

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

# Quintessentially Vermont

Fantast Alex Potter Talks About His Work AN INTERVIEW BY ELIZABETH A. ALLEN

For a state with so few people, Vermont teems with talented writers. One such is Alex Potter, an author and activist based in Brattleboro. Alex devotes himself to short stories, particularly science fiction and fantasy. Editor and contributor to numerous anthologies, Alex talks about reading, writing and the way Vermont sneaks into almost every single story of his.

**EA: Why do you write?**

AP: I've always lived in my head more so than in the world. I was a daydreamer of a child and I'm a daydreamer of an adult. Writing offers me a way to bring my reality to the world around me.

I can express feelings on paper very differently than I do in my day-to-day life. Writing is like a direct unmediated conversation between my soul and my hands. I don't censor myself in my writing in the same way I censor myself in daily interactions.

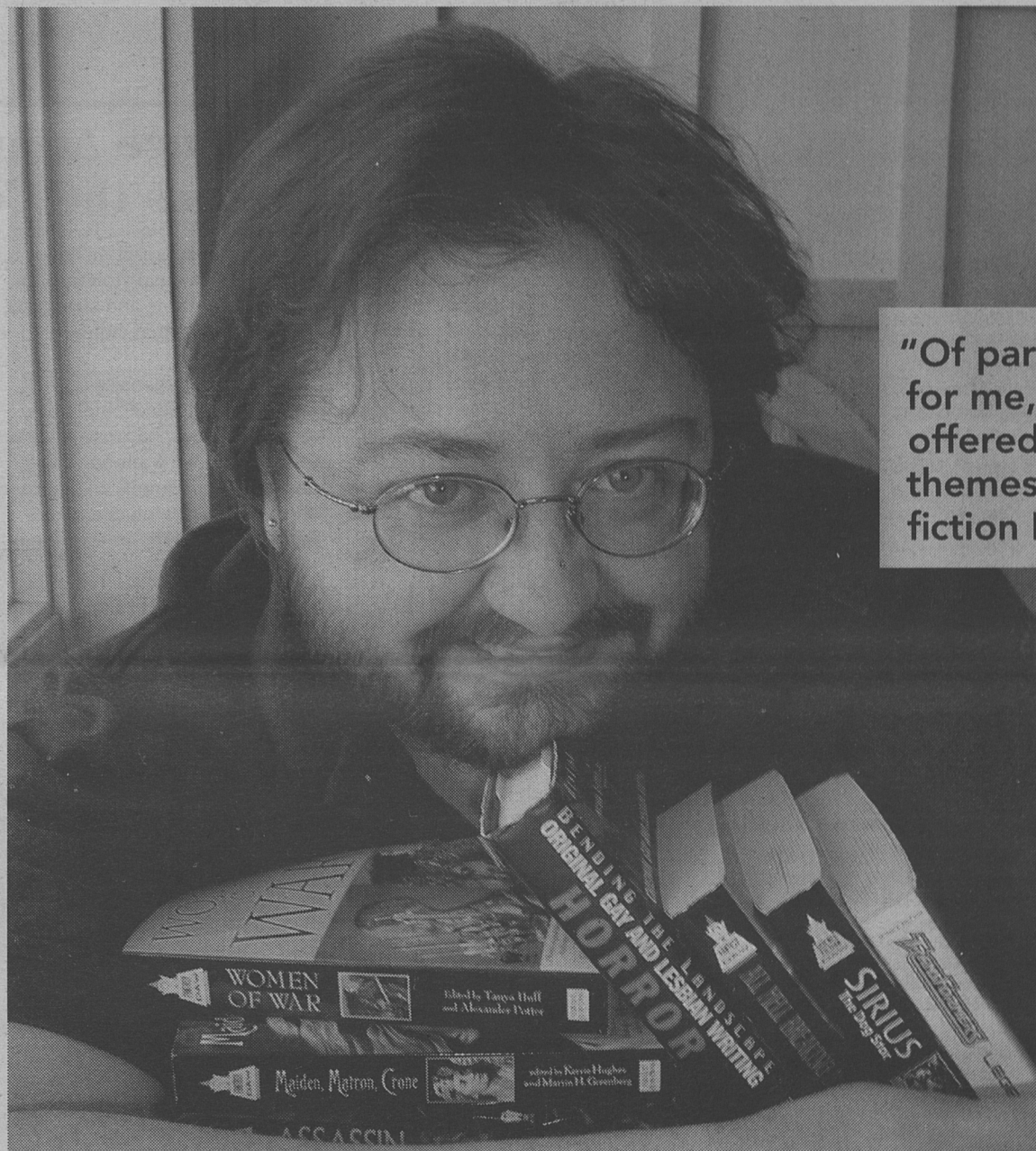
**EA: What's so cool about the sci fi/fantasy genre?**

AP: One of the reasons sci fi/fantasy caught my interest as reading material was the pure freedom of imagination it offers. In a way, finding sci fi/fantasy was like being given back that blank slate of childhood again, when books offered real escape from daily life, a door into an entire other reality.

Of particular importance for me, sci fi/fantasy offered prominent queer themes when no other fiction I could find did. High fantasy in particular, with strong women and romantic men, used all sorts of gender and sexuality themes. Science fiction has done fascinating gender storylines. Gay characters popped up everywhere in the late '80s and the '90s in contemporary and urban fantasy, high fantasy, space opera, sci fi and cyberpunk. The popularity of queer themes already within the genre offered another incentive to write fantasy.

**EA: Speaking of gayness, in what ways does your sexual identity intersect with your writing?**

AP: My sexual identity intersects with my writing in the same way my identity as a Vermonter does ... it influences and colors



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everything I write. I see the world through my own - inherently queer - eyes, and that affects what appears on paper in a very organic manner. At the same time, just as some of my stories are set in Vermont and some are not, some of my stories have immediately visible queer content, and others don't. Yet, just as what I think of as quintessential Vermont characteristics color all of my characters, quintessential queerness also colors all of my characters.

**EA: Does the openly queer content of your work dictate where it is published and distributed?**

AP: I have had excellent experi-

ences submitting to the mainstream publisher DAW Books, which has been publishing queer themes in their fantasy and science fiction, and marketing to wider audiences, for decades. I've also seen queer content with Bantam Spectra and Eos. Sometimes my work will appear outside of the mainstream as well, though often through self-selection. That is to say, at times I've chosen to submit a story to a queer-only anthology such as the *Bending the Landscape* series. However, ghettoization may then occur when those anthologies are not available in large numbers of bookstores. Even bookstores with a small section of queer-interest books seldom have a truly

representative selection of queer fiction.

**EA: Let's talk about another important identity of yours: that of Vermonter. In what ways does the Green Mountain state affect your writing?**

AP: I was born and raised here, and I have lived here all my life. Both of my parents and their parents are also native. Vermont is an integral piece of me, and, as such, I see its influences all over in my work.

One of the primary ways the state has affected my writing is through offering such a solid setting. Eight of my fourteen published short stories are set in Vermont, and numerous other pieces

of my work are also based here.

I also believe Vermont influences my work in tone and voice. My characters, no matter if they're currently wandering around in Vermont or if they're on a spaceship, often have characteristics I think of as quintessentially Vermont. In other words, I write strongly independent individuals who exhibit a die-hard sense of

personal honor that may be at odds with traditional or popular definitions, and who keep a deeply caring heart hidden away, all locked up quite securely in an efficient, practical, eternally polite, and somewhat distant facade.

**EA: What forthcoming works do you have?**

AP: Two short stories will be appearing this spring, in the anthologies *Child of Magic*, edited by Kerrie Hughes; and *Slipstreams*, edited by Martin Greenberg. A third short story will be appearing early next year in an as yet unnamed fantasy anthology.

**EA: Where can we find your work?**

AP: Currently, all of my DAW anthologies - the three I've edited and the four I have stories in - are in print and available through any bookstore by order. At the moment, *Maiden Matron Crone*, edited by Kerrie Hughes, is the anthology with a story of mine that I've seen on most shelves, and for the anthologies I've edited, *Women of War* and *Sirius: The Dog Star* are both widely available. *Bending the Landscape: Horror Volume* is now in paperback and more available at gay bookstores, as well as some mainstream bookstores. ▼

Elizabeth Allen lives in Somerville, MA, but her heart resides in her home: the Green Mountain State.