JACK VANCE'S INTERVIEWS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

JACK VANCE'S WORDS

Vol. I

interviews

COLLECTED BY JEAN LUC ESTEBAN

Jack Vance [Art by David Johnson]

WORKING DOCUMENT

Please, DO NOT SHARE

Warning: all translations of non-English source texts are shown in COLOR.

This is the first part* -English version- of complete French edition:
"ENTRETIENS ET TEXTES DE JACK VANCE"

Thanks to

WIL CERON, JACQUES GARIN (vance.jack.free.fr), STEVE SHERMAN, ISFDB,The JACK VANCE MESSAGE BOARD, LOCUS Magazine, Mickael IVORRA, Pierre Paul DURASTANTI, Matt HUGHES, David B. WILLIAMS, Silvio SOSIO (DELOS), Jerome DUTEL, Jack RAWLINS, Charles PLATT, Mike S. FRIEDLI for their agreement & assistance.

and all the contributors who made this collection a reality.

**this volume contains only the Vance interviews.*

Broadcast: Hour 25 Honor to Finuka fanzine # 4&5 1980

Editors : K. Cockrum & M. Koester

[raw transcript]

HODEL: Our guest tonight is Jack Vance, and if he needs an introduction, you're in the wrong radio station and the wrong science fiction program, and if he doesn't, hang in.

THONG: And if you don't know who Jack Vance is, you're going to be pleasantly entertained, and we will elucidate some goodies...

((Here follows a discussion of the proper pronunciation of the diphthong "gn" in Latin, which we will not transcribe; also the movies of Werner Herzog and a museum display of the various uses of grass and grass-like plants in art, crafts, and music. Also, Terri Hodel reads the science fiction calendar.))

THONG: THE WORLDS OF JACK VANCE is an Ace paperback which is a collection of some of his stories, and THE BEST OF JACK VANCE pocket book is introduced by Barry Malzberg, and in that introduction, Malzberg says the following about Jack Vance: "...To the best of my knowledge, he has never entered the social life of science fiction, prefering to live iconoclastically and well in the far West where he has let his work, and only his work, make a contribution. I cannot recall any other writer in science fiction who -had managed to make a similar reputation without self-promotion and social involvement in the field's interstices, which makes even more of a statement as to the value of his fiction." Then Malzberg says, "Jack Vance is remarkable. His landscapes are wholly imagined, his grasp of the fact that future or other worlds will not be merely extensions of our own, but entirely alien, has never been exceeded in this field. He is also one of only two writers (the other is the brilliant short story writer Avram Davidson) to have won both science fiction's Hugo award and the Edgar award of the Mystery Writers of America, the latter for Best First Novel back in the mid-sixties.

His real name is John Holbrook ((Vance))[1] Jack Vance has had, as John. Holbrook ((Vance)), and impressive parallel career as a mutery novelist.

So I guess the first question, Jack, well, the first statement is "Welcome to Hour 25," and the second question is "Why do the show, and why not continue to let your work speak for you?"

VANCE: Well, there's no reason to be consistent.

HODEL: Hobgoblin of small minds, eh? Why the avoidance of publicity?

VANCE: Well, as I was explaining to may friends here tonight, it seems that when you're writing fantasy, especially fantasy (or fiction of any sort whatever), you're creating a kind of a world, which you are asking the reader to believe in.

[1] 1It is not clear here whether or not Thong knows that "John Holbrook" is not Vance's entire name. He may have meant that "John Holbrook".replaces "Jack" in the non-science fiction work. Here, as throughout the text, the double parentheses (( )) indicate that I have found it necessary to add a word or two to the transcription in order to make the sense of it clear.

This reader's credibility is very fragile and easily fractured. Now, if you interpose between the reader and this world which you are asking him to believe in, this image of yourself, then you diminish your chances of having the reader believe in this world you're creating. For the best effect, to get the best out of your work, you have to have the reader divorced from all these handicaps, by having this face of the writer between him and the work. I think too many writers get conned by the publisher into supplying all this publicity for themselves, and it all appears on the cover - all their biography, their pictures, their foibles. And essentially what they do is make themselves very ordinary types, and the reader isn't really interested in having the writer of something he believes in appear as en ordinary type - the reader would like to think of ((the author of)) a book which he likes very much to be an extraordinary type. Now here is the proof on the back cover, where the chap is revealed as a -- maybe he's got Hodgkin's disease, or some kind of deformity, or something weird about him -- the bubble is broken just like that.

80 out of the sheer mechanics of trying to produce a believable fantasy, in my opinion, you're well advised to keep your own personality as far aver from it as...

HODEL: I don't think that would apply in your case. You must be about 6' 6", let's see, 18 or 20 - I imagine you've been writing for only a few years, and that incredible black moustache of yours with -- it must be at least a tuo-foot spread when you spread it out-- VANCE: Well, that's all fake. I put that on just in case there's any photographers down here, but I see they're not. I'm going to pull it off now. Where's my red moustache? (Laughter)

GOTTLIEB: He's actually 4' 3".

HODEL: His moustache is 4' 3"....

VANCE: Actually, I'm told that Phillip Dick saw me someplace or another, and he thought I was a big game hunter instead of just a mere pathetic science fiction writer.

THONG: That's why you're wearing the horns!

VANCE: Maybe I'm overstating this, but in order to get a point across, sometimes you have to overdramatize or overstate.

HODEL: And many of the writers say "Let my work speak for me," and yet they will at the same time not avoid fans. - They will not go out of their way. And yet the personality does both form and deform their work.

VANCE: Exactly. I couldn't have expressed it better.

THONG: Are you interested in success?

VANCE: Goddam right!

HODEL: Well, in what does your success consist?

VANCE: Well, a very large bank account.

HODEL: But not that kind of adulation, or...

VANCE: No, my vanity is secure, but I'd like to nee some of this vanity translated into some dollar bills at the end of the month. I'm not interested, really, in popularity, or whatever you want to call it.

HODEL: You've won two Hugo's. You won for THE DRAGON MASTERS, I believe, and for THE LAST CASTLE.

Does winning the Hugo's, which may or may not have a monetary effect on your future writings (I'm beginning to wonder if it does sometimes), is that the sort of gratification you're after?

VANCE: Well, you can't help appreciate any notice taken of your work. Something Barry Malzberg said, and this I appreciate, it's impossible not to have a glow of satisfaction, because what it means is that you have communicated.

You have tried to do something, and somebody has appreciated it. All right, you have made a success in this particular case. You can't lose it. Well now, the Hugo's mean a kind of recognition in the same way. However, it's a bittersweet kind of recognition, because sometimes you say, "Well, probably I didn't deserve that Hugo, but I deserved a Hugo for this, which I didn't get." In other words, these people... much as it's nice to get this award is... "How come I didn't get the award for this, or how come I didn't get the award for that?" Or, "How come I wasn't put in jail for this?" or something like that, you see. Sometimes you get praised for the right things or the wrong things. So I think that after you've been writing for a certain period of time you get a little bit calloused towards these things; and if you don't get them you don't care, and if you do get them, well that's nice.

HODEL: But it really comes down to the people who buy, who read the books, who believe in the worlds that you create. That's what it's about.

VANCE: Yeah, I would think so. Essentially, I try to do the best work I can. When I was quite young, I thought I would try to be a...what do you call these writers that turn out a million words a year?

HODEL: A hack?

VANCE; Not necessarily a hack, because Max Brand is a magnificent writer, although he was a million word a year... err, anyway, he produced millions of words a year. You couldn't call him a hack, because his work was so great, you know.

But anyway, I thought I'd try to produce lots of words, so I started one time and knocked out two short stories in a weekend. And or course they were the most wretched possible things I'd ever written, or that anybody else had written.

HODEL: And they sold immediately.

VANCE: And not only sold immediately, but this is how I got down to 20th Century Fox. I was mentioning that I had worked for 20th Century Fox. They picked up one of these stories for a movie sale, mind you, and it was the most miserable story that could ever be conceived.

HODEL: I gather that this vas when you were writing mysteries and that one of them was a mystery.

VANCE: No, it was so-called science fiction, but it was way back twenty years or more ago.

But it always amuses me when I think about my attempts to be one of these multiple word types.

HODEL; We were talking a couple of weeks ago when Robert Silverberg was on the show of the same thing. One year he wrote and published two million words.

VANCE: Silverberg is amazing.

HODEL: And now he's leaving the field. Well, he's stopped writing. SHADRACH IN THE FURNACE was his last book. Have you thought about doing something of the sort?

VANCE: Leaving the field? I can't afford to.

When I make as much money as Silverberg does, then I'll start thinking along those lines.

HODEL: What do you think of the field?

VANCE: Science fiction? I don't know, to be quite honest.

HODEL: Do you read it?

VANCE: No. The only thing I know: about is my own work. I can see a progression. It's gotten better over the years. And now I'm to the stage of life when I'm scared that everything I write has to be as good as the last, or I figure I'm over the hill; so now it's going to be anxiety ridden, so to speak.

HODEL: Is an author qualified to make that judgment?

VANCE: Who else?

HODEL: The public.

VANCE: Well, that's debatable, but I suppose again you have to go by the testimony of the bank account.

HODEL: Not necessarily... Well, if you don't, then it's a refutation of my argument, so go ahead.

VANCE: But actually it works out, as far as my own career (so to speak) goes that the better I feel I've gotten to be as a writer, the more money I'm making. I'll probably never be wealthy, but over the last few years I've become a lower middle class type. Probably don't make as much as you fellows do... (Laughter)

HODEL: Back to fantasy again...

VANCE: But anyway, at least I can survive...

HODEL: As a matter of fact, Barry Malzberg says in there that... talks about survival in your writing.

THONG: One would hope that writers with small enough output that most of us haven't heard of them would be making some sort of living in this field, and people with the well-known names such as you have would be very obviously making a great deal of money in the field. Once again we're back to some sort of a semi-political statement that isn't it a shame that a person of your stature, and the number of books and stories behind you that you have; and yet even one of the major writers in the field is unable to do better than lower middle class ?

VANCE: Well, I'm not complaining. Let's not put me in the position where I'm poor mouthing around here. I'm not making enough - let me put it that way - but at least

I've got the minimum objective that there's always beer in the icebox. One of you chaps wants to pop up and take a look?

THONG: It's there.

VANCE: Actually, there's very few science fiction writers that have made any money at it.

Heinlein..., Asimov has made quite a bit of money, but I don't think he's made so much from his fiction as he has from assorted other stuff.

Silverberg has made a great deal of money, and he tells me that he's made most of his money out sf his non-fiction rather than his fiction.

Frank Herbert has made a great deal of money.

He's made it primarily out of his... First of all, he made a reputation with a book called - it was originally UNDER PRESSURE - then it was called THE DRAGON IN THE SEA or something like that. This established his reputation, and then be produced DUNE, which of course approached 'best seller status - not just science fiction, but became a well- known book across every phase of society. Well, Herbert's made a lot of money.

And now there's a chap called Lin Carter whom people don't know too much about, but I understand he just sold a book to the movies. Well, I don't know how much he made out of it, but I know the budget is going to be seven million bucks a movie, of which Carter's going to get perhaps three million of... (Laughter) No, of course not. What do you think he's going to get out of it? Have you heard?

THONG: Do you know which one? THONGOR, or something....

VANCE: But anyway, he sold it to the movies, and it's going to be seven million. Now Carter deserves whatever he gets cut of this. Carter's a hard worker. He's worked, he's (so to speak) paid his dues, edited, Put an enormous amount of enthusiasm into the field. I haven't read these particular books, so I'm not in a position to comment on them. But if he's sold them, and can get some money out of them, then I applaud him.

I'm glad he does. There's other people, I think, that don't deserve the money they get from movie sales; but Carter, he's earned it, as Frank Herbert has, of course.

HODEL: Isn't there a difference in quality, though? Herbert's writing is good. I've read some pages of Lin Carter's things, and when I see people like Phil Dick or Ted Sturgeon, or any one of a score of names who are not in that position ... O.K., anybody who can get money legally, and sometimes extra legally... O.K., fine, but sometimes I do wonder about justice, etc., etc.

VANCE: Yes, but now maybe it's possible that Lin Carter's books weren't absolutely 100% the best; however, as I say, he has put so much energy and so much work into the field through his editing, his enthusiasm, his dedication to the field. Maybe he's earned it on another basis than what he got paid on... that he got paid in kind of a backhanded way, in a way...

HODEL: You worked for Fox, right? You know that's not how the film companies work.

VANCE: No, I know that, but that's neither here nor there. Anyway, Carter earned anything he gets. Whereas, well, I won't mention any names, but I know other people

who haven't earned what they've gotten from these lightning strokes of fortune, so to speak.

HODEL: You write in two genres. You write in mystery fiction and science fiction. Make a lot of money in mysteries? You can, it's possible', it's a lot easier than science fiction...

VANCE: I don't think you can any more, to tell you the truth.

HODEL: Why not?

VANCE: I think that field has reached its peak and is declining. There's certain writers - Len Deighton and, oh, John Le Carre... They kind of made beat selling books for awhile, but I suppose you'd put Deighton in the category of suspense.

Not Le Carre - in fact, I think he's retired by now. But aside from an odd name or two, there aren't any big producers any more such as there used to be, such as, oh, maybe thirty years ago when you have dozens of names that would be household words. Now you go to ask in a household and say "Name twelve murder mystery writers," and they can't mention them. They say "Agatha Christie" - Agatha Christie's dead. "John Creasey," - John Creasey's dead.

HODEL: John D. MacDonald, Evan Hunter writing as Ed McBain, Georges Simenon...

VANCE: Simenon is dead. I think he's dead. I'm pretty sure - right or wrong? I think he's dead, but I wouldn't swear to that. But say, ten, fifteen, twenty years ago mystery writing was a very important phase of popular culture. Now, no.

Think television has killed mystery writing. Now science fiction does not, in my opinion, concern itself with the same kind of audience that television deals with. I think the people that read mysteries and the people that watch television are essentially the same group of people. The Primary audience of the science fiction writer (so I've been told - I've never made this investigation myself) is a highly intelligent young person between the ages of thirteen and twenty-five, and then ((perhaps they catch the habit)) and they keep on reading it. But in general, the science fiction writer is addressing young people - young men and women between these ages, and they're not too much interested in television. Well, maybe I'm getting too general, too broad here, but I think I've gotten my general point across.

HODEL: Why do you not read science fiction?

VANCE: I think... I won't make any comment on that question.

THONG: Do you have - I don't know why this occurs to me; I haven't asked anyone else the question - do you have a definition that satisfies you?

VANCE: For science fiction? Nowadays there's booted about the words "speculative fiction," which I think is as close to what science fiction is as anything else. If you wanted to capsulize it in one or two words, you'd say, "fiction which deals with an imaginary milieu." Generally it's connected with the future. And some other people have called it "future history." All of these definitions have elements of... what's the word...not credibility, but validity, or making conviction, or something like that. But it's something that's hard to describe, because every time you say "This is science fiction," then somebody will say' «Well, is this science fiction, or isn't it?" And life is not... well, if you asked me I'd say "No, of course not, that's just a bunch of trash." But you say,

"Well, it's claimed as science fiction." But I think science fiction essentially deals with the future, and future possibilities of human conduct, the way people will act under different societies, different stimuli.

HODEL: One of the things I've continued to think about is something I'd like to get your reaction to. A lot of people assume that the mainstream of literature is the place where the most gross lies, where the greatest amount of academic publishing goes on. But I'm convinced that it's the vitality that tells you where the mainstream of literature is, and that science fiction is the mainstream. What is called the mainstream is something else.

VANCE: We're getting involved here in a very, very complicated business, and if I were to give you my ideas on this, well, you might or might not agree. Essentially, if you study the history of aesthetics at all, you'll find that certain types of endeavor get public acknowledgement....

I can't think of the word... acclaim, or acceptance, and they become the «mainstream." Now, presently, these things burn themselves out after a while, and then you get some iconoclasts that start something new. Now, this happens in practically every field. Debussy, when first "L'après-midi d'un Faune" was performed... they had riots and threw rocks at Debussy, and chased him up and down the street. It was considered iconoclastic music. And of course nowadays Debussy's considered quite mild, quite old hat. It wasn't even the twelve-tone scale... What do you call that thing? Not the diatonic scale, but the other scale... Well, be that as it may. Well now, science fiction represents something completely different from "literature." It's not a branch of literature.

THONG: You're thinking of dodecaphonic, I think.

Serial music?

VANCE: No, Schoenberg... What do you call Schoenberg's...?

Atonality. It means that you're using ALL the notes of the scale without reference to the different modes or the different scales.

There's a better word for it than "atonality" _ it's not the twelve-tone scale, anyway. Well, be that as it may.... Anyway, this is what I feel.

It is easy to consider science fiction and so-called "mainstream literature," as science fiction ((being)) a little truncated branch of it, but it isn't this way at all. These two things have in common the fact that they both use words, plots, characters; but aside from this, they're not really alike. Now you take a piece of sculpture, for instance, and a piece of wood carving.

You can say, "Well, yes, these are identical.

Look, somebody hacked these things out of some material - therefore they're the same. They both use relief, or resemblance to something living, or something." But essentially these things are aesthetically completely different. Now, I like to think in terms of jazz music and classical music. Jazz music and classical music are alike in that they use the same general chords...

HODEL: Some of the same instruments...

VANCE: Some of the same instruments. They use the same scales, major and minor scales.

HODEL: Same notation.

VANCE: Same notation. Still, there is an enormous amount of confusion when people try to relate jazz to ordinary music. Many, many people who should have known better have made this mistake.

Gershwin, for instance, who should have known better... Well, I won't say that because he made a lot of money; but he made a classical rendition of what he considered to be jazz, and of course it was very popular. But of course it wasn't any more jazz than, oh, that clock in the corner there. Now similarly with science fiction; science fiction isn't any more mainstream literature than jazz is classical music. These things are completely different genres, and the attempt to bridge between them is doomed to failure, is Bathos with a capital "B." This occurs in these horrible "Star Trek" situations, where somebody decides that they are going to try to interpret science fiction to the masses. They use the themes of science fiction just as Gershwin used certain clichés of jazz to produce his "Rhapsody in Blue," so do the producers of these television shows use some clichés of science fiction to try to make the idea penetrable to the mass audience. Of course they're wildly successful.

Are we to be angry? Are you angry?

HODEL: Not particularly. I'm offended by bad art, but insofar as they fail in their task of using science fiction devices, yeah, I'm angry, but overall, no.

VANCE: No, we're too callous when we reach our age.

HODEL: Can't be more than a couple of weeks apart.

VANCE: You just can't help it. Now I've often wondered if... I don't know what his name is, but if he approached me and said, "Vance, come write some Star Trek things..."

HODEL: His name is Gene Roddenberry.

VANCE: I've often wondered what I would say, you know. I'd say, "Well, first of all, how much?" And then I'd say... Well, essentially I'm not going to do it. I could be tempted with more money than he's got in his budge..., but essentially I'm just not at all interested. And he's not interested in me as far as that goes.

THONG: What about the other side of the coin? Using science fiction as a vehicle to get themes which might not otherwise receive a television airing?

VANCE: Oh well, I don't quite know what you. Mean to be honest with you.

HODEL: When Roddenberry talks about Star Trek (we had him on the show and scores of other places as well), he talks about using Science fiction as an allegory to talk about war and peace...

VANCE: Ah! This is just a lot of ten-dollar words, meaningless, just a lot of abstract vagueness. It's a frothy kind of abstraction that has absolutely no meaning at all. It's just talk.

HODEL: I think they may have had meaning / - they were concretized for that particular program. I've talked down the series often, but he did get some ideas into it...

VANCE: Well, actually, what can you say about war and peace, really, that isn't just... Well, can you tell anybody about it? No. Or you can say, "Yes, war is bad and peace sometimes O.K.," you know. But isn't it really kind of a waste of time to devote (I don't know what his budget is), but to produce a big show and say, to demonstrate the horrors of war? I mean, that seems like not only beating a dead horse, but a horse that's become a hamburger or something like that.

HODEL: In essence, then, it's a cop-out. It's an easy target, an easy shot that doesn't accomplish anything, which has no way of ever serving the purpose for which it is theoretically intended.

VANCE: I don't really think you need to have a television show, purportedly science fiction, to display the horrors of war. I think this has been accomplished through other efforts, so to speak

HODEL: The trick is to get the enemy to watch the show.

VANCE: Exactly. Let the Peace and Freedom Party go over there and demonstrate in the streets of Moscow. Somebody was telling me that Heinlein said something about peace and freedom, and he made the point that these words are mutually contradictory.

The Peace and Freedom Party, they're ... each idea negated the other, so to speak. But anyway, this is just same second or third hand report I had of some remark of Heinlein's. But essentially it's got some reverberations which I think deserve a bit of attention.

HODEL: Let me back up for a minute. ..

What made you start writing science fiction?

VANCE: Well... oh, I don't know. Hard to say. I really can't put my finger on it exactly.

HODEL: Probably wasn't the money. When you started in the fifties...

VANCE: Oh no, I wasn't making any money at all, because I wrote lots of stories which never got published.

HODEL: You could have chosen lots of genres, but you chose that one. I'm rather glad you did.

VANCE: Well, I think it was just because I was essentially interested in the field. I can't think of any better way of saying it than that.

HODEL: I wonder how many of the writers got started by reading something and saying, "Good God, what a piece of nonsense. I could do better than this," and then proceed to...

VANCE: No, that wasn't my way. I remember....

When you're a kid, you read things and they excite you tremendously, and they haunt you. And then when you start writing, then these things start coming out.

THONG: You try to do it yourself, and wonder then how it was done in the first place. Some of the most moving literature that you read doesn't use the big words or the poetic words or the ones that are supposed to elicit this response.

VANCE: Exactly. It's a very straightforward kind of thing. In fact, when I was a kid, I remember I was much impressed by the poetry of the early nineteenth century -- Shelley, Keats, and so forth.

And recently I thought I'd reread some of it.

And good heavens, you know I said "How in the world could I have liked this stuff?" You know, I don't know, it's either maturity or... Let's see, my idea came from yours, and now I've forgotten the connection. What did you say? What was your last comment?

THONG: I don't remember.

VANCE: Anyway, it doesn't make any difference.

But anyway, the idea is that this language that these nineteenth century poets used now in retrospect seems so stagey, so far-fetched, so unreal.

THONG: I remember how entranced I was with the word "numinous" for a while.

VANCE: Now there's very little poetry that I enjoy reading just for this reason -- the language seems so strange. There are some poems that don't have this strained, odd language. Some of William Blake's stuff is written..., it seems like he's talking, and yet by the end of it you come out with these passionate declarations there.

HODEL: Who are the writers you pay attention to who have been an influence?

VANCE: Nowadays, as I mentioned, I don't read much fiction at all. I read things which interest me in other fields, but very little fiction.

HODEL: Not necessarily fiction. Philosophers, historians?

VANCE: I like mainly history, mathematics, science.

It sounds foolish to use these words, because they're so general and broad. But essentially I'm interested in learning how the world is put together, how it works, what has brought us to our current condition, and the possible way that things might have been different, or possible speculations. In fact, some of the best books of history have never been written, I think. I know it's been tried. There's a hook called IF -- I forget what it was, but it was, say, IF Napoleon had won the battle of Waterloo, IF Attila had not died, or such and such. In fact Phillip Dick... what was his book?

HODEL: THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE.

VANCE: Wasn't that one of these same...

GOTTLIEB: If the Axis powers had won World War II.

VANCE: If the Axis powers had won World War II.

Well, these are fascinating books, because they show us, instead of all of us sitting here placidly -- you with your Scotch and sodas in front of you, and me with my ice water...

THONG: Is that what you're drinking? I had no idea...

VANCE: All of us, heavens knows what, ((we'd be)) talking fir trees up in the great North woods or something like that, or diving for abalone, instead of sitting here, and things might be different.

HODEL: Is that one of your themes? I don't recall that as being one of the themes you've ever touched.

VANCE: No, because it's so obvious.

THONG: Well, there's a difference between being obvious and doing a good job, as you yourself pointed out.

VANCE: Well now, I don't know the circumstances under which your father met your mother, you see; they're evidently very chancy. I mean if someone introduced them, or if your mother had gotten off the streetcar at one stop before, you wouldn't be here. Or if your father had gone to the University of Michigan instead of the University of Florida, or something of this sort, then you wouldn't be here again.

HODEL: Jack Finney or Charles Finney, one of the two, wrote a book about five years ago called TIME AND AGAIN, which was exactly...

GOTTLIEB: Jack Finney.

HODEL: The theory was, he had to go back and prevent a man from meeting a woman... set in that well-known science fiction locale, San Diego....

VANCE: But essentially, these kinds of speculations are kind of pointless, because we must accept the world as it is. Here we are.

HODEL: Why? Why must we?

VANCE: We don't have any other choice.

HODEL: Sure we do.

VANCE: No we don't.

HODEL: As writers, as creators, I say that you do. As a matter of fact you've got to. If you accept the world as it is, THE LANGUAGES OF PAO would not have been written, etc., etc.

VANCE: No, I accept the world as it is. However, that leaves me at total liberty to construct future possibilities. But I'd be foolish to start using a set of premises which weren't-with us today - that would be pointless.

HODEL: If Booth had missed Lincoln, the South won the war...

VANCE: Is that a book that's been written?

HODEL: Yes.

VANCE: Well, essentially, the South has won the wax - Carter just got elected.

HODEL: What are you working on now?

VANCE: I'm working on the third Alastor (so called) series. Just a novel, and when that's done, I'm not quite sure what. I have something else in mind, but- Sherry has talked me out of it.

Jeez, I made a terrible mistake.

GOTTLIEB: I didn't talk you out of writing anything!

((Here Hodel gives station identification and announces Vance's appearance at the Change of Hobbit bookstore.))

THONG: Anyway, you don't read science fiction. You prefer history and etc. How about the way you work? Do you sit down and just write for X hours, or do you write until you produce X pages?

VANCE: Always I had some discipline along these lines. Actually, I start in very dutifully in the morning, and hope to turn out a certain amount of work every day. And I'll work, and then something will distract me, and so I find myself doing something else. And then I go back to work and something else distracts me, and then I get angry at myself and I absolutely swear that I'm not going to do this again.. I'm going to turn out all these words per day. And of course the next day is just like the one before.

HODEL: Do you do much revision?

VANCE: Yeah, quite a bit. I do my first draft in longhand, which my wife types for me. In other words, she has this telepathic connection or something like that where she can decipher my horrible handwriting, and makes a legible draft from it.

And then I go over this typewritten draft and make a second draft on that, and then she retypes that; and that generally is the final draft, with some small revisions. But the work is done in the first two drafts. The tremendous revision is done in the second draft.

HODEL: Do you plot the thing fully before you begin?

VANCE: Well, I'd like to think that I do, but not always. Sometimes things get a little out of hand, or you get some idea that when you're writing the thing that seems so much more interesting than what you'd already plotted, so you say, "Well, I'll go along this sideline." And then of course this leads you into terrible difficulties when you want to turn the thing off. You find yourself... you're up a tree someplace. So the best thing to do is just stop the story and say, "Well, this is close enough to the end; let's atop here. (Laughter) HODEL: Back in the late fifties, early sixties, I'm not sure where, you did these stories that I read about Magnus Rudolph, and I loved that character -- he's really nice, and I'd like to see more of him. Is there any chance that he will ever come back?

VANCE: Well, I doubt it very much, mainly because - I'm fond of old Magnus myself - but it's just a question of time, really. I've got some other projects which I'm really anxious to fulfill, so to speak, and I fear that that particular set of stories has gone its course.

HODEL: One of the things you do best is create aliens. You have some beautiful aliens. Do they come from anyplace except... Do they have an origin, or are they just suddenly there? I know it's an ill-formed question, but...

VANCE: Well, I really can't give you a sensible 33 answer. I'm not putting down your question - your question is perfectly sensible, but I can't make a sensible answer to you, so I won't even try.

THONG: You want to entertain when you write a story. Are you also... do you have any other purpose, such as to reform the world, or do you like to have a view of the world you'd like to have people take on?

VANCE: Well, yes and no. If I do, I generally I feel it's something that you can't hardly help.

Just the way you string words together, almost...

There's a word -- I can't think of it-- it means "set forth a view of the universe." Or you -- not establish a point of view -- but you propound a world view every time you put one word after the other. This is the most elemental answer to this question, but the question you want answered is, for instance, if I believe in free land, am I...

Well, essentially, I think perhaps that there's a bias in that I believe that traditions are very valuable, and that by forgetting traditions, destroying traditions, that the human race is losing tremendously. I like to see old things preserved -- old ways of speech, old customs, old music's...

THONG: Because we repeat our mistakes otherwise?

VANCE: Not so much that, but it's just that, as we all know that as we're going through life, we get a great deal of pleasure out of the complexity of life. Now, traditions add to the complexity.

If you destroy traditions and odd customs, and arbitrary ways of doing things... Well, for instance, look at the difference between baseball and soccer. I think soccer is deadly dull; I like baseball. What's the difference between these two things? One, baseball is a very arbitrary game.

It's full of odd little rules, strange things.

You can't do this, but you must do that. Soccer, you stand at one end and kick the ball toward the other end, and the other people kick the ball back again. There are one nr two rules in Soccer, so I'm told, that do make the game a little more complicated than this. But essentially' that's what it is. One team is trying to kick the ball this way; the other team is trying to kick the ball that way. From my my point of view, it's deadly dull. Now, the more arbitrary... Well, for instance take the difference between chess and checkers again. Checkers is not a simple game, but chess is so much more complicated, and also much more interesting than checkers is, because it's got a lot of arbitrary regulations and rules. Now if you simplify life, so that it's like checkers or soccer, then also you're making it very dull. Now if you have a lot of arbitrary, meaningless customs, even if they're kind of pointless, even if you're aware of them... Well for instance, an Englishman tells me that in England it's absolutely legal to urinate on the left, the roadside wheel of a car. It's a right guaranteed you by the Queen. You may do this - it's common law. However, if you did this on the other wheels, you'd be dragged away as a common nuisance, you see. Now that's one of these arbitrary laws, you see, that makes it O.K. Now if you're in England and you come out of a pub, mind you, the left roadside wheel of the vehicle -- choose that one— don't go to any other wheels. (Laughter) But anyway, this is one of these little arbitrary things which... Many of these rules persist in England, and of course they cherish these things, cherish traditions. And I feel that we should do the same here. Well, our life goes past so fast, you know; one thing is fashionable today and it's a dead dog tomorrow.

HODEL: Kind of tough to hit the wheels.

VANCE: That's right, especially the new Cameros, whizzing past. How about a skateboard -- wouldn't that be kind of a problem?

HODEL: Are things going too fast? Are those wheels turning too rapidly? Do we not pay attention to some of the things we should be paying attention to?

VANCE: Well, it's a truism to point it out, but we all realize it owing to communications being as they are today, that an idea gets transmitted backwards and forwards at the speed of light, and people get bored with it very quickly, and fashions come every week; whereas a hundred years ago they came every year, so to speak. A hundred years before that they came every two or three years. And who knows what's going to happen tomorrow?

HODEL: Does that hold true for writing? Is the writing too fast?

VANCE: I would say so, yeah, sure.

HODEL: Too flashy? No depth to it?

VANCE: Well, I don't know that that's.., too fast, no depth, those are two different things.

In other words, it could be fiat you might have different styles of writing, and they may all be absolutely profound, and absolutely Shakespeare's succeeding each other. It might be; it's not without possibility. But I would say... well, it's something that can't be helped. Again, it's a matter of accepting reality. If we want to have, or if we live in this world where we live, with these communications, like we're doing tonight here... You see, we're all conniving in this whole thing, sitting around explaining our ideas to countless millions of people.

THONG: All five hundred. (Laugher)

VANCE: But whether it's right or wrong is beside the point. It just happens to exist, and so we live with it.

THONG: You know, something does come through after doing this for awhile. That is, we're saying a great deal more than we think we are. And you're saying things in so many words that could be analyzed without perhaps realizing the subtlety of the actual message that's being transmitted.

When we open the phones up on our program, you can tell whether you've communicated or not by the people who call, and they may not ask any questions that depart at all from what you've said. But certain of our guests have brought forth an entirely different part of the audience, and not so much because of anything they said on the surface, but because of that underlying message, whatever it is.

HODEL: Let's find out. Want to do that?

Honor to Finuka #4

KPFK Interview with Jack Vance (Part 2) ((Here follows the announcement of open phones, followed by a short discussion of refreshments, which will be omitted.))

HODEL: KPFK, you're on the air.

CALLER 1: Hello, I want to defend and say something about Star Trek, and also say that you need more study of historical consciousness...

THONG: ((Voice-over)) Michael, one of these days you'll just recognize the voice and push the button quick. We all know who he is.

CALLER l: ...as to whether the kind of narrow, insipid rationalism that Blake tended to fight, and so did Shaw, as opposed to kind of an intentional thing.

THONG: ((Voice-over)) I'm losing my patience...

CALLER 1: I think what's important about Star Trek is a tradition different from what you call science fiction, which can be traced, which is the tradition of surrealist, like Fritz Lang movies, even some very insipid things like the Flash Gordon popular things... How far ahead of the culture it is, and how it structures things in certain ways. And I think Star Trek was a fantastic form of structuring a new kind of myth form, and you compare it with the kind of insipid nonsense that's on otherwise. There were some blundering types of things, but it's a true kind of classic form, and I think it should be defended.

This is Fair-weather in Venice, and I can' put my knowledge against anybody on this. I'd like to create something that relates basically to the medium -- I'll give you an example...

HODEL: Thank you very much. (Sigh) If you'd like to talk to Jack Vance or express an opinion, the phone number is 985-5735.

THONG: That's a regular caller.

NOBEL: An Mitch said, you get people from all...

VANCE: That's all right. In fact, I anticipate it. I mean, after attacking it -- there are people who love this thing, and I trod on their toe a little bit, so why shouldn't they respond?[2]

HODEL: Do you see yourself as an icon-smasher?

VANCE: No, I don't see myself as anything, really, except just an artisan-craftsman trying to make an honest living.

HODEL: You're lucky enough to be able to do that. There are many people in the field who aren't.

VANCE: Yeah.

THONG: KPFK, you're on the air with Jack Vance.

---

[2] What Vance doesn't know is that his comments on Star Trek had very little to do with this character's response. Every time Hour 25 has open phones, this guy calls up and runs out a long spiel on Star Trek. His speech wouldn't have been much different had Vance praised the show to the skies, or not said anything at all. It's really too bad that this transcription gives none of the character of the interchange -- for that you would have to be a Southern Californian somewhere in OM's broadcasting range. It's like listening to the Firesign Theater -- you hear "Don't Crush That Dwarf, Hand Me the Pliers" differently it you happen to know where Yucaipa is.

CALLER 2: Yeah. I'd just like to make a comment on traditionalism. You were saying that things being arbitrary, rules being made arbitrary can make them interesting, and that's not necessarily so.

And things being traditional doesn't necessarily make them good. I'd like to see if he has any comment on that.

VANCE: No, I don't have any comment, except that it's not a hard and fast kind of situation. Sometimes traditions are kind of... Maybe some traditions are possible to get along with, but in general...

Personally, I'm a very sentimental man, even maudlin, so you can't argue with me about that. Put it on the basis of "I like traditions." Maybe you do or you don it, but I do. SO you can't say that I don't have these feelings. You can say I'm a fool for having these feelings, but I have them nonetheless.

HODEL: KPFK, you're on the air.

CALLER 3: MY name is John Carr[3] I'd like to speak to Mr. Vance. I've read a number of your novels over the last twenty years. One that really just turned me on was TO LIVE FOREVER. And what I liked about that so much was the fact that you had captured a totally alien culture, but one that was technological, yet you presented it in a way that just was fantastic. And I've noticed that most of your books are preindustrial in technology.

I was just wondering if you plan to do anything more with an expanded technology.

VANCE: Well, the reason for this is, and actually it's essentially a..., well, one reason I don't write too much about telepathy and precognition and things like that, is that because it's hard.

To know where to stop. If you believe in this, well no, let me phrase this a little better -- it's hard to write a story where people know what other people are thinking, or to move objects at will. It just goes beyond your capacity to get an interesting plot going. Now generally, for the same reason, I don't usually write about advanced technological societies, because when you have things like death rays and instant communication, then it makes human beings so powerful, so... Everything becomes so easy that the conflict with natural phenomena comes to a halt. You give away half of the interest in the story, so to speak.

.CALLER 3: In that particular story, one of the things that impressed me was that it dealt with longevity, and the way you had brought it down to that personal level, with one man trying to deal with it, and you could see that it was beyond his capacity to deal with it, and he began to commit excesses. And it continued in that vein, and it was really fascinating, because it seemed so real, you know it seemed very human. It seemed the kind of thing that one might have to face at that point in the future.

VANCE: Well, if you think about it, and you think about an advanced technological society that has access to longevity -- as, if you've been reading the papers recently, I think somebody had something to say along those lines, some hormone where people would live eight hundred years -- that sooner or later human beings would have to

[3] One of our honorable subscribers...

come to grips with the idea of who is going to be allowed to live and who isn't, presuming we can't colonize the stars. So just going with this idea to its ultimate ends, it seems to me that you'd let the people live who, by some arbitrary scale of achievement...

CALLER 3: And that would offer more to society as a whole.

VANCE: This is essentially the theme of that particular story. But anyway, thank you; you've made some intelligent comments.

CALLER 3: O.K., thank you Mr. Vance, bye.

HODEL: KPFK, you're on the air.

CALLER 4: Hello? My name is Dan Alderson, and Jack Vance has been one of my top favorite science fiction writers for about twenty-five years now, and I didn't get to listen to all of the program previously, but in part of it where I was, a remark that he was unlikely to write any more Magnus Ridolph stories...

VANCE: Incidentally, I pronounce that Ridolph, but nobody else ever does.

CALLER 4: I'm sorry.

VANCE: That's all right. How would you know?

CALLER 4: Right. But one other series of yours that's been one of my favorites that was terminated rather abruptly in the middle, apparently ... was the "Demon Princes" series, and I wondered what the situation is with that?

VANCE: Well, the situation there is that I've been toying with the idea of proceeding with those. I've been waiting, waiting, waiting, tin,' till I could get a package deal -- that some publisher would buy five books, in other words three reissues and two new novels. And I've had some nibbles, but they didn't come up with the price -- essentially it's an economic matter. In other words, I don't want to work on these two novels and give away the reissue rights on the first three, and I want all five to come out in a kind of uniform edition. Let me recapitulate. What I want is three reissues plus two new novels, and I want to sell that in a package. And until I can get a proper deal on that, I'll do something else.

CALLER 4: Well, I'm sure I speak for many of your fans in hoping that that will work out.

VANCE: Well, I think it will within the near future.

I've got the stories plotted, or at least one of them. Anyway, I hope I can get at 'em.

I'm anxious to, too.

CALLER 4: Thank you.

HODEL: Thank you for calling. KPFK, you're on the air.

CALLER 5: Hello. I'm not really a fan of Jack's at all; I really don't even know who he is.

VANCE: ((Voice-over)) A11 right -- change the number!

CALLER 5: He could be as popular as H.G. Wells, I don't know. But he touched on something that kind of interests me, the subject about how the cultures are kind of like

vanishing, like, and how everything's becoming like, everything's like, I don't know, like, all the same, like kind of normal.

And I was thinking, like, I think it's like when the people, when they're all becoming the same kind of a person, there's not any separation anymore as far as, like, their interests. Do you know what I mean?

((Thong counted the instances of "like" in a voice-over. This caller had a lot of extraneous verbiage, which I have included above so that you can get the flavor of the conversation. When it is omitted, the fellow is a lot easier to understand, not to mention being a hell of a lot easier to punctuate. Therefore, I am leaving "like" and the like out from now on, so that the punctuation doesn't drive me nuts. --MK))

VANCE: Well, I'm not really sure...

CALLER 5: People going their separate ways, doing their own thing. You know, back in the sixties when the hippie movement came, and. there' was talk about conformists, non-conformists, and people conforming. And it seems like everybody's conforming now, and everybody's trying to do the same thing.

VANCE: No, no, I don't think you're quite right there. I think probably that nonconformists flourish when they're economically able to. If you're broke, or if you're a peasant, you can't afford to be a nonconformist. In conditions of prosperity, you'll find nonconformists. We live in a very prosperous, fortunate society, and we've got a lot of nonconformists. In a place like Russia, you won't find very many non-conformists.

They're all in the insane asylum in the first place. But in China you can count the number of non-conformists on the fingers of three of your hands.

CALLER 5: I see your point. Yeah, you're right. But I just mean if you decide to do something where you think you're going to do something on your own, like "I'm going to get into skiing," or like to get into this," or "I'd like to be a musician."

VANCE: You can do it.

CALLER 5; Yeah, of course you can do it. But it just seems like everybody else is doing it also, you know?

VANCE: Yeah, but look at all the choices you have. You have a choice between skiing, music, hang-gliding, deep-sea diving, sailing -- I could go on and talk the rest of the night about the choices you have. Whereas, if you lived in a peasant society, your choices would be "Shall I go out and bait a bull?" or maybe "Should I go out and hunt a deer?" Your choices would be so limited.

CALLER 5: In the time when the media wasn't such a big thing, you did these things and maybe that's all you did. And then, sure, people still do it.

You know, I'm trying to be a musician myself, and I find it hard just trying to stay tuned in on one thing, but I know you can do it and I know people do, but I'm talking about the majority...

VANCE: What happens, I think -- excuse me for interrupting you -- but I think I want to anticipate you here. I think when we are confronted with this enormous

number of choices, I know I myself, sometimes I don't know what to do with them. If you only have two or three choices, you can make a choice pretty easy. But nowadays we're confronted with these myriad choices, we're kind of awash with the number of things we can do. And we tend to diffuse... is that the right...no, dilute our efforts. See, probably you want to be a skier, and a musician, probably other things. So you don't put any of your energy into one particular thing.

CALLER 5: Right, right! You're bombarded by all these different ideas, and if you're always thinking, "Well, to be the ideal person, I have to to this, and I've got to do that•"

VANCE: Lots of energy, lots of hours, lots of time.

CALLER 5: Right. Now that might sound kind of superficial, but I only think that's what's happening, and that's where it's at.

VANCE: All you have to do is work, work, work, work,....

CALLER 5: What, trying to do all these...

VANCE: Either that or concentrate on one of 'em.

CALLER 5: Yeah, that's got to be the ideal thing, of course. But I'm just saying I think we're more swayed to be this everything-type person, and that's why I think we're losing...

VANCE: Oh, I don't think we're losing. Essentially I think we've gained, but, oh well...

CALLER 5: Well, anyway, it was nice talking to you.

HODEL: KPFK, you're on the air.

CALLER 6[4]: Ah. hello. The callers must be queued up pretty deep tonight. There're two of us on the line, and so we both have some questions that would like to ask. Do I have my radio turned down?

HODEL: You're doing fine. Go ahead.

CALLER 6: O.K., you already answered one question about the Kirth Gersen series, so I won't bother with that. I'm kind of interested in the DYING EARTH aeries - Cugel the Clever.

VANCE: Kōō'--gle

CALLER 6: Kōō'-gel, ah, O.K. Oh, one thing that might be nice is..., many of your names are hard to pronounce, I don't know, it would feel nice to pronounce them right. What did you think of QUEST FOR SIMBILIS? I noticed that that was a sequel, but...

VANCE: Well, Mike Shea wrote me a letter. He (said that he would like to do a novel based on this particular milieu, and asked if I objected.

I said "No, by no means. Go ahead." And then he wrote the book, and of course I didn't know who he was, but he wanted me to read it. And then I had no idea whether he was a good writer or a bad writer, but I told him I didn't want to read it for various reasons, but I said, "If you can get it published, by all means go ahead and have it published." And evidently the book was publishable, and he had it published. I haven't read it.

[4] Your honorable editor (KC)...

I've glanced at it, and more power to him.

CALLER 6: Well, I think he did pretty nicely.

VANCE: Yeah, well, I hope so. I told him to do anything except kill off Cugel.

CALLER 6: Do you plan on, doing any more with it?

VANCE: Yeah, I do. In fact I want... I've got two stories already written in the second book, and I plan to do... in other words, I plan to make another book of adventures of Cugel. .

CALLER 6: I guess since you don't seem to be interested in reading QUEST FOR SIMBILIS, that your later Cugel stories won't necessarily have any continuity with it.

VANCE: Well, in my opinion, as I understand it, Shea took up Cugel where he was thrown on the beach, and he did something to him-- I don't know what. Well, as it happens, my next book will go along with the same thing, that I pick him up in the beach and take him somewhere else. So essentially, we're both writing that...

CALLER 6: Oh boy, I can hardly wait!

VANCE; Essentially what we're doing is Oust writing parallel stories, there.

CALLER 6: That's a great idea.

VANCE: Well, it's not an idea, it's just the way things... In other words, it wasn't by any scheme -- it vas just the obvious thing, which was obvious you know from where the last story left off.

Bo... well... it doesn't make any difference one way or the other. Maybe somebody will come up and do a third one. Why don't you try?

CALLER7[5]: May I cut in? I don't have any heavy philosophical comments or anything. I just wanted to tell you that I've always loved reading your description of your characters sitting down to eat.

VANCE; (Laughs) Thank you.

CALLER 7: I've had many happy hours imagining what those things must taste like. Especially the feast of the several hundred repasts[6]. Remember that?

VANCE: Yeah. I remember it.

CALLER 7: Well, I reread that section just by itself.

VANCE: Yeah, someday we ought to try to make that. I don't know where we'd get the recipes, though.

CALLER 7: I don't know about in our society... but those kinds of traditions, yeah, we need those.

CALLER 6: Our Jack Vance books get pretty dog-eared over here.

---

[5] Your other honorable editor(MK)...

[6] °See THE BRAVE FREE MEN (Ace: 07200, pg.99).

VANCE: All right, came to the "Change of Hobbit" tomorrow and buy same new ones.

CALLER 6: Ah yes, I will.

(Clapping in the background on the studio end.)

THONG: That applause form Sherry Gottlieb, for some unknown reason. (Laughter)

VANCE: Well, I'll be there tomorrow, and sign some autographs.

THONG: You know, the supposed benefits of not making contact with someone because maybe your preconceptions will be destroyed, are far outweighed by the benefits and reality of actually meeting the people that you've enjoyed so much.

And while you might discover that Mr. Vance does not have a three-foot black moustache, you will probably be entranced by discovering that he exists in the real world. So come on down tomorrow.

CALLER 6: Yeah, we will.

HODEL: Anything else?

CALLER 6: That's all we have. Goodbye.

THONG: Goodbye, thank you for calling. Is there a particular... the problem that whenever you sit down at a typewriter and finish a story, is there a particular problem which you have to overcome when you're building a series, or when you're doing a thing that you have to go back to; do you have any problems with continuity?

VANCE: No, not really. The main problem is the traditional problem of getting yourself in motion.

You know, just work. You've probably tried it yourself, haven't you? Huh?

HODEL: (Laughter) Yeah, motivation's a big problem for me.

THONG: A question I try to ask each of our guests -- what is your "Room 101"[7]?

VANCE: MY Room 101?

HODEL: Yeah.

VANCE: You've left me behind.

HODEL: The thing which you fear, that...

VANCE: I don't know. I don't have any particular fears, beyond normal fears. Oh yes, I do have some, now that you've mentioned it -- I do have some. claustrophobia. I have this terrible fear ... I don't know if you've read AKU-AKU.

THONG: Heyerdahl? Those underground caves? They gave me the creeps.

VANCE: Yeah, where Heyerdahl explored these tunnels which were built by small people, and he crawled down these passages, inching himself forward on his elbows. And he came -- oh, I don't know how far below the ground he was— but he came to a situation, a crook in the tunnel, and he couldn't get himself forward and he couldn't

[7] See George Orwell's 1984 (Signet: CP100, various printings, paper, pg.233).

get himself back. And that gave me nightmares. That scares the hell out of me. This is my... Oh, I just dread claustrophobia.

HODEL: Have you ever written about it?

VANCE: No. Well, not at length, no. But occasionally I make a reference to that, among other things. But aside from that, I don't have any particular fears or phobias, no.

THONG: What part of the world do you find the most joy in?

VANCE: Home, usually -- around the Bay Area.

But I find I'm very fond of Europe.

THONG: Do you get there often?

VANCE: Yeah, quite a bit. But I'm tormented by wanderlust when I'm home, and I'm homesick when I'm away... I can't win.

HODEL: I read someplace you were a merchant seaman.

VANCE: Yeah, that's right. In fact, the DYING EARTH was written aboard ship, and put into present form when I got ashore.

HODEL: Just right off the top -- Sturgeon was a seaman, Heinlein of course a naval officer, yourself...

VANCE: Don't forget A. Bertram Chandler.

HODEL: A ship captain.

THONG: Nothing like the sea to give you a sense of your own...

VANCE: Well, one thing is that you have such beautiful stretches of time where there's nothing else to do.

HODEL: That would apply to people who spend some time in prison, too.

VANCE: It would, wouldn't it?

HODEL: I wonder why they don't write.

VANCE: I wonder. You've never heard of any science fiction-type writers in jail, have you?

HODEL: No.

VANCE: I think maybe that's just because they're a nobler breed.

THONG: Ha! That's got to be it. (Laughter) HODEL: Either that or they just have not gotten...

VANCE: They're too crafty to get caught. Cause I'm sure you could think of a couple who might belong inside

GOTTLIEB: I can think of one exception. Harlan Ellison. He even wrote several books about it.

VANCE: In jail?

THONG: That's right, that's correct.

GOTTLEIB: MEMOS FROM PURGATORY.

HODEL: Yes, that's right. And in no leas than The Tombs...

HODEL: You don't read in the field, so there's a fair question to ask. Where do you think the field is going? Or do you know, or do you care?

VANCE: No, I don't know, and I don't care. Because...

Well, I can't give you a simple answer to the question. At the present... yell, I won't soy that all I'm interested in, but essentially I find enough in trying to produce my own stuff that keeps me from putting my nose in other people's business, so to speak. In other words, making my own living keeps me occupied. I'm not worried about what's happening elsewhere. Now, if I were to stop selling, then I'd think .I vas doing something wrong, and I night start reading and see what in the world am I doing wrong. But evidently since I'm selling, I must be doing something right, so why bother? I do feel that..., no I won't even develop that idea, what I vas going to say. It's not an important idea.

HODEL: How are your stories changing? Well, obviously part of it is maturation, but are they changing? Do you feel something different?

VANCE: I don't know. No, I really don't know.

HODEL: Do you foresee an end to your writing?

VANCE: Yea, certainly.

HODEL: Well, obviously hopefully shortly before or maybe shortly after you die. But aside from that, do you see yourself stopping to write?

VANCE: No, no, I don't.

HODEL: What is it you do when you're just tired of writing? When you have just had it? And you just cannot put another word on another piece of paper?

VANCE: I've got lots of projects going at all times, so it's not a matter of taking the time, or stopping the writing to go to the projects, it's taking the time from the projects to go to write. So the difficulty hadn't arisen at all.

HODEL: What about writing blocks? Do you run across those?

VANCE: Yeah. It's generally about two-thirds through the book, I come to a situation where I've written myself into an absolute impasse. So what can I possibly do now to end this book? And so sometimes I just get stuck. I know Joe Elder asked me to write a story for him called... it was ultimately called "Sulwen's Planet." And it wasn't a very long story, I forget, 7,000-8,000 words. And I had a good idea to start that story with, and I thought it vas going to be a real fine story. And then half-way through I couldn't figure a decent way of ending that story to save my neck. So I had to... there were lots of ways of ending it, but each way seemed kind of cliché, contrived, or stupid or something, so I had to kind of change the whole point of the story to make it... rather than kind of a cosmic story to kind of a story of interpersonal relationships.

And Joe Elder wasn't satisfied with the thing and he mentioned it to me. But I spent— just in this 6,000-8,000 word story -- about two months trying to sit there, cudgeling my brain trying to figure something out. And of course I got very angry with

myself, very angry with the story, disgusted ... but these are the kind of things you get into.

But sometimes you will pose yourself a problem that simply doesn't have any solution. And I suppose some genius might be able to work out some...

Well, for instance, it's said of Earl Hines, the piano player, that he gets himself into harmonic difficulties in the same way, and that he goes through all these agonies trying to work himself out of these things. And being a genius, he ultimately, well, usually, succeeds. But sometimes he doesn't... (Laughter)

THONG: He can't do it all the time.

((Here follows a plug for the jazz program following Hour 25, and a discussion of past and future time schedules of the program. Thong suggests that possibly Hour 25 should be called "Grok Around the Clock," which is rejected by ' Hodel on the grounds that all the stationery says "Hour 25". We return to our discussion...))

HODEL: You write mysteries as well, under your real name?

VANCE: I haven't written many mysteries recently.

I wrote something called BAD RONALD; a television movie was made of it last year or so ago.

But probably I won't be doing any more murder mysteries or suspense, because I've just got too many other of the -- I hate to use the word "science fiction" -- it's a bad word, as everybody knows, but there's no other nomenclature that is adequate -- just like "jazz" is a very bad word for very beautiful music. It doesn't have a good sound to it.

THONG: Sort of reminds you of its origins.

VANCE: Yeah, but so I guess we're stuck with "jazz" and "science fiction" and all these other things. So why worry about it? Anyway, I just rake more money in science fiction than I do at these other things.

MODEL: You do make more money in science fiction?

VANCE: Yeah. As a general rule, the murder mysteries get published in hard cover, soft cover, and maybe a few foreign rights. With science fiction, I'll get hard cover if I'm lucky, soft cover, and then the foreign sales. I get lots of foreign sales; and then, reissues. And it all adds up, makes a larger package than the murder mysteries. Although if I sell to the television industry, like with this BAD RONALD, and I made more money out of that than I do out of many science fiction. But I can't count on that happening.

See, that's a shot in the dark.

HODEL: You mentioned earlier selling a science fiction story you're working on at Fox. ((20th Century Fox - ed.))

VANCE: That vas one of these Magnus Ridolph stories. Actually, one of the first two Magnus Ridolph stories were the most horrible things. In fact, I'm not too pleased

with art of my early stories. I vas learning the trade, and the way to learn it of course is by doing it.

HODEL: Well, ideally you would learn it...

VANCE: I suppose some people leap full blown into professional status.

THONG: Or they write and they never learn.

HODEL: ...the frightening part. So it was an apprenticeship.

VANCE: Yeah, that's right.

HODEL: I can't believe that somebody in films had the vision to see that science fiction might...

VANCE: No kind of vision...

HODEL: It wasn't some kind of monster movie.

Right away that puts it two light years ahead.

VANCE: No, but the... he didn't buy the story.

It was Julian Baustein -- I don't know if he's still producing or not. But he bought the story, not through any literary excellence of the story, or any remarkable characterization, but because there was one most trivial, ordinary idea in the thing which he thought he could make a movie of.

And this idea, I won't even tell you what it is, because it's so simple he could have thought of it himself. Why did he pay me for the story, and then hire me to come down and work on the story? It's just one of these miracles of old Hollywood. He could have a dozen of these same ideas in twenty minutes, just sitting like you are, just making notes on a piece of paper.

THONG: I think it was Algis Budrys in one of the current science fiction magazines tried to come to grips with the enigma of John W. Campbell's personality, what he was in total. Of course that can't be done yet, but he tried; and I wondered if you had any stories about Campbell or others that you'd like to share.

VANCE: No, I never knew him very well, I never had the opportunity...

HODEL: Did you know Tony Boucher very well?

VANCE: Ob, yes, I knew him quite veil. In fact, I used to live only several blocks away from him.

But I didn't like playing poker, and he had these famous poker parties, and I never went to those things. They didn't interest me. And I was never part of Boucher's immediate coterie, although we very fairly good friends. In other words, I went to his parties, he came to my parties. But I wasn't one of his intimate circle by any means.

THONG: Do editors help you?

VANCE: No, because... well, no, I won't say that.

Yea, because I just thought of a story recently where an editor made a suggestion for ending the story a little differently, and as soon as the suggestion was made, I said "Yes, of course. This is extremely sensible." I changed the story, and the story was improved. I was about to say that, in general, I don't have too much contact with

editors any more. Generally, something goes in and it's sold. But then as soon as I was about to say that, I thought of this other incident....

Well, I think any time a person's a professional and is reading, it's their business to judge manuscripts.

And if they see something wrong with it, their opinion ought to be respected, just as you go to a doctor and the doctor says, "You've got a sore foot." You'd better believe him.

HODEL: I understand that you just about have to have some kind of a base in New York. Without going into detail, is your agent in New York?

VANCE: My agent's in New York, yeah.

HODEL: What about other writers?

VANCE: I have... Well, some of my best friends are writers. I wouldn't want my daughter to marry one, but... (Laughter) HODEL: But you've never been part of that old Milford scene, etc.? I don't mean that specifically, I mean the idea of shop talk at a convention, and so forth.

VANCE: No. Now, this bores me. It seems an artificial, charade type of situation, where... It leaves me utterly cold. So I avoid these things like the plague.

HODEL: So it's you, your typewriter, and your mind-- whatever comes out, whatever happens after that, may or may not have anything to do with it.

THONG: Do you have a large family?

VANCE: No, just one boy.

THONG: Did you have any problems when he was at that noisy age, trying to do your writing? I assume he's more than 2-1/2 now.

VANCE: He's fifteen. And the thing is, when he wants to do his homework, he gets into my favorite chair when I'm anxious to get there and possibly knock out a word or two. But inasmuch as he has a right to be there, I just kind of wander around behind him and look at him a couple of times and then go someplace else. But he's probably got some music on the radio which I don't like very much. But actually, he and I get along very nicely, and...

HODEL: We were talking earlier about "What if's." - Have you ever done a "What if?" as to bad you not become a science fiction writer?

VANCE: Well, gee, I don't know. I can't think of anything right now that I particularly... I've toyed with many other occupations, but I think I probably rather early decided I wanted to be a writer, and just became a writer. I was originally going to be a scientist, a mathematician, but that vas when I was quite young.

HODEL: Are you a fan of Martin Gardner's?

VANCE: Well, yes and no. I don't like the man personally. I don't like his philosophical bent.

He annoys me -- I think he's smug. He has a closed mind, although he pretends as if he's the most open-minded son-of-a-gun in the world. Campbell is an open-minded man. Martin Gardner's got a closed mind. Although Martin Gardner's a much more

voluble, clever man than Campbell is. Campbell is a much deeper man than Gardner could ever pretend to be, and probably more honest. Gardner is -- well, I don't know him personally-- but it irritates me to read him, because he puts forward his opinions as if they are solid fact'. And he ridicules ideas which.... well, just on the basis of his prejudices, which annoys me. There are certain things going on in the world which I think deserve investigation rather than ridicule. Essentially what I'm talking about is parapsychology.

Gardner's a foe of parapsychology and parapsychological research. Now I personally haven't had any events occur to me which I could put my finger on exactly, but it certainly seems to me that if he, Gardner, wants to consider himself a scientist, he should have an open mind, and be willing to judge events or reports of events on their own merits rather than on his personal prejudices, which is my basic annoyance with Martin Gardner...

((Some further discussion of this topic was omitted at Vance's request.))

HODEL: We are about out of time. Jack Vance, thank you for coming down and doing Hour 25.

VANCE: Well, it's been a great pleasure.

THONG: It wasn't what you thought it was going to be, was it?

VANCE: How do you know what I thought it was going to be?

THONG: I don't have any idea what you thought it was going to be

HODEL: But he's willing to bet that it wasn't. But if you've had any experience with the media...

VANCE: I just came out here utterly blank. You know, I thought I'd come here and be a victim.

THONG: That explains it.

((The autograph party at Change of Hobbit is announced once again, with pertinent data.))

THONG: Come back whenever you're in town, because we'll still be here on Friday nights.

VANCE: Very good.

HODEL: I like to talk to you. And once again, thank you very much, and keep working, please.

VANCE: I will.

((Show closes with announcements of plans for upcoming programs, and a final plug for the next program.))

Credits

Source: Honor to Finuka Fanzine #3&4 1980

Audio transcription Martha Koester from KPFK “Hour 25” interview with Vance

Scan from Steve Sherman.

2020 Formatting:Jean Luc Esteban.

1980 Comments on the 1976 KPFK interview

by Martha Koester

Tradition in the Work of Jack Vance

When I transcribed the Vance interview, I wondered about Vance's response to the second caller.

It seemed to me that Vance and the caller were talking at cross purposes for lack of a common definition of "tradition." A perusal of Vance's work indicates that he is actually much more ambivalent about tradition than the rather cut-anddried opinion that he stated in the interview. I say this because Vance's most engaging characters are either ambivalent about the traditions of their society or in outright rebellion against them.

Most of Vance's characters come in one of three recognizable types. The first is the person who is no more and no less than a representative of his culture, for example, most of the people that Reith meets on Tschai. They are usually of no interest by themselves, but only as part of the general landscape.

Secondly, there is the Adam Reith-Firth Gerson type, who come equipped with the bare minimum of personal traditions. Matho Lorcas argues the advantages of adaptability with Singhalissa (in MARUNE), and to be sure, if a person is to travel around and become exposed to all types of people and cultures, he must have a minimum of hard and fast rules for conduct if he is to survive. But, as Vance points out in the interview, the resulting lack of complexity makes them downright boring as characters. Matho Lorcas is hands down the least interesting character on the planet Marune.

Send this boy to Survival Training Camp and you have Adam Reith. Caller 2, on the other hand, was pointing out in an indirect way that it is a lot more appealing to be Matho Lorcas than to be tied to a bunch of customs that cramp your style, despite the fact that it isn't nearly so appealing to read about him. And let's face it, most of us science fiction and fantasy readers (and writers; I think Vance will have to admit) love exotic traditions -- for other people. Fundamentalist Christians, and other people who (like Singhalissa and Rianlle) think that anyone who does not live by the traditions that

structure their lives is either immoral or mentally unstable, find fantasizing about different ways of living irrelevant, if not downright threatening. For better or worse, all of our subscribers and Vance himself are more like Matho Lorcas in. our personal realities than like any other Vanceian character.

Could it be more than coincidence that Singahalissa and Rianlle, the two perfect exemplars of Rhune propriety, are the bad guys? Thirdly, there are the characters who are interesting in and of themselves. They are usually tied to their cultures to some degree, but also they can be exiled from it (Traz and Anacho of THE PLANET OF ADVENTURE), ambivalent about it (Efraim and Macrio in MARUNE), or in outright rebellion against it (Gastel Etzwane/Ghyl Tarvoke in THE FACELESS MAN/EMPHYRIO, and Sklar Hest and Merril Rohan in THE BLUE WORLD). It is precisely the ambivalence and the conflict which make them interesting.

With these characters, Vance goes straight to the heart of the perennial conflict between individuals and their collective traditions, and makes us feel the ambivalence. We like the idea of a Big Planet or a Shant filled with exotic and highly balkanized societies, but we are appalled at Gastel Etzwane's, personal suffering.

We find the rigorous standards of craftsmanship in Ambroy appealing, but we rage with Ghyl Tarvokc at the notion that his father should have been paid peanuts for creating a priceless masterpiece. We find the Dirdir sexual schemata colorful and amusing, but sympathize with Anacho for running afoul of it, and applaud his eventual rejection of his own ethnocentrism.

I realize that I have left out the Vance rogues, but they pretty much ignore traditions if they can get by with it, despite the fact that all of them are products of their culture as well.

Vance's example of tradition is one which has very little potential for cramping an individual's style. Few of us have any truck with traditions which are more repressive, i.e., believing that you will burn in hell forever and ever for masturbating.

Let someone else be interesting and quaint by believing that. There is a big difference between adhering to a harmless tradition that you don't really believe in, for instance nailing a horseshoe over your barn for good luck, and actually being a medieval peasant who would really and truly get upset if the shoe turned upside down and all the luck fell out. The latter would make a much better character in a Vance novel, though I seriously doubt whether Vance or any of his readers would pick that character to identify with. I think that we would all rather identify with the third type of character, the ones who fight back at traditions should that prove to be necessary, but who are nonetheless not'totally outside of their. societies. This is pure fantasy -- the odds against being called upon to do anything heroic about it are quite high.

HARRISON BERGERON -- Kurt Vonnegut Jr. 1961

A story not yet selected from Poul Anderson

A story not yet selected from Jack Vance

Other titles, which will be considered :

POSTMARKED FOR PARADISE -- ROBERT ARTHUR 1968?

BREAK THE DOOR OF HELL -- John Brunner 1966

THE WIRES -- John Hopkins 1970-1975?

PRIMARY EDUCATION OF THE CAMIROI -- R. A. LAfferty 1966

WELCOME TO THE STANDARD NIGHTMARE -- Robert Sheckley 1973

CALIBAN -- Robert Silverberg 1972

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW #23 - nov 1977 an interview with JACK VANCE, Conducted by PETER CLOSE

VANCE : I'll try to cooperate with you by answering questions which, in my opinion, don't diminish the impact of the stories themselves. As you are aware, I am not anxious to discuss myself personally, and I won't undertake to analyze sources, influence, etc, in any great detail. However, feel free to ask questions, to which I in turn may or may not respond.

SFR : When you mention sources and influences in that way, I'm reminded of Asimov's anecdote in THE HUGO WINNERS, transmitted from Bob Silverberg ; apparently he asked you in conversation whether you regarded Kafka or Dunsany as a greater influence upon your work, whereupon you changed the subject. Faced with such a question, I imagine most writers might have done the same thing, but could you say anything about your reluctance to dissect your work?

VANCE : I think the situation is that, once I finish a story, I regard it as finished, out of the way. I enjoy writing, but when I go back and reconsider the product, then I see faults, and it annoys me.

SFR : A number of writers have been cited as influential upon you - Stapledon, Burroughs, Chambers, Cabell, Howard - - and, outside the genre, R.L. Stevenson, Wren, Saki, Wodehouse and Jeffrey Farnol. I'd regard most of these as peripheral, although some affinities are recognizable, such as Saki's talent for detached, ironic humor and economic characterization, Stevenson's color and themes, Farnol's handling of action, bargaining scenes and female characters, and Wodehouse's influence in SPACE OPERA...

VANCE : I think everything I've ever read has worked on me to some effect. The names you mention are more or less picked at random from my background. I don't, personally, take these influences too seriously ; I think in general I'm my own man. These other writers have certainly served to show me what can be accomplished with words and ideas ; they 're in effect, exemplars, although maybe that's not the right word either.

SFR : I think your style, themes and plotting weren't greatly influenced by other writers.

VANCE : This is essentially correct.

SFR : For example, I've seen Hodgson 's NIGHT LAND cited as an influence upon your « Dying Earth » stories, although they have almost nothing in common except a cold sun ; Clark Ashton Smith' s « Zothique » stories are maybe closer...

VANCE : I'm not aware of Hodgson - I've never read THE NIGHT LAND. I have, of course, read Clark Ashton Smith, when I was an adolescent. We lived in the country in those days ; our mailbox was about a mile from our house, and, on the day I might expect WEIRD TALES in the mail, I can remember walking down to that mailbox, peering in there, and being very unhappy if WEIRD TALES hadn't arrived.

SFR : As regards your style, I think James Blish summarized it very well in a review of EIGHT FANTASMS AND MAGICS, in which he said, « Vance's marvelous feeling for the telling of sensual detail, his incantatory tone, his muted humor, his rather arcane vocabulary, his ear for exactly the right proper names, his love for the mediaeval and for anachronisms in general... have been with him from the beginning ». There's also your very strong visual sense, your characteristic dialogue, your elaborate syntax and meticulous grammar - there's a split infinitive in THE DIRDIR that's conspicuous by its uniqueness - -

VANCE : I remember that split infinitive ! The rhythm of that particular sentence demanded that that infinitive be split. I tried the adverb on either side but I found no other recourse... so I did it. I've always regretted it a bit. I could have used different syntax.

SFR : Any comments on the development of your style - - is it very disciplined, or does it more or less come naturally to you to write in this way?

VANCE : My style certainly isn't accidental ; I know exactly what I want to do, and work something over until I get what I want. I try, perhaps subconsciously, to use a style which is appropriate to the subject matter. I do this more or less automatically, I think, without any particular selfconsciousness. There is, from time to time, the occasional happy accident, where the sentence reads properly the first time through.

SFR : Have you ever tried to introduce technical devices into your writing? I'm thinking of things like Poul Anderson's practice of using at least three sensory modalities in descriptive passages, or Van Vogt's 800-word scenes :

VANCE : I don't use, and I'm not aware of such technical devices ; I think that when you start using artifices, you destroy your flexibility, so to speak. I don' t think Poul takes such artificial techniques seriously ; he's too good a writer.

SFR : In tracking down your output since the beginning of your career, I expected to find a fairly straightforward development from pretty bad at the beginning, through mediocre to competent and then increasing sophistication. This wasn't really the case ; your very first story stands up remarkably well to present- day reading (that was « The World Thinker » in 1945) and much of your early work is of consistently high quality...

VANCE : I generally prefer to forget my early stories. I decided when I got out of college that I was going to be a professional writer and set about learning the trade. These early stories represent my apprenticeship.

SFR : You established quite a fol lowing. among the readers with the « Magnus Ridolph » series in STARTLING.

VANCE : I set out doing these to see if I could be a million-word-a-year man, you know, one of these chaps that writes prodigiously, on the order of John Creasey, Max Brand, Simenon... So one weekend, I wrote the first two "Magnus Ridolph" stories - I forget what their names were ; "Hard Luck Diggings" and something else. They were first- draft work and, of course, absolutely terrible.

SFR : They did seem to get better, though, after « The Howling Bounders » I think.

VANCE : I think there is a definite improvement towards the end of the series. Some I rather liked - - « The Kokod Warriors », the last two or three anyway. I've used some of these in collections. • Oddly enough, « hard Luck Diggings », the worst thing I

ever wrote, was picked up by 2Oth Century Fox for a movie. And, to my amazement, I was hired to prepare a treatment and a scenario from this wretched story. I worked in the studio for several months, until my producer, Julian Blaustein, was promoted to executive producer and all his projects were shelved, and I was required no longer. Which didn't hurt my feelings too much. I was afraid of getting trapped in the golden snare. I was getting paid handsomely of course, but I think, by and large, I've been happier as a freelance writer. A little later I did some television work, CAPTAIN VIDEO, an early space program. A number of other writers worked on it as well - - Robert Richardson ; Arthur Clarke, I think, was involved ; Sheckley ; I don't know whether Paul Anderson did any of that or not, but I don't think so. It was about this time that I met Frank Herbert. My wife and I were living in the mountains and he lived in the same area. Our two families went down to Mexico and set up a « writer's household » on Lake Chapala. We stayed there for three or four months and neither of us sold anything very significant, and we returned to the States in utter poverty.

SFR : Yes, you weren't very prolific for the first few years, up to around 1950 - - although you did break into ASTOUNDING in 1947 with « I'll Build Your Dream Castle ».

VANCE : Although « I'll Build Your Dream Castle » sold to Campbell, it's a story I never liked particularly.

SFR : Most of your early work appearead in STARTLING and THRILLING WONDER and other pulps, which weren't very prestigious. This seems to have happened quite frequently throughout your career - - you've often chosen poor markets for your work.

VANCE : The fact of the matter is, I was-happy to sell anywhere. I never became part of John Campbell's entourage. I met him only once or twice. • There's no mystery about my appearing in these markets - - a matter of expedience.

SFR : You were in ASTOUNDING again in 1950 with « The Potters of Firsk », but the major step forward in that year must have been THE DYING EARTH. Is it correct that you wrote these stories at an early stage of your career, and had trouble getting them published?

VANCE : The stories were written at sea and failed to sell individually, so I rewrote them, tied them together and sold them to Hillman as a book.

SFR : Were you happy with the Hillman deal? I've always thought it was an appallingly shoddy edition - did you think the book deserved better?

VANCE : I didn't think much about it at all. I was writing something else and, as I mentioned, once I finish a book, I tend rather to lose interest in it. Then it's my agent's responsibility and he's supposed to do the best he can with the material. A friend, Tim Underwood, has published the book in a hardcoveredition, a very nice job, illustrated by George Barr. So this book has been reprinted several times - - first Hillman, then Lancer, now Pocket Books. Lancer, I think, had two printings.

VANCE : There are some discrepancies in later editions - - for example, « Mazirian the Magician » is the first story in the original edition, although, chronologically, it follows « Turjan of Miir » ; the order's reversed in subsequent publication. It was my intention to make « Mazirian » the first chapter ; I thought it led into the second story better than the second story led into the first.

SFR : « Guyal of Sfere » also exists In two versions- - the story as printed in EIGHT FANTASMS AND MAGICS is quite heavily cut. Sometimes this is for the better (for example, you replace the « Book of Kells », which is an extant manuscript, with the « Lost Book of Caraz », which is invented) but mostly, I think, the editing damages the story. You've edited most of the long descriptive passages, such as the entrance hall of the Museum of Man.

VANCE : As I re-read it, I thought I'd better make a few changes, but both Bob Silverberg and yourself have not approved of these changes. At the time, I thought I was eliminating over-exuberant expressions and extravagance.

SFR : Also in 1950, you published a story called « Ultimate Quest » under the name « John Holbrook », which is, of course, a version of your full name, John Holbrook Vance, which you put on your mystery stories. Any particular reason for using a pseudonym of sorts?

VANCE : I was starting to write more prolifically and I think I had some vague intention of segregating stories- - for a good story, I'd use one name, and for stories that were not so good, I'd use another. But it didn't work out ; one story was much like another, so I used the same name for everything. There is a story which I used another pseudonym for, and which I've always rather liked. It appeared in a magazine called MALCOLM'S MAGAZINE not many people are aware of this story. It was called, I think, « First Star I See Tonight ». I have forgotten the pseudonym I used, but it was a mystery story, dealing with astronomers who became annoyed with each other. In, my opinion, it's a pretty good story.

SFR : The sociological or anthropological element in your work was now becoming evident. Was this sort of direction a conscious decision on your part?

VANCE : I experimented with the « gimmick » story, the « pure » or « hard core » science fiction- - and I found it rather tedious. I don't care to write stories whose punch, or denouement, is based on some unfamiliar aspect of science ; it seems a rather sterile approach. I gradually drifted into the sociological or anthropological stories which I've found myself more interested in, although I have a scientific background. I originally started university as a mining engineer, became a physics major, then decided that a technical life was not for me. I ultimately wound up in j ournalism- - although I'm certainly not cut out to be a reporter by any means.

SFR : Have you had any formal education in social science?

VANCE : No, none whatever. In fact, I think education in social science is a terrible waste of time, and it is a study which people go into when they can't think of anything better to do...

SFR : It's well known that you've travelled very widely - - do you think this has helped to generate the alien societies which you specialize in?

VANCE : For the most part I don't think travel has generated any alien folkways or customs.

SFR : You have a legendary skill with proper names. Is this natural inventiveness, or do you have techniques for making up or collecting exotic names?

VANCE : No, I don't have any particular technique. Usually it's just a matter of trial! and error.

SFR : I'm thinking of such examples as-the old English legal meaning of « deodand » as an instrument of death, the Latin root for humour in 'Iucounu', and so on. I 'm completely at a loss as to the etymology of things like « IOUN stones », « Scop Sivij Suthiro or « Ballenkarch »...

VANCE : "Deodand"- - I hesitated over that word. Then I thought it had a good sound, and very few readers are acquainted with rather archaic legal terminology, so I used it anyway. The other names that you mention were used because they sounded right in the context.

SFR : My only cavil concerns SERVANTS OF THE WANKH- - I was unable to buy the original edition when one of London's major sf bookshops, located in a rather red- light area, sold out almost at once to a variety of passers-by who were apparently under the impression that it dealt with an exotic form of masturbation... (American readers are generally unaware of the vulgar British word « wank »)

VANCE : I was unaware of the British usage until, I think, John Brunner informed me. Of course, if I'd known, I'd have avoided the term.

SFR : I don't want to dwell in excessive detail upon your output during the prolific period from 1950 to 1953- -

VANCE : I don't want to dwell upon it either!

SFR : Nonetheless, during this time, you sold an excellent and complex « hard » sf short to GALAXY (Winner Lose All), contributed a thoughtful, if poorly resolved, psi story to ASTOUNDING (Telek), diversified to a number of other markets, invented the unique and devastatingly cool Jean Parlier, in « Abercrombie Station » and « Cholwell's Chickens », struck off in new directions with very atmospheric stories such as « Noise » and « The Mitr », and published VANDALS OF THE VOID, a juvenile now eagerly sought after by many enthusiasts, including me, despite the negative opinions of those few who have read i t. Any comments ?

VANCE : You mention VANDALS OF THE VOID. This was a story commissioned by Winston. As I recall, I wrote it in Italy- - Positano, which you're probably acquainted with. We had a beautiful flat overlooking the water, and lived there all one spring while I wrote the book. My boy John- -John II - -has read the book, and he likes it, although the rascal won't read any of my other books. I think he finds them too grown-up. But he thinks I 'm a good writer on the basis of VANDALS OF THE VOID.

SFR : There was « Big Planet », of course, in 1952. Richard Tiedman, in his monograph JACK VANCE : SCIENCE FICTION STYLIST, quotes you as saying that the story originally ran to 120 000 words, with three entire sequences cut by Sam Mines (against your better judgment) for its appearance in STARTLING.

VANCE : I wrote that as a longer story, with a few more incidents and episodes in it, but when I sold it, the editor, whoever it was, wanted it shorter. So I cut out some of the episodes, and I don't think it hurt the story too much. I t was « against my better j udgment », I suppose, to some extent- - because the more I sold, the more I'd get paid. When it was published as a book, somebody else edited it, and this was done without my consent- -changing the name, for instance, of « Heinzelman » to « Atnian ». This bothered me tremendously.

SFR : How did you come to write such a massive story in the first place ?

VANCE : Oh, I jus t felt in the mood.

SFR : Your next major work was your first formal adult novel, TO LIVE FOREVER. I like this a lot, but I think the most pressing question about it must be why it falls apart so badly right at the end, in an unreal setting of chaos and improbable instantaneous revolution. This has happened time and again in subsequent stories, too. No doubt you' ve heard this many times before ; would you be willing to comment on it ?

VANCE : No, I don't have any particular comment, except that sometimes I write myself into traps. I have to end the story some way or another. I should take much more trouble with my plotting than I do. I think I start writing on the basis of a mood and figure : Oh, well, the story will take care of itself. Of course the story doesn't take care of itself, and halfway through, I start asking • myself where is the story going? Sometimes I find that in order to end the story in 60 000- 70 000 words, I have to go through some rather undignified antics. Well, I'll try to do better in future...

SFR : I'll skip quickly through the next few years- - there's « The Men Return » (one of your best short stories), THE LANGUAGES OF PAO, the excellent baroque, « The Miracle Workers », « Ullward' s Retreat », which seems to be one of your own favorites, « Dodkin's Job »... In 1960, you published THE MAN IN 1HE CAGE, a mystery novel set in Morocco, which won you an Edgar award from the Mystery Writers of America. Do you want to say anything about how you moved into this field ?

VANCE : I wanted to see if I could make any money in suspense, murder so I started writing these things. I stopped because I make more money with science fiction and fantasy. Although two or three years ago I wrote BAD RONALD which did pretty well, although I think it deserved better. It should have been published in hardcovers ; Softcovers... you fling them out into this abyss, and they're gone. I like this particular book. It was bought by TV and a rather successful TV movie was made of the thing. I like THE FOX VALLEY MURDERS and THE PLEASANT GROVE MURDERS ; these are the two California mysteries. They're part of California which Europeans are not aware of ; they think in terms of San Francisco and Los Angeles and Hollywood, and of course California is an enormous number of different environments.

SFR : In the next couple of years you wrote THE MOON MOTH (perhaps the best novelette of your career), « The Augmented Agent », « The Dragon Masters » (your first Hugo winner and one of your best- known stories)... In 1963 you made your first appearance in F&SF with « Green Magic » and also began the splendid « Demon Princes » series with « The Star King » in GALAXY. There's a lot to be said about this series - - for example, the way in which Gersen develops and grows through the sequence, after starting off as a very repressed, withdrawn character...

VANCE : I did not develop Gersen purposefully. The more you work with a character the more real he becomes. I think this is probably what happened in the case of Gersen- - after working with him for three novels, he began to become a human being.

SFR : GALAXY ran « The Star King » and « The Palace of Love », and « The Killing Machine » was scheduled for IF, but never appeared- -what happened there?

VANCE : "The Killing Machine" was sold to Fred Pohl, and it was about to appear ; in fact he'd got the art work ready and was all set to go. But through a mistake at the agency, Berkley brought the softcover out before Fred Pohl had a chance to get the story into the magazine. In other words, it was just an administrative error, back in New York. So Fred Pohl couldn't use the story... and in order to repay him for the money he'd advanced me, I wrote « The Last Castle » for GALAXY. At the time, as I recall, we were living in Tahiti ; we'd gone down there and rented a lovely cottage about 15 miles south of Papeete. Like Positano it was just an absolutely glorious place to work- -but it wasn't so glorious finding I had to write this story for nothing.

SFR : How was it that you never finished the series?

VANCE : I don't remember why I didn't go on with the last two. I think maybe I got sidetracked into a murder mystery, THE DEADLY ISLES. The milieu was the South Pacific, the Marquesas, Tahiti, big sailing vessels- -well, not big, but 120- foot schooners. This is one of my interests, deepsea sail ing. We currently have a small sailboat (well, it's my boy Johnny's boat) and we keep talking about our next one. All my l ife I have planned deep-sea sailing and somehow the plans never materialize. My wife's not a deep-sea type but my boy is, and hopefully we'll at least cruise the South Pacific. But to get back to the two final stories in the "Demon Princes" series - - I'm currently trying to work out a deal. I don't know when they'll come out ; I haven't got the contracts yet.

SFR : In 1964 Ballantine brought out your first collection, FUTURE TENSE. You had been publishing stories since 1945 - - any reason why you waited so long before issuing a collection?

VANCE : I was never happy with the earlier material. The material now in collections is about the only stories that I want to reissue.

SFR : 1965 - - you brought out several books and started the « Cugel » sequence in F&SF. You also had a couple of stories in British magazines- one was « Alfred's Ark » in NEW WORLDS, which is a very odd little vignette.

VANCE : I'd written that as a kind of recreation and had it hanging - around for years. Meredith finally sold i t.

SFR : There was also « The Secret » in IMPULSE. Is this related to the « lost » story of that title that you mention in THE BEST OF JACK VANCE? [As Mr. Vance began to answer this, the cassette ran out.]

VANCE : It's only appropriate that, just as I was talking about « The Secret », the tape runs out... these have been the circumstances connected with this story- - things like that happen. I wasn't even aware it had been published ; I never got paid for it. There's been a terrible foul -up somewhere.

SFR : I've always admired the « Cugel » series, THE EYES OF THE OVERWORLD, immensely, but there 're some questions about it. Cugel seems to start off as a sympathetic sort of character- crafty and opportunistic, but fairly amiable- -but towards the end of the sequence, he's becoming much more evil ; he tricks all those pilgrims into accompanying him across the desert on a trek which only he survives, he betrays Fabeln and his daughter to a grisly fate among the rat-folk....

VANCE : I think you exaggerate the differences in Cugel's character from the beginning to the end. I never thought of him as either sympathetic or unsympathetic, but just the person he is - - a rogue and a scoundrel, capricious, self-serving. I think you're making too much of changes in. Cugel's personality. I have never thought of him as developing from story to story.

SFR : That's interesting, because the « Cil » episode, which does portray Cugel as a very malicious, selfish sort of person, is the second story in THE EYES OF THE OVERWORLD, yet didn't appear in the sequence as published in F&SF. I thought that perhaps this was inserted afterwards • to shift the characterization at an early point in the story.

VANCE : No, this isn't at all the case:- For some reason, which to this day I've never been able to figure out, Ferman at F&SF decided not to publish this second story, « Cil ». Why, I don't know ; he had access to the whole book, but he chose not to publish this episode. I'm planning a second book of Cugel stories. « The Seventeen Virgins » had already appeared. Lin Carter has a second story- - he's had it for several years now- - which is called "A Bagful of Dreams". I've got stories plotted and I'm very anxious to get at them. Along with the PALACE OF LOVE I think EYES OF THE OVERWORLD is my favourite book. These two I like very much indeed. Tim Underwood, who's published THE DYING EARTH, is going to do a nicely- illustrated hardcover job on EYES OF THE OVERWORLD too. (That's not my title, incidentally. In fact lots of my novels - - TO LIVE FOREVER, SHOWBOAT WORLD- - aren't my titles).

SFR : Your output was rather restricted in 1967.

VANCE : A friend and I became involved in restoring an old Victorian type mansion which meant a lot of fancy ornament. I wasn't particularly making any money doing this but I got interested in it, and my writing suffered because we spent all our time producing fancy woodwork.

SFR : There was « The Narrow Land » in FANTASTIC ; this was supposed to be the first in a series.

VANCE : I wrote this for ANALOG ; the first of three-story sequence, but Campbell didn't like it very much. In fact, he was rather unreasonable. Since it didn't sell in a good market, I never completed the sequence.

SFR : In 1968 you began to publish the « Planet of Adventure » series. Compared to some of the stories you had been writing immediately prior to this, I don' t see these books as being among your best.

VANCE : The « Tschai » set was commissioned by Ace. They enticed me with talk of big promotion, millioncopy sales... Owing to BATMAN AND ROBIN they wanted a juvenile in it, so I put a juvenile in ; I don't think he has too much function. Well, l won't say that ; I think I've probably used him as well as I could in the circumstances. I had fun writing these things, although I never made much money out of them. The word "money" must seem a recurrent theme, but I think you'll find that when someone supports himself by his writing, he's very much aware of how much a story is making for him.

SFR : EIGHT FANTASMS AND MAGICS came out at about this time ; it's an impressive collection, if a.little familiar in parts, and the stated unifying theme of « the paranormal » didn't fit too well.

VANCE : Unfortunately I don' t have too many stories that I'd want to reissue, so I had to scratch through rather familiar things. They charged the title a bit ; originally it was something like EIGHT FANTASMS, UNFAMILIAR SCIENCES, AND... something else.

SFR : Then there is EMPHYRIO, which first appeared as a serial in FANTASTIC. This has had some rave reviews, including an exceptionally perceptive one from Joanna Russ in F&SF, and I think it's a splendid novel which represents the very peak of your achievement. I can only urge you to do what you can to restore it to print.

VANCE : I'd forgotten it ran in FANTASTIC and I haven't seen Joanna Russ's review. This will probably be reissued soon.

SFR : Over the next couple of years, there was the « Durdane » series and in'73 a couple of commissioned series- - « Morreion » and « Rumfuddle ». And you started a new series with TRULLION : ALASTOR 2262, which is a thoroughly entertaining novel. The game of hussade is a splendid invention and could usefully be staged at a science fiction convention, although the selection of shierls might be controversial.

VANCE : By all means ! I appoint you to take charge of this

SFR : You also came back to the mystery field with BAD RONALD from Ballantine ; I haven't seen this one, just the rather arch publicity.

VANCE : I didn't like Ballantine's production at all, or their cover. I didn't see any of their publicity.

SFR : You used the name "John Holbrook Vance" on this one, as on all your mysteries. Is this maybe intended to direct them to a different readership?

VANCE : I us e that name on murder mysteries or suspense stories, to differentiate between these two aspects of my work. I've often thought that maybe, if I were starting all over again, I probably wouldn't use « Jack Vance » as a byline. « John Vance » would be somewhat more dignified perhaps.

SFR : What about THE GRAY PRINCE? I don't consider this as successfulas some of your other recent books. VANCE : This isn't one of my favourite stories, although I think there are some pretty good parts in it. I prefer the ALASTOR series, the « Demon Prince » sequence, and, of course,» Cugel » and THE PALACE OF LOVE.

SFR : Then there's « Assault on a City » in Terry Carr ' s anthology UNIVERSE 4 - this one seems to me as if it were written against a deadline.

VANCE : Well, I won't comment on That. I don't think it's quite the case.

SFR :... and « The Seventeen Virgins », already mentioned ; colourful, prodigiously inventive, perfectly paced, neatly plotted- - a jewel of a story... and SHOWBOAT WORLD- -an unexpected surprise...

VANCE : I like this story, too. I think there's scope here for a beautiful movie, but unfortunately, I do not think anyone would spend the money on it.

SFR : You brought out the second book in the. ALASTOR series a couple of years after TRULLION- - this was MARUNE: ALASTOR 933. I don't like this one as much as the first- - the plot seems to lurch around rather a lot and the story shows signs of haste. For example, giving a character a name and •then changing it a few chapters later tends to be confusing to readers.

VANCE : Well, de gustibus... As for Signs of haste, not really. « Confusing » perhaps- -but I thought I made it clear that the name given to him was, in a sense, a stop-gap. He needed a name, but I couldn't use his real name because, for the first half of the book, his real name was not known. It was just something which had to be done. I'm currently working on number three in the ALASTOR sequence ; in fact, the story's just about done. It's completely different from the other two, and I think you may like it better than MARUNE.

SFR : What about THE BEST OF JACK VANCE? Who picked the stories?

VANCE : I selected them.

SFR : All the stories have appeared at least once • in other books, several of which are still in print or readily available. I'd have thought that a representative « best » collection would have included stories like « The World-Thinker », « I'll Build Your Dream• Castle »,' a Ridolph story, « The Potters of Firsk », « The Overlords of Maxus », certainly « Winner Lose All »...

VANCE : Well, I picked stories for the reasons I've already mentioned, and all these that you mention here, I 'm not too happy with.

SFR : « Green Magic » ? « The Seventeen Virgins » ?

VANCE : « Green Magic » has appeared in several collections and I 'm saving « The Seventeen Virgins »- - oh, well, I could have put that one in, I suppose. It doesn't make that much difference. Maybe what I'd like to do is THE SECOND-BEST OF JACK VANCE and put these in... or the THIRD-BEST, FOURTH-BEST stories...

SFR : MASKE : THAERY is your latest novel, which I haven't seen yet.

VANCE : I'll probably do others in this sequence ; I have two more in mind at least. But I've got so many books ahead of me... I don't know. I hope I'll get time to do it all.

SFR : most of your recent work has been at book length and in series- do you expect this to continue?

VANCE : It takes me just about as long to plot a short story as to plot a novel. I remember I sweated for a month and a half over « Sulwen's Planet » and I never did come up with a decent ending.

SFR : Your recent shorter work has mostly been in original anthologies, but I notice you're one of the few major writers who hasn't contributed to Harlan Ellison's DANGEROUS VISIONS series. Do you want to say why that is?

VANCE : I don't know Harlan Ellison very well ; I've only met him once or twice. He asked me to do a story, but I was busy otherwise.

SFR : What about Michael Shea's QUEST FOR SIMBILIS, which attempts to continue the adventures of Cugel? Were you involved in this at all?

VANCE : No. I made no contribution to his work ; I didn't comment on the manuscript, or make any suggestions. I told him to go ahead and publish it if he could find a publisher, which he did. I just asked him: « Please don't kill off Cugel ! »

SFR : You've already stated that you don't wish to discuss yourself personally- -

VANCE : Well, about my reasons- - I 'm not at all shy or anything of the sort. However, on many books, the back cover shows a picture of the author holding a cat or smoking a pipe and he looks an utter ass. He' s obviously posing. A reader is not supposed to be aware that someone's written the story- - he's supposed to be completely immersed, submerged in the environment. Now, if you're aware of the back cover, of this funny- looking chap with his cat or his guitar with the studio lights on him, it certainly subtracts from the effect of the story.

Also, the biographical notes about people... they're so much the same somehow. What they do again is bring to life a kind of...not a stereotype, but a superficiality. There's nothing wrong with me ; I'm not deformed or grotesque or anything of that sort- - in fact, I'm quite normal. But I'd much prefer to be « Jack Vance »- - those two words on the byline- - than any picture on the back of the jacket with my biography, « born such- and- such a time » and « went to school such- and- such a Place » and « does this, does that »- they have no bearing on the story ; they interest the readers not at all and create distortions.

SFR : Well, I'll limit myself to reproducing what I've already written about your background, derived from various published sources ; if there is anything you'd want to correct or expand upon, I hope you'll let me know.

« As regards Vance's biography and personal circumstances, public information is limited. He has the reputation of a man who guards his privacy, and has stated in print on several occasions that he feels a writer does his work no service by intruding his own persona upon the reader's attention. In a brief autobiographical note accompanying his first published story in 194 5, he described himself as « taciturn » and this seems to have been an enduring component of his personality. Even his age is uncertain, although he was in his early twenties in 1945. Vance has apparently led an adventurous life and has traveled widely throughout the world, spending several years in the Merchant Marines. He has now settled in California with his family, although continuing to travel. An elegant biographical sketch of Vance by Avram Davidson appeared in THE BEST FROM F &S F : 13th SERIES. accompanying « Green Magic » - excerpts : « ... slightly delayed honeymoon enabled us to meet the pleasant Mr. Vance, pleasant wife, and pleasant boy-child... Vances span the state of California - in space and time, one great - great - grandfather arriving 11 years before the Gold Rush ; Jack born in San Francisco, raised in the San Joaquin-Sacramento Delta, highschooled in Los Angeles, attended U. of C. - - picked fruit, hopped bells, canned, mined, constructed, rigged, fared at sea, played jazz band cornet - lives in an old house in the Oakland Hills, defies storms and tempests in building the famous houseboat with Frank Herbert and Poul Anderson... says he i s in favour of « ... feasting and festivity, sailin g, ceramics, books, Scotch Bourbon, beer, gin and wine » and is against « ... modern architecture, psychiatry, confusion, Picasso, Muzak, progressives and reactionaries, etc. » There are various snippets of information to the effect that Vance is also an expert ceramicist, that his house is on the side of a cliff and can only be reached on foot, and that the legendary houseboat displayed an unfortunate propensity to sink (perhaps under the weight of its owners' accumulated awards) and passed into other hands. »

VANCE : This is more or less accurate... I don't "guard my privacy" ; I've got lots of friends. I 'm not particularly taciturn... Our houseboat only sank once. A big storm came up and Poul Anderson and I had to go down in wetsuits and lift it up with all manner of means. Anyway, we're talking about building a new one now- - just talk, so far.

SFR : You were Guest of Honour at a convention in Sweden last year- - did you enjoy this ?

VANCE : Yes, I did, very much. I had splendid time- - in fact much better than I anticipated. Perhaps you know John Henry Holmberg who's a fine fellow- - I number him among my friends now.

SFR : Do you think the convention helped your career?

VANCE : No, I don't think so ! They are not selling too much of my stuff over in Sweden. But I had a good time. First time I've ever been to Scandinavia, as a matter fact, which is one reason I went.

SFR : Do you think you're still learning as a writer?

VANCE : Oh, I don't know about that :-:-:1 don't think so. I do feel that each story must be better than the one before, and I'm more afraid of reiteration and of duplicating myself than I am of... I think I've learned the techniques of writing by this time. If not, then I'm in a sorry condition.

SFR : What about plans for the Future ?

VANCE : The main problem is time. We've got a thousand projects going here ; we're working on our house and it's coming along very slowly. We are gradually remodelling it ; when we get done it'll be a very large place. My boy has been dragooned into service and we just finished putting down a big slate floor in our living room. Next year it's j ust conceivable that we might come to Europe, but this is by no means certain. Of course, I've got all kinds of writing to be done. Two « Demon Princes » novels ; I'd like to do a second in the MASKE sequence, then finish the « Cugel » stories... I've really got to work harder than I have been heretofore.

SFR : I wish you the best of luck and look forward to seeing the results. Mr. Vance, thank you very much

Fantarama magazine summer 1979

FRANK HERBERT:

They didn't know what a dangerous thing they were doing when they asked me to introduce Jack Vance —dangerous for Jack Vance! Some of you may know that Jack and I have bruised our thumbs together pounding nails into wood side by side, when we should have been writing. A lot of you may not know that I would never have written Science Fiction at all had it not been for Jack Vance. We were remodelling a house of mine in Cloverdale, California and Jack dropped a 2X4 on my head...

We've had quite a few things to do together in our fanciful lives. We've plotted a story together; and then we flipped a coin. Jack lost, he had to write it. We even went to Mexico together. We lived down there together in the midst of the whitefish and the white flowers. We've done a lot of things together, but what we've never done is stood on a platform together.

Once upon a time, many long years ago, I was interviewed on a radio program in San Francisco. One of the interviewers' questions was: "Whose writing in Science Fiction do you think will have the most endurance?" And I said "Jack Vance, if for nothing else, for his imagery, which is the very best in English letters today."

There were some things I agreed not to do [in this Introduction]. I agreed not to tell you how old Jack is, because that would give you a clue to my age. But I made no commitments whatsoever on telling you his real name. Now, some of you may have seen his pseudonym, John Holbrook Vance, and some of you may even believe that he is Jack Vance. I am here to expose the sham. His real name is Holjance von Brook.

There has been some confusion as to whether there was a real Jack Vance. I was cornered at a science fiction convention in Kansas City by some fans, and they said: "We heard you know Jack Vance." I said: "Yes". They said: "sHe's really Henry Kuttner, isn't he?" I said "No, that's not his real name, his real 'name 'is Holjance von Brook." They said "We put you up to that didn't he?" No matter how much I protested these people kept coming up with other names in science fiction who were, they said, Jack Vance. Really, THIS is the fellow who goes by the name of Jack Vance.

He's real.

The problem is, he's very shy. He blushes easily. He'll curse at the drop of a beer. He once told me that he would just as soon have open heart surgery without an anasthetic as sit at the head table at a banquet and have somebody describe his foibles. When the blood runs out under the table onto the floor, you'll know that I've said enough.

Ladies and gentlemen: Jack Vance !

Frank hasn't left me very much room room to maneuver.:.

I think what I'll talk about is the thing I know most about—myself. Also I'll talk a little bit about style in science fiction; or, let's say, the raw materials of science fiction. In order to write science fiction you have to know a great deal more about the world, and about people, than any other form of writing; your scope is so enormous. Also you are addressing a very intelligent audience who is very hard to fool. The audience reading science fiction will instantly detect foolishness, falacy, or incorrect ideas. Its almost as if this is a cross section of the top of the population. You have to be very careful.

In the early days I tried to write gimmick SF. I experimented with it and gave it up as a lost cause. I gradually drifted into the kind of stuff I write now. I think the story Frank mentioned, the one we flipped for, was probably the start of the new direction I was taking. The story is called To Live Forever. We were going to write it together, but (for various reasons) didn't.

Since then I've avoided the gimmick story and concentrated on a certain milieu. I guess the basis is in sociology or ethnology; whatever you want to call it. Frank writes a similar kind of story. I think he probably deals in more profound ideas than I dare to tackle. He has an uncanny knack for using these ideas and making them not only plausible, but interesting. That is very very hard to do indeed. In fact, it is a major talent to be able to do this. I have no particular facility for it, so I'm very cautious and I stay away from that kind of a story.

In writing, you don't get anything out of your head, but what you put into it. To be a writer you have to keep filling your mind up. This means new experiences, a lot of reading, mingling with all different varieties of people, and in general not sleeping very much. Every hour that you spend asleep is an hour you sort of waste out of your life.

My theory is that style should not be self-conscious. Style should follow the mood of the story. If you're writing one kind of story you should be rather loose, then after you've done your first draft you should try to erase any falsity in the style. Obviously if you're writing a story in the far future the style isn't the same as what you'd use in a modern day story.

The difference between writing mysteries and science fiction is approximately the same thing. Mysteries are usually contemporary stories, science fiction is usually future stories; and the style is going to be coloquial in one case and in science fiction it would be more formal, because it's kind of a translation.

[At this point questions were taken from the audience.]

Q. What do you think your best book is, and why?

Well, I've been asked that question before and I don't think I have any answer to it, because I like certain aspects of one book and in another book I'll like another aspect to it. I don't like my early stuff as much as I'll like my later stuff. I feel I'm more competant in my later writing than I was in my first stuff.

Q. How did you get interested in science fiction in the first place?

I think most science fiction people are alike in that, in their adolescence, they were probably loners, were possibly lonesome, did a lot of daydreaming and were perhaps regarded as a little bit weird by their peers. I was fortunate in having a mother who was fond of Edgar Rice Burroughs. She had all the Tarzan books, and some of Robert Chamber's books, which I don't think anybody's ever heard of. He wrote some early— well its hard to call it fantasy...

There was one called Maker of the Moons. I tried to read it recently and it just falls flat. But, for a young teenager it projected a great deal of atmosphere. Then there was a series of boy's books written by someone called Roy Rockwood, who was actually a pseudonym for Edward Stradomere. He had an enormous fiction factory, the like of which no one does nowadays. Edward Stradomere had, oh, twenty different writers working for him. He turned out hundreds of books— Motorboat series, Dave Porter, Tom Swift and a series which didn't have any particular name but which had titles like Through Space to Mars, Lost on the Moon, At the Earth's Core. They were very close, even though they were boy's books, to science fiction as we know it today. They're never recognized when people talk about science fiction. They go back to Verne and HG Wells, but they always neglect Roy Rockwood. These were awful good books—for boy's books; they really projected atmosphere.

But, I was this typical science fiction type; a dreamy teenager. I was very much impressed with these things and I decided I was going to be a writer, so I fell into this, automatically. Essentially that's the story. I suppose its more or less the same story as anybody who's written science fiction.

Q. For a writer who projects such an incredibly visionary aspect to his writing; and yet, at the same time, especially in your later works, seems to to have so damn much fun relating these with, words; what sparks in your writing the highest creativity? Is it something out of life, an image, an, experience or words themselves?

- I don't know, I do a lot of work. I'm a hard worker. I write things down. I think if I have any talents at all they're two very ordinary ones: (a) this "Teutonic" persistence, and (b) a kind of self-critical facility for possibly sensing when something isn't any good. I think those two qualities are the most essential ones for any writing of any kind; creativity will come of itself. One idea will lead to another. You write something down and you look at it and say "Now this is a very ordinary idea; what way can I change this idea?" As you sort these things out, just the association of ideas will lead you. Maybe your subconscious is working at the same time, and your subconscious will present you with another possible way of doing it. But, again, it all comes back to painstaking labour.

Q. When you first started writing, did you ever write things "just to make a buck"?

Oh, definitely!

The first stories I wrote, which were actually subsequently published as the so-called Dying Earth series, I wrote at sea, essentially for my own amusement I wasn't thinking, really, of publishing them. But, when I went ashore I tried to sell them. They wouldn't sell, so I just put them away for awhile. Then I wrote some stuff that did sell, but I still wasn't really thinking of making the buck then. I was just trying to sell some stories.

After I sold maybe three or four stories—then I began getting avaricious! I decided I wanted to be a 'million word a year man'! [Laughter]

Once we were spending some time down in central California. I decided I was really going to churn this stuff out. So I wrote two stories over the weekend. They were absolutely the worst stories I ever wrote in my life, absolutely vile. They both got published, of course.

One was called Hard Luck Diggings. I forget what the other one was called, but they were the first of the Magnus Ridolph stories. I don't know how this happenned, but Hard Luck Diggings caught the eye of a producer at Twentieth Century Fox. He bought the thing for two grand. He even hired me to come down and work in the studio to make a treatment of this thing. So I went down and 'sucked on the golden tit' for six weeks or so. As I say, I found the way to make money. But it didn't work after that I never tried again.

I didn't like the stories, thought they were awful, I just couldn't work that way again. I decided to go back to the old fashioned way and 'gut it out'.

Q. Have you ever considered collaborating with somebody, say on the order of Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle?

Well, Frank and I have talked about it and started once. And one time Poul Anderson and I were kind of laughing about the idea of having a good space war in which he had one world and I had another world and we'd have a good space war between us, through the pages of the magazine.

Herbert: *Don't forget Noah Arkwright, either!*

Vance*: Noah Arkwright! I forgot about that, Herbert, tell the plot of it, forget it.*

Herbert: *Noah Arkwright was [for] a story Jack and Poul and I plotted while we were building this infamous House Boat. We were going to write this story under a pseudonym and Jack invented the name Noah Arkwright for the pseudonym. But I don't know if the story was so bad that neither one of them wanted to touch it, or whether they really were busy as they said they were, but kind of by default they turned it over to me to write and I won't tell you the name of It! (Laughter)*

Vance: *As I recall the plot was that… [Louder laughter]*

No, it's not really that bad. The plot was that somewhere, someone found this enormous diamond crystal. "What in the world can we do with it? No reputable diamond cutter would touch it for fear of ruining it." It was worth ten million dollars. So in some remote part of Africa they found some old man, still making Abyssinian arrowheads and spearpoints, who was known as an absolute genius for knocking this stuff out. So they sent an expedition and got this guy and told him "You're the only man alive who can fix this diamond for us at a blow, because you have this uncanny ability for seeing the grain. Can you handle the job?" He says "Yes" and takes this priceless diamond and after 20 minutes of pounding out comes the diamond as a little arrow head!

Well, that was the story. Frank did a very good job with it.

Q. What causes a writer's block?

I think a little bit too much work: You work at a certain idea so long that your mind gets absolutely bored with it. In that case the best thing, which I do, is forget

about it. Go away from it and busy yourself with other things and let your subconscious mind work this particular problem. Your subconscious mind is very very good at this. Come back to it in two or three days or sometimes just wake up in the morning and your subconscious mind will have a story for you.

Q. [H. Warner Munn] I've been curious for some time to know just how you determine these euphonious names for your characters and places. Do you have a system for it or do they spring from your fertile imagination?

This is a very hard question to answer. It gets down into a cold art or theory of writing, namely symbology. When you write, of course, you are using symbols: words. But, ideas are symbols that you must very cleverly and subtly use. If you don't use the Proper symbols, you confuse your reader...If you use your symbols too overtly or too brutally then everybody thinks you're a hamburger.

So—the use of the symbols in the Proper way is very important. Names and Places are symbols and they have to ring absolutely true, otherwise the mood won't ring true. So, in order to have the proper symbology in names you have to know your language well. You can't be good at using words if you're not fairly proficient in the use of language, For instance, if you have a name that is in a dark gloomy part of the world, you have to have a word that has a dark, gloomy sound. You don't do it in such a crass way that everybody knows what you're doing. You maybe write down a few possibilities and say, "This might be good if I used another letter here or changed it there or put something in front..." Again, there's no formula for doing this. It's just hard work, persistance, making lists and checking off lists—I think the hardest thing to do is get ladies' names in science fiction. Either they're impossibly cute or obvious or they're so abstruse as to sound ridiculous. So, you just have to work at it.

Q. How do you invent the different societies you have in your books?

What I think I do a lot of times is start out with a mood. Not an idea, but an emotion, an emotional mood of what it would be like. Then I just think about it and start figuring some of the aspects of this society. It's a matter of consistency, I think, and yet you can't be too consistent, otherwise it becomes a drag. Like our own society, there is so much consistency in it, and yet there is a basic overall pattern to it that we all recognize. In fact, it's the glue that holds any society together. It's a concensus, a way of looking at life. It's hard to define and yet all of us feel it. When we don't, they say we're alienated and put us away in institutions because we don't understand this set of conventions. Well, in creating these societies, it's an artificial thing at first. It's just like building a house out of different blocks, You put things here and see how they work together; how they look together. At all times these things have to be rather consistent, but not totally consistent. You have to allow for the human factor in all these societies.

For instance, with the society in Marune, it just occurred to me that in our society here, we make a great deal of effort when "going to the bathroom" to secrete ourselves, we hide, lock the door and use all kings of euphemisms for the digestive processes involved. It seemed to me, about the other end of the process, "Why isn't that similarly a matter of taboo?" Its essentially the same thing, One is putting food in one end of your digestive process and the other is...

It just occurred to me it would be kind of fun to work on a society on that basis. One thing led to another.

Q. I've always been fascinated with the images you have of food. I wonder what you drew your images from. What's your favorite kinds of food that you eat at home?

Well, I don't have any particular... Well, this isn't quite an answer to your question, but some years ago I ran into a book called Ancient Roman Cookbook. It was a faithful rendering into modern terms of how the Romans cooked their meals, and what they ate. There were the most amazing things that these people put in their mouths. The most disgusting things. Not because it was bad material, but because of the way it was cooked. For instance, there was boar's tongue in honey with nutmeg or something like that.

Essentially every culture will have its food based upon the materials available to it in that particular world. And also they'll be based upon certain psychological attitudes, which I think derive from the society itself. If you have a society that is living in the water, naturally they'rg going to make use of a lot of aquatic farms. Actually, here's a convention that a lot of science fiction writers use.

To digress a minute on the subject of conventions, science fiction is not a rational form of literature. Everybody knows it is impossible but, in order to overcome this feeling of unreality, we use these conventions: spaceships and one thing or another…

Now it's very likely on far worlds there will be an enormous amount of synthesized food and food which is prepared more or less to be like earth food. The technology, of course, is with us now. But this doesn't make very interesting reading Hence, in talking about foods eaten on different worlds, I like to pretend that they'll do as we do here—which is eating organic food, derived from the materials and the life of that particular world. That's not necessarily going to be the case because a lot of that protein will be poisonous or dangerous or make people sick. But just to add color to the story, you think of whatever kind of life is involved there—sea worms and puff balls. Again, you can't go too far overboard or you lose credibility. Its got to be a mixture of something we're familiar with and something of the exotic together. All this stuff is all compromise. If you tried to write a story that was absolutely full of fidelity to the alien culture you'd be doing nothing but explaining that culture. It would be so tiresome reading all this exposition about why they use three-pronged forks instead of four-pronged forks or something of this sort. So, again, you have to concentrate on certain things and ignore certain others.

Q. A lot, of your work incorporates the notion of magic and I would like to know if you think it's possible to write realistic fantasy literature.

Yes, I think it is. Again, I think it has to be done very carefully. By realistic, I think you mean characterization that makes the reader think that the people to whom this fantasy is happening are real, ordinary people like themselves. Many, many writers nowadays do that. Kirby Macaully's anthologies are full of stories like that.

Q. Do you think it's a matter of characterization rather than setting?

Yes, I would think so, because nobody knows how magic works. You can pretend you do just to make the story plausible but as soon as you do that then the magic goes.

There's no more magic left, it's just science. So, I think the trick to making realistic fantasies is to make very, very real characters.

Q. Do you have a character you feel particularly empathic with—your own personal fantasy?

I'm fond of sheriff Joe Bain in these murders that I've done. And, hmm, I like Cugel in Eyes of the Overworld.

Q. When are you going to take care of the last two Demon Princes?

Number four is being published at the moment, and I am writing number five right now. [Audience applause]

Q. Are you considering doing any more 'Dying Earth' stories?

Yes. I want to do another volume with Cugel, and then another one after that.

***

Source: FANTARAMA-magazine / summer 1979

Recovered and photographed by Michael Scott Friedli- 2022

Pdf by J.L. Esteban 2022

BY: Tim Underwood & Kees van Toorn - Orbit # 16

Translated from Dutch

John Holbrook Vance was born in San Francisco in the twenties. Driven by his somewhat fickle nature he travelled a lot in his younger years, worked in construction, played the clarinet in a memorable number of jazz bands and, as a sailor, watched half the world up close. His first science fiction story The World Thinker appeared in 1945 in Thrilling Wonder Stories. Vance still writes short stories, but he owes his great fame and popularity, especially in the Netherlands, to a long series of intriguing novels.

As a reward for his superlative invention he received a HUGO Award in 1963 for The Dream Master and again in '67 for The Last Castle, a short story that had already earned him a Nebula Award the year before.

The interview, which we print in this issue of Orbit, was edited by Tim Underwood, a member of the American fanzine The Many Worlds Of Jack Vance. For this issue of Orbit, it was specially supplemented with a number of additional details, for which we would like to thank a number of American employees.

ORBIT, number 16, fall 1981.

ORBIT: The introduction to The Best Of Jack Vance states that you don't like to analyze your own work. Instead, do you want to say something about how your fantasy worlds are constructed? Is it just inspiration or are you deliberately constructing them, brick by brick, like a number of 'hard' science fiction writers?

VANCE: In certain cases I have, where necessary, worked out a whole world in detail. If you're talking about a certain kind of world or planet, you can usually provide it with a number of beating properties if you want to take the trouble to do so. You can assume a dense core or, as for example with Great Planet, a very light core, consisting of very light substances, with a world that has a large diameter. In general you can say that you can create almost any world that you can use in a story.

But on the other hand, there are of course cases where things run into a hundred, if you assume something that turns out to be wrong. It happened to me in the series The Devil Princes, with the worlds of Rigel. I know, and already knew, that Rigel is a relatively young star; if there are planets, they haven't had time to cool down yet. But I just didn't think about it when I was writing. I thought: Rigel is a sun with a lot of light, so can have a lot of worlds that are habitable. And that's why I ignored the fact that it's a very young star. Poul Anderson pointed it out to me and in the following books I've straightened it out in a somewhat silly way. But I usually assume that just about any world is possible, and that no one will take me to court if he encounters something that isn't possible.

ORBIT: By the way, they're not much more than the setting against which your stories are set, are they?

VANCE: Essentially that's true yes. There's actually no reason to chew up all the mathematical facts to the reader, unless that fits in with the story.

ORBIT: How did you become interested in science fiction or fantasy?

VANCE: I don't really know. During my childhood we had a lot of books at home. There were also fantasy books... my mother had read all of Edgar Rice Burroughs' books. When she was young, she was a Burroughs fan. There were also books by Chambers, all OZ books, Tom Swift, the series by Roy Roelewood, Jules Verne and a whole bunch more. The material from which I later started writing was in the bookcase at our house.

ORBIT: You mentioned Weird Tales once.

VANCE: Yes, Weird Tales made a deep impression on me when I was young.

ORBIT: You've been negative about your early stories more than once. Would you really like them all to disappear?

VANCE: No, I don't, but I wish I wasn't reminded of them. They were written while I was still learning my trade, so to speak. A good analogy might be that if you try to learn how to paint, you start with a whole series of monstrosities. Then you make a recognizable tree or something like that, or a cat, whatever ... and later on someone messes around with what you've made in your early days, saying maybe, because he doesn't know anything else to say: 'What a charming cat', or 'What is this piece sensitive'. Of course you then try to do things that go further, that are better, and you only realize very well what is wrong with the earlier things ... how crooked the tail of the cat is, for example ...

ORBIT: But that doesn't always have to be mistakes, does it? Maybe these earlier stories are just less complex.

VANCE: It's not just that. I've just reread one of my old stories, and the style came to me rather... eh, journalism.

ORBIT: A lot of your old stories breathe, I think, the atmosphere of the magazines of that time; there was a certain kind of SF-story that was written a lot in the fifties.

VANCE: You're probably right.

ORBIT: Can you say something about the writing itself? How do you feel about your writing? Is it just hard work? Is it just inspiration?

VANCE: You're probably right.

ORBIT: A visit from the Muse?

VANCE: Sometimes the Muse comes too late and I have to work all by myself, and that's not very pleasant.

ORBIT: In the Devil Prince series, you have someone acting under duress, and if you assume that, you'll probably go anywhere.

VANCE: Motivation is of course an important component of every story, the dynamic essence so to speak. If a story has no motivations - obsessions, lust, desire, fear, vengefulness - then it becomes a pastoral idyll, an impressional sketch. Nobody has much interest in stories about virtue, that's an essential fact for a writer.

Frank Herbert had a formula - maybe he still has it. He wrote it down for me: P.R.E.S.S.U.R.E. Due to an accidental coincidence he had also published a story around that time, Under Pressure, in which the formula appeared, even in the title. He thought that your main characters should always be under pressure to do something, should be forced to go one way or the other. Of course he is right. I don't follow formulas, not one. I don't trust them. I don't believe you can use a set of rules as a basis for your writing. If you always keep a certain slogan in mind while writing, you impose restrictions on yourself.

ORBIT: Your style has changed a bit since your work in the mid and late fifties (Great Planet, for example). And even now you write, although the style remains immediately recognizable, very diverse books. The Gray Prince (The Domains of Koryphon) has a calm pace and pays a lot of attention to background, while in The Seventeen Virgins the humor and the animated style resounds from the earlier stories with Cugel. Is this difference in narrative style just the result of using different main characters, or is it a result of a difference in your own mood when you wrote them? Are the differences conscious?

VANCE: Consciously, though not deliberately - if this distinction can be made. No, probably not. If I may use again the analogy with painting: if you paint a sea, you use a lot of shades of blue and green. If you want to paint the lagoon room of an old Genoese tavern, use black and brown and gold shades. What it comes down to is that I try to use the tools that best fit the work I'm doing - and by tools I mean choice of words and style. It's not a matter of planning in advance, it just happens.

ORBIT: A critic recently pointed out that, although you are certainly one of the most important fantasy authors still alive, your style has few followers. Heinlein's novels, to name but one example, have had a direct influence on the style and subject choice of a large number of young writers. But with you it is either written by Vance or not. Do you think your writing attracts a certain kind of reader?

VANCE: Maybe. I don't know.

ORBIT: Anyone who reads your books may find that you travel a lot. Is that so?

VANCE: Broadly speaking, yes. But there are places I've never been... Antarctica... the North Pole... (laughter).

ORBIT: I'm asking you this because your worlds seem exotic, and that, I think, is a consequence of the fact that the main character is confronted with an unearthly landscape, with something very different from what he knows.

VANCE: I don't know where such a thing comes from. Perhaps from images of imaginary landscapes, from the National Geographic, who knows... But all this shouldn't be very secretive - everyone can take note of it. There's no lack of material to build up your background ... For example, I just looked into an issue of the National Geographic and saw a picture of Jaipur, in India. Talk about fantastic panoramas! It

was taken from above, and you looked down on a gray tableau ... mud huts. I will not try to describe it. It was a scene from a science fiction world

ORBIT: Have these exotic areas inspired or influenced any particular book of yours?

VANCE: To be perfectly honest, Tim, I don't want to get too specific or analytical about anything. I actually feel like a magician with his repertoire of tricks - we both create illusions. Does he sometimes put a lot of effort into explaining his technique to the audience?

ORBIT: Malcolm Edwards recently remarked that you get tired of your worlds once they're on paper. Is this correct?

VANCE: Yes and no. As soon as a certain background has been fully worked out, it becomes more fun every now and then to get involved with something else.

ORBIT: From your work I sometimes get the feeling that you're more interested in creating yourself, a world or a certain area: that creating this world is more interesting than continuing to write about it ...

VANCE: I think that as soon as such a world is well and truly completed - that's certainly not the case - you can move on and start something else as soon as it starts to become familiar to you. I think something comes into play when looking at the way in which such a world develops. With certain stories the background is part of the story - just look at the Cugel stories. As always there are exceptions to every general rule. Undoubtedly also on this one.

ORBIT: You avoid that with the Devil Prince series ... Gersen travels from one world to another, and they are different every time.

VANCE: With the Alastor series just as ... each part plays on a different planet.

"I usually consider the stars as a backdrop.

ORBIT: It strikes me that the current popularity of your old work is roughly proportional to the distance between those stories and what you might call the Analog style of scientific science fiction. The Dying Earth and Eyes Of The Overworld are probably the best examples of this, but the four Tschai parts are also very different and exotic, and Great Planet here and there similarly. Do you have anything to say about this?

VANCE: Science fiction has dealt with scientific processes or the consequences of a scientific whim in the distant and not so distant past. Often the writers were a long way ahead of science. They 'invented' a lot of things that you see around you today. But in this day and age 'science' is such a wide-ranging field that no writer can keep up with all the developments, unless he is involved full-time. If he doesn't confine himself to generalities, a writer can make terrible blunders when he wants to give too many details about aspects of 'modern science'. If I wanted to write a story with as 'punch line' the behavior of Quarks or the various kinds of magic that exist, I would only use jargon. That is only one side of the matter - point A. Point B is that many stories from the forties and fifties, including a couple of my own, often used little-known or misunderstood scientific facts to bring the story to a conclusion. I remember using

superconductivity like that once. But this kind of thing does not form a very solid basis for a story. Today's readers are not that interested in such tricks. They're amusing, but at least they can't be the basis of a work of any size. What a reader wants is to find a situation with which he can identify. The old kind of sf-stories, written around an idea, then falls short. But this is so obvious that I'd better keep quiet about it. I recently came across a reissue of Stanley Weinbaum's work.I remember that I used to find his stories fascinating. And yet now, as I re-read it, I thought: 'How is it possible that I have ever wasted my time with this mess? The world has grown a bit more mature since then. If Stanley Weinbaum were still alive now, he would have grown up, too, and undoubtedly written much better things.

ORBIT: Could you say something about what you're doing right now? And what else are you planning to do?

VANCE: I'm finalizing the second version of the fifth [?] part of the Alastor series, and negotiations are underway to complete the Devil Prince series. I have the framework for that fifth part on paper. It appears mid 1981.

ORBIT: Marvel Comics has made a number of adaptations of sf and fantasy books. Would you mind if they took Cugel and made a comic about his adventures?

VANCE: That depends on what they pay. But I don't like it - I don't like it at all. If they paid enough, ten million dollars or so, I might put my objections aside.

ORBIT: The cartoon could make the tragicomic Cugel known to a whole new generation ...

VANCE: But if you remember the Tarzan strip - that Tarzan didn't look at all like the Tarzan of J. Allen St.John, and I don't think it was the Tarzan that Burroughs described. The real Tarzan was a subtle guy, not from the battle of John Wayne. In my opinion, Tarzan does not have an excessively muscular body. Of course he's solidly built, but at least not the bloated bodybuilder he became in the strip. When I think of a comic made out of a book, I think of what happened to Tarzan. I certainly wouldn't object to a strip if I could determine one hundred percent what the end result would look like - but that probably won't happen.

ORBIT: In the Asutra Etzwane stands at a battlefield and asks: 'Can't you feel the presence of so much death? And Ifness answers: 'An intellect that is completely in control must unfortunately sacrifice the sensitivity that distinguishes it from a more primitive mind. In general I have taken this evolutionary step with satisfaction'.

All seriousness aside, is this a reflection of your own thoughts?

VANCE: Not entirely. We probably all have a melancholic longing for our lost youth, when we were still open-minded about everything and new experiences were very exciting ...

ORBIT: What do you think of the genre?

VANCE: Science Fiction? To tell you the truth, I wouldn't know.

ORBIT: Don't you read it?

VANCE: No. The only thing I have read from sf, is my own work, in which - as I said before - I see an ascending line. I am now in a stage of my life [Comm.: around 65 years of age] , in which I worry about the fact that a new book and/or story must be at least as good as the previous book. On the other hand, however, I realize that many of the expectations of the fans are sometimes too high.

I do more than just sf.

ORBIT: You are active in two different genres. You write science fiction as well as detectives ... or mystery fiction, as the correct description is. Isn't there more bread in the latter genre? I mean, it seems to work a lot easier than science fiction.

VANCE: Unfortunately, that doesn't work anymore.

ORBIT: How do you mean?

VANCE: The detective story has - at least in America - reached the top and slowly but surely a relapse is taking place. There are a number of authors, such as Len Deighton and, hm, John LeCarre, who have written excellent books, but there are no really big names anymore. Most of the great authors have retired or died. If you ask someone about a good author, you will undoubtedly hear names like Agatha Christie - and he is dead; or John Greasy - and he is also dead. Ten, fifteen years ago [meant mid-60's 20th century] this genre - I mean detective-stories - was an important facet of our society. Unfortunately, television has put an end to the existence of this kind of stories. Science fiction, on the other hand, focuses on a different kind of audience. An audience that feels less connected to the medium of television. The primary audience of the sf author (at least I've been told) consists of fairly intelligent young people from about fifteen to twenty-five years of age. Once they have discovered the genre, they generally remain loyal to it. I believe that the Sf author focuses mainly on the younger audience. Maybe I'm generalizing a little too much, but that seems to me to be true. By the way, sometimes I still write some detective stories. One of my own will soon appear in Dutch at Rostrum publishers. [Comm.: The silent witness]

ORBIT: How do you proceed? Are you going to sit behind a typewriter with the idea of writing an x-number of pages per day?

VANCE: If I could do that, I'd be a lucky man. Unfortunately, I can't afford the self-discipline. As a rule I start early in the morning full of good plans and then I cherish the hope of getting an x-number of pages on paper. I get to work, but there is always something that distracts me. Then I'm busy with something else. After that I start writing again, but still ... finally something is on paper and I take myself to work twice as hard for the next day. Unfortunately the next day somehow always looks suspiciously like the previous day.

ORBIT: Do you spend a lot of time rewriting and editing your stories?

VANCE: Hm, pretty much. First I put the story in shorthand on paper. My wife ticks that off in front of me. In other words, she has a kind of telepathic gift for my ideas, because she's one of the few who can decipher my horrible handwriting. Then I edit the tapped version of the story and that usually turns into a sort of second rough sketch. My wife works that out as well, and once that has been tapped, the final story is usually

written down on paper. Sometimes I change a few details, but as a rule it stays that way.

ORBIT: Do you make a plot before you start a story?

VANCE: Sometimes. Although sometimes things get out of hand, or I suddenly get a better idea while writing, so I change everything or start all over again. Of course, that causes the biggest problems, so now and then other stories start germinating during the writing of a book - but I usually save those for a later stage. When that happens, I'm usually inclined to say 'that's it, enough; here comes the end!

ORBIT: We think that is indeed a neat point to end the interview. Thank you for your cooperation, Mr. Vance, and good luck with your new books.

Part of this interview was posted as A Conversation with a Master of Science Fiction Magazine 1.

“Reprinted with permission of Jacques Post”.

In« Dream Makers vol.2 »Berkley Books, New York; First Edition (06 01 1983)

Hello? This is Charles Platt, Mr. Vance. You remember, I wrote to you

"Charles who?"

"About doing an interview, for Dream Makers."

"Dream what?"

There's a trace of humor in his telephone voice, as if he knows perfectly well what I'm talking about but he feels like being playful—or awkward. "You did write back to me and say it would be okay," I reminded him.

"I did, did I?"

"Yes, and I'm in San Francisco now, and I'd like to drive out and interview you some time this week. "There's a pause.

"Well, I tell you what. I'll give you ten minutes. From 11:42 to 11:52 tomorrow. How's that suite you? Eh?"

"I might need a little longer than ten minutes," I reply, playing it straight. "About an hour."

"An hour! Do you realize how much I value my time? Are you going to pay me for it?"

"Ha ha! No, actually, I'm not, Mr. Vance."

"Well, then, you'd better be a really interesting fellow. Otherwise I'll do what I do with other people who come up here and waste my time."

"Ha ha. What do you do with them, Mr. Vance?"

"Throw 'em out."

Driving up into the steep, wooded hills north of Oak-land the next day, I replay this telephone conversation in my mind, feeling apprehensive about confronting this ogre—and irked, too, by the indignities that are some-times heaped upon the heads of innocent interviewers. The narrow road gets narrower, and steeper, and winds back and forth, and finally I find Jack Vance's house half hidden amid the tall trees. I park the car, and I get out, and an intimidating voice bellows down:

"Who's there?"

But when I finally meet Vance, he shrugs off his irascible act and is very friendly. He dismisses the matter of the phone call.

"I just like to tease people," he says, with a sly grin.

"And you seemed like a pretty amiable fellow."

He's a brawny man in old jeans and a short-sleeved shirt, with an anchor tattooed on his forearm. He once worked as a sailor, and still looks the part. His wife brings out some

pomegranate wine, and we sit together on a porch swing on his stone-paved patio, beside the house that he designed and built with the help of his son.

Jack Vance values his privacy. He won't have his picture taken, doesn't like being interviewed, and doesn't even socialize much with other writers.

"Some of them are quite decent chaps," he admits, as he flicks through the pages of the first volume of Dream Makers, which I've brought along for him to inspect. "But others in here, who I won't name, are horse's asses. My God—is this the company in which I'm going to be placed?"

I ask him if his reclusiveness is a deliberate, conscious decision.

"Yes, deliberate. Naturally I have friends—Poul Anderson lives near here, and we are good friends—but professionally, I don't care to make my living through my personality. "And he avoids visiting publishers in New York. "I bypass it. Detest the place. Don't even think about it. My part is to sit home and write, send out manuscripts, and then run down to the mailbox to see when the check arrives."

Despite his tendency to hide himself, he has become a much-admired science-fiction storyteller, known for "voluptuous prose and soaring imagination," as Robert Silverberg has put it; or, in the words of Norman Spinrad, "perhaps the premier stylist . . . in terms of fusing prose, tone, viewpoint, content and mood into a seamless synergetic whole. "He shrugs. "It hasn't come easy. It's been a matter of plugging away, finding what I can do, and then trying to do it properly. I'm not one of these chaps who was an instant success. There was a long period in which I wrote a lot of junk, as an apprentice, learning my trade. I found out I was no good at gadget stories, or at least they were very boring to me, and I found out that I didn't enjoy writing whimsy, and I finally blundered into this thing which I keep on doing, which is essentially a history of the human future. "I didn't start selling until kind of late in life. I was doing other things. Working, gadding about—I was a merchant seaman, a deckhand. The only way I could get on a ship, with my bad eyesight, was to memorize the eye chart. See, every time you go on a ship, they'd parade you in front of doctors and have you read an eye chart. Luckily, they always used the same chart. "I wrote while I was at sea. I did this so-called Dying Earth thing."

"Why 'so-called'? "I interrupt.

"It wasn't my title."

"What was your title?"

"Damned if I know." He chuckles. "Anyhow, I wrote that, sitting looking out over the water, and then I got tired of that particular life for various reasons. I met a friend of mine who'd become an apprentice carpenter; he said I should try it. Have to go to school for four years, but after that you'd usually get a job. I said, "all right, 'cause you gotta do something". I went down to the union hall, they asked me what size a saw-horse is, I held out my hands like so. They said, 'Why do you place studs sixteen inches apart?' and I said it was probably because plywood sheets are four feet wide. They asked me which end of a nail goes in the wood first, so I said, the sharp end is usual, in this case. Fine, they sent me out as a journeyman—full-time carpenter, forget the apprenticeship. I hardly knew which hand to hold the hammer in, lasted on the first job

one hour, the second job two hours, finally learned the hard way."But I was still writing, and one of the worst stories I ever wrote I sold to Julian Blaustein in Hollywood; he saw a sentence in it that inspired him. Bought the story for what was then a lot of money, and so for a while I worked in Twentieth Century-Fox's West Coast studios. Then my producer got another job and I was fired, politely. "So we went to Europe, stayed there nine, ten months. We toured England by bicycle. Came back penniless, to New York, where Scott Meredith, the literary agent, got me the job of writing Captain Video scripts. Worked on that for a while, then came back to California, to the mountains, and that's where I met Frank Herbert. He was working as a reporter on the Santa Rosa Press D emo-crat, and he came out to interview me. "Three months later we drove down to Mexico with the Herberts and set up a writers' household in Chapala. We had a wonderful time, but the period was financially arid. We came back to California and the Herberts stayed on for a while longer. We found this place, and have lived here ever since, except for when we travel. On our last long trip, the three of us—Norma, our son John, and myself—took thirteen months to go around the world. We set up housekeeping at Madeira; at Fishhoek, Durban, and Graff Reinet, in South Africa; a houseboat on Lake Nagin in Kashmir; and Hikkadua in Ceylon. And many other places for shorter periods. I wrote, Norma typed, and John studied his lessons.

"I write in longhand, Norma types it out, I go over that draft, she retypes—does all the real dirty work. She probably edits a little bit too, I guess. It's a very essential part of the process."

He talks in an offhand, earthy style, pausing now and then for a quiet chuckle. He seems to like telling anecdotes about his life and the manual labor he's done, but he avoids talking seriously about his books.

"It never occurs to me to even try to analyze my writing," he says. "I just write more or less what I think I would have liked to read myself, at the age of sixteen or seventeen. "As a teenager, he studied to be a mining engineer, then decided it was "too damned dull" and majored in physics at the University of California, then decided physicists tended to be "single-minded, one-dimensional people" and became a journalism major, since he enjoyed working on the college paper. It's evident from this that he's an educated man; but he comes across more as a crafts-man than an intellectual, so I ask if this means he has no time for academia or literary criticism.

"I don't have much respect for so-called intellectuals. I think to call somebody an intellectual is the same thing as calling him a fool or a blackguard." He pauses thoughtfully. "Critics are intellectuals. It's their role. They work with ideas, words, thoughts. Their tool is a pencil or a typewriter. I won't go into a long discursion on esthetics, but a critic—I won't say he's necessarily a deviant, or a criminal, or a disgusting person; he can be very nice, pet his cat, treat his wife nicely. Who knows? But still, to admit that's what you do for a living! It's like saying, 'I give sex shows down at the Burlesque for a living.' Something you'd have to blush to admit."

Does he feel this way because he receives negative criticism?

"No. I try to avoid it, certainly. But criticism simply doesn't interest me."

I mention that Don Herron, a critic who contributed to a symposium on Vance, deduced that Vance had been heavily influenced by the work of Clark Ashton Smith.

"That's true. Can't help it; Smith is one of the people I read when I was a kid. But it only influenced The Dying Earth. "I was one of those precocious, highly intelligent kids, old beyond my years. I had lots of brothers and sisters, but I was isolated from them in a certain kind of way. I just read and read and read. One of the things I read was the old Weird Tales magazine, which published Clark Ashton Smith. He was one of the generative geniuses of fantasy. The others, Lovecraft for instance, were ridiculous. Lovecraft couldn't write his way out of a wet paper sack. Smith is a little clumsy at times, but at least his prose is always readable. "When I wrote my first fantasies, I was no longer aware of Smith—it had sunk so far into my subconscious. But when it was pointed out to me, I could very readily see the influence."

I ask why he has never drawn directly on his global traveling experiences, to color his fiction.

"I do, more or less, on a subconscious level. And I wrote one murder mystery called The Deadly Isles, set in Tahiti, with a deep-sea sailboat, navigation, things like that. Also, a suspense-thriller, The Man in the Cage, had a Moroccan locale. "I particularly don't like these movies that call them-selves science fiction, with a Star Trek type of space-ship and everybody in uniform—essentially all they are navy ships, floating around in space, very boring and dull. When the time comes—if it ever does come—that we're traveling in space, the experience will be so different from the everyday. We've had just a little taste of it; what's going to happen eventually will obviously be much richer and more complex." He takes another sip of pomegranate wine. "I'm talking a lot more theoretically than I enjoy talking," he complains. "Theoretically, or, what's the word? Didactically."

As if he doesn't like being quizzed on his outlook and ideas. I ask him if, similarly, he dislikes putting messages in his fiction.

"Well, I have done it a couple of times. There was one book that used a very simple fact, which everybody knows but doesn't want to admit. I have heard American Indians complaining about the wrongs done to them by the white man, who stole their land and so on. Which is true. But something which everybody knows is that the forebears of these Indians had stolen the land from some other Indians, and those had stolen the land from some earlier tribe, and the white man was just the latest tribe to come along and kick somebody off the land. No doubt some time in the future, we'll be kicked off. "Same thing in England. Should we check out the Domesday Book, see who owned the land in A.D. 1000 and give it back to 'em on the theory that the Normans shouldn't have come there in 1066? In that case, you can think, well, the Saxons were kind of marauders themselves, so you can give the land back to the Britons. And so on. "So the central idea of this thing was that there's no state in the world whose title does not derive from violence, which seems to be a harmless thing to point out, except that the word 'violence' is kind of like a red flag to many people. It made the peaceniks get very, very furious. "In the other book I did, the theme was even less inflammatory, in fact it was so trivial as to be trite. Essentially, I said that socialism, the welfare state, is debilitating. That is such a trite thing to write a book about, that I'm ashamed of it, in a certain sense. But the idea of this very, very large welfare system carried to extremes had such grand possibilities for picturesque episodes that I decided to go ahead with

it. And some British fellow, evidently left-wing in his political opinions, sent me this long analysis. He seized upon these two books to prove his theory that I'm from the extreme right wing. Which, of course, in my opinion, is absurd. I'm nowhere, not left or right or center of any-thing. I'm an ad-hoc individual."

This angry, emphatic refusal to be typecast as a member of a political group reminds me of his refusal to join in with the science-fiction crowd—or, for that matter, his large family, when he was a child. Preservation of his individuality seems very important to him; his fictional heroes likewise tend to rebel against becoming loyal members of any particular social unit. I ask what he's working on now.

"A very long medieval fantasy. It's not sword-and-sorcery, although there are wizards and swords. This is quite different. It's romance. Trying to do something to sell to the general public, a broader audience. These particular situations and characters, I think, will have a wider appeal than some of the other stuff I've written. "If it goes over well, I've got plans for another two or three more, for Berkley-Putnam. "Also, one of my favorite books that I've written is Eyes of the Overworld—not my title, incidentally. I want to do a few more stories dealing with that same protagonist, to make up a second volume there. "I ask how many books he writes each year.

"I don't keep track. I don't like to think about it. I don't do enough; I waste too much time."

This sounds like a self-imposed work ethic.

"Uh...yeah, in a way. Life is too short not to get as much into your life as you possibly can. That doesn't just include work; that includes exerting yourself to have various experiences. For instance, Johnny and I are getting our boat ready to sail down to the South Pacific. We've got a forty-five-foot ketch, a sea boat, in fact we should be at sea right now, except for, oh, money problems. But we probably will sail to the Hawaiian islands, or down to Mexico, next year."

At this point, Vance's wife comes out and tells us lunch is ready. "All right," he says, pulling out of his relaxed mood and remembering to be grouchy again.

He turns to me.

"Have I disemboweled myself sufficiently for you? You see, I'm not a recluse. I just keep myself reclusive in a certain sense here, because I don't want to be associated with the goddamn science-fiction field. Myself, that's all I want to be. Just me. I don't want to be lumped in with this person and that person. In fact, I don't like even being in your wretched book! For all I know, you'll put me in face-to-face with some fellow I don't approve of at all." He chuckles, a little bit playfully—but only a little.

Notes by David B. Williams for the edification of curious readers:– The story Vance sold to Twentieth Century-Fox ("one of the worst stories I ever wrote") was the Magnus Ridolph tale Hard-Luck Diggings. –Captain Video was the greatest SF television series ever broadcast, or so I believed in 1952 as an avid seven-year-old viewer.– The "symposium on Vance" in which Don Herron adduced the influence of Clark Ashton Smith was the Jack Vance volume of the Writers of the 21st Century Series, Underwood and Miller editors, Taplinger 1980.– The novel about serial land-grabbing was The Gray Prince, and the novel about debilitating

socialism was Wyst: Alastor 1716.– The “long medieval fantasy” became Suldrun’s Garden, published in 1983, and Vance did continue the Lyonesse series with The Green Pearl and Madouc. In the course of composing the Lyonesse books he gave up longhand writingand converted entirely to word processing.– “That same protagonist” was Cugel the C lever, whose second volume of adventures also appeared in 1983.– Vance never did fulfill his dream of sailing to the South Pacific.– His interview in Dream Makers II was placed between Poul Anderson and Theodore Sturgeon. I know Vance approved of Anderson, but I have no idea what Sturgeon’s rating on the Vance Affinity Index might have been.

David B. Williams, a frequent contributor to Cosmopolis, was responsible for obtaining the author ’s permission to reprint this article. Thank you, David

Return to the Elder Isles

Smiling Jack in Locus, nov.1984 (c) C.N. Brown

JACK VANCE has completed the second book in his "Lyonesse Cycle."

From childhood daydreaming to this new volume of "146,150 sweated-out words," the fantasy realm of Lyonesse and the world of the Elder Isles have developed over a lifetime. "When I was a kid, nine or ten years old, I first began writing fairytales set in the same forest, full of magic. I remember reading some Russian fairytales, some Howard Pyle, and it seemed like a lovely thing to write. I made some drawings and maps too, but I was a little kid and I never finished those stories."

Vance's first sf was written for a college English class. "It was roundly denounced," he declares. But he later came to be known primarily as a science fiction writer.

"There was a long period in which I didn't do anything else except this so-called science fiction.".

He mistrusts the term because

"It's hard to say where science fiction leaves off and fantasy starts. Many physicists would consider faster-than-light space travel impossible. "Science fiction" is a house of many doors, many windows, many chimneys...."

Finally, when he had finished the "Demon Prince" series,

"I wanted to write a large book -- three large books. As far as I know, no one has written about Lyonesse before, and it seemed high time to do it. It belongs to the Elder Isles, mentioned in Celtic and Breton legends as Hy Brasil and Ys, and Avalon in the Arthurian legends. Lyonesse is one country in the south of the main island, Hy Brasil. There are six or seven large islands, and twenty or thirty smaller ones surrounding, in a land area about the size of Ireland.

It's a lovely place for having some nice mythological romance."

Like all of his worlds, the Isles are places with a special richness, a quality that has invested his work since the first daydreams.

"I just can't get away from it, this intensity of atmosphere, of light. Not bright white sunlight, but a richer, goldener color. It's got so much color in it that the shadows are colored with these dark, somber hues, dark greens and maroons. That's where you might see little eyes peeking out at you from behind the harebells."

While THE GREEN PEARL is somewhat longer than LYONESSE, the work went more quickly on Vance's new word processor -even with his notorious care over language.

"Each word I took out of the word processor and I polished it separately. Each word has to be segregated and inspected and examined for flaws and then put back. The writing went easily, though, and took about a year."

If Vance had had his wish, the first book in the trilogy would have been called "Lyonesse I: Suldren's Garden", to be followed to "Lyonesse II: The Green Pearl", and "Lyonesse III: Madouc".

All three volumes are directly connected. "The Green Pearl" takes up where the first book leaves off, after a little backing and filling. All the characters that I didn't kill off in the first one reappear in full regalia.

It's complicated, devious, with a lot of subplots."

The third book, MADOUC, has also been plotted. Although it will conclude the trilogy, vance say write other tales of the Elder Isles. Traditionally, they vanished in a great flood, but he could not bring himself to end the trilogy with such a catastrophe.

"I love the Elder Isles and the people that live there. If the disaster occurs -- the waves crashing in, everybody screaming and yelling and getting drowned -- It's going to occur without my help. I"ll try to prevent it as long as possible. With a place this size, you could go on forever with romances and fairytales and legends."

Face to computer, Jack in Locus, nov.1984 (c) C.N. Brown

In Demon Prince, The Dissonant Worlds of Jack Vance

By Jack RAWLINS

AN INTERVIEW WITH JACK VANCE

"The bad stuff I forget."

In January of 1985 I telephoned Jack Vance and asked him if he would be willing to talk with me about his life and his work. He groaned and sighed, and reiterated his famous hatred of discussing either of those topics. I asked why, and he said interviewers always wanted him to say something profound, which he was unable to do; or something embarrassing about other SF writers, which he was unwilling to do. I promised to be kind. 1 don't know what to say," he concluded unenthusiastically. I showed up at his home in the Oakland hills with tape recorder in hand and heart in mouth. I was welcomed as a friend and valued guest, and Vance spoke playfully, volubly, and astutely until I ran out of tape. Here are some excerpts from our conversation.

VANCE : I'll set the ball rolling. "Well, Vance, what the hell are you doing with yourself?" That's a good question, Jack. I just finished the second volume in the Lyonesse Cycle, and so...I'm not doing anything. I've got a contract for three new books, and the third book in the Lyonesse set, and I'm just sitting back stupefied by the magnitude of this task.

RAWLINS : How's business? You're very busy. Are you doing well?

VANCE : Well, it's relative. Compared to Isaac Asimov, I'm striving for every last crust of bread. Compared to some Patagonian aborigine, I'm doing fine.

RAWLINS : When I first met you, it seemed like nobody had heard of you then except your immediate family, and now you've won a tidy reputation and found publishers who take you seriously and want you to write for them. Fifteen years ago I asked you why you didn't write the last two Demon Princes books, and you said, "I'd be glad to write them if anybody would pay me for them." That's no longer a problem.

VANCE : I don't know. I guess so. I suppose the reputation is growing a little bit, but I don't think there's any great mushroom cloud...I still don't have the mass public that even Ray Bradbury has.

RAWLINS : You must be the most honored "Little Name" in SF : two Hugos, one Nebula, one Jupiter, and an Edgar for your mystery fiction.

VANCE : This last year they threw a...what the hell's the name of that thing?—H.P. Lovecraft?—at me supposedly for lifetime achievement' Apparently their system for giving them out was to select the guy who looked to be on his last legs, and give one to him so he could have it as his eyes faded, so it's kind of the kiss of death.

RAWLINS : Lyonesse appears to be a somewhat more conventional, more easily categorizable and marketable book than your earlier work.

VANCE : That was done purposely. 1 thought I'd try to catch some lending library ladies. And the book's sold pretty well. But my audience is still very specialized : highly intelligent young men.

RAWLINS : When I started it I was hesitant, because it looked more like things a lot of other people were doing; but I was happy to see that it's still very much in harmony with what you've done before.

VANCE : You're accurate on both counts. I didn't compromise on the intellectual level, but I dealt with things I thought the general public might be more at ease with.

RAWLINS : How are the publishers treating you these days? I know many of your early titles aren't of your choosing. Do your books come out the way you want them to now?

VANCE : Now they do!

RAWLINS : I know Big Planet went through some radical cuts.

VANCE : I didn't mind the cuts so much, but they changed the names without asking me, which irked me no end. But then I didn't have any clout; I was happy to get five hundred bucks for a book.

RAWLINS : What about some of your other titles?

VANCE : One very early book called Bird Island was renamed by the publisher Isle of Peril, which was foolish, because there wasn't any peril in it. To Live Forever wasn't my title—I don't like that title. Showboat World I called The Magnificent Showboats of the Lower Vissel River : Cusp 23. Big Planet; they didn't like that, and called it Showboat World, which I think is a rotten title. Cugel's Saga isn't my title—I hate it. The Effectuator was changed to The Galactic Effectuator.

I don't like the title Space Opera, but since I was commissioned to write a novel with that title I couldn't complain.

RAWLINS : You mean you're sometimes commissioned to write a book to fit a tide?

VANCE : Sure. I wrote "The Augmented Agent" to fit a cover. I went to a party, and a publisher of Planet Stories said she had gotten some artist's paintings cheap. I got two. One showed some giant moths attacking a person, so I wrote around that the story called "Ecological Onslaught," which is a rotten title. The other one showed a row of missiles in silos in the water along a coast. I wrote "Augmented Agent" for that one.

I did another story around a cover, showing a bunch of sails in space. Turned out to be one of the best short stories I ever wrote—"Sail 25."

RAWLINS : Which was also originally called something odd : "Gateway to Strangeness?

VANCE : That was for another reason. The editor had to set up the magazine cover before he knew what the story was going to be called, so he just decided that whatever the story was about it would be called 'Gateway to Strangeness."

RAWLINS : Anyone interested in turning one of your stories into a movie?

VANCE : Once, in the Fifties—from one of the Magnus Ridolph stories ("Hard Luck Diggings")—worst story I ever wrote. Some producer saw it, and I guess he liked the idea of intelligent trees. It didn't come to anything.

At that time I had set out to become a million-word-a-year man. So I hid out in a relative's house over a weekend and wrote the first two Magnus Ridolph stories—first drafts. I don't think I've ever reread them.

RAWLINS : How do you write now? Do you write slowly? Do you rewrite?

VANCE : I've got my writing down, and I'm pretty disciplined, so I don't have to do a lot of rewriting. I like to write about two or three thousand words a day, and I like to write straight through the whole first draft of the book without rewriting, then go back and do the whole second draft at once. But I find that in the morning I glance at the stuff of the day before, see something needing to be changed, and get caught up—pretty soon I'm completely rewriting the day's work.

The word processor has really increased my volume. I used to write longhand, my wife would type it out, I'd go through it again, and she'd type it out again. Damn, she did a lot of work. But that was the only way to do it, because I couldn't type—it's too rigid.

RAWLINS : You have a famous reputation as a recluse. Are you?

VANCE : I like having the reputation. It adds a kind of glamor.

RAWLINS: Asimov's introductions to your two stories in The Hugo Winners—Last Castle and The Dragon Masters—are both about what a mystery man you are. The first says in effect, "SF is one big happy family. We all go to conventions and goof around together —except Vance." The second says, in effect, that you're impossible to locate, but he managed to find someone who said he knew you, from whom he wrested a stray biographical fact or two. This is the Vancean myth, yet your home phone is listed in the phone book, you answer your own phone, and as far as I know you've welcomed anyone who has come here in friendship.

VANCE : Not everyone. I just don't enjoy going to conventions and goofing around. And I generally don't answer letters from anybody.

RAWLINS : Asking a writer about the craft is always anticlimactic. The first time I met you I asked you everyone's favorite Jack Vance question—'Where did you learn your wonderful vocabulary?" —and you said, "I use the thesaurus a lot." But I teach people how to write, so I'm interested in how people learn to do it. How did you learn?

VANCE : First of all, I think your occupation is like tits on a bull. No one can teach anybody how to write. People go to writing classes because they want to write and they grab at any straw. The best I think you can do is teach people punctuation, spelling...and conceivably put the idea of rhythm in their heads. Aside from that, what can you teach them?

I think the best way to teach someone to be a writer is to force them to read twenty books I would set out for them : Don Quixote, Wind in the Willows, works of P. G. Wodehouse, the Oz books, The London Times Historical Atlas (my favorite book—I don't know of anything that's more clutching for the imagination), Watership Down—there must be others on that list.

Watership Down might be the last book I read, actually. It's a great work of art; it creates a unique mood. I think the author got something there he wasn't even expecting to get. He just got swept away...and he tried to do other books and just fell flat on his face.

RAWLINS : That book isn't written; it just happens.

VANCE : Exactly right. I won't ever read it again.

RAWLINS : Elsewhere you've described yourself in your youth as standing impatiently by the mailbox eagerly awaiting the latest issue of Weird Tales. Is that an accurate portrait?

VANCE : Yes. We lived in the country, and the mailbox was about a quarter of a mile from the house. I knew about the day it was supposed to arrive...

RAWLINS : What made you decide to become a writer? Did you feel like you had something to say?

VANCE : No, no, no, no. I wanted freedom, and the only way I could think of to be free was to be a writer. I started in university as a mining engineer, changed to a physics major, but I just couldn't see myself in it—both those occupations seemed so claustrophobic—so I changed to English, History, journalism. And about that time I figured I'd better take this career thing seriously. In my sophomore English class I had to do a paper every week, so I decided to write a story, turn it in, and try to sell it. When the batch of stories was returned, the instructor said to the class, This week, we run the gamut. On the one hand, we have, written by Mr. Smith, this beautiful, pungent story of a prize fight, in which you can smell the rosin and feel every blow. On the other hand, written by a person who shall be nameless, we have this piece of so-called science fiction?

RAWLINS : So that's when you knew... Which are your favorites among your works?

VANCE : Palace of Love—because of the mad poet, Navarth. And I like the last two [Demon Prince] books : The Face and Book of Dreams. Of course you know the symbol in Treesong's book got printed upside down in the DAW edition. It was supposed to look like a symbolic representation of pure spirit dynamically driving through space; it ended up looking like a beached whale.

RAWLINS : Who do you read these days?

VANCE : I never read anything in SF. I stopped reading that long, long, long ago. Haven't read anything for forty years.

RAWLINS : What about other things?

VANCE : I used to read murder mysteries—go on a binge every two or three years.

RAWLINS : Do you feel that the turn away from hard SF in the last ten years and toward fantasy has resulted in a break for you?

VANCE : I don't pay much attention to trends. If you tell me there's been a turn to fantasy, I'll accept it, but I don't read the books myself.

RAWLINS : Among fantasy writers, your work is remarkably 'hard'—logically sound, interested in problems of the head. You love to write about escapes from physical imprisonment, siege tactics, and battle strategies, for instance. Yet you're often connected with the world of Dungeons and Dragons and sword and sorcery, which is usually thought of as juvenile escapist emotionalism.

VANCE : I wouldn't even consider myself a fantasy writer; I totally reject that—dragons and such like. My fantasy stuff I can number on the fingers of one hand : The Dying Earth, which is very early, and the other Dying Earth books, and the Lyonesse books.

RAWLINS : Yet even in your fantasy books there's a great respect for the operation of the intellect—in The Eyes of the Over-world, there are episodes like Cugel's escape from the tower in the Mountains of Magnatz, a perfect little lesson in logistical problem-solving. And all your heroes can do that...

VANCE : Competence—they have competence. Have you read Cugel's Saga?

RAWLINS : Yes. I like very much the scene in the tavern where Cugel and Bunderwal are trying to con each other out of the job on the boat.

VANCE : Yes. I think of that and laugh sometimes. The problem with writing the Cugel stuff is that you can't allow it to become farce. Because it's supposed to be...fantasy, or—but yet...I don't like the word fantasy, come to think of it. I think of it as straightforward adventure within the premises I establish for that world. Except for a couple of books where I made the mistake of putting some ideology in there...

RAWLINS : I think fantasy always has the connotation of mindless wish-fulfillment let's have a good scare, fall in love, cleave a few skulls with swords...

One of the things that makes your work remarkable is the way it changes point of view, mood, temperament so often. Your books refuse to be just one sort of thing. Lyonesse is a perfect example : it juxtaposes stirring heroism, truly disturbing violence and cruelty, slapstick, bitter dark comedy, satire, pastoral romance, logical problem solving, swashbuckling adventure. So the reader is having to shift gears at a moment's notice—one page he's gasping with horror and the next roaring with laughter. For instance, in the middle of the long and otherwise unrelievedly grim portrait of Casmir's court, there's that brief, poignant interchange between Suldrun and her ineffectual but loving tutor Maister James, so gentle and sweet it brings tears to your eyes. Then, of course, you make us pay for caring by killing James off in an especially unsatisfying way. Compare that to, say, Tolkien or Herbert, where the tone, the point of view, the way I read, are the same page after page through the whole book. Do you do this intentionally?

VANCE : Yes, I try to...how to express it?...change the key, so to speak.

RAWLINS : I suspect that makes the reader work a lot harder, makes you harder to read .

VANCE : I know I'm writing for people to read, but long ago I decided I wouldn't make concessions to the low end of the reader ship—that I'd be always writing to the high end of the readership, and the low end would have to look out for themselves. I wouldn't condescend...because that's no fun .

I'll tell you the truth. I have a competitive streak in me, and I'm happy that my 'reputation' as you call it is finally seeping out; and occasionally I'll get a little critical notice in the world of legitimate, 'mainstream' fiction, and I get a little chuckle—someone's picking up the wavelength at last .

RAWLINS : Your work is predominantly written against a backdrop of melancholic loss and the failure of heroic or romantic expectation. Your heroes generally refuse to play the

hero. Gersen, for instance, is self-confessedly dour and bland. Your heroines refuse to think of themselves as romantic objects, and often grouse through the books being attractive in spite of their best attempts to be obnoxious, frigid, and gloomy. Your plots tend to end with loud doubts by the quester as to whether the quest was wise in the first place. Most of your best work— The Dying Earth, The Last Castle, 'The Miracle Workers; The Dragon Masters—is about the death by attrition, stagnation, or richly deserved revolution of ancient, moribund, yet abundantly rich cultures. Your worlds frequently sport vastly old, precious cultural artifacts—like the Song of the Ka—and the pursuit of the quest almost always results in those artifacts getting trampled in its path .

VANCE : I have a strong sense of loss. We just got back from Europe, where we visited Corsica for the first time. I was curious about the place. I envisioned it as being wild, primitive. I'd even heard somewhere that there were still brigands in the interior. I believed it—the home of the vendetta, you know, But Europe has discovered the group tour, and it's devouring all its capital of beauty and privacy in pursuit of the quick buck of mass tourism. And so everywhere in Corsica there were hotels and highrises. The locals don't like it, but can't stop it. It's very sad to see; the place is being ravished, devoured. It isn't the tourists' fault .

RAWLINS : In your books the trampling usually isn't malicious; these artifacts just get in the way .

VANCE : This has been going on forever. Gengis Khan sweeping through Asia, destroyed city after city, their priceless scrolls and miniatures; some witless Christians burnt the library at Alexandria; Spanish Christians burned all the Incan art .

RAWLINS : Your later work has a profound sense of the importance of home—family estates, especially.

VANCE : Oh, yes. I love my home—this house, or any one I'm living in at the moment. Even California...even Oakland, I feel affection for.

RAWLINS : Your family is Old Californian, isn't it?

VANCE : Quite old, yes, many generations. My grandfather came out from Michigan about 1875. My grandmother was born in San Francisco. That must have been in the Sixties. I've been trying to find out, but all the records were lost in the [San Francisco] Fire. The Fire stopped a couple of blocks away from my grandfather's house.

RAWLINS : The character of your heroes has changed a lot since your early days; in books like The Five Gold Bands the hero tears around accomplishing things right and left. Lately things seem to have slowed down.

VANCE : That's because I slowly came to realize that people don't act like Paddy Blackthorne [hero of FGB]. I don't want to write about Conan or Tarzan; I want to write about human beings, under the influence of some extraordinary motivation.

RAWLINS : One of the best features of Gersen [hero of the Demon Prince novels] is your notion, which is with him from the beginning, that if he's going to devote his life to accomplishing this great deed, he's going to have to give up an awful lot. We almost never acknowledge this about our heroes; we want our athletes to be obsessively dedicated, but

we want them to lose none of their warmth, their humanity, their simplicity, their honor, their accessibility, their ties to spouse and family in so doing.

VANCE : That's right.

RAWLINS : In each of the Demon Prince books, something happens to taint the sweetness of Gersen's victory, and in The Book of Dreams he actually gets robbed of the pleasure of killing the villain; that sweet old couple steps in and steals his thunder.

VANCE : I did that because I just couldn't envision Gersen standing there face to face and pulling the trigger on someone as vital as [Howard Alan] Treesong. So I got someone else to do it. There's a nobility about Treesong; he's an elemental force of nature. You might kill him, but without gloating—like you'd kill a rattlesnake.

RAWLINS : Heinlein once said that when he writes a book he imagines someone standing in the store with two dollars in hand trying to choose between a six-pack and the book, and he concluded, "I try to be better than beer." I get the impression you think more highly of your work than that. Is that true?

VANCE : Yes, I think it's true.

RAWLINS : You mentioned that you like "Sail 25." So do I. The characterization of the instructor..."

VANCE : Henry Belt.

RAWLINS : ...is as deep and subtle as any in SF. Which suggests a problem : you're not supposed to be able to write like that. And that's typical of your work : it refuses to stay within other people's tidy categories. Interviewers keep asking you to name the writers who influence you, in a desperate attempt to figure out which pigeonhole you fit into. They always go away disappointed. You write hard, empiricist problem-solving SF like The Blue World. You write penetrating social satire the New Wave would have been proud to write.You write anthropological SF that stands up well to Le Guin's. You're a master stylist in the manner of Bradbury or Bester. You're knock-down funny like Retief. You have the mythic emotional grandeur of the high fantasists. You write taut, dashing dramatic adventure when it's time for it. You are one of the very few SF writers who takes joy in language play and language use, as a medium. You delight in setting for yourself staggeringly difficult writer's tasks, like describing alien musical performances or the imagist competition in "The New Prime." [11/ : "Yeah, that's fun."' And all this really in addition to what you're renowned for : the creation of weird, eldritch, static worlds of suggested emotions without earthly names. You seem to be a classic example of a writer who's been hurt by the need to put writers and books in categories. I know lots of people who would love your work except they refuse to read anything with a sword or a spaceship in it.

VANCE : It really drives me up the wall to be thought of as a sword-and-sorcery writer. And space ships are just devices for getting from one environment to another.

RAWLINS : Do you share my sense that you ought to be a titan in the field? Do you have a high regard for your work?

VANCE : You're damn right I do.

RAWLINS : I notice you remember your own work very well.

VANCE : The bad stuff I forget!

from: www.vancemuseum.com - Mike Berro

Jack Vance is probably the world's greatest living fantasy writer, each new book is a heralded event, and he's a favorite of all readers who enjoy quality work. The following short interview offers just a small glimpse of the author and his work, but I'm sure you'll enjoy

A MEETING WITH JACK VANCE
Conducted April 15, 1989
By Marty Halpern

Following up on an invitation I had received from Jack Vance months earlier, I finally made arrangements to visit him at his Oakland home on a Saturday in mid-April. Transportation that day was provided by Michael Tallan, a close friend of mine who collects both sf *and* mystery books and is a rabid Jack Vance fan. I myself brought ten books to be signed, including the five original Demon Princes paperbacks (Berkley Medallion and DAW Books), while Michael brought along a small boxful, which included the Summer, 1945, issue of THRILLING WONDER STORIES containing Jack Vance's first published story, "The World-Thinkers".

It was a typically warm, sunny Northern California afternoon, and a wonderful day to go visiting. Jack provided us with excellent directions from Berkeley -- Ashby Avenue, past the Berkeley Claremont Hotel, and onto the Warren Freeway. The Vance home, in the Oakland foothills, is atop a steep, long, gravel driveway. Michael parked at the bottom, off the main road, and we walked up the hill. Jack's son, John, met us out in front of the house and escorted us inside.

The Vances have a three-story hillside home. One walks up a flight of stairs, from the ground level, into the living quarters. Jack informed us that he purchased this land (and the "shack" that existed on it) in the 50's after completing a stint with the Merchant Marines. Over the years, he built up the property, initially by himself and then later with the help of John, to create the existing marvel. There is a room, above the kitchen, with an interior balcony that overlooks the dining area below!

Mrs. Vance -- Norma -- greeted Michael and me and guided us to the dining area where we sat and awaited Jack. Norma was most cordial throughout the entire afternoon, offering us cold drinks immediately upon our arrival.

I learned to my surprise, that Jack is an avid potter and has a workshop downstairs. After joining us at the table, his hands still covered with the white of dried clay, Jack explained that he recently purchased a computer program on the subject of mixing glazes, but was having some difficulty with the software due to the flurry of computer-ese throughout the documentation. Jack even showed us the program manual in order to make his point. I offered Michaels' talents as a programmer to Jack but he declined the offer, explaining that he had telephoned the program's authors and was able to use the software.

For the next two hours, Jack, Michael, and I chatted around the dining room table, munching mixed nuts from a large bowl that Norma provided us. We discussed many of Jack's written works, past and present, and his future plans. Michael and I eagerly kept a constant

flow of books in front of Jack until all were autographed. Due to Jack's limited eyesight, he uses a bold marker to sign books, his signature filling the page from margin to margin. I took a few photographs of Jack autographing our books but, choosing not to impose upon him with the use of a flash, the pictures unfortunately came out dark. In retrospect, I'm now sorry that I didn't snap a picture or two of the Vance house.

During this time, I asked Jack Vance four questions Gary Lovisi, PAPERBACK PARADE editor, had provided me. Jack was opposed to me recording our conversation, however he did suggest that I take notes instead. What follows is Jack's responses to the four questions. I have quoted Jack to the best of my ability, using my cryptic and incomplete notes. In regards to Jack's harangue of our "popular culture", he did go on a bit and then asked that I not print all of his comments on that point; what you read here is an abbreviated version.

MARTY HALPERN: "Could you explain how THE DYING EARTH tales came to be written and from what influences (such as Clark Ashton Smith and James Branch Cabell) they may have sprung?

JACK VANCE: "I read Smith as a kid and was intrigued by his writing, so he has influenced me to some extent. Cabell, though, no, I didn't like. There were a lot of influences and it would be most difficult to put names to all of them. Robert Louis Stevenson, for one ... GOLDEN BOOK MAGAZINE had a fantasy story each month, a wonderful magazine. A hundred writers who I assimilated on how to write a story, but I didn't set out to imitate any one style. I loved the OZ books as a child too, but you'll not see any of those influences in my work. I loved Edgar Rice Burroughts as a kid -- Barsoom!

P.G. Wodehouse is my God. I think he's the greatest 20th Centrury writer, but he ran out of gas after the war. His best stories were in the 20's.

I wrote THE DYING EARTH when I was a seaman, at sea. I wrote a number of short stories that I couldn't get published, so, over time, I put them all together. It's really not a novel but a collection of related stories. If people want to call it a novel, then so be it."

HALPERN: "THE DYING EARTH stories were written in the 40's, published in the 50's, and considered classic by the 60's. Do you see these stories as a metaphor for a kind of creeping decadence which seems to be growing with each passing year, as time slips into the 1990's and beyond?"

VANCE: "A metaphor? No. This is my feeling about the popular culture -- rotten rock 'n roll, rotten movies, decadence. All this drug business is the end result of it. The popular culture is so immersed in entertainment -- sports, movies, television; they make all the big money and it is taken for granted that this is the way we live."

HALPERN: "What made you return to THE DYING EARTH series with two books in the 80's, and are any more planned?"

VANCE: "I had CUGEL'S SAGA in my mind for a long time, and the two of them make a complete story but I don't have any plans at this time to go back to that series."

HALPERN: "You obviously love the flavor and texture of words. How do you come up with the names that you do, names that sound just right, as if they were meant to be?"

VANCE: "Are you a musician? No? Well, if you are and you play a particular note or chord and you have a sensitive ear, then you can see if it's 'in accordance with a chord'. It's a tricky business..."

It was nearly dinnertime and one could sense that the visit had come to a close; Michael and I said our "goodbyes" and "thank yous" and saw ourselves out. The drive home was most enjoyable, our conversation filled with talk of the Vance's hospitality and wondrous home. Jack Vance, with his adventurous characters, shall continue to be one of my favorite authors. I'm now looking forward to re-reading the Demon Princes series!

Aberrations magazine #36 - April 1996

Interview With Jack Vance

John Holbrook Vance (1916-) has written dozens of science fiction and fantasy stories and novels since his first published story in 1945. Though of the caliber of Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein, he is often left off the list of science fiction innovators due to an intentional lack of self promotion and a careful avoidance of the limelight. Recently a copy of his first book, The Dying Earth, sold at auction for $5,000, one of the largest sums ever paid for a paperback original, and ten times what Vance made when he initially sold the book.

Tendrils of fog drifted among the eucalyptus branches as two young science fiction fans made their way to the top of the Oakland Hills to sit at the feet of the master, Jack Vance. A house of darkly painted wood and stone rested atop a lofty perch, but before the door rested a well-used welcome mat. Tentatively, the initiates knocked on the door.

"Come on up!"

At the top of the stairs, a smiling Norma Vance beckoned. The house was spacious with hardwood floors and a majestic view. Jack Vance put down the phone, explaining that he'd been speaking with an old jazz friend. A trumpet was noted on the way in, but Vance vehemently put aside questions of professional musicianship. He is now a banjo player, occasionally banging out a few chords, a strict non-professional. His horn-playing days occurred back when the world was young.

Jack Vance has been writing award-winning science fiction and mysteries for some fifty years, and continues to turn out science fiction novels to this day. He sat us down in the dining nook, overlooking the fog-shrouded Oakland Hills, and after plying us with promises of a peanut butter sandwich, the cagey author turned the tables on us

« Jack's interviewing you ! » Norma Vance smiled as her husband inquired into the interviewers' lives.

Though he is one of the most highly praised writers in science fiction, Vance Is not a public figure. He does not often give interviews, and feeling that he is not a part of the science fiction 'clique.' he prefers spending time with local friends, authors Robert Silverberg and Pout Anderson, Stead of attending conventions. Why doesn't the only writer to win a Hugo, a Nebula, and an Edgar award get invited to many conventions?

Norma interjects, 'People think you're dead!.. That's supposed to be funny, Jack."

Worse than being dead, in the 1950s it was believed that Jack Vance didn't exist at all

« There was some rumor going 'around, » Vance grumbles, « It started in a book of short stories edited by Dicktie and Bleiler, and there they accused me of being a pseudonym of Henry Kuttner, which annoyed me a little bit. Anyway, that took a long time to wear off—but it did. »

« Especially since the Library of Congress thought you were a pseudonym for Kuttner, » Norma added.

Jack allayed dismay with a joke.

« The thing with being Henry Kuttner ts that Henry Kuttner is known to be dead, and Jack Vance is known to be alive—or rumored to be alive anyway. »

Very much so, since a new novel is on the way, Night Lamp, to be published by TOR in October '96, and he is halfway through another novel, Ports of Call. He credits Norma Vance with doing an enormous amount of work editing and straightening things out, and so the writing process is pretty much a collaboration between husband and wife.

Steering Vance towards his standing as a science fiction writer proved futile as he again switched from interviewee to interviewer.

« I don't follow the pulps much these days, » he admitted, and inquired about the health of various genre publications; Astounding (now Analog), Galaxy (now an on-line venture) and The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction. He briefly reminisced about the former editors.

Regarding his style and the use of strange words, Vance says « Essentially, I don't think I use too many words that you have to look up. I don't think it's good technique to stop a reader in the middle of a sentence. A reader should be unaware of the writing, and the story should just go into his brain. Occasionally, out of sheer mischief and malice, I'll make up a word myself. That's just foolishness, to amuse myself. »

Norma served tea and toast. Talk turned to Vance's past. He is a San Francisco Bay Area native, and very well traveled.

« I decided when I was fourteen that I didn't want to work for anybody if I could avoid it. There were things I wanted to do with my life, to be free to travel, to be my own boss, and the only way I figured out how to do it was to be a writer. It was nothing to do with what I read, but a kind of cold-blooded decision. Of course, I wasn't an instant success, but I made it suck.

"When I started University, I started in physics, with a minor in engineering, but it got so dull I dropped that, and went on to major in journalism—which is equally as dull. I just didn't have the temperament to be a scientist. Not that I'm not interested, because I am. »

Does he feel that writing gives him the best of both worlds, getting to do the fun part, to research the things he's interested in, and having the scientific grounding to do it?

« I have a good scientific background, but nowadays I don't use any traditional science in writing at all. It's foolish to try to extrapolate modern science into what's going to happen thousands of years from now. I use ray guns and space ships, but to try to evolve complicated sciences, and imaginative sciences—it's foolish. In general, I try to write stories of cultural diversity, sociological, if you call that science.

« You could call It social science. But, 'science fiction,' that's a word I don't like. I don't have words for what I write except for possibly 'speculative fiction,' or 'adventure stories'. »

Space Opera?

« No, I don't like that term at all. Space Opera has connotations of [John Norman's] Gor, or Start Trek, something mindless like that. »

He went on to speak of the callousness of some science fiction writers who take very topical issues and modern fads and turn them into science fiction stories.

"I think you need to think in broader, elemental terms—human beings in broader aspects—and then put them into different circumstances, cultural modifications and evolutions; which I think is fun and I enjoy doing that. But I think it's important not to take yourself too seriously?

What about the Cadwall books (Araminta Station, Ecce and Old Earth, Throy), does he have an interest in conservation?

« No, not really. Here I was a minute ago sneering at stories based on topical issues, and I go and write a trilogy about ecology. But I wasn't trying to attract the attention of Green Peacers or anyone like that. But that was the germination of the idea, ecology, well not even really that. It was the idea of a beautiful world, and the idea of not allowing it to be vandalized, to be settled by human beings to such an extent as to totally change it. With that in mind, I started the trilogy. Worked out pretty good. »

He attended U.C. Berkeley before the war, then returned during the war to study Japanese.

« I was going to go to the army school, but they wanted to draft me, so I became a merchant seaman instead. I shipped out during and after the war. I enjoyed being a merchant seaman, I liked being aboard ships, I was good at it »

Did that have an impact on his writing? A sea ship and a space ship . ?

« No, no similarities whatever. A ship wallowing in water and a ship going through space are two different things. In fact, if I were given the chance to go aboard a spaceship, I'd probably draw back in alarm. »

The story Sail 25, about several recruits left by a drunken captain to pilot a spaceship by themselves, that wasn't based on experiences at sea?

« No, it was not What happened was, a magazine editor came out to Poul Anderson's house; I was there, and Frank Herbert, and she passed out covers. We were to write stories based on these covers. So the cover I got was showing these silly looking space ships—they were just absolutely asinine—the artist hadn't a clue as to what they were supposed to be. Anyway, the artist had put the number twenty-five on the sail of the ship, so I called the story 'Sail 25,' and didn't pay any attention to the picture.'

Does he think his work carries over well to other media?

« Long, long ago, when I was trying to find a voice, as we used to say, I thought to myself, 'the only way I'm going to make any money—at a half cent a word—is to become a million-word-a-year man.' So one time I was at Norma's house down south, I wrote two stories over the weekend. I think they were the first two Magnus Ridolph stories. They were rotten stories, but I sold them both. To my amazement, one of them caught the attention of a producer at 20th Century Fox He bought it, and hired me to

do a treatment on it, and perhaps do the script. So I went down to 20th Century Fox for a bit, but finally, the producer was kicked upstairs as an executive producer. All his projects were put on the shelf, and they told me, « don't call us, we'll call you. »

« But I didn't mind. I was scared to get attached to that big money; that if I got dependent on it, I'd suffer if I ever got kicked out But I got kicked out before I could get acclimated to any big salaries. Another time, I wrote TV scripts—Captain Video. I did that for a few years."

But Vance didn't like working for the weird and arbitrary TV people. What about mysteries?

« Not enough money in it I'd like to do mysteries if someone would pay me for it. If I could make as much money doing mysteries as I do the junk I now turn out (junk' is an affectionate term), I'd like to do mysteries. I wrote Man in a Cage, and that won an award, the Pleasant Grove Murders, The Fox Valley Murders. They got good reviews. I hope people read them, they're pretty good.

« But it's hard, especially now days. There are so very many good writers. I admire John McDonald. He's dead, unfortunately. I think he's an excellent writer."

Other writers Vance admires are British humorist P.G. Wodehouse, historical adventure author Jeffrey Farrell, and Edgar Rice Burroughs's Barsoom books. A favorite publication from his youth was Weird Tales. Among his own works, he likes his Rhialto book, and the Cugel books.

Cugel? (Rhymes with 'frugal] Is that how your pronounce that?

"How else would you pronounce it? You know, I very seldom find anyone who pronounces it right. I don't know where I got the name, but it seemed to be an appropriate name for the character. But long after I finished the books, someone told me that 'cugel' is a German slang word for, well . . . for your organ. Your 'Germanal' organ. I don't know if that's true or not. »

What advice does he have for the beginning writer?

« Well, read the best P. G. Wodehouse, Jeffrey Farrell, Jack Vance. And don't try to imitate, but generally see what their intentions are, see what's being done, do a lot of writing and don't get discouraged when you get rejected. I have lots of rejection slips. » He indicated a tall stack with his hands. « But if you get discouraged by rejection slips, forget It. The thing is, you have to keep working, keep getting ideas, and analyze yourself to see where the mistakes are. Chances are, you've been rejected for a good reason; your story isn't as good as what's being published. So you have to ask yourself 'why isn't my story as good as the one that's being published?' »

« You might use too many words. This is the sin of most beginning writers, they use too many words. So you can go over your manuscript, and take out all the adjectives and adverbs, and write using nothing but verbs and nouns. Occasionally, you can use adjectives and adverbs—occasionally. But I find you can get your effects by more subtle things, in the rhythm of the sentences, and when the ideas come, make the Ideas carry the weight of the story rather than try to do it by manipulating words. That would be my advice. »

No flourishes, ever?

« Very seldom, because the flourishes distract the reader from the flow of the story, and this is what you don't want to do. You want the reader unaware that he's reading. You want him just to be aware of the story going through his mind. Now if he's hung up, because some dummy puts in words the reader can't understand, then he's defeating his own purpose, because he makes the reader stop and—'hey, what's going on here? I can't find this word in the dictionary. Ah, Vance has lost his mind!' But I only do it, as I said, out of sheer mischief, and usually only when the meaning of the word is implicit in the context. In Night Lamp I think there are four of five words there that you won't find in the dictionary. But the meaning is very clear. »

In closing, Vance is reminded of the words on P. G. Wodehouse's tombstone. « I forget the quote, but it's something to the effect that I want everyone to know that I worked, that I was a hard worker. The stuff doesn't come out like whipped cream out of a can. »

Look forward to seeing more of Jack Vance's hard work in the future.

The interviewers wish to thank Jack and Norma Vance, as well as Chris Treadway, Caroline Younger, Jeff Lindquist, and the staff of the Hills Newspaper Group for publishing a shorter version of this interview in The Montclarion newspaper.

Interview not credited Editor: Richard Blain

Last publication of this magazine in august 1997

Jack Vance Interview on Sci-Fi Buzz

SFB: Jack Vance has been captivating readers with his far-future adventure tales for more than half a century. This Hugo and Nebula Award-winning author recently joined the likes of Isaac Asimov and Robert A. Heinlein in receiving the coveted Grand Master Award. The Science Fiction Writers of America honored Vance with their most prestigious award at a ceremony in Kansas City.

JV: I think it was something I'd been waiting for many years... and when it came I was properly, uh, not thankful, or grateful or anything, but I kind of took it for granted. I went to Kansas City, and I was polite; I got up and made a little speech, said thank you, accepted the award, came home and put it somewhere, I don't know where it is.

SFB: Now past 80, and legally blind, Vance still spends his days writing on a specially equipped computer in the basement of his Northern California home. Here he turns out novels that are eagerly anticipated by his ardent fans, better known as "Vance-iacs." [sic]

[There's a shot of the large-screen computer during the above, and the phrase "once or twice I can run 55 miles a minute" is visible. Other text is fragmented or obscured by Vance's head.]

JV: I write for the educated, sophisticated man - or woman - that has some acquaintance with life locally and internationally - and a brain. And I want to have these people interested, and maybe get them to laugh once in a while, but also startle them once in a while with some ideas.

SFB: Vance's stories are often set in far-future worlds thousands of years away, and focus on what he calls "social anthropology." By sending human beings on intergalactic adventures and observing how they respond to their new surroundings, Vance says he hit on a concept with infinite story possibilities.

JV: The background of these stories are the alterations or the evolution of the ways people act when they're out on strange worlds and have to adapt to strange circumstances. I don't use in these stories the what is called "aliens," which I think is cheating and silly. You could make anything happen by just putting down some funny-looking thing with eyes on stalks and sucks blood or... So that's comic book, to use aliens in here. I never use 'em, except just kind of sometimes as part of the background of different worlds. But I mainly write about human beings.

SFB: The author of highly respected works like The Dying Earth, To Live Forever and the Demon Princes series, Vance is again earning praise for his latest book, Night Lamp.

JV: I got reviews- magnificent reviews- everywhere, and they all go into this aspect of my writing, that it is aimed at intelligent, cultured people, not just teenagers and people that sit with their nose pressed to the laugh track, and/or "Star Trek," which is the same thing really.

SFB: That statement may sound insensitive to some sci-fi fans but after 30 novels, countless shorter works and a Grand Master Award, Jack Vance can say just about anything he wants - and we'll listen.

Original sur vancemuseum http://www.vancemuseum.com/jvip/reviews/sfbuzz.html

Transcribed by Diana Hamilton

HTMLized by Mike Berro

De Telegraaf Saturday 18 April 1998 - Jip Goldstein

Jack Vance:

82-year-old science-fiction author most read in the Netherlands for thirty years.

"Marvel comics offered me five million for a series of comic books with my hero Cugel. I said, please, but without me. Never heard anything of it again."

Jack Vance lives in the middle of the hills of Oakland on the opposite side of the bay of San Francisco, his hometown. So at the end of his 82 years of life he hasn't wandered far away of his home. But in his imagination much furthermore. And millions of people followed him. Jack Vance is one of the most read science fiction writers of all time. In the United States, where he has spent much of his long career 'too subtle' for American tastes, not even as massively as in Europe.

In the Netherlands, he has been by far the most popular representative of the genre for thirty years, despite the fact that his books are so different from each other that his oeuvre could have been written by ten writers. His Cugel books are, for example, rascal-novels in the spirit of Tijl Uilenspiegel and the good soldier Sjveik, the adventures of another beloved Vance hero, Magnus Rudolph, one of his Interplanetary detectives.

But Jack Vance is at his best in those books that are in fact (space) travel stories and moral sketches. His latest, 'Ports Of Call' (Dutch translation, 'De Wilde Vaart, ISBN 9029056460) is another fine example of this. The main character is Myron, a young, rebellious and adventurous spirit, trapped in a primeval conservative business environment. Intended for a career at the stock exchange, he seizes the opportunity offered by his eccentric aunt Hester to escape social hostage-taking – she wants with her new space yacht Glodwyn to look for the source of eternal youth - with both hands. The journey has barely begun or Myron is trown overboard by the fortune seekers surrounding his rich aunt. Then a very different kind of search begins, even more exciting than the one he was on with aunt Hester. Of course everything will be all right, but at the end, the faithful Jack Vance reader has been 320 pages away of earth again.

Bail refund

"There's a deposit on the whole life," says the writer. "Everything you got, you gotta turn back in. Traveling is out of the question for a near-invalid of my age. Hardly making music. Playing cornet could explode the blood vessels in my brain. The banjo is less risky, but there's not much to it, on your own. Just the writing, I hold on to that like life itself. I have a computer that can talk. But I had to learn to operate it by the age of eighty, so it doesn't always tell me what I want to hear and sometimes it IS silence for whole hours. Just like my wife. But I've never expelled her out of the house in fifty years either, so with this other secretary I'm also being patient, HAHA."

"Talking about things, I like better than witing about it. I firmly believe that analysis, let alone self-analysis, is the hereditary enemy of magic. Even the Bible can be reduced to a book of fairy tales by too much study, and not even with fun fairy tales, like those of the Brothers Grimm or Hans Christiaan Andersen, HAHA.

"For my fortieth anniversary in 1965 I was lured into attending such a scary 'fan fair'. Hundreds of people had come to Austin, Texas, to adore me for three days of ritual. I felt like Ron L. Hubbard with the difference that he had initiated his canonization himself. At school, when I had to answer the question "What does the writer mean by...?" I thought, if I had wanted to know, I would have asked him myself, not knowing that James Fenimore Cooper had been dead for 80 years. Now, for three days, I was told what I had ever meant. Since then, I have avoided explanations as much as possible. But when someone comes flying in from the other side of the world it's very rude to say: just read the books. Especially if he has apparently already done it.

"My hate for research has broken me too. The five Demons Princes' books play on planets of Rigel, a star like our sun, which I had invented, only younger of age. So young, in fact, that the planets might not have cooled down enough to have life on them. A scientist, who by the way claimed to have enjoyed the first book in the series, 'Star King', subtly drew my attention to this. He didn't want me to make a fool of myself any longer. I corrected the mistakes as good and as bad as I could, but my own fun in the Demons Princes' books was ruined forever".

"In general, that applies to all my youth work, although I made my debut so late that it may not even be possible to speak of it. I wouldn't want them all to be burned, but rather they wouldn't stay, haunt me. The friend who made me that painting encouraged me to publish what I had never wanted until then, despite the fact that I had already written dozens of stories. He compared writing to painting: you start with a cat. After twenty tries, it's a cat that can be recognized as such by others. Then you can throw away the first nineteen. My problem is that the first nineteen cats have been preserved, if you know what I mean. Set up. But if someone has taken another one from the basement, he invariably says: 'What a cute cat, why don't you make another one like that? When all I can see is that his whiskers are too short, you know?"

"You've got these people who don't want to go to the same place on vacation. Most readers are the same, even science fiction readers. But when I'm in one place for a long time, I want to leave, even if I thought of it myself. I've been told that that attitude may have cost me my place in the history of literature, but I'm sure it would have cost me my soul otherwise. Maybe my whole life. Because I would have died of boredom if I had had to write another story by Cugel. There was once talk of him becoming a comic book hero. At Marvel Comics, they were doing a whole series based on science fiction and fantasy heroes. They offered me five million. I said, please, without me. "Never heard anything again of it"

"I don't want to be sentimental, but actually it's thanks to Meulenhoff that I'm still at the word processor every morning at seven. They make a sport of it to publish the Dutch translation before the English version. Without them, 'Nachtlamp' and 'De Wilde Vaart' might never have made it. Now I often think, especially when I feel too

much pity for myself: the end is approaching, but in any case I'm going down while writing".

Interview also published in SF TERRA magazine 149/150

Translated from Dutch by Wil Ceron & JL Esteban

by Nicolas Bohbot Centre-Presse (local newspaper)

(from Utopia 98 convention at Futuroscope)

TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH

"I don't write for the common scoundrel.

-I am simply a writer

-I don't really appreciate being labeled as a science fiction writer, because there's a lot of stuff in science fiction that's not worth anything. 95% of SF books are written for teenagers. It's crude and badly done. I lump together movies like "Star Trek", "Godzilla" and "Jurassic Park". If that's science fiction, I'm out of there! »

SOURCE: http://pulpstories.free.fr/jackvance.html

Excerpts from the article by Philippe Monot

About his conversation with Jack vance at the SF convention UTOPIA – Futuroscope[8] France 1998

TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH

"I HAD DINNER WITH JACK VANCE... AND I DIDN'T EAT ANYTHING. »

Dinner with Jack Vance, Philippe Monot, Christophe Arleston, Paul Rhoads.....Excerpts :

.../...

- Jack, asks Christophe (Arleston), how would you like to see one of your books in comics?

Comics ? answers Jack. I don't like Comics; it's poor literature for teenagers.

Christophe doesn't really know how to react, but he keeps smiling. I step in and tell Jack that there's a clear difference between comic book production in the US and in Europe. Here, comics have been considered for some years as a means of expression in their proper form. It is not about Pulps. There are very talented authors and their "language" is truly appreciated. Christophe adds to this by mentioning some names, Bilal, Manara, Rosinsky...

Jack shrugs his shoulders; he doesn't know them.

I had in mind to write a screenplay based on the Demon Princes. Would you give your agreement to such a project?

I don't think so. I'm not interested.

Paul(Rhoads), who followed the conversation, nodded his head. We understand that it's no by now, but that it can be discussed later.

I talk to Jack about his very particular way of making his descriptions.When I do this work on my own, I often have the impression that the result is heavy, or that it doesn't correspond to what I want to express.

Words are full of meaning in themselves, he says. When you choose the right words, and put them together wisely, you quickly manage to express a precise idea. The important thing is the force (He said: "The Force") of the words. And their combination opens the mind to the desired feeling as well as to the visual.

.../...

[8] Futuroscope : Futuristic theme park located in Poitiers - France.

I want to know how Jack proceeds in the elaboration of his frames. When he has an idea, how does he develop it? How does he manage to structure a complex narrative, or at least one in which thousands of ideas intersect and manage to form a coherent whole?

- I take notes all the time. Every single idea has to be noted down, no matter how trivial. I may or may not use it, but it will not have escaped me. Sometimes one of these ideas leads me to a deeper reflection, and in this case, other ideas are added to it. That's what, most of the time, forms a narrative. You also have to know what you want to tell; it's not easy, but when you know it, the story flows naturally. Whether it's about a man's particular experience, you know where he's coming from and where you want him to come from. The trick is to put the story in order, to determine what is really important and what is incidental. Above all, the reader must always have something to discover. The character has to experience a lot of things so that the reader is perpetually hooked to the text.

Sometimes I feel, I say, that my characters gradually come to live a life of their own, and...

Jack starts laughing.

- So stop writing! Do something else. You are responsible for your character. He has to go where you want him to go. Are you the one who holds the pen, yes or no?

Maybe it's a view of the mind, I admit. What I mean is that you give a character a psychology, a behavior, ideals, a whole bunch of elements that make up his personality. But in the course of the story, the events he experiences can contribute to making him act differently.

- No, they do not. If you have chosen, for example, a character who hates space travel, you have to take that into account when he is forced to leave a planet. It's too easy, at that point, to make him change his mind for one reason or another.

He's right. I'm not digging deeper into this idea, it's not necessary. I realize that I have a plate of hors d'oeuvres in front of my nose, and I haven't touched it.

I tell Jack that some of his stories, I'm thinking of the Lyonesse trilogy in particular, are real labyrinths. Lots of events happen at the same time, or one after the other, which are so many little stories that intertwine, with each, it seems, their main character. I ask him how he finds his way through them.

- When I was twenty, I was trying to write very complex stories, with lots of characters and events. I used to tear my hair out - he laughs-. I could never do it, and I gave up very often. So I got into the habit of writing simple stories; a single plot, no more than two or three central characters. And these stories, I managed to finish them. Gradually, my stories grew in complexity; I allowed myself to attach to the main plot small things that grew more or less in size and fleshed out the story. It's a question of patience. Above all, I never hesitated to throw away texts that didn't satisfy me.

- The theme of revenge comes up very often in your stories, points out Christophe. Are you in favor of revenge?

- Not necessarily. But as I said earlier, you have to keep the reader on the edge of his seat. Revenge is a widespread human feeling, which also implies the theme of the quest. From that point of view, it's interesting. The whole cycle of The Demon Princes

revolves around revenge; Kirth Gersen wants to take revenge for the death of his parents. TheDP has been one of the most exciting stories for me to write.

- Why write footnotes? - It's Christophe again.

- Ho. Just for fun.

What about Baron Bodissey? I was asking. - Jack laughs.

- Well, what about Baron Bodissey?

-- There's never more than a few scattered references about him, just in the footnotes. Sometimes he's quoted by a character. But we don't know anything more about him. Did he ever want to make him a character in his own right?

- Well, no, he didn't. I think he's very good like that. I sometimes imagine what he likes, what he eats, where he's lived, what he's done... Above all, he wrote a life story in twelve volumes called Life; that's all I need to know about him.

I claim he has something of a spiritual guide. Vance's characters quote Baron Bodissey as if we were quoting Confucius or Descartes.

- Perhaps... he replies evasively, half a smile stretching a corner of his lips.

I won't know more; and I see around me that I am not the only one who is frustrated.

.../...I want to know what the decisive readings were for him (for Jack Vance, not for salmon in sauce). Was there one author who was particularly instrumental in giving him a taste for writing?

- I don't know... I read Verne's "Mysterious Island" more than ten times. I love Burrough, C.A. Smith, Lord Dunsany and P.G. Wodehouse. But I don't have a favorite author. At home, when I was young, there were no books. When I entered the College, I discovered with fascination a huge library. And from then on, I began to read everything I could get my hands on.

In the world of Cugel... I began.

And Jack noisily tapping on the table.

Philippe! he shouts.

Uh, yes? What is it?

CUGEL Cugel! he articulates it by imitating my way of pronouncing this name, namely with a G as in January. As it should be in French, since the G is not followed by a U.

Not CuGel! KIOUGUEL !

All right, Jack. Pardon me. Kiouguel. I forgot my question anyway.

Once he has finished laughing, Christophe asks:

- About Kiouguel, is the Dying Planet part of the Gaiana Area?

- The Gaian civilization has been extinct for millions of years when the sun of this planet began to die out. I have placed this age at the limit of the end of time. That is why the sun is dying, and the day is like an eternal twilight.

I ask him if he doesn't want to write new mystery novels in the style of Bad Ronald or Lily Street. He says no.

- Too much work for not enough money!

By Pascal Dupont, published on 19/11/1998

(French newspaper)

TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH

"Monument Vance"

Undisputed master of heroic fantasy, Jack Vance has just been awarded the Utopia prize in Poitiers.

MEETING

With forty titles over the past forty years, you have made a profession of imagining the future of the world. Has your vision changed?

You know, it's still a simple diagram: a constellation scattered throughout the galaxy, like the Gaian Reach, the last world I described. The beyond is populated by pirates, nomads, runaways...

They seem to have no choice but to conform or to disappear. In the future, peace and democracy seem very fragile...

But who cares about democracy? It only has to take care of itself!.... Honestly, the authors of SF are like children in a sandbox. To think that they can teach us about the world as it is today seems absurd to me. As for me, I don't venture to anticipate what will happen. And, contrary to what you say, the inhabitants of the Gaïan Reach do not try to dominate the nomad tribes. They can develop, if they want to.

You are seen as a moralist, a humanist. Do you still have hope?

I notice, like everyone else, that the world is in a depression, a hollow. There are real threats, with the proliferation of nuclear weapons or the emergence of nationalism. But I accept things as they are. Yes, I still have hope!

https://www.lexpress.fr/informations/le-monument-vance_631212.html

Originally published in Slash magazine No. 17 in 1998

TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH (by Patrick Dusoulier)

If there are masters of Science-Fiction, characters that are cited as references in the literary imagination, in all countries, Jack Vance is certainly one of them. So, when Slash saw the possibility of interviewing a " near-god-living ", can you imagine the excitement? We would especially like to thank France Ruault, without whom this interview would not have been possible under such conditions. Damien, then, who, as a true pro, reread the complete Vance book and tutored the author until late hours when the moon merges with the stars. Paul Rhoads, finally, a friend of Jack Vance, who refined and added his knowledge to this interview.

Paul Rhoads had a telephone appointment with Jack to ask him the questions. Jack Vance cheerfully answered the phone: "Here I am!". He seemed to take a childish pleasure in the idea of being interviewed and started the conversation himself as if it were a run or a game:

"Are you ready?".

Jack's voice is that of a tenor, soft and slightly singing. Born in California, he cuts some words in the local way (for example for "Them" he says "um"). He laughs a lot and often changes tone according to his overflowing mind, making me think of his famous prince-demon: Howard Alan Treesong (The Book of Dreams) with his multiple voices. With his sweet and dreamy look he suddenly takes on a falsely pompous air, which barely hides his laughter, to tell a joke; immediately afterwards he imitates a voice or asks a question in an innocent or clever way.

Paul Rhoads: I'm ready. Shall we go?

Jack Vance: Let's go!

You are a great traveler and your work shows a great sensitivity to the specific character of different places. What do you think are the most striking differences between Europe and the United States?

There is a sense of continuity in Europe. Europe stretches into the past. Also there are great differences between countries. What I like about Europe is that a small trip of 200 kilometers can put you in front of a radically different culture. The United States is more homogeneous. But that's not to say bad things about the United States, it's a wonderful place and you shouldn't forget its regional differences, but it's much less marked than in Europe. But I love America... You have to admit that its regional differences are getting blurred from year to year; in Europe too with the approach of the European Union. But I love the feeling of crossing a border and finding myself in a different culture, like between Italy and France; I love it!

What's your opinion of French science fiction?

I don't know anything about it... I don't consider Jules Verne as a science fiction writer. He's more of an engineer with a down-to-earth and unimaginative way of writing. As a child I read several times "The Mysterious Island". I was crazy about it!

And Italian science fiction?

I don't know anything about it... Except that Italo Calvino what a drag!

And Stanislas Lem?

I don't know who he is.

And Gabriel Garcia Marques? He wrote "Magic Realism" ...

Who? I don't know anything about all this chic and avant-garde stuff.

Who is your favorite author of the 20th century?

P.G. Wodehouse.

Your stories almost always happen in the future. However, compared to other science fiction authors, you don't care much about futuristic technology. And then you talk about contemporary problems such as the environment. How do your stories deal with the future and do they justify the name science fiction?

I never think about it. I don't like to talk about robots or aliens. It's like cheating at chess. If you want a robot that runs fast you turn the switch and it runs fast! If you want a hyper-intelligent alien, snap! He's hyper-intelligent. It's useless. My stories are about the development of mankind in different environments. I don't like the word science fiction.

I like stories about people in different circumstances and how those circumstances change their ideas. And I try to make my protagonists understandable to my readers who are not from 25 million AD or before Christ! I need to use a protagonist with whom they can identify, so that their reactions to this or that situation can match their own. Let's take the example of a sculptor: if the Academy of Art asks him for a statue of a man and he makes something that looks like a gigantic heap of worms, how do you want people who look at it to be able to identify with it? When I write about humanity I look for a link between my readers and my characters.

In the fifties science fiction writers gave the impression that man would soon colonize other planets. But so far this hasn't happened. Do you have your opinion on this subject?

I never think about it. I would like to say that I don't like to be called a science-fiction author! I don't care about any of this! I'm out of trends and fashions of any kind. Maybe there were people who thought they were going to live on Mars soon, but I never believed it. It's not reasonable. To discover planets around other stars you have to go there at the speed of light, and this is impossible for man. As for the planets of our own solar system, they are uninhabitable. It would take a huge deployment of resources to settle there, but for such an expense one needs a very strong motive! We do not have a strong enough motive to live on these planets. It doesn't make sense. We need the speed of light for these stories. We must also imagine that the problems posed by the different biologies of the planets will be solved so that we don't die of horrible diseases every time we land on one of them. These are conventions.

You often talk about childhood. You take children as protagonists and your heroes and criminals have often experienced tragedies in their childhood. Is it related to your own life or how important is this theme to you?

I don't know... I don't know... Everybody has a life that starts with childhood... It is impossible to separate a person from their childhood. I never asked myself the question in those terms. It certainly has nothing to do with autobiography. I use childhood to explain the development of my heroes. I let their past and their environment influence them.

Among your most fascinating characters are your villains. Often they are artists or they are motivated by creative impulses. Does this mean that evil is a source of creativity or that creativity is a source of evil?

No... Evil people are interesting because... Do I know some really bad people myself? I don't think so! Two maybe. It's easy to write about bad people, nobody knows any! Do you know any?

...Yes, my neighbor.

Ha! They exist, that's for sure! Stalin, the Marquis de Sade, Gilles de Rais, the Emperor Tiberius; they can all march in the front row of the Legion of Evil!

What is Evil? It is the essence of selfishness that is unleashed in the extreme, ignoring the feelings of others. How can you take pleasure in torture? It makes you shiver with horror even when you think about it! When I think about what Ivan the Terrible was doing... It's too awful, it's not understandable.

On the other hand, creativity is a passion that devours everything. The best aspects of life may come out of it. But maybe it makes the people it inspires put aside the feelings of others.

You often deal with politically sensitive and controversial issues. WYST presents a critique of equality, while TRULLION seems to approve of a permissive society. In CADWAL you propose the remedy of deportation for the very topical problem of immigration, yet your work clearly condemns slavery. How do you place yourself: left or right?

Neither, I am only myself. I am certainly not on the left. And I am not religious. I am against egalitarianism, but I hope that every human being who is born will have a chance to live a happy life. I'm against idleness, cheating, stealing your best friend, and all those nasty things that people do! Equality is a disease of society. Religion is the same... But the Catholic Church has nothing to do with egalitarianism, it is as hierarchical as possible. What I don't like are ideas that want to make people jump and walk to the rhythm of the same song. Everybody has to sing their own song... Sometimes you have to say, "Hey, what's that refrain you're bawling out there! I can't stand it! »

Is it true that the French colonial history of Algeria has inspired LES DOMAINES DE KORYPHON?(1)

No, it was an abstract idea. I simply realized that the title to any small piece of land, except in the far north or in completely inhospitable places, owes its origin to an act of violence. You just have to go far enough back in time. The American Indians

bemoaned having been thrown off their lands, but they did the same to other tribes before, etc., etc., until the first ones came through the Bering Strait.

And... Uh, they ejected the animals?

That's it. All the saber-toothed tigers are dead! But this book isn't one of my favorites... It's not bad in places, but it's not done properly.

THE DOMAINS OF KORYPHON and CADWAL seem to approve of colonialism. Is this correct?

I don't know what colonialism is. Is it simply that the most advanced societies impose their rule on the weakest? In CADWAL there are people who find a virgin world and want to keep it intact. It's like someone who has an island and doesn't want a scoundrel to ruin it.

Colonialism is a name for what human beings do. The Indo-Europeans colonized Greece, the Celts colonized France. These are things that happen! One society dominates another, then there is assimilation. In general, by colonialism we mean what England and France did in the 19th century. I don't see anything wrong with that. It is normal. Sometimes it's not right, sometimes it's good. Sometimes it's even very beneficial! Take India for example. When I travel to India I keep hearing: "Oh how much better it was with the English! Ten times better! "It's not the same in North Africa, but in Dakar and Morocco the French are always there! They never left, although I doubt that the Foreign Legion remains very popular in the Atlas Mountains! Such cases are so complicated, they give rise to so many ideas and theories, it is very difficult to judge them? Sometimes it's no, sometimes it's yes.

I remember a picture of a miserable little Vietnamese boy - he looked like he was 5 years old, all skinny and shriveled - who was carrying a huge 150 kilos Dutchman on his back across a river. The Dutchman's voluminous buttocks completely encompassed the Vietnamese boy's shoulders. This is colonialism. Is it good? Is it wrong? It is good for the Dutchman!.... And then, I guess it's good for the Vietnamese too. The Dutchman would give him a piaster to buy a small bowl of rice.

THE MURTH seems to be a condemnation of feminism. Is this impression accurate?

No, not a condemnation, but simply a satire. I am strongly in favor of women's rights. They have the right to equality in law. What I don't like are those naughty, dressed-up females! But I laugh at them.

Who was that woman? She was a writer... We were at the Herbert's (Frank). By the way, I gave her a little slap on the buttocks with my banjo - I don't remember in which key it was tuned - but it was like that, not bad. Then his lip began to tremble, his eyes flared. She said (in a low, penetrating voice), "Don't do that again Jack! ». I agreed!

I don't like it when people get too excited. But women have the right to make an effort to improve their condition.

One day I was with a group in a public building. Everyone had gone before me and a woman who was not in our group arrived and I kept the door open for her. So she said, "Don't keep doors open for me! "So I walked past her, but I always held the door open because otherwise it would have closed on her violently. But she always

refused to pass by, looking me in the eyes, her own eyes were saying, "You stupid bastard! ». She turned around and entered the building!

Some French critics claim that the Thaery country is inspired by the United States. What do you say about it?(2)

Thaery? What is it?

You don't know? In MASKE: THAERY, the country divided into counties...

Ah, I see... No, absolutely not.

Slavery and tenure often appear in your works. Is there a connection with U.S. history?

Absolutely not. This kind of thing comes from the depths of human beings. Maybe the Neanderthals held humans in slavery, who knows? England stopped slavery in the 18th century, didn't they? (3) In America it took a war. The Arabs have slaves even today. It's the same for sharecroppers, they are simply names for a person who depends on someone else for a living. In Russia there were serfs. No, it has nothing to do with America, it's the human race.

Can you explain why you were in favor of American intervention in Vietnam?

Of course I can. At the time communism had momentum. The Communists had taken China. With the Korean War we pushed them back. It seemed to me that we had to contain them on a global scale. I believed in the domino theory (that a Communist country would make its neighbors fall into Communism). I still believe that we missed the boat. If we wanted to wage war, we should have gone in the right direction and crushed them, instead of playing the flea market.

Today, I still believe that. Our policy was wrong. What was happening was horrible! At the time it was the communists who were relentlessly fighting against the weak democracies, a real flood of evil over the world. If we wanted to defend ourselves, we had to have the courage to fight.

It is impossible today not to have a nuanced opinion, but at the time we saw it as a fight to the death.

Are some of the maritime adventures in your books based on your own adventures?

No, absolutely not.

It seems that you are particularly interested in Irish mythology. Does it attract you more than other mythologies?

Yes, rather... But I love Russian myths! They are full of whimsy and imagination. Cu Chulainn does not interest me. All his stories about cattle rustlers are boring. I prefer fairies and ghost stories, but Russian myths are bewitching, like the house walking on hound's feet.

What about Greek myths?

Boring. It lacks that little stamp, a background of weirdness and savagery ... Except in some of them, like the one about the Medusa.

In THE CHASCH you wrote: "In Pera, nobody has the right to steal or rape except Naga Goho and his Gnashers". That's a hard one, isn't it?

It's a little satirical trick. It's part of the attributes of this society, in harmony with their ideas.

Is the enigmatic character who appears in the ALASTOR series Connatic?

Yes, I don't like to be too explicit. He is a benevolent tyrant, the little mouse or Santa Claus. He doesn't have the omnipotence of God, but he is there. He goes around in disguise, goes into bars and gets an idea of what's going on. I know it's impossible. It's hard to believe! I use it because I like the idea. But I know that it's impossible to reign over 3000 planets by going from bar to bar! It's an idea that doesn't bang its fist on the table but floats like a ribbon of smoke, like a dream: a nice man who goes here, there, he does good, he leaves. But if I had a splinter, I don't think the door will open all of a sudden and President Clinton will rush to fix me!

In Servants of the Wankh and other stories, you introduce official organizations of assassins that have a recognized place in society. What do you like about this idea?

Nothing, it's just for the shock. It's like in Clarges (ETERNAL LIFE) or it's a mechanism to deal with overpopulation. It's a play on words: "Tonight we invite our murderer to dinner! "At last... It's just what you might call a petty ruse of rhetoric.

At the end of the series DURDANE and LA GESTE DES PRINCES DEMONS the heroes are struck with melancholy: why?

It's because I myself am struck with melancholy at the end of a series...

Which of your heroes is your favorite?

I don't have a favorite... Cugel maybe. But he's not my favorite, it's just that he surprises me... I think it's rather myself that I admire for having written it.

Why don't you start again?

I don't think I can do it anymore. I'm very proud of Cugel's two books... Although I'm not happy with the first chapter of the first one. I would like to correct it. I like Navarth, the mad poet, very much. I identify with him! And there are women I love... Especially the girl who is in the same book, what's her name? Flir?

Don't you mean Jheral Tinsy?

No, one of the girls who came from her...

Drusilla Whales?

I don't remember, but Gersen meets her on the dock when he comes to find Navarth, you see?

That's Drusilla, Zan Zu from Eridu. She wears a black skirt and a brown jacket...

When I think of her it makes me shiver... She excites me... And then there is another girl in MONSTERS IN ORBIT. Her name is Jean Parlier. I admire her.

Did you like the TV version of MECHANT GARCON ?

No, I haven't seen it, but it was described to me. Maybe I should have seen it... In general, films and television dilute and reduce a book to nothing. I've never liked films based on my scribbles.

Are there other adaptations coming out?

Maybe a few, but I don't know. My agent tells me about them, but...

Why do you take different names: Jack Vance, John Holbrook Vance and Ellery Queen?

Because Ellery Queen gave me $3,000 a book. That was money then! In the contract I was required never to reveal that it was me who wrote them. Theoretically so I never took the name. Anyway, he took my good prose and stuffed it to death to make his own little soup.

John Holbrook Vance is reserved for my mysteries. I took the name Jack Van See for "First Star, I see tonight ". The strategy was to have a lot of names, to do different things and sell more, but it didn't work. I couldn't deliver. It's an unfulfilled idea.

Your more recent books seem to be a little different from the others. What do you think about that?

I don't know, ...I don't see that... I'm getting older, it's normal! I don't want to work on the same things again. I already did that in HENRI MEETS THE TIGER, so flute; now I'm doing something else!

Every year there's something new. But my interests change a little... But not much... Now there is less brilliance... But I don't know anything about it... I am more relaxed. In PORTS OF CALL "Escales dans les étoiles" (last published book) there are more funny things; I let speak quietly what is funny in my nature.

(1) : cf in Jacques CHAMBON's preface to the Guestbook or Butterfly of the Moon (Jack Vance, the great temple of science fiction)

(2) : Jacques GOIMARD in the afterword of Un tour en Thaery

(3) : Historical error, it is at the beginning of the XIX° century.

Interview of Jack Vance By Paul Rhoads and Damien Dhondt

Last addition : Wednesday 10 July 2013

Original in French: http://www.sfmag.net/spip.php?article10528

in English : http://pulpstories.free.fr/jvenglish3.html

Thanks to: ***Jacques Garin***

Interview with Jack Vance by Henri Loevenbruck and Alain Névant –

TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH

Musician, bon vivant, gifted with a fierce sense of observation, Jack Vance is an author whose art is difficult to define. Above all he is a storyteller, a lover of words and all the sensations they can awaken in the reader.

Fifty years of regular production on the bangs of S-F and Fantasy make him an atypical creator whose texts do not seem to have to suffer the outrages of time. Vance is, along with Isaac Asimov, one of the few writers crowned both for his Science-Fiction novels and for his detective novels. In 1950 his first novel, The Dying Earth (French title: *A Magic world*), was published, which is still only a collection of short stories about a dying Earth, but already the richness and exoticism of a fertile work, full of originality, can be seen. Later will come Cugel, Tschaï, Durdane, Lyonesse, and especially the Aire Gaïane, this human expansion through the stars so exciting to explore. In just a few sentences, Vance knows how to stir the reader's senses, ignite his imagination, taking him with him on a true Odyssey of space and time.

Five hundred meters away from Futuroscope and only one meter away from Jack Vance.The master of the future worlds that will never be, opened the door of his hotel room to us. Surrounded by Norma, his wife, and his disciple Paul Rhoads, Vance agreed to share some visions, but also some memories, with the readers of SF-MAG.

What were your main readings as a child, your influences?

Alice's books or those of Edgard Rice Burroughs? And later those of Clark Ashton Smith. In fact, when I was 10 years old, I subscribed to Hugo Gernsback's Amazing Stories, and I also read a lot of Weird Tales. Reading those stories, I was quickly taken on a journey of mystery, fantasy, magic, and science fiction - they were really good stories. Of course, I also read children's books, like Tom Swift's novels - I read them over and over again. And then there's also Wodehouse!

Did you read French novels?

Not many. I especially remember Jules Verne's Ile Mystérieuse (Mysterious Island). But Verne was never a real influence for me because I'm not fond of novels about technology. The story marked me, not the way it was told. On the other hand, my mother had the complete Dumas in 20 volumes. So I read The Three Musketeers, Twenty Years Later, The Viscount of Bragelone, The Count of Monte Cristo... They were superb adventures with a frenzied rhythm. I always admired and still admire his sense of reality in the narration, and maybe unconsciously it left an impression on me. For me, that's what makes a good novel.

As with Dumas, the theme of revenge seems to be a driving force for your stories?

Yes and no. In fact, revenge is more what drives my characters. The protagonist has to be motivated to get involved in the story. It can be gambling, money, anything and everything. But revenge is one of the simplest and most practical engines that exist. But I'm not personally obsessed with it. I am much more interested in the theme of Adventure in general.

And what is Adventure according to Jack Vance?

Adventure? It's a disaster that ends without anyone being killed. (Laughs) Adventure is escaping death.

Humor seems to be essential to you. Both in the way you are and in your novels. Where do you get it from?

Actually, I have less a sense of humor than a willingness to explore the absurdity of the human condition. I'm lucky to be able to notice the most absurd situations or elements of everyday life. I don't think laughter and humour can really be defined. They are too complex.

Cooking, religion, politics, music and language are also recurring themes in your work. What does man think about them?

Well, I'm Western, and I think American food is the compendium of all Western cuisines. In fact, in my opinion, American food is the best in the world. And what I prefer is a good home-cooked burger, prepared properly, with onion slices, salad, cheese and mayonnaise. Otherwise, I'm not a religious person, I'm neither from left nor right. I like Jazz and I play the banjo before I played the clarinet. Love is too vast! I love my shoes (Laughs). As far as language is concerned, I like linguistics, but I only speak English well. My favorite French word is saperlipopette, because it swings!

Do you like to create words?

I like to do this every other book, just to annoy my readers.

Do you make precise plans to write your novels?

Do you? That's a good idea, I'll have to think about that. (Laughs) No, I write at night, as it comes to me. Every time I've wanted to build something, I've been disappointed by the result. It's better, for me, not to be too precise and let the images that come to me speak for themselves.

First edition: Science-Fiction Magazine #1 - January-February 1999.

Excerpts of radio broadcast WDR Text version - Hanno Ehrler (Germany)

Note: the text below presents only Vance's words and comments

TRANSLATED FROM GERMAN

"Mirror is the time of unreality"

The worlds of the American science fiction author Jack Vance

Speaker 1

Jack Vance was born in 1916 in San Francisco and has been living for a good forty years in neighboring Oakland, in a house he designed himself, surrounded by mighty redwood trees. Vance took an early interest in astronomy, later studied physics, then journalism at the University of California and played the jazz trumpet on the side. His first short story was published in 1945, his first book in 1950, and since then he has written numerous short stories and more than thirty novels.

Original sound track Vance --- 0'52''

OVERVOICE I couldn't sell enough, back when I got married, so I became a carpenter and built houses - for a few years until the money I earned from the stories was enough. Those were just jobs, without meaning to me. I was with an engineering company for a while, up in the mountains. I built mines, learned to weld and various construction techniques, but I never worked in an office, never inside, never in my life. I was on plantations, I harvested fruit and all kinds of things. I had to do this often, although it was no fun, because one thing was always completely clear to me: I wanted to be a writer. What I liked most in writing was independence. I was my own boss.

Speaker 1

In the USA Jack Vance is known and famous as a science fiction author. However, he does not like the label science fiction, although almost all his books bear the traits of this genre. They are written as adventure novels, with heroes, love affairs and the motives greed for money, revenge, jealousy and striving for power. They are set on distant planets, and thanks to advanced technology, spaceships fly all over the galaxy. Extraterrestrial beings also appear, such as the Asutra, who inhabit the planet Kahei.

Original sound by Vance --- 1'26''

OVERVOICE Normally I avoid including so-called aliens or aliens in my stories. I do this very rarely, firstly because it is a kind of cliché among so-called science fiction authors; everyone uses aliens. Secondly, it is much too easy to construct a counterpart of humans and aliens. Humans land on a world, and suddenly these strange-looking

creatures come out of the mountains and everybody is screaming, look, look, there are aliens over there. I think it's childish to do something like that. It's so easy for a writer to manipulate an alien creature to fit into his story.

If it really happens that people come to a world where there is another intelligent life form, I think it would be very confusing. They wouldn't know how to deal with this life form. It would be extremely complicated to communicate with it; you would probably never understand each other, and that would create mistrust. Two different life forms would probably never be happy together. They might be able to cooperate, but it would take many, many years before the two civilizations could interact with each other easily.

Speaker 1

In his novel "The Asutra" Jack Vance draws the picture of an extraterrestrial life form. The insect-like, strange creatures are the subject of scientific research, a scientific problem, so to speak. For reflection on science is the actual subject of the book. The two protagonists Etzwane and Ifness discuss methods of research and their meaning, the evaluation of facts, and ethical and moral questions on the basis of the aliens. There are no simple answers, the secret of the Asutra remains unsolved.

For Jack Vance is interested in humans, whether he writes about extraterrestrials, whether he stages chases in space or psychodramas on foreign planets. Such clichéd adventure scenes serve as narrative slides, as suspenseful surfaces for thoughts and discussions about human civilization, about science, art and philosophy, about social and economic structures.

Original sound track Vance --- 0'50''

OVERVOICE I began to write about people and civilizations and how they develop and change, how people emigrate to another world, live there alone for a while and then are visited by people again. When the human race actually spreads out in our galaxy at some point, there will be small communities and societies that are among themselves, evolving in their own way, isolated in a way, and forgotten by the others for a few thousand years. There will be changes then. These people will have changed their relationship to life and their views. That is what I like to do, to portray these changed and however further developed societies.

speaker 1

Most of Jack Vance's stories are set on the same stage; it is called "gaian territory". The time: thirty thousand years in the future. The place: our galaxy, which has now been colonized by humans. On many planets, independent civilizations have developed, simple or eccentric, esoteric, technical or decadent, in any case always noticeably influenced by the shape of the world on which they are located, by landscape, climate and other environmental conditions.

Jack Vance describes the behaviour and rites of the people, as well as countless details: architecture, furniture, dishes, lighting, clothing, jewelry, art and music. The short story "At the Last Minute", for example, lives from the design of a fictitious musical instrument, and a

ludicrous dress code makes life difficult for the hero in "The Book of Dreams". The descriptions are precise and vivid, as well as an expression of the determinism that runs through the writings of Jack Vance: The civilization and culture of a group of people, their behavior, their customs, their language and their aesthetic sensibilities are all determined to a large extent by the conditions of the environment in which they live.

For example Pardero, protagonist in the novel "Marune, Alastor 933". He has lost his memory, has been taken to a foreign planet and can be identified as an inhabitant of the planet Marune because of his behavior and psychological reactions. He returns home, where life forms and customs are closely related to the daily routine, i.e. the shape of the solar system.

quote from Vance --- 1'31''

OVERVOICE There is a whole series of tacit agreements among all so-called science fiction authors. One of them is that a spaceship can fly very fast, faster than light. Of course we know from science that this is impossible. But for the stories to work, you simply have to assume that spaceships can fly so fast - or you can't write such a story. There is another agreement, which is really ridiculous, although I use it myself, namely that language, the language of the earth, is understood everywhere. This is nonsense, because we all know that language is of course the first thing that changes when a society is isolated. The way of communicating would change quickly, and if people from the earth came there later, they would not be able to communicate with the people there. But it would be a hell of a thing to write a story that takes this language problem into account. You would have to have interpreters or computerized translators or something like that. That would slow down the story incredibly. So I use the convention that all people, no matter where they come from, can understand that they are using the same language. This is illogical, but useful.

speaker 1

Even if he neglects the problem of communication for the sake of the plot, language is a central cultural feature for Jack Vance, like customs and traditions, like architecture, furniture and art. Vance explains grammatical structures of a fictional language in footnotes as if the novel were a scientific text. He simulates them with antique-sounding or freely invented phrases, with sequences of syllables made up of parts of different words, and with neologisms that are loaded with associations or even seem completely alien. In 1992 a Jack Vance encyclopedia was published, which lists and comments on several hundred of the author's word creations and formulations.

Finally, language is the subject of the novel "The War Languages of Pao" from 1958, in which the peace-loving and self-sufficient population of the planet Pao speaks a common language. Certain interest groups now want to use the introduction of new languages, a technical, a scientific and a warlike one, to transform the character of the population into a militant aggressive one - which they succeed in doing during the course of the novel. The book is based on the theory of linguistic relativity, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. It states that the formal structures of a language decisively determine the structures of consciousness, thinking and social action.

Original sound by Vance --- 0'40''

OVERVOICE I have written a book based on the idea that the ownership of every piece of land in the world is based on an act of violence. You buy or inherit a piece of land, legally, but if you go back far enough in history, someone has tricked, chased or slaughtered someone else to take possession of that piece of land, except perhaps in the tundra, which nobody wants. But you can prove with every piece of land that at some point in time the ownership rights were acquired by an act of violence.

speaker 1

Perhaps it is a piece of processing of one's own history as an American when Jack Vance takes up this theme in the 1974 novel "The Grey Prince". White-skinned colonists have subjugated the former blue-skinned settlers on the planet Koryphon, robbed them of their land and made them servants. There is also the island of Szintarre, which is home to an intellectual and, in contrast to the population of the continent, rich population. These people keep a semi-intelligent way of life as slave-like servants, the so-called Erjinen.

Parallels to American history and present are hardly to be overlooked: The conquest of the American continent, the racial problem between the white-skinned and the blue-skinned, who in the course of the novel self-confidently emancipate themselves; the problem of a social divide between rich and poor and north and south.

(...)

Speaker 1

Jack Vance's novels bear the label of science fiction. But unlike Stanislaw Lem's allegories of depth psychology, Herbert W. Franke's far-reaching predictions of scientific discoveries, or William Gibson's nightmarish cyberspace adventures, Vance does not seek to project technology and society into a distant future. He seems more connected to the genre's centuries-old roots, to the utopias of Thomas Morus, Tommaso Campanella or Francis Bacon. He creates detailed images of societies, whereby the future, the alien planet, the extraterrestrial life form are the stage sets for these designs.

There Vance unfolds archaic structures, class systems, anarchist societies and asks questions: what are the conditions of civilization, how do differently socialized people communicate, how are different population groups with diverging interests able to live together?

The End

The 25-minute audio report was broadcast by WDR on May 17, 1999.

www.verlag-hanno-ehrler.de

Dear readers,

it was not possible to get the audio contribution for the website itself Reason given by WDR: "Unfortunately, we are not able to meet your request for a transfer to your Internet pages. Please understand that the WDR does not grant the appropriate permissions due to the large number of individual requests. This has legal reasons, but also journalistic ones.

Many thanks to Dr. Ehrler for the permission to publish the text version of the article free of charge!

Andreas Irle, August 2016

The origin of Vance's audio recording is not specified.
Complete German text of the broadcast at:
http://editionandreasirle.de/?page_id=253#hehrler

Italian SF magazine Delos #62

TRANSLATED FROM : English to Italian to french to English

Interview with the master

After a maneuver worthy of the most enterprising assaults, Baccalario and Lingeri (Delos journalists) have succeeded in an almost unprecedented undertaking: they have interviewed one of the greatest - and most reserved - science fiction writers of all time, a true living myth for many (of which we are): Jack Vance.

John Vance II: Last night I conducted your interview. The scene: my father and I were sitting at our dining room table. A fire was crackling in the fireplace. My children (a three and a half year old girl and a one and a half year old boy) were running around shouting and playing. Dad was sipping bourbon while I was drinking a glass of wine. My wife and mother were in the kitchen preparing paella for the evening.

Delos: What do you think of Italy? We found many words that sounded Italian to us in your stories! Have you ever been to Italy or would you like to visit your country with your family?

Jack Vance: My wife and I visited Italy in 1950. We liked the countryside, but we were not very interested in the cities. We stayed three or four months in Positano. There are places we would still like to visit, like Sicily and Ischia. I like the Italian language, the words have beautiful sounds.

Delos: Reading some of your books (especially The Secrets of Cadwal and Lyonesse), we found a kind of ironic disgust with religious institutions. Is this true? Do you believe in God?

Jack Vance: I am not religious at all.

Delos: What is the secret of your beautiful names?

Jack Vance: I work diligently to make sure that the names resonate with the particular situation or mood of the story. The naming of the story must be consistent with the structure, or mood of the plot.

Delos: Do you consider yourself a traditionalist? We have read some of your manuscripts written with three different colored pens (!). What do you think about computers and technology?

Jack Vance: I don't consider myself a traditionalist, or anything else. I am myself! I'm used to writing with colored inks because I find them fun. In a rather strange way, I'm focused on what I write. I like to decorate the pages with colored ink drawings. It was just a whim at first, but I've always liked it. As far as computers are concerned, I now use one. I find it extremely practical. Technology has its place. It shouldn't overwhelm other aspects of life. I find technology and the progress of knowledge fascinating.

Delos: When you plan a new book, what is your first objective: the psychology of the protagonists, the general plot or the background of the story? Your moods seem so real that we think they've been studied at length before you start writing. Are we wrong?

Jack Vance : I don't have a particular method for writing. I often start a new story by obeying a particular mood. I just start thinking about a situation and immediately the text is born. Wyst, for example, was born while I was trying to create an atmosphere that would be the absolute definition of the state of assistance. The story developed from this idea. For Lyonesse, the story emerged from the idea of the Elder Islands, a place where stories like the Arthurian legends would be real, and where magic would not be dead yet.

Delos: In the five years that we've been dedicated to the development of science fiction and role-playing, we've realized that in Italy, the first thing a novice author has to do is to be politically committed. Do you have the same problem in the United States? Do your politicians seek to interfere in the world of fantasy and science fiction?

Jack Vance: Absolutely not.

Delos: All of your characters except Suldrun never stop twice in a row in the same place. How important are freedom and travel to you?

Jack Vance: In order to make a variety of scene changes, the characters move from place to place. It's fun to go from one place to another! I've never felt the need to write a static story with a unique atmosphere.

Delos : When and why did you decide to become a writer?

Jack Vance : The idea grew in me. I had several ideas. I thought I could have become a scientist, but I found that job too limiting. When I went to university, all the science students were not only boring, but also thought in too rigid and linear a way. The researchers I knew, at least, were extremely competent in their field, but they were not very open-minded. I would never have wanted to spend my whole life with people like them. Also, I didn't want to work for someone else, I wanted to be independent and rely only on myself, and so I decided I wanted to be a writer.

Delos: And now... what is the responsibility of being one of the masters of dreams and science fiction?

Jack Vance: I never thought about it.

Delos: Do you prefer to be considered as a youth or adult writer?

Vance: I generally write for intelligent people. I don't write for children or teenagers. I write for people with developed intelligence, regardless of their age.

Delos: Have you ever had any film contacts, or has any Hollywood producer ever wanted to direct a screenplay based on one of your books?

Jack Vance: Once, at the beginning - around 1949 or 1950 - I sold a story by Magnus Ridolph to Twentieth Century Fox and worked on it for a while, about four months, developing the plot. That's when the producer became executive producer of the whole studio, and put my project on a shelf. He said, "Don't call me, we'll get back to you," which I didn't mind. The studio wasn't working well; I didn't feel comfortable being in that environment and was happy that I felt "relaxed". Immediately after this

work, Norma (his wife, N.D.T.) and I made our first trip to Europe. The money was wonderful, of course.

Delos: While reading "Araminta Station" we met your (great) love for nature. Do you live in a big city or in a country village? Do you have pets?

Jack Vance: I don't have any pets, although my wife has a few cats. We live on the outskirts of Oakland in a semi-suburban atmosphere. I would have preferred to live in the country, but we tried it and it didn't work.

Delos: Gary Gygax's first role-playing game, Dongeons & Dragons, was inspired by the world of the Dying Earth. What do you think of the JdR and games in general?

Jack Vance: I've never played it. I have no opinion.

Delos: What are your new projects?

Jack Vance: I'm currently working on a sequel to Ports of Call. The story, called Lurulu, is progressing very slowly, but I like it very much. I have no idea what will happen after Lurulu.

Delos: Is there one of your characters who looks more like Jack Vance than any other?

Jack Vance: I especially like Cugel!

Delos: Here's the last question: Tell us something you've never said before!

Jack Vance: (Silence).

Italian translation: Bruno Para

Source: http://vance.jack.free.fr/jackvance.html

Thanks to : Silvio Soso – DELOS ITALIA

.

by Michael Ivorra- Released in © Faery 4 special JV

TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH

At 85 years old and having now lost his eyes, Jack Vance continues to write with his customary verve. This extraordinary man, a great traveller, remains impressively quick-witted, as he demonstrated when he came to France for the first Utopia festival during a memorable question-and-answer session punctuated by gentle irony.

He was kind enough to grant us a short interview.

Of all the characters you have invented, one of the most appreciated is undoubtedly Cugel. Cugel has inspired several short stories by French authors, and has even been the subject of a "sequel" written by an author other than you, Michael Shea. How did it go?

He asked me if he could write a sequel to Cugel, and I said yes, I really didn't think he would. It completely slipped my mind... but he did. And two or three years later, my agent called me and said that some guy was submitting a manuscript in Cugel's universe and I said "OK". So I said, "Oh, yeah, that's right." Then the book came out, but I don't want anything to do with it. I don't like it.

In all of your books, the characters express themselves very carefully, you get the impression that they turn their tongue seven times in their mouths before they risk speaking. Your heroes are very careful about what they say, as if words are dangerous. Do you...

[before the question is asked] Yes. Yes, I do. Yes, I do. [Chuckles]

I was going to say, do you have a lot of lawyer friends?

I don't talk to lawyers. (laughs) No, I read a lot of books, a lot of dialogue. It's just a lot of work. And I like to write this kind of dialogue, it's fun.

Your characters are great travelers, "Ports of Call" or other books present people who travel through the universes, but who often don't have a real purpose. What are your characters looking for in life?

In most of my books, the journey itself is a goal. You can't have a goal when you travel - there is no final goal, it's just life. The only thing that interrupts the narrative is when the crew changes, the ship is sold, another captain takes command... But the ship goes on, it never stops, whether there are people on board or not... it goes on and on and on and on.

We're getting closer to the tales of yesteryear - but usually the environment, the universe, survives the differences. Sometimes an idea comes to my mind and upsets everything; nothing is ever defined. Sometimes I prefer to plan the story, but this new idea forces me to go back in the story to correct its path. You can't say that there is a fixed rule. Although your universes are populated by fantastic creatures and

landscapes, very heterogeneous, they are part of a whole, in a way, since they are grouped together in the "Gaean reach" .

Yes, I don't know if the term "Reach" is accurate but it seems to me quite appropriate, the "Gaean Reach" defines an area in which people can travel without encountering too many danger, without encountering another species for example. A little bit like today, you can go a little bit everywhere in Europe, in the UK, in the Mediterranean, without fear of being attacked and kidnapped. This is the « French Reach ». It used to extend as far as Africa - but today « French reach » does not extend any further. ...only to France! (laughs), yes, and we could consider adding Martinique, islands like Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon... It's still less dangerous than the Gaean Reach!

No, I don't think the Gaean reach is that dangerous, as long as you mind your own business. The danger is more at the borders of the Area... but as the Gaean reach gets bigger and bigger, like it or not... it's like a big amoeba, subconsciously absorbing everything around it. People are always looking for new worlds, more beautiful, bigger worlds. And there are very few of them. Maybe one world in a thousand where humans can survive, and one world in ten thousand where conditions are perfect. I mean, I don't know if those are good numbers, but whatever. Hence the importance of the explorer. In those days, you can get a small individual ship for really cheap - well, used anyway. But no spacecraft can last long with wear and tear, vibrations. Of course, the spaceships have to pass through other dimensional spaces, maybe there are also particles in these spaces that play on this wear, but it is the only way to travel faster than light.

You've been looking for a scientific explanation for space travel?

Yes, astrogation is done by means that I've thought about but never defined.

Hard science is something you're not interested in, though?

I have a very good scientific background, you know, maybe better than some pseudo-scientific writers, but I'm not interested in using it in a story, it's boring and from a scientific point of view it's a bit silly. You can reasonably project yourself into the future of 5 years, maybe 10, but things are moving so fast... What's 100 years, 500 years, 1000 years from now... who can predict these things? And I think mechanical objects are... stupid, pointless. I don't care what a robot can do, even if it talks or is intelligent, it doesn't capture my imagination.

Is that why your spaceships are so close to the ships of old? The alien planets visited by your heroes are not so far away from our good old planet Earth after all.

Oh, they look like Earth because you had to explore 10,000 planets to find this place! The explorer will find a world that is close to nothingness, a planet covered with sulphur, a world that will be too hot, another world that will be too cold... He will look at 10,000 worlds before he finds one that is similar to Earth. The Gaean Reach isn't full of Earth-like planets, it's close to the work of the gold prospectors.

Sometimes, indeed, the explorer is going to make a lot of money, and sometimes he's going to get cheated. It takes time anyway. It's fascinating work. But even if he finds this wonderful new planet, it may be inhabited by monsters, dinosaurs, flying warships... It could simply be poisonous plants, a place where the pollen is so poisonous

that you drop dead at the first breath! Human beings could live there, but if you take certain measures. My books are about people who have to live in places like this.

Your worlds are populated by wonderful or dangerous creatures, but despite the fact that your texts are very evocative, you don't just go straight to the "climax" of the story, but try to illustrate the atmosphere of the story, not stick to the script.

Were there any illustrators that you particularly liked, who conveyed the atmosphere of your stories well in your eyes?

Yes, in "Galaxy" magazine, for example, on the story "The Dragon Masters". His name was Jack Gaughan and his dragons were very, very beautiful. He won me a prize for that story. If it wasn't for his illustrations I might not have gotten that trophy - but his drawings were so striking that you couldn't help but read.

You said earlier that you don't like long descriptions of characters, but your descriptions of landscapes are often detailed, though. Do you think your worlds would fit well on the screen - in the form of movies, video games?

Well, in these situations, you trade your artistic control for money, but sometimes it's the cost of survival.

Some writers, like Raymond Feist or Pratchett, have been directly involved in writing screenplays for derivative games...

Actually, I'm not really interested in that kind of thing. I prefer to focus on what I know how to do and what I like to do, and let other people do what they're good at...

Do you still have any texts hidden in your drawers, unpublished books or short stories that have not been published?

No... actually I do, I have texts I wrote when I was 13... sheets and sheets covered with the handwriting of a 13-year-old kid, poems... but not things that would be publishable!

Faery 4 May 2001 - Nestivequen France

By permission of Michael Ivorra

("title" by P. Dusoulier who acted as intermediary)

From : Norma Vance
To : Jérôme Dutel
Sent : Thursday, December 05, 2002.

How, and when, did you get the idea of the plot for Languages of Pao?Did you have at the time some knowledge of linguistics?Did you know the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis? If so, how did you come to know of it?

JV: I have always been a student of linguistics. I read everything available on the subject. Yes, I know of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

How would you rate this novel among your total literary production?

JV: I like the novel, but I do not wish to rate it. Languages of Pao is superior in some aspects to other of my works, but the others are superior in other aspects.

At the end of the book, Pao's destiny seems to be fully settled (integration of the neo linguistic enclaves through common use of Pastiche): is this your inner conviction? In which direction, would you say, could Pastiche evolve once this integration has been done?

JV: As you probably realize, this question is too complex for the time I can spend on it.

Pastiche has done its most important work, but as with any other world the future of Pao is uncertain and might develop in any number of directions.

The question of language is a recurrent theme in your books (Sulwen's Planet, Gift of Gab among many others): does this represent for you a theoretical concern, a linguistic interest, a plot material, a philosophical questioning about the Other and Man?

JV: I am not clear on what is meant by 'the Other'. As mentioned before I have always been interested in linguistics. Spengler and the magnificent structure of his thesis has always been a favorite of mine, even though his concepts may not be absolutely germane in certain cases.

In a similar way, several of your characters are, or become by necessity, linguists. When you compare such characters with those who adopt more adventurous professions (policeman, effectuator, spaceman), what is your feeling?

JV: I have no answer for this question… You will note, however, that for the sake of simplicity, I assume that the same language is spoken across the Gaean Reach. This, of course, does not represent reality.

Do you speak (or at least have some familiarity with) other languages than American?

JV: Yes. French, Spanish, German, Japanese.

What is your opinion of artificial languages such as Esperanto?

JV: They may be efficient and conceivably useful; at the same time they seem sterile. I can't imagine myself using them.

You said in an interview that you like, every two or three books, to make up neologisms to intrigue and surprise your readers: how do you invent those words, and how do you see their future?

JV: I imagine a word which seems as if it belongs in a dictionary. It looks as if it is a real word, but when a search is made it isn't there. This is a capricious and frivolous exercise on my part. But if a word became more than frivolous, I would not object.

A last one. Have you heard of René Daumal? What do you think of Georges Orwell, 1984 and Newspeak?

JV: I don't believe I have heard of René Daumal; not fond of Orwell; don't know 'newspeak'.

Comment

Although Vance has, in accordance with his habits, chosen to elude (first part of question 1) or bypass (question 2) a significant number of questions and his answers are mostly lapidary, it seems possible to extract some very important elements from this questionnaire :

-interest in linguistic questions (with the mention of Spengler, Sapir and Whorf) ;

-the limited role of the pastiche (which would force to envisage a future much less positive for Pao than the one that the end of the novel seems to indicate);

-the foreseeable lack of knowledge of Daumal but the more unexpected lack of knowledge of Orwell (Patrick Dusoulier, who acted as intermediary for this questionnaire, nevertheless remarks: "I'm sure Jack read 1984, but he obviously forgot! I also think that Jack read relatively few novels in his life after all. He preferred to write them! »).

This interview was conducted in 2002 by Frenchman Jerome Dutel (through P. Dusoulier) to accompany his thesis entitled: "From Linguistic Fictions to Linguistics Fiction : a Definition Based on A Night of Serious Drinking by René Daumal (1938),1984 by George Orwell (1949) and The Languages of Pao by Jack Vance (1957)"

Source: personal file from Jerome Dutel (France)

Interview by Kathie Huddleston

Jack Vance is restless to continue building one Big Planet after another

Few can deny the impact Jack Vance has had on the fields of science fiction and fantasy. According to The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, Vance is "a landscape artist, a gardener of worlds" with "a genius of place." That genius has led him to write incredible tales about amazing worlds for over 50 years.

Born as John Holbrook Vance in 1916, Vance held down a variety of jobs before he published his first story, "The World Thinker," in 1945 in TWS. As the author of over 60 novels, Vance is credited with helping to define the genres of science fantasy and the planetary romance. Significant series include The Dying Earth, Big Planet, Gaean Reach and Lyonesse. He is presently working on a sequel to his recent novel, Ports of Call, called Lurulu. Many of his works have been reprinted in the Vance Integral Edition in their original form.

Vance has won nearly every science fiction and fantasy award possible, including the Hugo, Nebula, Edgar and World Fantasy awards. He also received the prestigious SFWA Grand Master Award in 1996.

Science Fiction Weekly chatted with Vance about his beginnings as a writer, his upcoming novel and his love of jazz music.

Back when you were a kid, did you ever imagine the world would be like it is today?

Vance: I don't want to insult you so quick in the interview, but that's a question which doesn't have any sensible answer, really, 'cause as a kid, I want to say, everybody speculates about all kinds of worlds that they're going to grow into. But I hardly thought about it. I thought that automobiles were going to have mufflers and go fast and airplanes were going to fly fast. I knew space travel was imminent, but I didn't do too much speculating.

Did you always want to be a writer?

Vance: Yeah. Not because I have any great creative instinct. It's just I wanted to get myself in a line of work where I didn't have a boss, where I didn't have to show up any place at any particular time. And after a lot of fooling around I finally made it stick. I never worked in an office in my life. It seems to limit you; when you're working in an office, you're a creature in a small cell under somebody's supervision and surveillance. But I've sure worked at jobs where I have been under inspection. I was a carpenter for a time and everybody watches what you do. In fact, almost every job you get somebody watching you.

Even the job you have now as a writer.

Vance: I don't care about that. I may have worried about that when I was very young, but when I started selling stories I didn't think about it at all. I just wrote what I felt like writing since they seemed to sell. I never made lots of money at it, but I sold

enough. I never wrote for the public. Never. If I had, I would have been writing Star Treks.

What was the writing and publishing climate like when you started writing?

Vance: Very hard to crack. Hard to get into and you couldn't make any money at it. I worked for half a cent a word. I'm not a fast writer to begin with, so for the first few years I had do other things. As I mentioned, I was a carpenter for a time. Then I worked for a company that put in building partitions in offices. A pretty good job. I had a van to myself and I could run around more or less on my own time and slap together these partitions. About as good a job as you can get, I guess. It was easy. It's simple enough, putting something on a Lego. So the carpentering was a lot harder work, really. It takes a lot more out of you both physically and mentally, you know—you have to be on the alert against mistakes and because you have a foreman always breathing down your neck. You've got to produce or you get laid off.

Did you have any influences when you started writing?

Vance: Well, I think everything I've ever read contributes to the background from which I write. But, for instance, when I was awfully young, I read all the Oz books. They were an enormous influence on me. And then there [were] the Edward Stratemeyer fiction-factory writers. [Howard R. Garis and other writers] had a pseudonym of Roy Rockwood and [they] wrote different kinds of science fiction stories. [They] wrote Through Space to Mars and Lost on the Moon and The Mystery of the Centre of the Earth. That kind of stuff. These were really, I believe, the first true science-fiction stories that were ever published. This is, if you want to discount Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, which were never intended to be science-fiction stories. They were intended for different motives or different feelings. H.G. Wells was a philosopher and Verne, I think, was an engineer. I think Verne's stories were a mixture of engineering stories and adventure stories, whereas H.G. Wells had philosophical axes to grind. But I'm not a student of either one of those writers. That's just my general impression. But Roy Rockwood, it was science fiction for the sake of science fiction. Later, I loved P.G. Wodehouse. I thought he was a marvelous writer. I still do to this day. I think he hasn't been appreciated enough for his magnificent creativity and his beautiful writing. Oh, they laugh at him, but they don't take him seriously because he seems frivolous. He did what he set out to do and he did it beautifully.

Then there was a writer called Jeffrey Farnol, who wrote in the early '20s. He wrote magnificent adventure stories, which I read in my teens, I guess. I was fascinated by their mastery of atmosphere and pace, excitement and derring-do. He's dated a little bit. He's kind of sentimental in his attitudes towards ladies and old people. He's very courtly. He's not as well known now as he used to be. He wrote The Amateur Gentleman, which became a movie. Those are two men that I admire.

Then there was Clark Ashton Smith, who wrote for Weird Tales and who had a wild imagination. He wasn't a very talented writer, but his imagination was wonderful. Also, Edgar Rice Burroughs. I don't think he had any influence on my writing at all, but I loved his work when I was young. Especially the Barsoom books. Burroughs could generate atmosphere, especially the Barsoom books.

These are just the tip of the iceberg, because I read and read and read. I read everything. I'd never been published when I was young. I was an omnivore at reading, so that everything I ever read contributed. There was a writer in the '20s called Christopher Morley, who I remember a little bit of, who had some influence on me, but I couldn't tell you what it was.

You broke big ground by helping to define the genres of science fantasy and the planetary romance. You've had a major influence on other writers. What do you think about the impact you've had on the field?

Vance: I don't think about it. I'm not concerned. I'm not particularly impressed. That doesn't mean to say, well, I'd rather have it this way than not. I don't have much vanity. I just know what I do. I just do because I'm capable of doing it and do it easily without any pretentiousness. If this happens all it means is that I am good at my work, which evidentially I am. I must say at this convention [Vance was Writer Guest of Honor at this year's NorwesCon 2002], they flattered me. This flattery has been rather slow in coming. I think all of sudden late in life now I'm getting some credit for what I've done. Which is gratifying, but it's kind of a little late. I'd much rather have it come with some big checks when I was much younger [laughs]. As far as this influence you're talking about, it doesn't affect me one way or another.

Do you see it though when you read other science fiction?

Vance: I don't read other science fiction. I don't read any at all. I haven't been to a movie since somebody gave me free tickets to Star Wars, which I went to. It's just I have an utter revulsion to being part of an audience. Sitting there in an audience and everybody sniffling at once and everybody laughing at once. Everybody's valves being turned on at the same time. I just feel like I'm going to some mass prostitution. I feel soiled sitting in an audience.

I do read books. I suppose it's more or less the same thing, but at least I'm alone and I'm an individual. I can stop anytime I want, which I frequently do. But I just despise mass media. As I say, I never ever look at science fiction. I don't even know what's going on. I know [Robert] Silverberg, of course, but I haven't read any of his stuff. And Poul Anderson, who was a dear friend of mine, I read one of his stories once because he happened to be in a little book produced by Ballantine. There were four stories in it. One was by me. But essentially the book was Poul's and mine, and Poul had a very good story in there. It dealt with some mermaids and his command of the underwater life was beautiful to me.

What do you read now?

Vance: Murder mysteries. I read them through the cassettes I get from Sacramento. I order them and I have my special favorites that I like. My favorite is a lady called M.C. Beaton who writes about a Scottish village up in the northwest coast of Scotland and has just wonderful books. Her protagonist is Hamish Macbeth, the village constable. She's a marvelous writer. There's an element of humor in her writing.

Anne Perry writes books of Victorian England. I kind of like her writing, even though this last book I read of hers, called Half Moon Street, I didn't like at all. She has a bad habit of fluffing out her work with chapters of dialogue that don't push the story

forward. It just looks like she has to put the words in the book, so she just has everybody talking to everybody else. It's done beautifully. You don't realize that she's not doing anything except having people talking to each other. But if you're critical about this, you'll notice.

I kind of even like old Agatha Christie. There's something kind of honest about her. She didn't make any pretenses of being a great writer or anything.

John MacDonald is a good writer. I don't like these sex episodes in every book. I think they ruin the books. They're just totally unnecessary. Every one of his books has a steamy chapter in there where you can see the whole process is going on. And it's totally unnecessary. I feel ashamed for him that he has to put a certain amount of sex in his books. Aside from that, he's a wonderful writer.

What makes mysteries more interesting to you than science fiction?

Vance: I don't know. I don't know. It seems like the general level of the craftsmanship is better. I like their sense of location. Certain writers have made certain places their private property. M.C. Beaton has got this little village in northwest Scotland for hers. MacDonald's got Miami.

What's the one thing as a writer you haven't done yet?

Vance: Oh, I don't know. I haven't sold to the movies. In other words, I haven't gotten any enormous checks yet. Right now I'm so old that if I had a big gush of money, I don't know what I'd do with it. I don't travel anymore. I don't need anything, don't want anything. I'd give it to my son, I guess, and let him enjoy it.

Do you have more stories to tell? Isn't there a sequel to your last book, Ports of Call?

Vance: Yeah. I'm working on it now, of course. But I'm so slow on it because I find it terribly hard writing blind on computers. The computer speaks to me, but it's just so slow, I'm so terribly slow using it. I don't like being slow. So after that, I don't know. I'd probably get awful nervous if I wasn't working on something, but I don't have anything in mind at the moment. Maybe something will come up.

I understand the Ports of Call sequel is called Lurulu.

Vance: Yeah. I got done writing Ports of Call and suddenly realized I have far too much material for the book. So I just boldly, bluntly, I almost said "To be continued." I cut people off and went on to the next book. As far as I know, it's unprecedented. But I couldn't think of anything else. The story was such that I couldn't make a graceful ending and then make a graceful new beginning. I could have, but I didn't want to. So, it isn't the most graceful way of writing a story. This new story is, I think, is pretty good stuff. I'm pleased with it anyway.

Will there be another book in the series?

Vance: Oh, no. This will finish the two books. Lurulu is a kind of romantic destiny.

It sounds like fun.

Vance: Yeah. My writing is fun for me sometimes. I get sidetracked on things that I think are fun. "Oh, I think this sounds a lot of fun, writing this." So I'll write it, and then I'll find out that I actually wrote something that is utterly useless. You can't use it in the

story and it doesn't fit. So I just throw it away. I've done that countless times. Sometimes some of these little side excursions are useful and I manage to fit them in the book somewhere.

Ports of Call and Lurulu take place in the Gaean Reach Universe. What's special about this universe for you?

Vance: There's nothing special. Its space ships are very useful in that you can get from one star to another within a reasonable time, which we cannot do now, of course. It would take us lifetimes under prison conditions to get from one star to another. It's so impractical I doubt that anyone will try to get from here to any star. Unless we get a quicker way. So most writers, they just assume there're ways of hopping through space so fast to get from one star to another in some reasonable time, so that's just one of the conventions of science-fiction writing, which has several conventions. Oh, [there are] a whole gang of conventions that aren't very reasonable.

Another convention is that everywhere you go people are using the same language, which in the case of the Gaean Reach would hardly be logical. People, after being isolated for thousands of years, would have developed dialects that wouldn't be comprehensible to strangers. But just in order to make it possible for us people to come to a world and communicate with the people that live there, you have to assume that they all use the same language. It's a convention of science fiction that we all blandly pretend is feasible.

What's the biggest challenge you've had in your career?

Vance: Oh, that all amounts to money. Challenges. I have a competitive instinct, of course. It's not that I'm trying to be better than anybody else, but I just figure that if somebody sells a book for $100,000, I'd like to do the same. I'm not mad at the guy that made $100,000. I don't have any envy at all. But it's just that, goddamn it, why can't I do that? I'm mad at myself. I'm mad at my agent. Well, I kind of brought it on myself in a way. When I first started writing I just, without thinking, used Jack Vance, which is my name. I think I should have used John Holbrook Vance as a pseudonym rather than Jack Vance, because Jack Vance doesn't have much dignity to it. Whereas John Holbrook Vance sounds more stable and serious and I think would have gotten people thinking I was a serious sober man, which I am, of course. Well, anyway, when I'm signing books, I'm glad I've got the name Jack Vance [laughs].

Maybe it would have made more of a difference if you were writing mainstream rather than science fiction and fantasy.

Vance: Oh, I think so too. I don't pretend. If anybody asks what I'm writing, I never say I write science fiction. I think Kurt Vonnegut, although he's more furious and intense, if anybody accuses him of writing science fiction, he has a fit. Me, I correct them. I say, "Well, I don't know what I write. It's speculative fiction. Fiction of the future. Fiction of sociological anthropology. And some people even use the [term] science fiction, which I don't like." I have to go through all that. It would be so simple if I could bring myself to say science fiction, which I can't because I detest the field. I don't like the people in it. Not the writers, but the fans. The young fans and some of their adolescent attitudes of going to conventions in funny clothes and being Star Trek-ians

and getting all these strange societies up. I think I don't want to be associated with those people. There are a lot of people, well, up in Seattle [at NorwesCon] I met a number of them, extremely nice people who are bright, intelligent.

What's surprised you most over the years?

Vance: That I'm still alive, I guess.

You're still alive and you're working.

Vance: Yeah. If anybody had predicted that when I was my age, I was going to be sitting here working instead of sitting in front of the television, I'd have been surprised. Of course, if they had told me I was going to be blind, I wouldn't like that either.

When I was 8 or 9 years old I went to an ophthalmologist, who had the reputation of being the best ophthalmologist in San Francisco. And he told me, "Oh, my boy, do you read much?" "Yes, doctor, I read." "Well, you can't read so much. You got to stop, otherwise you're going to be blind when you get older."

I don't think he knew what he was talking about, because my eyes went out as a result of glaucoma, which certainly isn't brought on by reading. It's other factors. Also the fact that the doctor who tried to repair my eyes did so using the laser, and every time he operated on me my eyes got worse. He finally just gave up. So here I am.

You're a very visual writer. Has losing your vision had an impact in your writing?

Vance: It doesn't bother me a bit. I have a memory and I can see things in my head. No, I don't have any lack for images.

Of all the stuff you've written, what's your favorite?

Vance: I don't even want to answer that one. I like all my latest stuff. I just don't like much of the younger stuff I did. I think I was just learning my craft, learning what not to do, getting so damn flamboyant. Trying to learn how to write.

What's the secret of continuing to write well?

Vance: Not getting Alzheimer's disease, first thing. You know that as well as I do. Continuing to have some feeling you want to write and keep having ideas and getting restless if you're not writing. Right now I'll be happy to take a blow and not write anymore until I get another idea, which I don't have now.

I don't mind being my age. I'm not afraid of dying, 'cause first of all, it doesn't do any good. It's foolish having that kind of a fear, I think, anyway. I wouldn't like to have cancer like poor Poul Anderson did. Which I feel awful sorry for him. I admire Poul extremely. He was a fine fellow. One of my best friends, really, Poul.

You've been imagining the future for a long time. Where do you think humanity is headed?

Vance: Don't ask me these questions. You expect me to come up with some sage, sage remarks that are going to surprise everybody and say, "That Jack Vance, he knows it. He's a real philosopher." Obviously, I don't know about the future anymore about than [anyone] else does.

What are your interests when you're not writing?

Vance: One of them is cosmology. Things like quantum mechanics. Astronomical physics, which is cosmology, essentially. I'm reading a good book right now by a fellow called Martin Rees, called Before the Beginning. I won't bore you with my theories, but I'm rather skeptical about certain ideas. I love to discuss these ideas and argue with astrophysicists.

Oh, for a time one of my great interests in life—in fact, I think of myself more as a musician half the time than a writer—is jazz music. The original jazz, not the so-called new jazz, which I don't consider jazz at all. It's just abstract noise. But the original jazz, the New Orleans jazz, is persistent today. It's not popular music, but it's great music. I used to play cornet and play banjo, but when my eyes went out I kind of hung it up.

Where you a good player?

Vance: My best instrument was a harmonica [laughs]. No, can't say I was a good player. My fingers were always too damn thick. But I played in bands once in awhile. Nobody tried to get in touch with me when they needed somebody to play, only as a last resort. But I enjoyed it tremendously.

What advice do you have for new writers just starting out who are looking to get published?

Vance: Just the obvious, just to work. That's the key. And not try to write too flamboyantly. In other words, don't try and be ultra-spectacular. Try to do sound work, not inflate their writing with lots of adjectives and adverbs. The main thing is to have a good story, a good plot. Have good characters and don't try to hit the gong every time. Use a little restraint in your writing.

http://www.scifi.com/sfw/issue266/interview.html

Cosmopolis #42 september 2003 - Editor : Derek Benson

On the weekend of August 2-3, 2003, several VIE volunteers conversed with Jack by tele-conference. The participants on Saturday were Joel Anderson, Jeremy Cavaterra, Brian Gharst, Chuck King, and Ed Winskill; on Sunday participated Chris Corley, Damien Jones, Dave Reitsema, and John Schwab; John Vance II was present both days. Transcription by Jeremy Cavaterra.

Day 1: Saturday, August 2, 2003

Jack: I thought I'd take this occasion here—if you're interested, if you have questions about my writing—to give you an opportunity to delve a little deeper into my subconscious. If your questions are too complicated, or the answers not readily definable, I may say "No comment". This doesn't necessarily mean I find the question offensive, it just means that to answer it, I'd have to go into all sorts of ambiguous remarks, et cetera. With this in mind, you can get started!

Joel: I get a lot of enjoyment from your descriptions of architecture, the mood and the atmosphere they create. Do you design your surroundings to evoke an atmosphere?

Jack: I wish I could give you a definitive answer; I think it all just comes together organically. When I start a story, I do have a mood, which is hard to explain—a certain feeling, or an idea. Then when I write the story, I make every aspect of it relevant or appropriate to this mood—which would include landscape, architecture…

Joel: Or language?

Jack: Language, costumes, everything. That's my goal, anyway, sometimes I succeed and sometimes I don't…

Joel: Well, from my viewpoint, you usually do succeed; I've rarely read anything by you that doesn't create a definite mood.

Jack: Apparently I have a knack! Maybe I was born with it; I don't take any special pride in it. Just like being born right- or left-handed.

Joel: Well, I'm glad you have it! I understand you built your house yourself. When you're writing a story, do you ever sketch the floor plans of your architecture just for fun?

Jack: No, I don't. When we arrived here originally, this place was like a chicken shack, perched up in the air. Over the years Johnny and I together built the present house around the old house, and essentially threw the old house out through the windows! Without exaggeration, this house we're living in now encompasses the old shack totally. There's nothing left of that place except the floor in the living room.

Jeremy: In a lot of your books, there is an emphasis on crafts, and craftsmanship, especially with things like ceramics, tapestries, and painting; but the emphasis seems to

always be on the craftsmanship, rather than what I'd call 'the artiste'. So could you tell us about your intimacy with ceramics, and maybe how this all weaves into your writing?

Jack: All right, well, I don't think there's any much connection between the ceramics and the writing, but ceramics at one time was—and still is in a certain sense—highly important to me.

Ceramics is a craft that has so many different aspects to it, so many special areas, every one of them is fascinating. There's the wheel, turning out a piece, there's firing, at different temperatures ranging from 1800º F to—I never did fire porcelain but that goes up to 2800º F. I used to fire at Cone 5, which is about 2300º F—that's stoneware.

The most fascinating part is making glazes. You take this piece of malleable clay, put it in this terrible heat, it comes out impermeable and permanent. You make a glaze—you can buy it of course, but the challenge is to make it yourself, using different chemicals, and mixing them according to precise formulas, then put this white paste on the body, and then put it in the fire. Then you await the opening of the kiln with the expectations of a kid coming downstairs Christmas morning, to see what's under the tree. "What the devil's in the kiln?!" The results can be a source of great joy, or distress! But if successful, your work comes out with rich glowing colors: greens, blues—perfect! The texture of glazes sometimes is a thing of beauty in itself, this oleaginous, buttery kind of a glaze. These are esthetic experiences, opening the kiln and taking out these fired pieces.

The secret is getting the glaze to 'fit' the clay. In the old days, that was a very difficult proposition; you had to go through all sorts of mathematical computations, then try, try again, and try again. But about the time I built my last studio, a fellow in Canada came out with a computer program called 'Insight' which simplified glaze-making to such an extent that it just became a pleasure. The names of these glaze components carry a romance in themselves, just like names of musical compositions…anyway, I've said enough about pottery, but I just love it.

When my eyes went out on me, I had to close down the pottery. We sold the kiln, and took down the studio. We still have a lot of chemicals down below, along with the potter's wheel…so that's the story.

Back to the more general idea of crafts, yes—I am highly appreciative of craftsmanship, of doing things precisely, doing them properly. Starting out with a vision of something and doing it with such expertise that it comes out the way you want it. This can be done in furniture making, pottery, writing poetry I suppose.

John V: Writing books!

Jack: Well, I don't know if I'd call writing books a craft or not.

John V: But there's craftsmanship in your work.

Jack: That's a matter for discussion—could be, I wouldn't argue. There's all kinds of crafts. Jeremy, what do you think about knocking about on the piano, do you think that's a craft?

Jeremy: Well, if you argue that writing books is a craft, or that 'craftsmanship' is the ability to create something according to your ideas, then sure, why not?

Jack: But I think that it's not so much the music itself, that 'craft' is hitting the right keys, teaching yourself to have in mind a certain effect, and then having your fingers go to the right keys…

Jeremy: In the way you write, there's this sense of precision in translating a feeling, or an idea into words in the most efficient way possible; that's the kind of craft I'm talking about. I see it as analogous to any type of craft that you mentioned.

Jack: I'll go along with that, I agree.

Ed: When I think about craftsmanship, I think about Emphyrio, which is so much about craftsmanship, the whole book…

Jack: Yes, there's craftsmanship in that story. I do admire craftsmen. Artists? The word has taken on so many unpleasant connotations, you know, 'artists'—these people with long hair and funny attitudes. I'm speaking of the old-fashioned stereotype of the artist; the 19thcentury kind of an artist.

If anybody's interested, I'll give you my definition of art. I don't put this down as universal law, of course, but to my mind, when a person has an emotional reaction to something or another, he tries to convey this emotional reaction to someone else by symbolic means. This is important: the artist must use symbols which are intelligible to not just himself, but the person he's trying to communicate with; there has to be mutual knowledge of the symbols involved, because if the artist uses symbols which the onlooker or listener can't interpret, the artist fails; he's not communicating. This is my objection to abstract 'art', so to speak—quotes around the word 'art'—and so-called 'modern jazz'. The people who are involved use symbols which are known only to themselves; it's kind of a narcissistic approach that means nothing, to anyone but themselves. The people who are listening—well, you'll hear a lot of people who don't know anything about music, or art, exclaiming with rapture about things—they have no idea what it all means, except they might say, "That's sort of 'bright', and this is sort of 'cheerful'…", but they don't understand the symbolism for what the artist had in mind. But that's enough about 'art'. Okay! Next question?

Brian: When I first picked up one of your books back when I was in high school, the thing that grabbed me, and made me say, "Wow, this is really neat stuff", was the way everybody talked to one another. Even the villains and the scoundrels were very intelligent people, and spoke with irony and understatement.

It seems to me that this has been present from the beginning, even in your very early books. Is this something you had to develop, on your own, before you started publishing? Or is it something that came naturally? And what was the reaction, in the early days?

Jack: In the early days, after I'd published a couple of short stories, one of the editors mentioned 'Vancishness' for the stories I'd written. So evidently even at that time I had a kind of a distinctive approach. But in response to your question, I think it just became this way, because of my appreciation of such masters as P.G. Wodehouse, who is an absolute genius at the rhythms, the wryness in his dialogue. He's superb at it, doesn't get credit enough for being one of the great writers. That's before the war, of course; after the war he was nowhere. But Wodehouse's dialogue is just wonderful stuff. It's mannered, of course;Jeeves speaks in a certain way, and you have to

appreciate this. There's also a fellow from the 1920's calledJeffrey Farnol; he wrote adventure stories, he used dialogue with a great deal of care, and was also excellent at it. These two, especially, gave me a goal to work towards: if I could write as good dialogue as Wodehouse or Farnol, I felt as though I was doing something good. Aside from that, I just didn't think about it, I wasn't self-conscious about it, the stuff just developed on its own.

Brian: Did you ever worry if the readers would accept it?

Jack: No, I never thought of that at all, any more than any other part of the story. In other words, the whole thing was organic, the dialogue and the exposition, et cetera, were all part of the same thing, and I just wanted to make them consistent. Going back to this mood I was talking about—all the parts of the story should be consistent and in line with the mood, generating the mood, reinforcing the mood. So the exposition and dialogue both go, in my opinion, to those ends.

John V: I can throw something in here, Brian. Dad generally doesn't give a damn what anybody else thinks anyway. That may be just a little blunt, but he probably never worried about whether other people could go for his style, because it didn't really matter to him. He just did it the way he wanted.

Brian: I'll often be reading one of your books, in my living room, and my wife will be sitting there with me, and suddenly from nowhere a gasp of satisfaction will escape my mouth—and she'll know that I must be reading a Vance novel—because I hit one of those beautiful, very clever pieces of dialogue that are so satisfying to me.

Jack: Incidentally…

I don't know how to express this, but I can't find the proper words to express my feelings toward you guys. It isn't gratitude exactly, I think it's just plain pleasure, that I have reached a bunch of people like yourselves.

I was at this convention in Columbus, and it just happened to occur to me—and I said this to a group of people—that I don't have any stupid fans! Everybody that seems to like my junk is highly intelligent, which I think is…well, it gives me a source of vanity, or something of the sort. But anyway, I do appreciate your interest, I can't say I feel gratitude for that's not the proper word. Thank you all!

Chuck: I have a question that ties into some of the things you were just talking about, when you mentioned your earlier writing. I was wondering if you could tell me something about the relationship between writers and editors.

Jack: Editors are in general frustrated writers. On second thought, that's wrong; they're business people. Some I got along great with; others, like John Campbell, couldn't see me for sour owl spit. Although that's not quite true, as soon as I wrote a story for Campbell that involved telepathy, or something similar, he went for it.

Campbell was engrossed with things like telepathy, telekinetics, extra-sensory perception of all kinds. He was interested in it; I am too, as far as that goes…but I knew I could always sell him something, as long as I threw in something of that sort. Some of my worst stories—just hack writing, some of the worst I've ever written, I sold it to him; he loved it. But in general, the relationship between writer and editor depends upon the individuals. It's personal; I don't have any basic theories or propositions.

John V: Going back to the telekinetics and that sort of stuff, you said that you're interested in it; does that mean you believe in it?

Jack: In general I am a skeptic about these things. Then of course I run into something, read something somewhere…like a book I recently read, by John Edward—he's a medium or something—he's so matter of- fact about talking to dead people, he takes it so casually, just like a mechanic fixing a car, that you have to scratch your head and say "what the hell's going on here?"

In general I'm skeptical; I haven't had any experiences myself, and I don't know anybody that has, that wasn't lying to me when they told me about it. I'm skeptical about these fields—I'll believe it when I see it.

John V: I believe you are 'skeptical, but tantalized by the possibilities'.

Jack: Exactly right. I'm tantalized by these things! There's a book called Ghosts in Irish Houses, by a fellow called James Reynolds; it's a marvelous book. When we were in Ireland, I went around trying to find these houses, and couldn't find any of them; we went to a University there, and I visited a professor of anthropology, and talked to him; I thought he'd be in the know about such things. Shows what a damn fool I am! I went up to him and asked, "Sir, what's your experience with ghosts in Irish houses, like James Reynolds put in his book?" He gave me the most withering look, and said, "There's nothing of the sort in Ireland!" He was so contemptuous of the idea that the Irish were seeing ghosts everywhere. I slunk out of there with my tail between my legs. I never saw any ghosts in Ireland.

As John said, I'm skeptical, but tantalized by all these things. It's the romance of the ideas—the romance of haunted houses, and castles, and ghosts—these are the things that fire the imagination!

Ed: You've talked about mood, and I wanted to ask specifically about it, in terms of water. It seems to me that you must have hung around a lot of estuaries; you've got fens, and mudflats, and quayside inns. I'd like to know about the sources of all that in your writing.

Jack: I was born in San Francisco. When I was six years old, the family moved up to my grandfather's ranch in the Delta, where the Sacramento River and the San Joaquin River divide up into waterways, which are known locally as 'sloughs'. Some of the sloughs are strikingly beautiful things, lined with cottonwoods and weeping willows; our house was adjacent to one of these. I grew up among these sloughs, swimming and boating and wading around. Subsequently, Poul Anderson and Frank Herbert (though he dropped out) and myself built a houseboat, 14 feet wide and 32 feet long, took it up into those waterways, and cruised it through there. That was one of the big eras of my life, when I think about it; we had so much fun aboard that son-of-a-gun; we'd take it out on the weekend. I had a 25-horse outboard on it, and we'd anchor it someplace, laugh and joke, drink beer and play music, while the ladies were inside preparing dinner. But anyway, I grew up among these waterways, and I have a basic, inherent love for them.

Joel: I have rather a stupid question, but I'll ask it anyway…

Jack: I'll give you a stupid answer.

Joel: Okay! If the movie moguls approached you, like the Cohen brothers, Scorsese, Peter Jackson—which one of your books would you tell them would be a good choice for a two-hour movie?

Jack: Well, I don't know…I would think—not that I know anything about movies—but it would look to me that the Lyonesse set would be a natural for someone like Disney, but nobody's done more than nibble at it. Maybe Trullion would be good?

Ed: I'd like to see it on film!

Jack: There may be others, Emphyrio? I've never thought of it too much.

I wrote a suspense story called Bad Ronald that was bought and made into a television movie. People have wanted to do it over and over again; that made a good movie. There's another one, which I called originally Chateau d'If, but which the editor called New Bodies for Old. That was also sold, and made into some sort of a television movie.

John V: Dad, are you sure anything was ever made of it, or was it just optioned?

Jack: I'm not sure…

John V: We got whacked on that a couple years ago, because it was just the option that was sold. Somebody approached us, offering some money that would have been wonderful, but as it turned out the option had been sold off for $500, or something like that, a number of years ago…

Jack: I don't know, you may be right.

Jeremy: Speaking of Lyonesse, compared to other stories in the fantasy genre, there's a scholarly feeling about the folklore, the Irish and Britannic and northern European folklore. Would you care to say anything about that?

Jack: What's the question?

Jeremy: Well, I wondered if you could talk specifically about fairy-lore.

Jack: Well, of course, I've assimilated fairy stories all my life—Lord Dunsany and the like. They're part of my mental background. It's a matter of romance; fairies are romantic little creatures. I don't believe in fairies, but they make very delightful little decorations. It'd be nice if they did exist. But I don't really expect to go out and see them sitting in the eucalyptus tree.

I don't know if that answers your question or not. I will say this: I was much fonder of Lord Dunsany as a young man than I am now. Now I think he's over-written, overripe, over-emotional, over-sentimental. But when I first read him, he made a big impact.

Dunsany, incidentally, writing all this beautiful, delicate stuff, was a big game hunter! In his castle in Ireland, you'd find heads of bison and lions and tigers all over the place. It's hard to reconcile Lord Dunsany shooting all these animals, and writing these delicate stories.

Sic transit gloria mundi…

Chuck: One of the things that has struck me in your writing is that you're a very keen observer of society and culture. I wonder whether you agree that California has always been perceived as fundamentally different from the rest of the country?

Jack: That's a complicated question. California is such a various country: up in the north, it's all forests, and a volcano or two, and down south we have the Mojave Desert, and Death Valley, and Los Angeles, San Diego down at the bottom—a lovely retirement place for the old people. And San Francisco, a den of iniquity…

Ed: And San Rodrigo County is in there, somewhere—

Jack: San Rodrigo County is a mixture of where I grew up: of San Joaquin County, and some other little counties further south. It's a composite county, but generally accurate to the atmosphere of those counties, as it might have been thirty or forty years ago—not the way it is nowadays, of course. But California, as I say, is such a various place. Raymond Chandler writes about Los Angeles, and makes it seem that it's an island in the middle of the universe. I can't think of anybody that writes about San Francisco in a similar way; it's a different city completely from what it used to be. Nowadays it's a thing in itself, an idiosyncratic sui generis, to use a ten-dollar word. A lot of good jazz bands in San Francisco: the Lu Watters Jazz Band…then there's a band that works out of Los Angeles, called the South FriscoJazz Band— But in answer to your question, I'd say that California is just too blasted complicated to generalize on. Of course now we're trying to get rid of Gray Davis—we're beset by Democrats here!…Next question?

Ed: I'm glad that Bad Ronald came up, because the movie they made was pretty good, I've seen it a couple times. But they had to tone the story down; in the movie, Ronald gets caught, in time, and he doesn't in your book. There's a kind of Brothers Grimm quality, a certain tone you get—a 'distancing' or 'detachment' when something bad happens and goes unrecompensed. One of your most striking scenes is when Cugel slays the innocent little water creature, for the crime of getting him wet. Or when the fairy Twisk gets chained to the crossroads post, and so forth…

Jack: Yes, these things have to be dealt with objectively. I try to describe what's going on without using emotive adjectives or adverbs, just using nouns and verbs. If you try to put too much impact in, you lose the effect. You get the effect by just detailing the circumstances, without commenting upon them. That does the trick, it's simple enough.

One of the secrets of writing, in my opinion, is every time you see an adjective or adverb, get rid of the son-of a- gun. Avoid them as much as you possibly can. It makes the writing far more pungent.

Ed: You don't tie a judgment up with it, you just lay it out.

Jack: That's right—say it just the way it is.

Joel: The lack of romanticizing elements in the story makes it effective. The Cohen brothers' movies to some degree share that; they have some ugly things in them, but they're not romanticized, not pushed in your face—

Ed: They're not sentimentalized…

Joel: Right, they're just stated. Another writing question…Do you plan your books, starting with an outline? And if so, do the stories 'behave'? Do they 'stay' where they're supposed to 'stay'?

Jack: I start out with a general idea, but as I go through it I have to go back and give everything a kind of consistency. Any of you guys would do the same thing— you just start out with an idea and try to finish it in the best possible way.

John V: How long would one of your outlines typically be?

Jack: Oh, I don't know, it all depends…some parts would be detailed, if I wanted to capture an idea, and I'd put down a paragraph or something. But generally, no detailed outline, really.

Joel: Are you working on something at the moment?

Jack: Yes, I am working on something at the moment, but it's not a continuation of Lurulu or Ports of Call. It's a new one, a new idea.

Joel: I don't suppose we should ask what it is, but just wait for it?

Jack: No, you'll have to wait and see!

Brian: There's one character in your books I always thought was very interesting: Kirdy Wook from Araminta Station. I think he's one of the most tragic characters you ever wrote about; it's very hard for me to read the book because of what happens to him, and how he responds to it. I wondered if you have any comments on how he came about?

Jack: No, I have no comments except that he just appeared, and I saw him as a whole, and he conducted himself in the story as this person. I had no part in his conduct, he conducted himself. That sounds like a very 'arty' way of putting it, and I don't mean it in the way self-conscious artist-writers talk, like "my characters go their own way" and all that sort of stuff. But I didn't do any artificial guiding of him at all.

John V: Dad, is there any chance that any of your brothers might have influenced that character? There's something about him that reminds me just a little bit about one of your older brothers.

Jack: No—he's not at all like either of them.

Brian: Just from my personal experiences in life, he rang a bell; I have seen what happened to him happen to people, and I've always been fascinated by him.

Jack: Well, aside from what I've already said, I don't have anything else to say about Kirdy Wook. He was there. Chuck: One of the themes that I find interesting in your books involves the sort of megalomaniacal villain who views himself as set above the normal ruck of humanity, people like Howard Alan Treesong, or Faurence Dacre, or Paul Gunther.

Jack: If you notice, in general, those people are concentrated in the Demon Princes set. Each one of those stories had to have a bad guy in there (incidentally, Demon Princes is not my title, someone else called it that). But they're all different, and I think they get better as the series goes along. I'm not too keen on the first two, I guess they're all right, but Palace of Love, and the succeeding ones, The Face and Book of Dreams— I like those last three books.

Chuck: Well, I hadn't thought of the other Demon Princes besides Treesong, but from Freitzke's Turn, Dr. Faurence Dacre…

Jack: Well, he was just a bad guy, but not a terrible, insensate criminal. To tell you the truth, I forget the story…

Chuck: Another place where the character decides that he's this singular being in the universe, and it's destined to mold itself to his uses, is Paul Gunther from The House on Lily Street.

Jack: Oh, yeah. That was back in the days when the world was young, when I wrote that. Back in the days when beatniks were beatniks! That was before the hippies—the beatniks were in power. Remember those?

Jeremy: I do notice that there is a common thread with a lot of your villains, that they're misunderstood characters who tend to be very fanciful, and have this very elaborate inner fantasy world, which in some cases they exteriorize— like Viole Falushe.

Jack: Yes, that's right.

Jeremy: And I notice that even in Bad Ronald, he's got this very detailed, creative inner world. They all tend to have that.

Jack: I think it makes them more interesting, rather than justJosef Stalin types. Of course I don't know howJosef Stalin was, he might have been very fanciful, for all I know…

Chuck: That brings up my next question, which was whether that type of person was based on any real-life figure.

Jack: No, just a way to figure out some real unpleasantness. All of us can do the same thing—each one of you guys out there, if you sat down to write a book about something unpleasant, each one of you would come up with a different variety of bad guy or bad lady, but it would be more or less along the same lines as I do: you just figure out what makes that person work, and why he or she sets him- or herself apart from the others, and what set him off in that direction to begin with. I just want to make the villain more interesting.

Chuck: Why do you seem to have relatively few female readers, and concomitantly, why are there so few female VIE volunteers?

Jack: I have not the slightest notion! I regard myself as a great ladies' man, of course, but that doesn't seem to do much good—I can't attract them! I wish I knew the secret…

I do a lot of reading of murder mysteries, and it's strange, but when I come across one that's written by a lady, with a lady detective, dealing with ladies' problems, I just discard it instantly, because I know that these things are slanted toward middle-aged, aging ladies sitting at home reading ladies' books.

There are, of course, some excellent lady writers. In fact one of my favorites, if not my favorite writer, is M.C. Beaton, who I want to recommend to all you guys. She's a marvelous writer. For you people that don't know her, she writes about a little town, Lochdubh, on the coast of Scotland. Hamish Macbeth, her detective, is a wonderful protagonist. And Priscilla, his lady love, works beautifully as a counterpoint to him. In fact all of her stories, all of her work is great. She has another series called Agatha Raisin, which I don't like as much, I don't find Agatha Raisin a very appealing character.

There's of course Ruth Rendell—Barbara Vine is her pseudonym— who's a marvelous writer, but she's such a pessimist; these things are all downers! And yet on the other hand, when she deals with her detective Inspector Wexford, she doesn't do that. Deborah Crombie is a good writer too. But anyway, that's enough of my criticism of lady writers.

Chuck: You mentioned the coast of Scotland, which ties in with another thing I wanted to ask about: I understand that you're also a fan of good whisky.

Jack: Exactly right. Even bad whisky.

Chuck: What are some of your favorite drams?

Jack: Well, I tell you the truth, I wish I was what the French call a 'fin bec', but I don't have a good palate for wines, I'm just perfectly happy with the plonk. Expensive wine is wasted on me. I drink them all, and I do seem to notice when you get especially good wine, but I don't make any fuss about it. Now in these single malts, I have at home five or six different brands, but I can barely tell the difference between one and another. I'm anxious to read that article in Cosmopolis. There was an auction on scotches a few months ago, and some sold for $400-$500 a bottle! The 50-year-old Macallans were very valuable, and others as well. But I usually stick with stuff that's $20 or somewhere in there: Glenlivet, et cetera.

All right! Anything more you want to know about my taste for bad liquor?

Jeremy: I had a question about mystery novels. Do you have any opinion about John Dickson Carr?

Jack: I think he's kind of a poseur. He likes to fancy himself an entertainer, and in the middle of his stories I see him break off and talk to the reader, he'll say, "Now, reader, if you can solve this problem, I congratulate you" or something of that sort. And I don't like his detective, Dr. Fell; he seems phony. His ideas are sometimes ingenious, but always seem artificial, and not very convincing. In short, I don't really like him very much.

Ed: I wanted to ask about your own mysteries, a direction that you took, but not nearly as much as some of your other directions…particularly the Joe Bain books are great; they evoke California tremendously. I've always been curious about the reasons you didn't pursue the mysteries more.

Jack: Because, I'll tell you—after I published The Pleasant Grove Murders, I had an outline for one called The Genesee Slough Murders. My editor died, and whoever took over shot it back at me. Maybe it wasn't as good an outline as it should have been. So I started writing something else, and I didn't continue with that San Rodrigo County stuff. Although I was kind of sorry about it; I liked that milieu, and I liked Joe Bain.

Ed: I like Joe Bain too! I love his roadhouse in the mountains.

Jack: Yeah, that was fun.

Ed: I wonder, in that regard, whether the real-world setting restricts your scope a little bit, particularly in dialogue. That ironic manner of dialogue which sets so much of the tone that we love, would be hard to pull off there.

Jack: Well, I think it worked out pretty good. I was not unhappy with the dialogue. I thought Joe Bain was a good character, I wish I could have gone on with those stories. He was—I won't say inspired by—but there was a fellow called A.B. Cunningham, who wrote about Sheriff Jess Roden in Tennessee a long time ago. If you get those out of the library, you'll find out that it's not like Joe Bain at all…Sheriff Jess Roden has a sidekick, a big black guy who gets into a fist fight with a bad guy in every story, always wipes up the floor with the other guy—they're entertaining books. A.B. Cunningham—if I'm not mistaken, I think he was a Texan.

Chuck: One more quick one. What aspect of your work has given you the most satisfaction?

Jack: Getting the check. I'm not fooling! But to be not quite as sardonic, I could say: writing the words "The End".

John V: Growing up, when I was fooling around, running around the house while Dad was writing, occasionally out of nowhere he'd chuckle to himself. It was very clear that he was enjoying what he was doing—that the writer was having a good time.

Ed: Looking for you in your books, Jack, I always thought I'd found you in Navarth. Is there anything to that?

Jack: He's one of my favorite characters. I identify with him in a certain way, but I don't consider myself him, though I'm fond of him and his ideas. But that's perceptive of you; of all the characters I've ever written about, Navarth is the closest one I identify with, though he's a totally different person than I am. But still, there are elements.

I like Navarth's poetry, too.

Ed: I love it.

Jack: Nobody ever talks about my poetry!

Ed: "Tim R. Mortiss"—one of my favorite poems. That, and being poured full of pomegranate wine by the riverbank…

Jack: Yes, "Eridu". That's a good poem. Then that "Song of the Darsh", and there's one other that I vaguely remember, though I don't remember where it was. It was about poison…

Ed: "Underneath My Upas Tree".

Jack: Where does that come from, I forget?

Ed: I think it's Palace of Love.

Jack: I think you're right.

Jeremy: Do you have anything to say about poetry in general?

Jack: Not in general. I'm not a big devotee of poetry. I like: Clay lies still, but blood's a rover;

Breath's a ware that will not keep.

Up, lad: when the journey's over

There'll be time enough to sleep.

Ed: That's A.E. Housman.

Jack: A.E. Housman! A Shropshire Lad. The only trouble is that it's so morbid, so depressing to read about his preoccupation with death, with young people dying. Why is it necessary to be so damned despondent? But I think those are the most beautiful couplets in the English language. I don't think anybody can write better than that.

Some of those little shorter couplets and limericks are true art. One limerick I really love is:

A curious family is Stein:
There's Gertrude, there's Ep and there's Ein;
Gert's poems are bunk
Ep's sculptures are junk
And nobody understands Ein!
Another really good one, too:
Hurrah for Madam Lupescu,
Who came to Romania's rescue:
"It's a wonderful thing
To be under a King!
Is democracy better, I esk you?"
The English are adept at writing these limericks, they're so goddamn good at it!

Day 2: Sunday, August 3, 2003

Chris: What was the difference in the way you wrote, when you made the transition from writing on paper to typing on the computer?

Jack: For many years I wrote longhand, then I jumped over the typewriter and went straight to the computer, but to my amazement, I didn't notice any difference at all. I think the processes were all going on in my head, and the methods of getting them down on paper were peripheral. I notice a difference now, since my eyes went out—it's hard to explain, but before, I could read up and down the page, and get a sense of the flow of the material; now, with my eyes out, I have to listen. I have a box, speech hardware, that reads the text to me, and try to pick out the flow of the stuff via what the voice tells me. It's very much slower. I have to go back and forth, make sure that it isn't just a jumble of disconnected phrases.

Anyway, I'm not bellyaching too much. I just bellyache a little bit.

John V: Let me throw in that writing is murderously difficult for Dad these days, it's really an excruciating process. Not being able to see, has proven to be—as you might guess—a very significant handicap.

Jack: Well, I'd rather do this, than get thrown into the Red Sea, with pirates on either side.

Chris: One of the reasons I asked, is because the file that I had to work with was very clean, of course—it had been picked over by you and by Norma and maybe some other people too—and it made me think about the way I write now, compared to the way I used to write

on paper. It's interesting to me that there's no real difference for you in the creative process itself.

Jack: Nope, it doesn't seem like it—except, as I say, since my eyes went out, the process has changed; I have to do it via my ears, and go back and forth a sentence or two. If I'm really audacious, I go back several sentences…

Chris: How accented is the voice? Is it hard to understand?

Jack: No, not for me.

John V: Dad's used to it, but it's a pretty peculiar little robotic voice.

Chris: I wondered that the potential mellifluousness of some phrases would not translate well, through this 'speaking box'.

Jack: No, it's okay. No complaints, let me put it that way. I don't mind it, in fact I kind of like the son-of-a-gun.

Chris: I'm glad there's a way you can keep writing!

Jack: Well, I'm really half-retired. I don't regard myself as an active writer anymore, but I don't have anything else to do—except, oh, a few things here with my records and music. So I'm just writing now more or less from my own steam, but I hope I'll get this book out.

Chris: We do too! And thanks for your answer, it's very interesting to hear your comments.

Jack: Well, I guess so; it doesn't sound very interesting to me.

John V: Dad's using a vintage 386 DOS machine, with a derivative of the old WordStar software, and he's not using a mouse, so when you say 'cut-and-paste', to put that into Dad's language that would be 'reading a block' and 'writing a block'. It's a pretty old-fashioned process.

Jack: A fellow named Kim Kokkonen worked out this program for me, called 'Big Ed'—Big Editor. When I still could see, I could get characters of different size on the screen—and by this method I was able to keep 'seeing my work' for several years. But finally, the eye-doctor got his revenge on me, and I can't see anything. Now, Big Ed doesn't mean so much anymore.

Damien: Jack, first of all I'd like to thank you for providing hours of entertainment for me in the past, and hopefully in the future.

Jack: I hope you bought the books, and didn't just go to the public library for them.

Damien: Actually I stole them from my dad.

Jack: You know, in Denmark, if you get a book out of the library, you pay a fee which goes to the writer. I think in England it's the same. But here in the States, the writer is screwed. People go to the library, take books out, and the writer gets you-know-what for the service. The musicians' union is set up now so that any time a tune is played over the radio, some royalty goes to the artist or the composer, whatever it is. So I think there's been a movement to try to get the same thing for authors, that the writer gets a cut every time somebody takes a book out of the library. It doesn't have

to be very much, actually, only a penny a copy or something like that—but it would mount up. As it is now, you write a book and it sells a thousand copies if you're lucky, but those things in the library get read a hundred thousand times and you get you-know-what for it. I'm not bellyaching too much, but I just want you to know it's not really correct.

Damien: I hadn't really thought of that, but you're right, that doesn't sound fair at all. But then I do actually buy books.

Jack: Oh, I was just joking…But I believe that in Denmark—I'm not sure about England—and possibly in some other Scandinavian countries, and perhaps Germany, they have that small fee.

Damien: I'd like to follow up on the question that Chris asked. I'm sure you've been asked this many times, but given also the conditions under which you work, I would like to know what compels you to write?

Jack: Well, I've been doing it for an awfully long time, and if I don't do it, I don't have much to do except sit around. I have a lot of records, old traditional jazz—are any of you people traditional jazz types?

Chris: I enjoy the music, I can't say my collection is large.

Jack: Well, I don't know how many records I've got but they must be in the thousands. They're scattered amongst CDs, records and cassettes, and so I've got an enormous project trying to organize them and get them all on CDs, indexed—it's kind of a pointless job, it doesn't do anybody any good except conceivablyJohn, or my grandchild—but it is a job. So aside from this particular job, I don't have anything else to do. Oh, I do a lot of reading, of course, on these cassettes. But still, I'd feel restless, or nervous, if I didn't have a writing project going, to occupy my mind so to speak.

John V: Dad, what about in the old days, when you made your living as a carpenter?

Jack: Well, what about that?

John V: What led you to write instead of banging nails?

Jack: Do you need an answer,John?

John V: I think I know the answer!

Damien: I think I'd like an answer!

Jack: Well, in the early days, I was a merchant seaman for a time; then I got married, and got off the ships, of course. I had to find some kind of a job to keep me going, until I could make a living writing (I wrote aboard the ship). A friend of mind said, "Why don't you be an apprentice carpenter? It doesn't pay very much, and you have to go four years to an apprentice school—it's a pain in the ass—but still, you can survive on it. I'm an apprentice, and it's very difficult—they really put you through it, run you this way and that—but at least it's an honorable living." "All right, Sam,"—his name was Sam—he took me down to the Carpenters' Union, and the guy at the desk there looked at me and said, "Aha! You're here, are you?" I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "All right, I'll ask you some questions. What're the dimensions of a sawhorse?" I said, "Oh, about like this and like that." He said, "Why are studs placed on 16-inch centers?"

I thought about it a little bit, and said, "Well, it must be so they'll catch four-foot sheets of plywood without overlapping." So the third question—I forget what it was—I think he asked me which end of the nail goes in first. "Well, it seems to me more practical to put the point in first because the head gives a larger surface to pound on." "All right,"—he wrote on a slip for me— "there you go; just go over yonder, and they'll find a job for you." And he made me a journeyman carpenter! My friend, Sam Wainwright, was trapped in this four-year apprentice program, and I marched out with a job as a journeyman carpenter at three times what he was making. How his face fell! "Jesus Christ, what the hell goes on around here?"

John V: Construction in the Bay Area suffered for the next year…

Jack: Well, I learned fast. I got fired from my first job after an hour or two. The second job I lasted several hours, and third job…anyway, after getting fired from a few jobs, it wasn't all that hard. I got to be a pretty good carpenter in the end. And I'm really grateful I had this chance to be a carpenter, because it stood me in very good stead when we moved into this house. It was just a little shack, but over the years, and when he was old enough, withJohn's help, I built this house we're living in now, around the old shack. I couldn't have done it without the training. In other words I'm not mad about being a carpenter, I'm kind of happy in a way, but I got out every chance I could get. Every time I had a sale, made some money, I'd quit the Carpenters' Union and Norma and I would go traveling. Then the money would run out, and I'd have to sneak back in and try to get a job again. At this time jobs weren't so plentiful, and they tried to keep me out, but I managed to get back in. I got in and out of the Carpenters' Union three or four times…the last time, I never did go back; the writing income was sufficient that I didn't have to perform these ignoble tasks. Of course Norma was working as well, so that helped.

John V: Was this around '73, or so?

Jack: I forget when it was. No, it was earlier than that, I think. Anyway, that's my life as a carpenter.

Damien: So you enjoyed the writing more than the carpentry, then?

Jack: Well, sure! I could do it on my own time, sit in a comfortable chair, drink coffee, beer if the occasion warranted, have Norma bring me a lovely cuisine when she felt in the mood…obviously it's much more pleasant being a writer. If you're a carpenter, you work on these hills around here, there's poison oak, and you have to carry stuff up and down the hills; it gets tiresome. It's work, hard work! You go home, and you're tired. But again, as I say, I have never regretted it, was never mad about it—it was okay. I met a lot of good people. I don't have any friends left, I don't think, from the carpenter days. But I made a lot of friends, carpenters. They weren't the same ilk as writers. I don't know of any other guy who was at once a carpenter and a writer. There must have been a lot of them, of course.

But my circle of acquaintances, once I stopped being a carpenter, totally changed. I got to know Poul Anderson—he was about the first writer that I got acquainted with—and we stayed very good friends until he died, which I think was a great loss. Poul was one of the finest men I've ever known, if not the finest—well, present company

excepted, of course. But he was a real gentleman—a wonderful guy, can't say enough nice things about Poul. He was born of Danish people, and his mother taught him Danish…but I don't want to rave about Poul too much. But I do miss him! He was my best friend, I guess, among writers. Frank Herbert I knew quite well. Anthony Boucher I knew pretty well. He was an editor—well, he was a writer too: murder mysteries, and so-called science fiction. So…have I covered the subject?

Damien: More than that—you've answered just about all my questions! Thank you.

Jack: You're welcome! Don't hesitate to ask questions. It's quite comfortable sitting here, and you gentlemen are no doubt comfortable where you are. My only regret is that we don't all sit at a table with some beer in front of us, but maybe the time will come.

Dave: Hi, Jack, this is Dave Reitsema.

Jack: Hi Dave. How's everything going?

Dave: It's going well, I'm on vacation in western Michigan—sitting on the shore of Lake Michigan. It's beautiful.

Jack: It is beautiful. Any mosquitoes?

Dave: Oh yeah, they have all sorts of bugs here—a lot of species that have never been named or discovered!

Jack: You have a cottage there, in a village, or out in the open?

Dave: It's a cottage. They line the shore, here. Both my wife and I are from this area, so we come back and visit, and all the relatives come out and drink margaritas and beer.

Jack: It sounds wonderful. Are you there all summer?

Dave: No, we just usually come up for a week.

Jack: From where? I forget…

Dave: I live on the south side of Denver.

Jack: Kokkonen, the programmer I was mentioning, lives in Boulder City, if I'm not mistaken. I don't know Denver very well, except I think there's the Brown's Palace, supposed to be a good hotel.

Dave: That's a wonderful hotel, and the Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, is even nicer.

Jack: Oh really? That Brown's Palace is really old, isn't it?

Dave: Yes, it's at least 125 years old, I believe.

Jack: Have you patronized it?

Dave: I patronize it for lunch occasionally, it's a good place to have a business meeting.

Jack: They probably feed you pretty well, I imagine.

Dave: They do, but you must wear a tie.

Jack: But I'll bet they probably have good steak, and things like that—

Dave: They do!

Jack: Well, sorry I can't meet you there for dinner tonight.

Dave: I'd love to meet you for dinner, some time!… The question that I was most interested in, was how you feel about the VIE, and whether you're happy with the progress or result so far.

Jack: Well, first of all, I'd be a churl if I found fault with it, you know if I made complaints and said "What a rotten bunch of people"—you'd think I was insane. No—obviously, I can't think of the proper word. I was thinking about it yesterday, about what adjective I could use to describe what I think about VIE. I discarded the word 'grateful' because I didn't think it was apropos, but I marvel at the work you guys have done. I'm really impressed by you guys—thankful that somebody's around to do this. As far as I know, I'm the only current writer that anybody's taking the trouble to go to these lengths. I'm happy about it—Norma suggested the word 'honored'—that's about as close as anything I guess. So, if you guys want some more flattery, I could probably go on. John V: I think the word is 'pleased'! Jack: Pleased and honored, and I'd rather have it this way than the reverse, that nobody paid attention to me! An old rascal like me, and everybody said, "Who's that?" No, instead it works the other way around. Somebody says, "Jack Vance" and now there are at least a few people who turn their heads, and don't spit on the sidewalk. So that's about it—does that answer the question or not? Dave: I believe it does; I must tell you that I feel happy and fortunate to be able to hear you talk tonight and ask you questions, but as I recall you have never appeared in the pages of Cosmopolis. Jack: No, I want to stay apart from it, I don't want to get… Dave: That's okay, but it's nice to hear you say that, because one doesn't read that in Cosmopolis or anywhere else. Jack: No, I don't feel it's my place to involve myself in the affairs of VIE. I'm not a member of the group, and it would be impertinent if I inserted myself. I very strenuously isolate myself from the work you guys are doing, except I'm sure happy it's being done. Again, I do admire your work; it seems like a magnificent job you are doing. I can't see the books myself, but everybody that has the books, admires them tremendously. John V: I'll just throw something in here. When Paul first came to us with this idea, Dad more or less explicitly forbade both my mother and me to become involved, just because it would take time, and we have plenty of other things to do around here. Dad wanted us to be working on other things, essentially. Jack: But luckily it didn't take any of Norma's time or John's time at all. Ha! It was worse than I ever expected! [laughs]

John V: Cosmopolis is an accessory to the major work that goes on. Mom in particular has put some things in, to show our appreciation to the people who are working on the project. But there isn't really a reason for Dad to come out and be involved in Cosmopolis.

Chris: Were you ever displeased with the way editors treated your texts in the past when you published?

Jack: Of course! Oh my god, I don't want to even go into it, I may have a heart attack! Editors have done things to my writing that even a dog wouldn't do. They do it without so much as a pang of guilt. When I see them, if ever I see them, they give me this bland look—and if I complain, they act surprised. "We're here to help you, Mr. Vance, here to make your writing better." All right! They've done some terrible deeds. Changed all my titles around, put in titles I don't like. About half the time, I give the

story a title, and some girl out of Vassar will say, "God, that's no good, I'll give it another title." And that's the way it comes out. And what irritates me more than anything else, these girls out of Vassar are given the jobs of copyreaders, so what they have is a copy of Fowler's English Usage by their elbows, and they want to make me adhere to Fowler! And I try to explain to them, this is a volume of usage! It's not a Bible or anything, they want to make everyone stand in line, and salute when Fowler goes by. That infuriates me more than anything else. "Fowler doesn't like that!" You know—you should use two commas instead of one comma, Fowler says so. Fowler can go jump in a lake!

Chris: Is it more a question of smaller details in the way sentences are constructed?

Jack: It's all kinds of things. I am luckily more or less protected from the worst atrocities, because a lot of it I've never seen. You guys have seen more of it than I have. Norma's seen a lot of it, and she tells me once in a while about this thing or that, and I ask her not to continue because my digestion is not all that good that day.

Chris: Then maybe we should go on to the next question!

Jack: But anyway, I'm not alone in this; everybody I know is mad at the editors, it's not just me. Except maybe Dylan Thomas or John Masefield or…well, anyway, continue.

John S: Now that Lurulu is completed, where do you go from here?

Jack: Well, I'll tell you, I knew you were going to ask this, and I don't want to go into details about this story, or even tell you title, but here's how it happened. When I was writing Ports of Call, I wound up with a long book, but still had a lot of material I wanted to use. So freely, unconventionally, I said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I've got to stop this story here, and continue in the next volume." And so I ended Ports of Call. But I used the material I had left over, in Lurulu. Now, I've finished that story, and I don't have the impulse to continue with another sequel, but I find I still have quite a bit of material, about places, ports and societies, that for one reason or another I didn't care to use in either Ports of Call or Lurulu, for various reasons which I won't go into—well, I'll say that some of these places were so scary, so grotesque, that I didn't want to scare my readers—so now I'm using some of this material in this new book I'm writing. I may use all of it or none of it. It's a different kind of a work than Ports of Call or Lurulu, which essentially make a single narrative; does that more or less get to what you wanted to know?

John S: I think so. I can't remember this having been asked before; I know that you and Norma have done a lot of traveling—to what extent do your travels and the people you've met find themselves in your stories?

Jack: None whatever. Well, let's put it this way: I'm not aware of it, but I suppose no matter what you do with your life, whether you travel or don't travel, or just meet people, or work as a carpenter or a radio announcer, all these experiences in your life get into your subconscious, and when you start to write you draw on these things without thinking too much about it. So I suppose that all the people I've met, either here in the States or elsewhere, maybe I've used them for help in the stories. I wrote some murder mysteries using backgrounds of Morocco, and the Pacific Ocean, and

Positano in Italy, and on a freighter that Norma and I traveled from San Francisco to Spain on—I used that as a background for a story—mystery stories. But in the other material, backgrounds are much more synthesized—incidentally, I hate the word 'science fiction', I just hate to use it—it makes me think of Star Trek, and the adolescents who… well, I won't go into it. The last movie I ever saw was Star Wars, and I only went because I got a free ticket to it. As it turned out, I liked it, I thought it was a lot of fun. I liked it all—except when the hero duels with the villain using flaming swords, which I thought was a bunch of hokum. Anyway, I isolate myself from the so-called 'science fiction' field. Anybody asks me what I write, I say, "Oh, adventure stories, social Darwinism"—I just give some kind of funny answer, nobody knows what I'm talking about. I suppose I shouldn't be so damned ticklish, or vain, or whatever it is. I should bite the bullet and say, "All right, Vance, everybody thinks you're a science fiction writer, you might as well accept it." That's probably the sensible thing to do. But the vanity is that I just don't want to be in the same leaking rowboat as Star Trek.

John S: Understood, and I will not refer to your work as 'science fiction'!

Jack: Okay, although I'm not really too upset about it—I just don't like it.

I'm reminded of the time the government of Mexico took me and Theodore Sturgeon to Mexico City, and had us on a talk show together with Italo Calvino and a Mexican communist. I didn't think much about it at the time, but every one of these people had a totally different notion of what the field of 'science fiction' was. Sturgeon and myself were a little closer together, but for instance, Calvino had the notion that the field derived from the Icarus legend, that it was just a continuation of Greek mythology; the communist thought it was all social propaganda, that all science fiction should be devoted to the egalitarian revolt of the masses, and that's the only reason for writing it. I forget what Sturgeon's ideas were, but in any event, my idea was just to use it for entertainment!

Damien: If you had your choice, whose work would you like to see, for lack of a better word, 'suffer' the same treatment as yours has, under the VIE?

Jack: Well, I guess Poul Anderson speeds to mind. Of course he's dead now, and can't appreciate it, but he certainly would have enjoyed having his work handled like this. But he's the only name that comes to mind, can't think of anybody else. There may be some other people whose work I admire. But as I say, you couldn't call me expert in the field.

Damien: Well, I don't want you to limit yourself to just science fiction—

Jack: Oh, well, for heaven's sake, I do a lot of reading of murder mysteries, suspense stories, and I've got some authors there whom I admire tremendously. There's a lady called M.C. Beaton. Anybody there know her?

Dave: I love her; she's a wonderful writer.

Jack: She is my favorite writer; she is magnificent. She can't be improved on. Her stories are a habit for me. She's got a new one out called Death of a Celebrity; I read her stuff over and over again. There are other good writers— I used to think that John MacDonald was really great, then I got sickened and annoyed by this feeling that he

had to insert into each one of his books a big erotic spasm, and they're all the same, there's a formula he used. But if he'd get this erotic spasm out of his books, they'd be great. He's an intelligent man, and he has an eye for all kinds of wonderful things, but all this talking about how he got his gun off, and these ladies he laid, it just got so goddamn tiresome, and now I just can't stand him, I don't read him at all. But let me think now…now, Agatha Christie, and Earl [Stanley] Gardner, they're old war-horses, I've got an affection for them, and enjoy reading them.

I like English stories better than Americans. Oh, and Norma just mentioned Arthur Upfield, an Australian; anybody acquainted with his books? If not, then run, don't walk, to the nearest library and get some Arthur Upfield.

Damien: To the library, eh?

Jack: You'd have to. Upfield went over to Australia, from England, as a reporter. His early stuff is terrible, but the more he wrote the better he got, and his latest stuff is just tremendous. Also you learn more about Australia reading Arthur Upfield than just about any other way.

There's a woman called Deborah Crombie who is a good writer—and Ruth Rendell, but her stuff in many cases is very depressing, and I don't read murder mysteries to feel depressed, to get terrible feelings about the world. Sometimes she feels impelled to pull all the stops out on tragedy and terrible things happening to people—the babies are all dead, and the ladies get leprosy…But when her stuff isn't a downer, I recommend her—she's a damn good writer.

I kind of like Martha Grimes's stuff, although at times I find her trying to be too cute, too coy; still, I find her entertaining. Again, I'm still talking now about murder mysteries, which you guys aren't particularly interested in.

Dave: You started out writing for pulp magazine stories, and then moved into mysteries…

Jack: I was trying to make an honest buck.

Dave: And then the move back into your current work?

Jack: Just a matter of economics. Those early stories, I was trying to write something that would sell. I tried to sell to John Campbell, and had pretty good luck with him, if I could find something connected with the paranormal: telepathy, telekinetics, forecasting…Poul told me one time that he was in Campbell's back yard, and Campbell gave him a bent wire hanger, and told him to walk across the back yard, and Poul said the hanger popped down every time he crossed over this space, and John said, "Well, that's where the pipe goes; you're a good dowser." That's the kind of stuff John Campbell was into. So I admit to taking advantage of—I knew I could sell a story to him as long as I included some paranormal stuff in it. Then I started writing murder mysteries—because, first of all, I liked them—but there wasn't any money in it, so I just went back to writing so-called science fiction, and never turned back.

Chris: I wonder where your extensive vocabulary has come from—there are words you use that would not be in any standard thesaurus, so I'm not going to accept the answer that you just look in the thesaurus.

Jack: I was one of these kids that had a wonderful I.Q. I could read very early, and I was anti-social, not so much because I wanted to be, but because the other kids didn't like me very much. In any event, I did all kinds of reading, of everything—science, history, art, music, everything. At age ten—I was very arrogant and vain, mind you—I thought that I had a better education than most other people I came in contact with. As a matter of fact, I was probably correct! But nobody wanted to hear some pipsqueak of a kid tell them how stupid they were.

Once I got out of high school, I decided I was going to change my ways. I wasn't going to be an aesthete and bookworm anymore, I was going to become a man's man, so to speak. So for about five years after getting out of high school, I went out and did all kinds of different kinds of work—manual work. I picked a lot of fruit, of course. I learned an enormous amount. I got a job with a mining construction outfit up in the Sierras, as a laborer. I learned all kinds of things there; I won't go into them. But I learned enough about electrical work that I subsequently conned the Navy into thinking I was an electrician, and they sent me out to Pearl Harbor to be an electrician's helper. I was there about three or four months. I was so mad at the Navy—they just didn't treat us very nice—and I came back to the States, arriving about a month before the Japanese hit the place. But I went out there, because of what I learned working for Western Knapp Engineering.

John V: What about rigging, Dad?

Jack: Oh, learning about rigging. Up in the mountains I learned rigging backwards and forwards: dealing with rigging, dealing with riggers, and admiring the rigging mentality, which I still do. I think rigging is a craft…well, you don't hear much of a rigger. As a matter of fact, later, after I got back from Hawaii, I got a job as a rigger at Kaiser, making ships. I was a pretty good rigger, in fact I became what they call a quarterman, which means I had six rigs under me.

But anyway, I learned all of this stuff working for Western Knapp; it was very valuable experience. I wasn't so much of an erudite weasel anymore, I was just a human being. I've developed all my life; I think almost anybody develops as the years go by, if they've got any sense to them. They see where they've made mistakes, and if they have any will at all, they'll try to arrange things so they're not the criminal they used to be.

Oh—where I got my vocabulary! Well, I got my vocabulary from my early reading. One time, before I went for Western Knapp, I got a job as an assistant to a surveyor. That means carrying the rod, knocking stakes in, and so forth, I didn't mind. But he was a pretty smart guy, and I thought I knew all kinds of things. I told him—I don't know how the subject came up—but I told him that electricity was the flow of electrons. He scoffed at me, said, "You're crazy, you don't know what you're talking about." I said, "No, no, that's what electricity is, it's well known." And he said, "Ah, bah, that's just what they teach you high school kids." And of course, he was right. Electricity is associated with the movement of electrons, but scientists today talk more about the electric charge carried by the electrons. Anyway, that's where I got my lore, all from the mistaken idea of what an electric current is. I did develop a pretty good vocabulary by reading.

Damien: I noticed, having spent some time with your works lately, that The Book of Dreams shows up in a couple of your stories, and I wondered if it's something that you just came up with, or…?

Jack: No, I never had a book of dreams, but it seemed like a good idea for Howard Alan Treesong to have one. He had this symbol, which he thought had mystical powers to it. This particular symbol I'd evolved, myself, long ago. There's a book by Rockwell Kent called North By East, in which there are these beautiful woodcuts, some of them showing a boat wrecking on the coast of Greenland; some of these woodcuts showed human beings flying through space in an idealized fashion. I got thinking, "I wonder how you can express this feeling in the simplest way, using two curved lines." So I experimented, did a lot of fooling around with it, so that the lines became a little bit more complicated, and I put this symbol into The Book of Dreams. The book was published by DAW first, and I included the symbol, and of course, they printed it upside-down—I just about had a heart attack! Of all the stupid things! This beautiful symbol carried all this magnificent dynamic thrust, and the damned thing was printed upside-down! How could anybody be so goddamn dumb? It looked, as I've often said, like a dead seal on the beach!

But did I have a book of dreams in my background? Not really, no.

Dave: I think you like perhaps to avoid being characterized as one type of writer, or another, and I'm curious as to whether—and I don't want you to be modest—you'd consider yourself just a creative person writing in your own style.

Jack: Oh yes, definitely. It's not just me, I think almost any writer has that feeling.

Dave: Do you feel that someone influenced you? Are you a craftsman, improving on the work of someone in particular?

Jack: Well, yes and no. When I was little, I used to read a magazine called Weird Tales. It was full of all kinds of good stuff, and I was influenced by the amazing stories that came out of it. This was way back in the '20s. And then Lord Dunsany had an influence on me when I was young. He doesn't any more, I think he's a little bit too hoity-toity, to tell you the truth, a little too charming. But when I read him as a kid I was very much impressed. Then of course I can't neglect P.G. Wodehouse, whom I admire tremendously. I think he was a great writer, at least before the war. Jeffrey Farnol, I've mentioned several times, was an adventure story writer, English, during the '20s. I liked Sherlock Holmes. Gee, I've read so much, I can't remember it all…

Dave: But you wouldn't say that you consciously—

Jack: Copied? No way. I was influenced, in the sense that, "Oh, that sounds like a good idea, I'll try to use something similar to this." But again, as I say, everyone who's ever written, uses what he's read as influence; but I don't think it's a matter of slavishly copying somebody's style, or attitudes or anything of the sort. Wodehouse I just admire, revere. He wrote an epitaph for himself: "That old son-of-a-gun was a worker." And he was… that stuff didn't come easy for him, Wodehouse really worked at it. When you read it, it flows so artlessly and so evenly, but he was a worker, he worked very hard at it.

Chris: Speaking of the craft of writing, I've heard it said that you start a story with kind of a 'mood' that you're trying to set and convey; do you then create characters that fit in with that mood?

Jack: I haven't used that method so much recently, but, oh, maybe twenty or thirty years ago, before I started a new idea, I'd have a mood, a certain feeling. Then I'd scratch together a plot, and I didn't purposely craft the characters to fulfill this mood, but just worked the story around this mood without getting too fussy about it. In other words, I forgot the mood as soon as I started the story, even though the mood persisted, I guess…especially in the Tschai books, I started those off with a mood about the planet.

But there wasn't any hard-tested method: it was just 'try this', and 'work at it'. I don't have any methods, really, I just work as seems good at the moment. But yes, the mood would come on me, and I'd say, "Gee, it would be nice to work a story out on this set of circumstances."

Chris: Was the mood that you had in mind for the Durdane trilogy related to music?

Jack: I don't know, maybe. It might have been. But as I say, don't take this mood business too seriously, because it's just a kind of passing ingredient, in the work of getting a story together. It's there, but not the guiding factor at all.

Cosmopolis #42 September 2003 - Editor : Derek Benson

2003 JVMB Axolotl (P.Dusoulier) Answers

https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/jackvance/answers-and-some-pictures-too-t830-s10.html

This new thread is here to show Jack's answers.

For Round 1, John managed to ask TWO questions, not just one. Thanks for all this, John.

For Round 2, three questions were addressed.

For Round 3, three questions were addressed.

For Round 4, five questions were addressed.

For Round 5, three questions were addressed.

For Round 6, five questions were addressed (if not at too much length! We may be tiring Jack a bit now, I suspect...)

That's 21 questions answered so far...

Some of the questions (or answers) have been illustrated. All my thanks to Jacques Garin (a.k.a. "Doc Mars") who has selected those illustrations for the questions/answers as translated to French on his remarkable site :

http://vance.jack.free.fr/jackvance.html

aug 10, 2003#2

Matt Hughes asked:

You arrived at your distinctive style after a number of years in which you tried different approaches. You must have known that, while it would delight some, it was sure to put others off. That meant you would sell fewer books than plodders like Heinlein or Asimov. What made you do it?

Jack replies:

To tell the truth, I wrote the way I felt like... I just decided, the hell with it, I'm going to write what I feel like writing, and forget trying to please John Campbell. I got tired of writing commercial trash, although I wasn't thinking in those terms, at the time.

I got tired of writing about cheap thrills in Science. Three-legged Joe was one of them- I had ice cold mercury being superconductive, and killing Three-legged Joe, because it was superconductive - that was a rotten story. There was one about, well, I wont go into it, I detest them all... Still, I wrote them, sold them, made a few bucks. I did as good a job as I could- some I think are pretty good- I like Miracle Workers, for instance, and Moon Moth. The Blue World, that was a gadget story; I don't like it much,

the idea of making weapons out of iron distilled from peoples blood you don't need to do that- iron comes from what people eat, and in order to get iron, all you have to do is get it out of the stuff they eat!

"I would say Blue World was the last of my gadget stories, after that, I got more interested in people, like Navarth, and the protagonist of Tschai, and well, I wont go into details..

aug 10, 2003#3

Kilo Volt asked:

Which are your favourite jazz albums? A short list of absolute masterworks, for the interested novice, so to speak.

Jack replies:

That demands some thinking about its not as easy as it sounds; there's so much beautiful music but I could suggest the Buck Creek Jazz Band, Black Eagle Jazz Band, anything by Jack Teagarden, maybe some of the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, from the second phase, with Wingy Manone, Sidney Arodin, George Brunies.. those are perfect records. Then the Jelly Roll Morton piano sides.. the basics, nothing fancy, to get started with.

But the Black Eagles, and Buck Creek, are probably the best jazz bands that ever existed; even though they're contemporary, they're better in every respect than the bands the pseudo-critics like to consider, like King Oliver .. of course that was a great band, I like King Oliver, love it, appreciate it very much, but they haven't achieved the complete mastery of technique, like these others I've mentioned..

I think Beiderbecke is the greatest jazz musician that ever existed; but its hard to recommend Beiderbecke to neophytes, because you can't appreciate him until you know the music better.

To me, Jazz does not consist solely of Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and Bessie Smith; these are socially progressive, and - politically correct- but there's so much other music out there; for instance I could mention Benny Strickler, whos absolutely unknown to almost everybody, but he was one of the really great trumpet players; his playing is so wonderful, its not showy, its not blasting, its not show-offy, its just easy, and relaxed, gorgeous relaxed music, music music music, pure music.. Benny Strickler, no one knows who he is..

Jack added a personal invitation to Kilo Volt (I have just edited the name he used, to protect Kilo's anonymity... which is flimsy at best, though!) Jack told his son :

"You can tell K. [name edited out] , if he wants to come over to the house here, bring over a couple of steaks, fry em, you know, over here, Ill play him some good music.. If he wants to bring his wife, well have a party, well play some good music"

---

aug 17, 2003#4

Question from Steve Sherman 5/8 9:05 am:

The outline for the third Joe Bain book, The Genesee Slough Murders, which will appear in Volume 44 of the VIE, treats the actual murders rather briefly, so much so that I had to reread it to find out who got killed and why.

On the other hand, some of the more incidental scenes are quite fleshed out: the trees on the waterway and the demonstrations, the pickup truck burglary, Miranda's mysterious phone companion, Joe's ongoing battles with Howard Griselda, and so on. My impression is that the finished novel would have been just as good a read as its two predecessors.

Yet it was never written. I've seen correspondence at the Mugar from the Bobbs Merrill editor, Robert Ockene, who was a great fan of the Joe Bain books and at one point wrote that he looked forward to publishing the third one.

So what happened? Why was The Genesee Slough Murders never realized?)

Jack's answer:

Bob Ockene, the editor for the first two Joe Bain books, died of leukemia. When I wrote the outline for Genesee Slough, I never did flesh it totally out; I never got the story really plotted to my satisfaction.. but for one reason or another, the new editor at Bobbs Merrill turned it back, I don't know on what basis. But I kind of gave up writing that stuff, the stories werent making any money for me, particularly .. of course nothing was making any particular money for us, in those days

I will say this: I really like Joe Bain, I like the situation, the locale, which is a blend of the sort of area in which I grew up, over the other side of the hills from the Bay Area. The locale is a kind of synthesis of several of the counties over there- its pretty authentic, the feeling of the countryside at the time I was growing up, anyway..

Question from Mike Transreal 5/8 9:59 am

And, aside from the Joe Bain novel, which projects and series would you have liked to continue, assuming editorial support?

You've mentioned in interviews, etc. over the years that you might return to your Lyonesse setting, continue with The Man from Zodiac, The Narrow Land, possibly Maske:Thaery and others. [Not too sure if JV mentioned a possible sequel tpo M:T, or if it's wishful thinking.]

Jack's answer:

I have not the slightest idea, not an ounce.. I see myself as semi-retired, although I am working on another story-

---

aug 17, 2003#5

Question from Funambulist 4/8 10 :37 pm:

I have never heard you mention an affinity for any team sport, yet team sports constitute an important element in some of your work. How important (if at all) do you think sports, or athletic competition, is in general to human society?

Jack's answer:

I cant answer that question specifically, I don't have an opinion.

Personally, I used to like college football; was very much interested in it. In the 20s and 30s, college football really had some romance to it, with the coonskin coats, guys with ukeleles, hip flask pockets, you know, and flappers-

I like baseball, but I don't like professional football, or basketball, or professional games of any sort..

Question:

Do you think team sports provide an outlet of some sort?

Jack's answer:

I think that amateur team sports, well, even the professional ones, provide a focus for the district which they represent, but I don't have any really original theories about this, everyone else probably has the same notions

I invented a couple of games, for fun, hussade, particularly- one time I was told that up at the University of Washington someone was going to start playing hussade! But nothing ever developed ... I've heard a lot of half-hearted references to getting the game in motion, but again, nothing has ever occurred.'

Question:

Do you think that sports are inevitable, in a certain sense, because of something in the make-up of any human society?

Jack's answer:

I don't have any real theories, in this regard I would'nt argue one way or the other.

---

aug 17, 2003#6

Question from Rob Friefeld 3/8 4 :57 pm

Merlings in Trullion, morphotes in Koryphon: the nightmare notion of a malignant race under the water, ready pull you down. Is this based on a myth or experience?

Jack's answer:

Neither one! No morphote has ever grabbed my leg, as far as I know- I would remember if it had..

Question:

Is it purely a psychological idea? I think it is powerfully effective that these are things people must live with, rather than solving the problem with depth charges and poisons.

Jack's answer:

No, these races are just story elements, they don't have any particular, strong significance. Just part of the environment of the particular story.

---

sept. 04, 2003#7

****** PLASTICITY OF HUMAN RACE ******

Question asked by Fironzelle 4/8 12 :18 am

Jack:

I've seen you use sentient aliens with good effect to contrast with humanity in the future. The Wannek, Chasch, Pnume, and Dirdir particularly molded their human symbiotes on Tschai. The aliens of the Last Castle, Dragon Masters, and Marune were all engaged in being remade in Man's image, remaking Man to their specifications, or remaining aloof from Man as much as possible.

The Demon Prince stories were more devoid of alien-human interaction (with the major exception of the almost human Star King, Malagate), but often portrayed mutually incomprehensible members of the human universe dealing with one another. Will the constantly changing scientific background to our lives force us and our descendants to abandon social rigidity and adopt a protean flexibility toward morality and social thought? Do you think that the apparent plasticity of our behavior patterns will allow us to change with scientific progress, or even permit the survival of core values of Western civilization?

Jacks answer:

The question is impossible to answer intelligently regarding the future of the human race, there are so many trillion possibilities that its pointless to have any specific theories in this regard. Any ideas you have are bound to be wrong.

From our contemporary point of view, we might as well just observe what's happening, with interest of course; but predicting anything seriously is just blowing smoke. I don't think seriously, at all, about future changes. The possibilities are so awesome, or not awesome, but so many that its pointless. I don't have any theories about the future of the human race- though nothing would surprise me.

[Johns prompt: But will our behaviors continue to flex, to adapt to changing conditions?]

Jack: Well of course, that goes without saying.

[Johns prompt: Do you think that the core values of Western civilization will survive?]

Jack: Not so much a question of surviving, theyre going to alter, go different directions I don't even know what the core values are anyway, they alter from year to year.

There will be changes, probably very slow, maybe so slow that nobody will notice. For instance if we were transplanted back to Victorian times, we could very easily adapt to life there, without any big, whats the word, dislocation. Wed have to think a bit, tip our hat a little more often .. wed just be careful. In the same way, if we were

transplanted to a society a hundred years from now, we might not even recognize the difference; there might be laws against fast automobiles, or ...

As far as my use of aliens, I use them as plot devices. I don't like to use aliens in my stories, generally speaking, because they're well I wont go into the reasons, they're complicated - but I use them only when necessary; the thrust of my work, I think, is about the way human societies act and react to each other, with ordinary, garden-type human beings...

[Johns prompt: Would you postulate that in the future, and under widely varied conditions, that human society will allow a continuum of behaviors?]

No, I wouldn't. That kind of talk is for people, very earnest young fellows, with funny eyeglasses, that go to coffee bars, and have earnest arguments with each other, very avant- garde types This is just one possibility, among ten thousand, it might go the other way; society might get more strict, its not impossible, although the tendency seems to be, as we look back over the last hundred, two hundred years, that people are acting a little bit more loose all the time, more undisciplined, a little bit more free and open, which is, I believe, all to the good - in general.

---

sept. 04, 2003#8

****** POINT OF VIEW ******

Question asked by Matt Hughes 10/8 9:04 pm

Ax, you can file this for future use, perhaps. But here's what I'd like to hear about:

Why have you never, or almost never, written in the first person? Is it because it's limiting in terms of putting a story together? Or do you like to have a little distance from your point-of-view characters? Or does it just not appeal to you? Or...?

Jacks answer:

All three!

I much prefer standing a little distance from what's going on, so I can report with a bit more freedom on the scene as a whole. If youre writing in the first person, it has certain advantages, you can report upon emotions with a lot more facility, and impact, than somebody making an exposition. But if youre good at it, by telling how somebody looks and feels, you can get the same effect.

In fact Im reading a book right now, by P.D. James, a lady writer, she does a marvelous job of talking in very far off exposition, making the emotional feelings, sorrows, and joys of her characters so real.. shes very, very good at this, works hard at it.

But the answer to the question is, I think standing apart from the action gives you a little wider view..

I like to keep myself out of my stories, as much as possible, so nobody can say, aha.. that damn Vance, that's how he, that's his there he goes again, you know - hates dogs - ...

---

sept. 04, 2003#9

****** ORIGIN OF NAME GLAWEN ******

Question asked by mije 21/8

dear Mr. Jack Vance

About 8 years ago we decided to call our firstborn Glawen. At that time my husband and I were reading 'the Cadwall chronicles'. We found the main character a really nice and friendly boy, with a very nice name ... Glawen Clattuc. Our oldest son was born on the 22nd of February in 1995 and we called him Glawen, it really suits him. But there's one thing I would very much like to know: It is a very special name, we never heard it anywhere. Did you make it up, does it come from your own fantasy, or does it exist? It would be nice to know if there are any other Glawen's or if our Glawen is the only one. I hope you can answer my question.

with regards

Marije Binsbergen

the Netherlands

Jacks answer:

I made the name up, so your Glawen may be the only one!

I work very hard evolving names that seem to suit the circumstances, and the personalities of the people involved. Glawen IS a good name, I like it too.. a very nice name for the person involved

---

sept. 15, 2003#10

****** APPROPRIATE COVER ILLUSTRATIONS ******

Asked by Agenerak 4/8 11 :53 am

I have a few questions:

Which books did you wish was turned over to a pen of well-fed incontinent food poisoned dogs for their appalling artwork? This would be the ones that stood out in your mind from yore that truly upset you.

Also what cover(s) made you say to yourself 'they got it right! ha!' if ever?

JACKS ANSWER 15 Sept 2003 :

There was one, an Underwood book, one of the Cugel stories, absolutely appalling I built up the story to a crescendo, a surprise, a climax, but the artist gave away the surprise! Like, in the Mountains of Magnatz, the surprise was that when Cugel was going across the lake, he hooked his anchor on the nose of this giant under the water,

and pulled him up.. but that was supposed to be a surprise, you know.. But the artist, he drew a big picture, showing this giant out of the water, pouncing on Cugel! No surprise! He did that on several others of his drawings; made me insane with rage...

There was one illustrator, I forget her name, she copied a picture out of a Russian book of fairy tales, sheer, bald-assed plagiarism. The picture was copied, every line, from the Russian book of fairy tales. And then, the people in the costumes, they were supposed to be costumes of the future, she made them all dressed up like Regency bucks, from 1803, or 1804, Regency clothes awful, awful, awful

(John V. prompt: Any others? Any with overly-voluptuous female figures?)

Oh, no, no. I cant think of any others, offhand.

On the other hand, the illustrations for the Dragon Masters were so excellent, so magnificent, they got me an award for the story, I couldn't have gotten the award if that guy Jack Gaughan hadn't done such magnificent illustrations.

(John V. : Was that the first edition?)

Appeared in Galaxy magazine.. they're just magnificent illustrations, except, with one exception, which I wont go into..

sept. 15, 2003#11

****** CULTURES/ANTHROPOLOGY ******

Attel 7/8 3:09 am

I would like to know if you have ever had any formal training in Anthropology and if not what resources you used if any when describing the various cultures in your stories for example The Sarkoy or The Tadousko Oi in the DEMON Prince Series!

JACKS ANSWER 15 September 2003:

No, I don't have any formal training, I've just done a lot of reading. I read everything I can.. in fact I just finished reading a book on anthropology.

I think every intelligent person ought to be fascinated by anthropology, the surroundings, the environment. I wouldn't say Im interested in anthropology, but that I'm interested in my environment; I want to know everything I can about my environment, which includes history, the world..

(John V. prompt: Your social environment? Physical environment?)

Just plain environment. Everything! Physical, social, everything. I guess I have an insatiable curiosity about everything

---

sept. 15, 2003#12

****** UNPUBLISHED STORIES ******

Willem 9/8 8:15 pm

A question on unpublished stories: are there any stories not published but lying around that could be published?

I am thinking of stories that needed editing, where bumped by publishers, stories that were not found good enough by Jack himself.

the more specific the answer is the better.

further i propose to add unpublished stories in the last vie volume.

(I cannot imagine that no stories were withheld from publication for different reasons, some of those stories could be below standards, but some might be found good enough by the author to publish at request)

JACKS ANSWER 15 September 2003:

No.

(John V. prompt: No studies that needed editing, were bumped by publishers...)

No..

---

sept. 15, 2003#13

****** EVEN WORSE STORIES ******

Charles 3/8 1 :33 pm

The collection Lost Moons has a great introduction, written by Jack Vance, which may well be the best part of the book. He describes the stories as lacking the distinction of being the worst that he has written, and says that the publishers are saving these stories for another volume, The Worst of Jack Vance.

No book of this name has ever been published and no collection I have seen would unequivocally qualify as the worst. What are the stories to which he is referring?

JACKS ANSWER 15 September 2003:

Oh I don't know, just a lot of the earlier stories. There are a lot of the earlier stories I don't like, I'm ashamed of. They were all pretty nave.. the first few years I was writing, the short stories I wrote I was trying to find some.. I don't know.. lets just say, my early stories I'm not proud of, my earliest stories I'm not proud of..

---

sept. 15, 2003#14

****** MARKETING IMPACT OF AWARDS ******

Aldiboronti 22 August 22, 2003 12:53 pm

The Last Castle and Dragon Masters are absolute gems. Did winning the Nebula and Hugo for these stories make any great difference to your career in terms of sales, contract negotiations, etc.?

JACKS ANSWER 15 September 2003:

No.

(John V. prompt: Never got the feeling it meant anything)

No-

(John V.: It never got you a single thing!!)

Zilch, zilch..

(John V.: Thank you for the honor..)

No, those guys don't give a damn about that stuff, all they're interested in is scandal, sensation.. get me in the paper, then Id sell lots of books..

Look at Phil Dick. Phil Dick, besides being an awfully clever writer, he got the credentials of being crazy- he became big there was a big clique around him.

For my taste, he was too batty, too sarcastic, too sardonic, negative.. and yet, some of his stuff was just insanely funny.. but he was not a person I could relate to, at all..

(John V. : Did you meet him?)

Oh, yeah, sure..

(John V.: Did you know him well?)

Not intimately, but fairly well..

(John V.: Did you meet him at parties, in that way?)

I don't remember, to tell you the truth.

When I first met him, he was kind of meek, quiet, I didn't think he was going anywhere then the last time I saw him, Poul and I were invited over to a party over in Marin county, by some woman, didn't serve us anything, didn't even serve wine! Anyway, Phil Dick came storming in there, crazy as a coot, didn't acknowledge either me or Poul, stomped through, stomped out, did some other things while he was there, I forget what now. That was the last time I saw him.. wearing a cape, big boots, swaggering through the difference between that guy and the guy that I first knew.. where did I meet him, at Scott Merediths office, or Anthony Bouchers house?.. this quiet, modest, little nondescript fellow.. the difference between that guy, and the guy that came stomping through that party, you know, swaggering, like a big pirate, with a big cloak, big boots, not waving a cutlass at all, but just swaggering through there.. by this time, he had his reputation.. he was on drugs, dope, crazy or something.. He was a clever son of a gun.

There was a fellow named Avram Davidson, married a women named Gronya, she divorced him, ultimately, a nice lady, we liked her.. she married Dick, and they lived, oddly enough, rented a house out in East Oakland, by some coincidence, or chance, owned by Ali Szantho...

---

oct. 07, 2003#15

*** BAD RONALD : WHY ? ***

Question asked by Matt Hughes 3/9 2:41 pm

The book is well done, but the character and situation are repellent. What interests me is that BR is so different from the other Vance books. Where did it come from? Why was it written? The main thing I'd like to know is how JV feels about that book and character.

And an additional question by Matt Hughes 15/9 :

After reading JV's roundtable interview in Cosmo 42, I'd more than ever like to know what he thinks of Bad Ronald, both as a book and as a character.

Jacks Answer:

Bad Ronald came into being by an indirect process. I read in a newspaper, or somewhere, an account of a mother having her child sequestered, in a house, for some reason, for a long time. And the thought was horribly fascinating, a fascinating idea.. And it just occurred to me that this would make a good theme for a horror story... I just thought Id try my hand at it, see how it turned out So I did, and I just tried to write it without too many dramatics, detail, gory detail, just straight- in other words I wasnt trying to shock too many people, I just explained what I considered a fascinating, if horrible situation. And the story, I thought, turned out pretty well, even though it was very disgusting.

I think the book is a success. The character, Im dispassionate about, Im dispassionate in regard to all my characters. I just use them as a means to an end. I don't have any feelings of hatred, or passion toward Bad Ronald; of course I do feel sorrow at the plight of the girls, but that's why its called a horror story

---

oct. 07, 2003#16

*** BARSOOM AND TSCHAI ***

Question asked by Dan Gunter 18/9

The Tschai novels seem to me to have some similarities to Edgar Rice Burroughs' Barsoomian novels (A Princess of Mars, etc.). Had you read those or similar "interplanetary adventure" novels when you began writing the Tschai books? If so, what are your thoughts on the Barsoom books (or similar books)?

If you were familiar with other "interplanetary adventure" novels: Some of the events of the Tschai books vary dramatically from the basic formula of the Barsoom books and the like. For example, Burroughs would never have permitted the death of Dejah Thoris; by contrast, Ylin Ylan, the Flower of Cath, dies fairly early in Wannek, and Reith has no other love interest until Pnume. Did you intentionally vary from the formula, or were you just writing the story as it seemed fitting to you?

Jacks Answer:

My mother was addicted to fantasy; back in 1915 when Tarzan first appeared in Blue Book magazine, the people of San Francisco, she tells me, the ladies all whispered,

told each other about this marvelous new story, and instantly- everybody was reading Blue Book, Tarzan..

Even before this my mother had a taste for fantasy stories, she had Robert Chambers books, Maker of the Moons, Tracer of Lost Persons, The King in Yellow, maybe some others, and when we moved from San Francisco up to the ranch, I was six, and she brought all these books up she didn't have the Barsoom books, just Tarzan, in fact only the first, Tarzan of the Apes, but I read Tarzan, and was fascinated by it, I got all the other books from the library..

Barsoom, I thought, was wonderful; Burroughs had a knack for creating this wonderful atmosphere; the Barsoomian atmosphere he created never left me. Burroughs, how shall I say it, some of his ideas can be criticized, he was, well, I wont go into a criticism, but one thing he could do profoundly well, was create an atmosphere; and the atmosphere of Barsoom got into me when I was seven or eight years old, and never left me.

I had no intention of emulating Burroughs Barsoom books in Tschai; I never even thought of Barsoom while I was writing Tschai; totally separate, brand new. The death of, ... whats her name..? was a plot device. Also it was leading up to developing the culture of Cath, these weird situations... From the standpoint of the story, I didn't want Reith saddled with a girlfriend, all during the other books..

At the end, I saddled him with this rather unlikely Pnume girl, which even at the time I thought was kind of unreal, and unlikely, but I decided to try to make it stick anyway.. if people thought that was a little strange, that he should become attached to a person of such totally strange sociological background, well.. I agree. (laughs) But I just thought Id take a whack at it. that's the way it goes-

---

oct. 07, 2003#17

****** BIG BANG THEORY ******

Question asked by Kilo Volt 21/8 5:40 pm

Well, I got my most burning question answered already, but if no-one else posts some more questions, I'll stop being polite and throw another one in for the poll:

Most of us are aware of the fact (if that it is) that you do not hold the Big Bang theory in high esteem, even if recent observations of the cosmic background radiation and its patterns of minute fluctuations seem to speak in favour of it. What are your reasons to differ, and what do you consider a more plausible scenario?

There! kV

Jacks Answer:

My reasons, for not swallowing this theory totally, at a gulp, like a salmon swallowing a piece of insect, are because as far as I can see, the thing was initiated by people trying to explain the red shift, as indicating the distance and flight of the far off galaxies; and I was extremely skeptical of using this as evidence because I felt that

there were other possible reasons, for the red shift, that might not indicate the Doppler..

I don't have any alternate proposals ... [the Big Bang] just doesn't strike me as being automatically right. And I feel like now, its conventional; all the scientists go for it.. they use the background radiation as evidence

These theories change, develop, every twenty or thirty years. One hundred years from now, who knows what ideas there will be.. Somebody is finding that Newtons laws of gravity don't work everywhere the same was as they work here; they work differently in far off galaxies, for inexplicable reasons. Dark matter, nobody knows, there's no evidence for it whatever.. scientists, in a very large handed manner, it seems, want to sprinkle matter around the universe, just in order to make the galaxies respond in what they consider a proper way, to the thrust, pull of gravity. If they don't put in the dark matter, the galaxies don't act right, so they have to postulate dark matter.. I cant see that the Big Bang theory makes any more sense than any of the other theories..

Shockley liked the steady-state; he manfully held on, until everybody piled on him, made him change.. his steady-state theory had some logical discomfitures, some drawbacks, they told him that doesn't work, this theory wont fly, Shockley, you know. Well all right, if you say so, so he did.

As far as I'm concerned, I'm just plain skeptical.. I'm not denying the existence of the Big Bang, I just think it doesn't seem particularly likely.

---

nov. 08, 2003#18

****** THORNE SMITH/ C.L. MOORE / E.E. DOC SMITH/ JAMES BRANCH CABELL/***

Matt Hughes:

Also: did he read Thorne Smith as a young man, and did Smith have an influence on his style (there are similarities in the dialogue).

Reformulated by Matt (I think he'd forgotten he'd asked that one already, in fact...) 2/10:

This question is just an instance of a writer wanting to know if the writer he likes another writer he likes. You know what that's like.

JACK: I read a couple of stories, didn't like 'em much... thought he was too New Yorkish, too clever for his own good was not influenced by him at all.

Sam Salazar:

I don't see any particular Thorne Smith influence but I do see definite points of similarity between C.L.Moore's Jirel of Joiry stories from the 1930s Weird Tales and the Dying Earth stories and I know JV read Weird Tales at one time; I wonder whether he remembers these ones...?

Jirel Discovers Magic

The Dark God's Shadow

The Dark God's Kiss, etc.

JACK: Lets put it this way. I admire C.L. Moores work very much indeed. [About the titles] don't remember, them, no. But Northwest Smith was a great character.

Joe Gottman:

Is Lens Larque's name a tribute to the sci-fi writer E. E. "Doc" Smith? Smith is best known for two series of novels, the Lensman series and the Skylark series.

JACK: No, in no way whatsoever.

Dan Gunter:

Some ignorant sot who occasionally stumbles onto the Jack Vance Message Board has suffered a hallucination in which your prose vaguely resembles (to his margarita-damaged brain) that of James Branch Cabell. Although one hesitates to believe anything spoken by said dolt (i.e., the Poster at the Board*), could you set our minds at ease by disclaiming any influence by M. Cabell?

* Think of "The Lurker at the Threshold," folks.

JACK: No, I thought he was over-civilized I read him, but thought he was, what's the word, a little hoity-toity... that's not quite the right word but self-conscious.

---

nov. 08, 2003#19

****** FAMILY CRITICS ******

Asked by Habeascorp 7/10

I noted your family interest in Tarzan. Did your parents ever have the opportunity to read your work and what did they think?

JACK: My father never saw my work, for sure. And I don't remember my mother saying anything about it, but Im sure she was favorably disposed..

Nov. 08, 2003#20

****** HUMOUR ******

Aldi 3/8 8 :17 am

The question Matt suggests is a good one; I've often wondered as to the development of Jack's style, that inimitable voice which sounds through all of his works, save for the earliest. (Although, having said that, it's always amazed me that Dying Earth was written at such an early point in his career.)

For my own question I'd like to ask Jack how important he considers humour as an element of his work. His sense of playfulness and fun is evident in the great majority of his books, sometimes breaking out in the most unexpected of places. It's one reason why I love his stuff so much.

JACK: Well, that's a hard question to answer. I don't analyze such factors, I just write

****** IDENTIFICATION WITH CHARACTERS ******

Paul Penna 3/9 7:53 pm

Do you find yourself identifying with any of the characters you create? If not in full, at least with some of their traits? Alternatively, do any of your characters exhibit traits which you wish you possessed yourself, or possessed in greater degree? If so, which characters and which traits?

JACK: No, with the possible, trivial.. lets see, jocular no, lets say a playful, or Navarth always seemed a good person to model my life after..(laughs) no that's silly.. But I always thought Navarth was a jolly character.

John V.: Any traits your characters have that you wish you had?

JACK: Certainly! Bravery, women chasing me, fighting ability.. (laughs) wealth, and yes, coolness under pressure I could wish for the super-macho characteristics of some of these guys

---

nov. 08, 2003#22

****** YANE, CARGUS, AND YANE CARGUS ******

Steve Sherman 8/8 6:24 pm

In Freitzke's Turn, you refer (in a footnote) to the starmenter Yane Cargus, who raided the Convent of the Divine Prism at Blenny, on Lutus, capturing two hundred and thirty novitiates.

In Suldrun's Garden, Aillas' two most trusted confederates, with whom he escapes from the Ska, are Yane and Cargus. Did you intentionally reuse this name, divided up into two characters, or is this simply a particularly remarkable instance of long-term memory in action?

Steve

JACK: I was aware of these names, and when I had to find names for the characters in Suldrun's Garden, on an impulse I used them again. I knew Id done it, but I just said to hell with it, re-used them..

2003 JVMB Axolotl Answers

https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/jackvance/answers-and-some-pictures-too-t830-s10.html

Question from Matt Hughes

Jack Vance Message Board (JVMB)

For me, and a lot of Vance fans, Bad Ronald stands out from the Vancean canon. It's the only book told largely from the villain's pov and its content is kind of nasty. Given a chance to ask the master about it, here was my question:

The book is well done, but the character and situation are repellent.

What interests me is that BR is so different from the other Vance books. Where did it come from? Why was it written? The main thing I'd like to know is how JV feels about that book and character.

Jack's Answer:

Bad Ronald came into being by an indirect process. I read in a newspaper, or somewhere, an account of a mother having her child sequestered, in a house, for some reason, for a long time. And the thought was horribly fascinating, a fascinating idea.. And it just occurred to me that this would make a good theme for a horror story...

I just thought I'd try my hand at it, see how it turned out… So I did, and I just tried to write it without too many dramatics, detail, gory detail, just straight- in other words I wasn't trying to shock too many people, I just explained what I considered a fascinating, if horrible situation. And the story, I thought, turned out pretty well, even though it was very disgusting.

I think the book is a success. The character, I'm dispassionate about, I'm dispassionate in regard to all my characters. I just use them as a means to an end. I don't have any feelings of hatred, or passion

toward Bad Ronald; of course I do feel sorrow at the plight of the girls, but that's why it's called a horror story.

Matt Hughes
http://mars.ark.com/~mhughes/

Permalink From the Jack Vance discussion board at

http://pub1.ezboard.com/fjackvancefrm26

Email question to Jack Vance from Swiss student for a thesis.

-1- From: John Vance [mailto:jhvance@earthlink.net]
Sent: Saturday, May 23, 2009 2:41 PM
To: 'Patrick Dusoulier'
Subject: RE: A JV Board member craving for some information about Lyonesse...

I am a MA student of English and German at the University of Basel, Switzerland, and my email adress is daniel.luethi@stud.unibas.ch

I am planning to write a seminar paper about Jack Vance's Lyonesse trilogy - I would like to compare it with classic Arthurian and Anglo-centric mythological and historical motives. One of my central questions is: What version of the Middle Ages and Arthurian legend are we offered in the Lyonesse trilogy? The preliminary of Suldrun's Garden provides some literary sources, but in order to write a good paper, I would be happy to get a more detailed background. Which historical and mythological works did Jack Vance read and use for creating his trilogy? What were his motivations?

I know that the autobiography of Jack Vance is going to be published in August 2009, but I need to finish my paper by the end of July at the latest. And first-hand information from the author himself would be extremely valuable for a scientific approach to the Lyonesse trilogy.

Thanks for forwarding the message, and let me know if you need any further information!

Daniel /// Cheers, P.

-2- From: Jeremy Cavaterra
To: pdusoulier@wanadoo.fr ; daniel.luethi@stud.unibas.ch
Cc: John Vance
Sent: Friday, June 26, 2009 8:33 PM
Subject: RE: A JV Board member craving for some information about Lyonesse...

Jack Vance says: The Arthurian legend had very little to do with my Lyonesse cycle apart from my having adapted the locale, a glancing reference to Arthur's "Round Table" which would later be inspired by Cairbra an Meadhan, and an incidental search for the Holy Grail. In other words, window-dressing. I reject the notion that the trilogy is a re-working of the Arthurian myth [c.f. Wikipedia]; nor, I believe, was I influenced by any other mythological or historical works, at least consciously. Motivations? Simply to write a good story.

[Off the record: I realize this is not very helpful, and that Jack perhaps has forgotten certain details of research that went into the Lyonesse books; but I also suspect that his reading of Arthur has been of a general and eclectic nature, and that he used the background of Lyonesse with its historical resonance for atmospheric effect and color, rather than to take a deliberately scholarly approach such as is seen, for instance, in Mary Stewart's work. -- J.C.]

Source: Seminar Paper: The Elder Isles revisited: King Arthur, Fantasy and Jack Vance's Lyonesse trilogy - 28 July 2009

By Daniel Lüthi

Email: daniel.luethi@stud.unibas.ch

https://www.academia.edu/1948467/The_Elder_Isles_Revisited_King_Arthur_Fantasy_and_Jack_Vances_Lyonesse_trilogy

Locus Magazine USA august 2012

Article: GO FOR BROKE

Vance is one of the most influential SF authors from the post-war period, and his work inspired authors including Avram Davidson, Harlan Ellison, Matthew Hughes, George R.R. Martin, Michael Moorcock, and Gene Wolfe. He won the World Fantasy Award for lifetime achievement in 1984; the SFWA Grand Master Award in 1997; and he was inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame in 2001. He lives in Oakland CA.

''I've always let my writing speak for itself. I'm not going to go around bragging about anything. If anyone likes the stuff, they'll find out, and if they don't like it, they won't. Apparently I've got a pretty good reputation.

''I don't read any science fiction or fantasy anymore. It leaves me cold. I just read non-fiction and history and detective stories, once in a while a western story. I've not read science fiction or fantasy for recreation since I was a kid. I used to subscribe to Weird Tales . I remember running out to the mail box – I had to run a quarter mile to get to it, we lived out in the country – to grab Weird Tales , and taking it back.

''I wrote to make money, not for any other purpose. I just wrote the stuff because I was pretty good at it, and I wrote as fast as I could. I don't glorify my writing at all. For some reason I have the knack. I can't take any credit for it, any more than you can take credit for being a beautiful girl.

''I was commissioned to write The Vandals of the Void . My agent called me and said this company was producing some books for kids and I'd been commissioned to write one. I said, 'All right.' I was over in Italy at the time, and I wrote it in a place called Positano. It's a lovely place along the coast of Italy, 11 miles south of Sorrento. I wrote a murder mystery about that place, called Strange People, Queer Notions . I'm not too proud of my murder mysteries. I kind of like The Fox Valley Murders and The Desert Valley Murder . Bad Ronald was a good one. The rest of the things, they're adequate.

''I'd forgotten Locus still existed. In the old days Charlie Brown would have parties and everyone would get gassed. I remember going up with Poul Anderson – in those days Poul was one of my really good friends. He was such a wonderful guy, one of the finest fellows I met in my whole blooming life. Frank Herbert, Poul, and I were building this houseboat up in Richmond. We had it half-constructed when a storm came up and sank it. We went out and the houseboat was just a ridge sticking up out of the water. It was dismal, of course. We said, 'We've got to get it out!' Frank Herbert said, 'No, I've had it,' and walked away from the whole thing. So Poul and I got started on diving to lift the houseboat out of the water. I got diving equipment and went down. Poul couldn't because he had bad ears. We worked our ends off. We got some 50-gallon drums and we had to fill them with water to get them to sink. I would push these 50

gallon drums under the boat, and then we had an air compressor to put air into these drums so they floated, and up came the houseboat. We fixed the houseboat and sailed it up the river – this was 40 years ago. We had such fun in that houseboat for years after that.

''I remember one time Fred Pohl and I were at some kind of convention up in Reno. I went up to him and said, 'Hey there, Fred!' He looked at me and said, 'Who are you?' and I got mad and said, 'Go to hell, I'm not going to tell you.' I walked away from him and was standing on the stairs there, and 15 minutes later he walked up and said, 'Jack Vance, you son of a bitch, you.' He was editor of Galaxy at the time. My agent sold him a story, but he'd sold it to someone else first as well, so he got Galaxy's money and the other guy's money too. Fred Pohl couldn't publish the story. He called me and was mad at me. I was in Tahiti at the time. He said, 'Give me that money back!' So I wrote him one called 'The Last Castle' instead, which he was happy for.

''I'll tell you a story about Robert Silverberg. One day Harlan Ellison came up to visit Silverberg. They went out in the backyard, by the swimming pool in the garden. Ellison asked Silverberg to read a manuscript of his. So Bob sat in the chair there, and began reading this story. He took a page out, read it, and threw it in the air. There was a big wind, so Harlan was running chasing the pages. Bob kept reading these pages, throwing them in the air. Some of them got into the swimming pool. Harlan fished them out and was running all over the garden. ''Come to think of it, I do like most of my books. I did so much of my writing while traveling. My wife Norma would type for me. Poor Norma. She worked harder than I did. She was such a wonderful lady. I miss the hell out of her. Here's how we met. I was working. I looked over the fence and there was this girl on a porch, playing with a kitten. She was petting it and being nice to it. I looked over and I thought, 'She's being nice to the cat. I wonder if she'd be nice to me?' So I asked her for a glass of water. She ran into the house, came out and gave me a glass of water, I got to talking to her, and a while later we were married. She was a sophomore at Cal, the University of California, at the time.

''I never was a good-looking guy. You can see my picture; I'm pretty ordinary looking. The girls never chased me much, but they never chased me away. Do you think I look my age now? I hate to tell you how old I am. I don't feel my age. Obviously I don't act like it.

''My first year at Cal was 1937. I had lots of fun there, though I never graduated. Terrible thing is, my two best friends from Cal, Don Matthews and Jim Tierney, both got killed in the war. Don was flying an airplane over Germany, he got shot down, and Tierney got shot in Italy. I escaped the war scot-free as a merchant seaman. I was in Leyte, the Philippine Islands, when the war ended. We were in a little cove, and people shot rockets up in the air. The war was over, and it was spectacular to see the sky full of these rockets going up.

''I regard P.G. Wodehouse as the greatest writer in the English language – except of course for me. I remember this poem he wrote, 'Good Gnus'. It goes like this:

When cares attack and life seems black,
How sweet it is to pot a yak,
Or puncture hares and grizzly bears,
And others I could mention;
But in my Animals ''Who's Who''
No name stands higher than the Gnu;
And each new gnu that comes in view
Receives my prompt attention.
When Afric's sun is sinking low,
And shadows wander to and fro,
And everywhere there's in the air
A hush that's deep and solemn;
Then is the time good men and true
With View Halloo pursue the gnu;
(The safest spot to put your shot
is through the spinal column).
To take the creature by surprise
We must adopt some rude disguise,
Although deceit is never sweet,
And falsehoods don't attract us;
So, as with gun in hand you wait,
Remember to impersonate
A tuft of grass, a mountain-pass,
A kopje or a cactus.
A brief suspense, and then at last
The waiting's o'er, the vigil past;
A careful aim. A spurt of flame.
It's done. You've pulled the trigger,
And one more gnu, so fair and frail,
Has handed in its dinner-pail;
(The females all are rather small, The males are somewhat bigger).

''P.G. Wodehouse was a big influence, but there's another guy, Jefferey Farnol. Very few people know of Jefferey Farnol. He wrote these wonderful romantic stories, just marvelous, and nobody knows who he is. He wrote some of the best pirate stories ever. Then there's C.L. Moore. She and Farnol... I wouldn't say they had any influence on me exactly, except that I admired them so much, and I felt if I could write as good as they did I would be pleased, and happy.

''I dictated my autobiography, This Is Me, Jack Vance! , and a friend of mine typed it for me, and I had a lot of fun. I've had a very eventful life. In fact, there is probably so much I left out. I like this lesson I put in there, to help people at a dinner party if they break wind. If you're at a wonderful formal dinner party and everyone is dressed up, and you break wind with trombone-like resonance, and everyone is looking around, and you don't want to be blamed for it, how do you avoid it? What you do is, you just turn your head and look at the person sitting next to you, and then turn back and pretend you don't notice the smell. Everybody sees you look slightly at the man or lady sitting next to you, and everybody starts staring at them. This leaves the person next to you outraged, but what can she or he do? This is good advice for anybody.

''There's one episode I talk about in the autobiography that haunts me, actually. I was a merchant seaman for a while, on a ship in Australia, and we took off and spent 28 days at sea. We approached this port, Tocopilla, off the coast of Chile, right on the Andes. We were in Tocopilla to pick up a load of bird droppings – guano. We dropped our anchor, and out from Tocopilla came a half a dozen boats, running at us frantically. The idea was, we'd take a rope, attach a dollar to it, and throw it over the side. They'd take the dollar and tie a bottle of brandy to the rope and throw it back for us to pick it up. Of course within 20 minutes everyone was rolling around drunk, because we'd been 28 days at sea, and here is this town with all the shore delights waiting for us, and we started by getting drunk right away with those dollar bottles of brandy.

''So we went ashore. It's a poor country with all these bars around to sell you booze, and all these girls around, and cathouses. It's amazing how many of these places sell you booze, and how many girls there are, and they're all ages and all different flavors – some beautiful, some not so beautiful. I think I was about 19, and I'll admit that I took advantage of all the delights of going ashore at Tocopilla. I chased girls with the best of them, then went back to the ship, and I was so drunk that I had a hangover and stayed on board the ship for two days. Then this friend of mine and I decided we would go ashore and not get drunk – we'd just go and watch the native people.

''So we went off to the far end of the city, to a place that was a little bit more upscale. Everything was more proper. We went into a soda fountain, and sat down and ordered something to drink. A couple of girls came in and sat at a table next to us – high school girls, dressed nice and proper. They seemed so different from the others. And we thought, look at these pretty girls, so polite and obviously top class. One of them was especially beautiful. This friend of mine and I, we weren't planning on making ourselves obnoxious to the girls, but I could speak a little Spanish, so we got talking to them and invited them over to our table and ordered them a drink.

''Finally this one girl, I've forgotten her name – such a beautiful girl, she looked like a movie star, and I kind of fell in love with her – I asked her if she'd like to go to

dinner at a nice restaurant. The girls talked to each other and one said she wouldn't go, but the one I liked said yes. She said she knew of a nice restaurant, and so we left the ice cream parlour and got into a taxi, and she gave him instructions to go off south, down along this bumpy road that led along the shore. It was now dusk, and kind of dark. We drove down this road with the Andes up one side and the other was dark water and the moonlight, and I can sit here right now and recall the gorgeous scenery. We drove down the road for ten miles, and came to this restaurant, and the guy who was doing the cooking just had a little stove and some tables. We took a table right near the beach, and ordered some red wine, and I don't think we ordered anything else – he just brought us some fish, and the taxi driver sat at a table, and we paid his way too. We had dinner there, and I talked to the girl and we got to know each other, and I found her such a delightful girl – in short, I fell in love with her.

''We finally finished, and I asked where she lived, and took her home. We got out of the car and I took her up to the house where she lived. I was about to kiss her good night, but she opened the door, looked in, grabbed my hand, and pulled me into the house with her.

''Now this sounds a bit naughty but – I took her to bed. Of course I was a young kid, but I was just fascinated with her, and oh my word, what an evening. I finally sneaked out of the house, and I forget where I stayed the night. I'd arranged to meet this girl the next day, and my ship was about due to take off. I wanted to leave her something, so I went to a little jeweler's shop and got her a little silver cup – it wasn't very much. I went to where she lived and she came to the door. I gave her this little cup, and said, « I wish you would come to California », and she said, « No possible ». I said goodbye, said I was sorry to go, and she said goodbye. I thought she was sorry too, I thought she liked me, and I took off and went aboard the ship.

''The ship took off, and we started north, up along the coast toward the Panama Canal, and I stood in the stern of the ship looking aft as Tocopilla diminished in the distance. It sounds like just a strange romantic story, but it has haunted me all my life. For heaven's sake, it was 70 years ago, but I still think of it now.

''Even though it was based on fact, I thought it would make such a good story that I wrote a movie skit for it and sent it down to this agent and tried to see if he could sell it. I thought it would make a beautiful movie, because it would show the ships and this beautiful little town, and scenery, but nobody ever looked twice it at the thing.

''I'm recording some music with my friend Kevin Boudreau. We call ourselves the Go For Broke Jazz Band. I'm going to sell CDs as well as e-books on my website, <www.jackvance.com>. I play harmonica, ukelele, and jug, and do vocals and play kazoo, and Kevin plays string bass and the washboard. Do you think anybody's interested in buying Jack Vance music?

''We used to have jam sessions around here all the time. I used to play professionally at two or three different places. If I was any good at playing cornet I

wouldn't be bashful about letting you know, but if I'm honest, I'm just barely able to play it.

''My mother played piano. These people used to come stay with us, and one time they brought LOCUS August 2012 / 53 up this guy George Gould. He was a wonderful jazz musician, and had a wonderful orchestra in San Francisco. When I was nine years old I heard jazz music for the first time, and it's haunted me all my life. Jazz puts dopamine in your brain. There are other things that send dopamine into your brain, including sex. I think if you've had a lot of fun in your life, it changes your brain. I'm serious about this. I think if you did some research, you'd discover that if you have a lot of fun, it keeps you young. That's a theory of mine and I don't see any reason not to believe it's true. Have as much fun as you can with your life. You see people going around that have bad things happen to them all their lives, and they are just dreary, and they die early.

I hope you don't write in Locus what a ham I am. Say, « Jack Vance, he was nice to us. He's not the worst guy in the world ».

Crédits :

•- In all cases, all quoted texts remain the property of the author and possible co-author.

•- Vance Estate for Jack Vance has kindly authorized sharing of the French translations (09-2020).

•- The possible co-authors (interviewers, newspapers, editors etc...) are listed below. Authorizations have been requested to those who still exist (2021).

•- The texts and translations of the author of this collection are under Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND license.

•- Presumed co-authors :

TITLE	AUT.	CO AUTHOR©
1. Introduction	JLE	
2. 1942 Jazz on Discs	JV	Cal. Daily
3. 1945 Biographical sketch	JV	TWS
4. 1946 Afterword - Phalid's Fate	JV	TWS
5. 1953 Vandals of the Void Preface	JV	Durastanti
6. 1962 Letter to Frederik Pohl	JV	
7. 1969 Foreword Eight fantasms and Magics	JV	Macmilan
8. 1973 Preface Rumfuddle	JV	R.Silverberg
9. 1974 Introduction - SF4 – Ulward retreat's	JV	H. Harrison
10. 1975 Afterword The Dogtown Tourist Agency	JV	R.Silverberg
11. 1976 Jack VANCE interview, KPFK, 11-12-76	JV	KPFK
12. 1980 Comments on the 1976 KPFK interview	JV	M.Koester
13. 1976 (?) Alternate civilisation, Variant societies	JV	
14. 1976 Preface The Best of Vance	JV	Pocket Book
15. 1976 Foreword SAIL 25	JV	VIE
16. 1976 Foreword - The last castle	JV	VIE
17. 1976 Foreword for The Moon Moth	JV	UM
18. 1977 Postface The New Prime	JV	T.Underwood
19. 1977 Interview SF REVIEW	JV	P. Close
20. 1978 Introduction from "Morreion"	JV	Meulenhof
21. 1981 Interview ORBIT	JV	T.Underwood
22. 1981 Jack Vance & Platt interview	JV	C. Platt
23. 1982 Foreword Lost Moons	JV	UM
24. 1984 Interview-article in Locus magazine	JV	Locus
25. 1985 Interview Jack Rawlins	JV	J.Rawlins
26. 1985 Introduction - The Dark Side of The Moon	JV	UM
27. 1988 The Symbol	JV	Cosmopolis
28. 1989 Introduction – GRAAL mag	JV	Graal
29. 1989 Interview Marty Halpen	JV	M. Halpen
30. 1991 Introduction to Blue Tyson	JV	T. Dowling
31. 1996 Interview Aberrations #36	JV	R. Blair
32. 1997 Sci-Fi Channel Interview	JV	SciFi Channel

33. 1998 Down While Writing	*JV*	*De Telegraaf*
34. 1998 Interview Centre-Presse	*JV*	*N.Bohbot*
35. 1998 Interview UTOPIA	*JV*	*P. Monot*
36. 1998 Interview l'Express	*JV*	*l'Express*
37. 1998 Interview Slash magazine	*JV*	*Slash*
38. 1998 Interview SF- Mag	*JV*	*SF Mag*
39. 1999 WDR radio broadcast	*JV*	*H. Ehrler*
40. 2000 interview in Delos	*JV*	*Delos*
41. 2001 Introduction Faery	*JV*	*Nestiveqnen*
42. 2001 Interview in Faery	*JV*	*Mickael Ivorra*
43. 2002 Interview SF Weekly	*JV*	*SF Weekly*
44. 2003 VIE Volunteers Talk With Jack Vance	*JV*	*JVMB*
45. 2003 Questions for Jack Vance	*JV*	*JVMB*
46. 2003 Jack Vance talks about Bad Ronald	*JV*	*JVMB*
47. 2004 preface for Station Abercrombie	*JV*	*VIE*
48. 2004 Preface Ullward's Retreat	*JV*	*VIE*
49. 2005 thank you for the job!	*JV*	*Cosmopolis*
50. 2006 Preface for The Jack Vance Treasury	*JV*	*Sub. Press*
51. 2008 Preface Songs of the Dying Earth	*JV*	*G.R. Martin*
52. 2012 Interview LOCUS	*JV*	*Locus*

This book is intended for study purposes.
Only the French version has been authorized by Vance Estate.
The English version is for personal use only and may not be shared without special permission.

2022-04-FRANCE

A4 - calibri 13