

82-year-old science-fiction author most read
in the Netherlands for thirty years.

JACK VANCE

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 Ulenspiegel and the good soldier Sjevik, 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.

*going down,
writing*



• Science fiction and fantasy author Jack Vance (82): "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."

Photo: J M Meulenhoff B.V.

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 writing 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 Christian 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".