitive over all previous editions.

Published simultaneously in Canada by
Fitzhenry and Whiteside, Markham, Ontario L3R 4T8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Engdahl, Sylvia Louise.

Enchantress from the stars / Sylvia Louise Engdahl; foreword by Lois Lowry;
illustrations by Leo and Diane Dillon.
p. cm.

Summary: When young Elana unexpectedly joins the team leaving the
spaceship to study the planet Andrecia, she becomes an integral part of an
adventure involving three very different civilizations, each one centered on the
third planet from the star in its own solar system.

ISBN: 0-8027-9921-3

[1. Space and time—Fiction. 2. Choice—Fiction. 3. Responsibility—Fiction. 4.
Science fiction.] I. Dillon, Leo, ill. II. Dillon, Diane, ill. III. Title.

PZ7.E6985 En 2001

[Fic]—dc21

Book design by Ellen Cipriano

Printed in the United States of America

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

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Foreword to the 2001 Edition

*
* How lush a literary landscape is the one that enables a reader to enter several worlds and make a home in each.

Sylvia Engdahl, the author of *Enchantress from the Stars*, says, in its preface, that it is not very important whether any of the people in her story are our ancestors or our descendants. Still, because she created them, and placed them there for both our scrutiny and our delight, it should be important to us, in my opinion, that they could be part of our future—and our past. Feeling a familiarity in fiction is what makes it live. Recognizing ourselves and our possibilities is what keeps us turning pages to the end, and keeps the story lingering in our thoughts, as this one does, long after the last page is turned.

Elana, the spunky stowaway who travels both forward and back—and confronts the moral issues inherent in the journeys—is the now in each of us. With her enthusiasm, her occasional petulance, her introspection, she could be my daughter, or my neighbor, or even my long-ago self.

Life works well for Elana. She has a sturdy footing in her own world and her own family: a knowledge of her place and an understandable pride in her role.

Then, quite unexpectedly, she is tumbled backward into the world of myth, magic, and dragons—and of Georyn, with whom she falls in love. (Who among us has not, at some time, been jolted to find that the past is not entirely past?)

And for Georyn, she becomes the Enchantress.

As a writer, I am impressed by the deftness with which Sylvia Engdahl veers between several points of view and several styles of language—even, amazingly, melding Georyn’s formal speech with Elana’s casual vernacular into a believable back-and-forth that moves from conversation into a deep emotional connection. At the same time she maintains the fine balance in Elana’s character, so that even as she pretends to sophisticated powers of enchantment to manipulate Georyn, she genuinely enchants him with her very human charm. Yet throughout, she is still Elana: guilty, dutiful, frightened, and very young. Like every teenager, she speaks in a jaunty flippancy and stirs with rebellion as well. Newly stunned by the awareness that she—despite the technology of her highly evolved society—cannot change the injustice of the world, she asks, “Father, haven’t you ever questioned this policy?”

With that hesitant question, later to become a firmer, more confident plea, Elana joins the multitudes of literature’s impassioned young protagonists forced to face the inadequacies and hypocrisies of their parents’ generation: my own Jonas, Robert Cormier’s Jerry, Katherine Paterson’s Lyddie, even E. B. White’s Fern. One by one they do what they can to set things right, to make things fair.

And Georyn! What a heartbreaking, wonderful hero



he is! The remarkable dexterity with which the author shifts viewpoint and voice brings us into Georyn's world, a world that embraces chivalrous honor and the structure of fairy tales as well. There is a sense of familiarity when he faces the three tasks (of course there are three! There are always three!) given him—the disk, the light, and the cup—in order to be able to confront and slay the dragon.

In the predictability of the once-upon-a-time world, however, his courage would earn him the hand of the princess. Here, in the multilayered world where past and present briefly blend, it will not be possible. Reading, we know it will not. The demands of the complex world preclude the romantic resolution we have learned to expect from fairy tales.

He knew all along. His brother warned him. “Think, Georyn: even if she should let you look through such a door, the time will surely come when it will be sealed again; and when that happens you will be not on her side of it, but on ours.”

The story of lovers from different and opposing worlds has been told for centuries, yet we love it no less for its repetition or the sad inevitability of its ending. Juliet will whisper sweet nothings from her balcony, but she and Romeo will die eventually anyway. Pinkerton and Butterfly will never live happily ever after. But as readers, we yearn for the possibility of it, and our hearts break as those doors close.

*Then, as the Lady's voice faded, he glimpsed the world
as she saw it, from above....*

*And after that, she was lost to him. Yet he was sure,
as he would be sure for ever after, that the powers that
were hers to tap would endure beyond time and space.*

* * *



Even in these days when politicians overlook the separation mandated constitutionally and invoke religion in their campaign rhetoric, spirituality remains a topic largely unaddressed in fiction for young adults. But in essence, *Enchantress from the Stars* is a story about sacrifice and compassion, two of the main ingredients of religious faith, and about the power of believing in that which one cannot understand. His belief in an unexplainable power saves Georyn's life. Elana's sacrifice of her own happiness restores Georyn's future. And the compassion of the Starwatcher—the overseer, the father—is the orchestrating chord.

Many books, including some of my own, contain a character like the Starwatcher: the elderly adviser, the one who understands outcomes and risks, the one who steers a young protagonist, points the way, and then lets go. Parents, of course, know the pain of that letting-go. I remember writing the passage in which *The Giver*, in the book of that title, tells Jonas that he will not go with him on the final, difficult journey. It was hard for me to send Jonas off without him in exactly the same way that it had been hard for me to see my own children move out into the world beyond my protection.

Elana's father undertook such a task with the wisdom, courage, and blind surging faith it requires. When she asks how he had known enough to stand aside and let things happen as they did, he tells her, "I didn't. I trusted *you*."

Maybe trust is the key element in the book. All good Young Adult literature is about leaving childhood and innocence behind. It is about the recognition and acceptance of responsibility. But every young person who goes forth—Jonas, Elana, Gilly, Maniac, and countless others—does

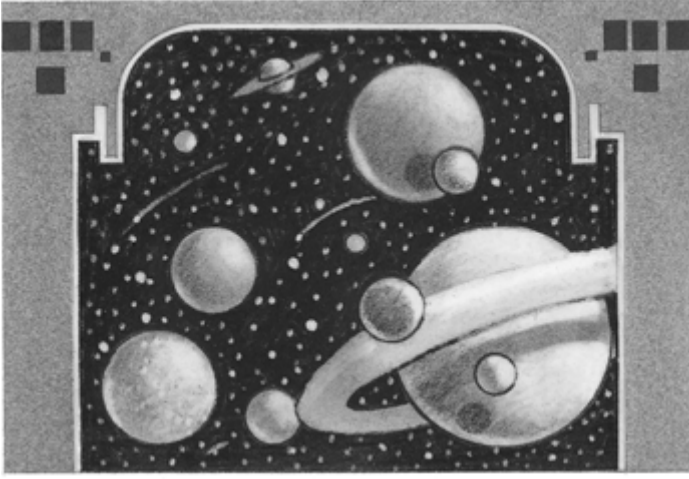


so buoyed and strengthened by the knowledge and trust of those who have made the journey before them.

Today's children find some of those empowering mentors only in books. For them, and for all of us, it is a wonderful thing that the Starwatcher is still there.

—Lois Lowry





Preface

* The locale of this story can be fixed neither in space nor in time. Perhaps it is the planet Earth—but then again, perhaps not, for whether this is a tale of the past or of the future is anybody's guess. Scientists now believe that the universe may contain countless worlds upon which life has evolved; who is to say how many such worlds happen to be third planets of medium-sized yellow stars? And who can predict how far the sons and daughters of Earth may someday travel?

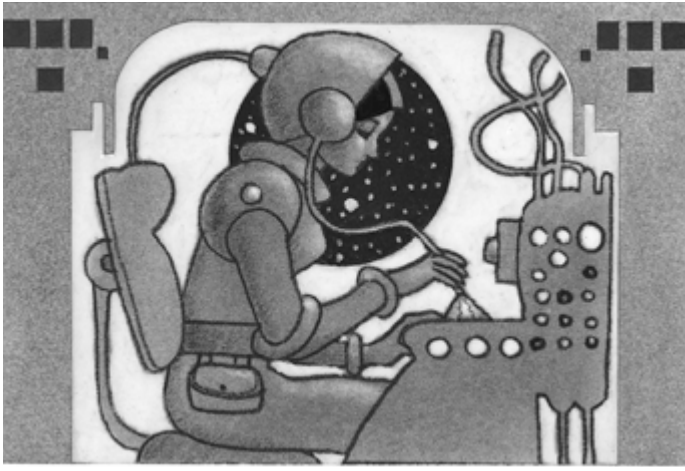
Three peoples of different levels of advancement appear here; whether any of them are our ancestors or our descendants is not really very important. If other peoples exist, their symbols are not ours; yet a story must be told in familiar terms. Thus, the elements of this one may seem commonplace: As magical charms and fearsome dragons are the traditional ingredients of yesterday's legends, so ray guns and interplanetary invasions are those of today's. All such legends are unrealistic

in a literal sense. This narrative is no more a prophecy than a history. Yet this, within the limits of its form, is how things may have been . . . or how they will be . . . or how they now are, somewhere beyond the Earth we know.



* * * * *

Enchantress from the Stars



Prologue

* The planet shines below us, cloud-flecked, dazzling against the dark backdrop of space. Down there it is cool and green and peaceful. In a little while we will take the ship out of orbit and leave this world behind, a mere speck in the vast currents of the universe. This world, which we call Andrecia—the third planet of a quite ordinary yellow sun . . . but that's just coincidence, of course. What difference does it make that just such a planet was my own people's ancestral home?

I am not supposed to cry. I am not supposed to let my personal feelings get involved. How could a girl ever become a field agent if it affected her this way every time? Maybe I'm upset now only because of Georyn. Or maybe I should never have joined the Anthropological Service at all, though it's a little late to decide that now. I've been warned often enough that an agent's life is not easy. I used to think people meant simply that you had to study hard and work hard, and that you were sometimes in danger; but I guess that's not the point. . . .

Last night when we got back to the ship, Father said that he hoped I saw now why people as young as I (I'm still a First Phase student) are not normally allowed to make contact with Younglings. But Father's a compassionate person, and he's well aware that I'm not sorry I got myself into this. Pretty soon he took me in his arms and smoothed my hair and said that it was his fault as much as mine for allowing it to happen. He admitted that he'd used me, and that he had had no right to because I wasn't ready. Yet we did accomplish something on Andrecia . . . without me, perhaps we couldn't have. And in the end I didn't cause any of the disasters untrained people can cause; there's been no harmful disclosure, and if Georyn and Jarel were hurt by their contact with us, it was only because they had to be. Anyway, I keep telling myself that.

But I wish I could know, really *know*, how it was down there. Was it only a hoax, a sham? Or was there real magic after all? I'm afraid I haven't much of the empathy that Father says an agent needs most of all. (*He says I do have, perhaps too much, only I'm too young to channel it properly.*) All the same, I've got to try to put together the pieces, not only to prepare my report but because it's important to me. There's a lot I don't understand yet. . . . The things Younglings take seriously—are they all real underneath, as a tree is real no matter what language you describe it in? Was Georyn not deluded, but only attuned to another kind of truth? Can believing something make it a fact? Is the Stone more than a stone, *really*?

That's one set of questions, the ones I may be able to answer. I'll try not to get bogged down with the others. The ones like why do Younglings have to be Younglings at all. Why, for instance, must Georyn be capable of wanting something that he'll never be able to reach? Why must a



man like Jarel, a good man, have clearer sight for the dark side of human progress than for the bright? And why should a person be stuck in the wrong age, anyway?

Well, I'll never get anywhere worrying over *those* things.

Because the starship was diverted to Andrecia, Father and I won't be coming to the family reunion, and it's just as well for I'm no longer in any mood for a vacation. You'll see why; I am going to record the whole story and send it to you, since we are not only cousins but friends, I think, although we've never met. You asked me what the Service is like, and I can't think of any better way to tell you. This account may help you make up your mind about applying to the Academy, but I honestly don't know which way you're likely to be swayed.

Since I'll be putting in a lot of detail, I'll keep a copy of the tape and edit it later for my report. The report won't be a formal, official one. Father will write that. It'll be simply the personal account required from every agent who's involved in a mission. I've been asked to cover the Andrecians' and the Imperials' viewpoints as well as my own reactions; the Service often requests this because they want you to learn to look at things the way Younglings do. (They demand that you be totally objective about the picture anyone you contacted got of you, even if this causes you to make yourself sound better, sometimes, than you really were. So please forgive what may seem like distortions in my favor!) It's easy now for me to see through Georyn's eyes and to speak in the words appropriate to his view of the world. With Jarel it is harder, since I didn't know him well; still I can try to imagine how he must have felt. This, then, is the way I *think* it was: for Georyn's people, for Jarel's, and for us. . . .





The Mission

* At the edge of the Enchanted Forest there lived a poor woodcutter who had four sons, the youngest of whom was named Georyn. They were able to earn a meager living by selling wood to the folk of the village, and although there was seldom more than dry bread or thin gruel on their table, they were not miserable.

Yet the brothers, as they grew to manhood, found little satisfaction in their lot. Often, as they toiled at the hewing of a tree on the outskirts of the wood, they stopped to watch the huntsmen of the King ride by to hunt in the Enchanted Forest, which their father had forbidden them to enter. And the eldest son would say, "Ah, if I but had the power of the King and a hundred servants to do my bidding!" And the next brother would laugh and reply, "Myself, I would settle for the King's treasure, for gold buys all that a man could wish for." And the next would tell them, "You are both fools, but if a man could win a fair bride such as the King's daughter, he would be well content."

Georyn, the youngest, would say nothing; yet in his own heart he would whisper, "Had I the wisdom of the King and his councillors, I would not be merely a woodcutter, and indeed I would not be hungry, nor would the villagers. And I would know the secret of the Enchanted Forest and be free to hunt there, and someday I might go even beyond it!"

Now to that country there came a time of great sorrow, for on the far side of the Enchanted Forest there appeared a monstrous Dragon that breathed fire, and its roaring could be heard far and wide over the land; and many folk fled in terror, fearing that their homes would be laid waste. Many of the King's huntsmen went to fight the Dragon, yet the Dragon remained and no men returned.

At last the King sent forth a decree, and in every village it was proclaimed: whosoever should free the land of the terrible Dragon would be given whatever reward his heart should desire, even to a half of the kingdom. Yet the people were afraid. If the King's own huntsmen had failed, how could mere villagers face the monster and kill it? And few men entertained thoughts of the King's reward.

But the woodcutter's sons had dreamed long of possessing such as the King could give, and they begged their father for permission to travel to the King and ask his blessing in the quest. The woodcutter himself, however, opposed them. "Even to enter the Enchanted Forest is death for such as you!" he cried. "Yet you talk of dragons! I forbid it; you shall not go."

The three elder brothers went angrily to their beds and whispered far into the night, making plans to disobey their father and set out together at first light, for they believed their valor equal to that of nobles and huntsmen.



But Georyn talked further with the woodcutter, asking, “Why should it be death to enter the Forest, when the King and his followers have hunted there since before I was born?”

“As I have often told you,” replied the woodcutter, “the Enchanted Forest is the home of evil spirits, who have laid a curse on all who go there, though they dare not touch the King’s companions. This was true even before the Dragon appeared to ravage our land.”

“Then if the King should send us, they would not touch us either.”

“Perhaps not. But how could you hope to slay the Dragon, you who have never before held a sword? It is impossible, Georyn.”

Now Georyn knew this, for though he was quite as brave as his brothers, he was not so foolish as to consider himself abler than the King’s huntsmen at killing. But these men had failed, and if they had failed then perhaps the Dragon could not be killed with a sword at all. “There may be a way to overcome the monster, Father,” he said. “But it will not be found by those who fear it! I can have no happiness until I have at least tried.”

And so at last, seeing that he could not dissuade them, the woodcutter allowed his sons to seek the aid of the King. They set forth the next morning, following the river that circled the wood. When they had gone but a short distance, they came to a fork in the path: one way kept to the course of the stream, while the other led to the King’s castle by a shorter route, through the forest.

“Let us take the quickest way,” said the eldest brother.

“That would not be wise,” protested Georyn. “That way leads directly into the Enchanted Forest.”

His brothers laughed, saying, “What, do you believe such foolishness? Do you fear that we will be bewitched?”



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